

# Pineapple Marines

(THE JOURNEY FROM CITIZEN TO MARINE COMBAT VETERAN)

WRITTEN BY ROBERT PETERS & ROGER STALEY

For

The Marines who gave the “The Last Full Measure of Devotion”\*  
including those heroic Pineapple Marines who earned our nation’s  
highest award, The Congressional Medal of Honor:

First Lieutenant Frank S. Reasoner

Corporal Robert E. O’Malley

Lance Corporal Joe C. Paul

\*From the Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln, November 19, 1863

## FORWARD

This story tells about how young men in the early part of the 1960's began a transition from citizen to Marine, and their training at Marine Corps schools, Quantico, Virginia where they learned to be Marine officers. The story continues to describe their experiences in the Fleet Marine Force with the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein), where they acquired the knowledge and the experience to become combat ready Marines.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein), part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade, were based at Kaneohe, Oahu, Hawaii. Locations of training exercises took place on several of the Hawaiian Islands on all kinds of terrain, from beaches, to jungles, to lava moonscapes.

In early 1965 the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines were scheduled to take part in a major training exercise at Camp Pendleton, California. Instead, the ships that had been loaded for some time sailed west to Okinawa for combat preparation.

And, finally the story takes us to amphibious and helicopter landings at Phu Bai, Hue and Chu Lai, South Vietnam, the combat situations that followed, the first major battle of the Vietnam war, (Operation Starlite in August 1965), and many of the combat operations that occurred throughout 1965 that involved the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein), and other Marine units nearby.

According to Senator Jim Webb, in an article published in August 2000 we learned that: the Vietnam war *"... was the most costly war the U.S. Marine Corps has ever fought - five times as many dead as World War I, three times as many dead as Korea, and more total killed and wounded than in all of World War II..."*

By any measure, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein) upheld the finest traditions of the United States Marine Corps.

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## **Chapter 1 – Marine Corps Officers**

### **Recruitment**

Following the Armistice that ended the Korean War in 1953, the United States military services experienced an unusual period of peace. However, the manpower needs of the military continued, and therefore, the drafting of healthy young men over 18 years of age for service in the U.S. Army continued. At the time those men eligible for the draft who were attending college full-time could obtain a deferment until they graduated or left school. The Marine Corps saw the opportunity and placed recruiters on college campuses throughout the country looking for future officers interested in a Marine Corps reserve commission.

The Marine Corps depends on a steady flow of young men who volunteer to join the finest fighting force in the world. Young men who have been motivated to obtain a college degree are preferred and are recruited through several programs.

The most common paths to a commission as a Marine Corps second lieutenant during the post-Korea, pre-Viet Nam era were the Platoon Leaders Class, (“PLC”), and Officer’s Candidate School, (“OCS”), programs which required twelve weeks of “boot camp” at the Marine Corps base, Quantico, Virginia. PLC candidates usually did their twelve weeks during two summers while attending college and were commissioned upon graduating. OCS candidates did their twelve weeks after graduating.

Also, during the post-Korea, pre-Viet Nam era, graduates of the U.S. Naval Academy and the U.S. Military Academy were able to choose the Marine Corps, and if accepted would be commissioned without any boot camp required.

Enlisted Marines with or without college degrees were sometimes selected to become officers via battlefield commissions during WWII and Korea. Other enlisted Marines were sometimes selected to attend OCS as a result of their meritorious service and potential as leaders.

### **The Basic School**

Every Marine who is commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant is required to attend The Basic School, (“TBS”), located in Quantico, Virginia, to learn how to lead and inspire Marines.

Guided by the mentorship of experienced Marines, new officers develop the leadership, knowledge and esprit de corps that define the Marine Corps.

The following Leadership Principles form the foundation of leadership in the Marine Corps. Living by these principles makes every individual a better officer. Together, they form the traits and values that define character as a leader:

- Be technically and tactically proficient.
- Know yourself and seek self-improvement.
- Know your Marines and look out for their welfare.
- Keep your Marines informed.
- Set the example.
- Ensure that the task is understood, supervised and accomplished.
- Train your Marines as a team.
- Make sound and timely decisions.
- Develop a sense of responsibility in your subordinates.
- Employ your unit in accordance with its capabilities.
- Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions.

Young Marine officers learn that it is a privilege to command Marines, and also that it is every officer's responsibility to provide the best possible leadership.

The Basic School program instills a pride in the legacy that you will carry as a Marine Officer. And you will become part of a lifelong brotherhood as you build a foundation of leadership for life.

Training at TBS emphasizes the role of an infantry platoon commander. Patrolling and war-fighting tactics are among the skills you must further develop to lead your Marines by example. You will learn how to mentor, train and develop the individual Marines in your command. You will also learn how your role contributes to the overall Marine Corps mission and organizational structure. The final phase of TBS training is a five day offensive/defensive exercise and a four day combat exercise that will test everything learned.

Instructors throughout the TBS program will challenge you. They push you to respond to situations and solve problems as a Marine Officer. Their mentorship helps to develop your own leadership style.

You leave TBS an effective leader, ready to command with confidence.

During the last month of the TBS program every officer is requested to complete a form that asks for three Military Occupational Specialty ("MOS") choices, and three duty station choices. Requests are granted, if possible, in accordance with the needs of the Corps.

Officers accepted to flight school head to Pensacola, Florida for eighteen months of flight training. Some officers assigned a ground MOS will continue their training to develop expertise in their assigned MOS before joining there assigned unit, while others will join their assigned unit and complete MOS training on-the-job.

## **Chapter 2 – The Fleet Marine Force**

The Fleet Marine Force (FMF) was created by General Order No. 241 from Secretary of the Navy Claude A. Swanson on 7 December 1933. Secretary Swanson stated that “1. The force of marines maintained by the Major General Commandant in a state of readiness for operations with the fleet is hereby designated as Fleet Marine Force (F.M.F.), and as such shall constitute a part of the organization of the United States Fleet and be included in the Operating Force Plan for each fiscal year.” Additional parts of the General Order dealt with force readiness and chain-of-command issues.

The island of Oahu, not the largest or most exotic of the Hawaiian Islands, was home to the largest collection of U.S. military headquarters west of Washington, D.C. There was CINCPAC, the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Command, responsible for all U.S. military forces in the Pacific, at Camp Smith; PACAF, the Pacific Air Forces’ Headquarters at Hickam Air Force Base; ARPAC, the Army’s Pacific Command Headquarters at Fort Shafter; the Navy’s Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT) aboard the large naval base at Pearl Harbor; and the Headquarters of the Marines’ Fleet Marine Force Pacific (FMFPAC) (also at Camp Smith). The Army maintained its famed 25<sup>th</sup> “Tropic Lightning” Division at Schofield Barracks and managed the facilities at Ft. DeRussy next door to Waikiki. The Marine Corps, in addition to securing the gates at Pearl Harbor and several naval ammunition dumps on the island, maintained a brigade of Marines in windward Oahu at a former Navy Air Facility, then known as the Kaneohe Bay Marine Corps Air Station, commonly referred to as “K-Bay”, the home of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade.

### **The 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade**

It was unusual, at that time, for a Marine command to include responsibility for a base, and air and ground forces. For those arriving in 1962, the Brigade Commanding General was BGen Keith B. McCutcheon, who would serve in several Viet Nam wartime capacities until he passed away 13 July 1971, twelve days after receiving his fourth star. The Brigade’s Commanding General in 1965 when the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines deployed to WestPac was BGen Marion E. Carl. BGen Carl was known for his heroic actions as the Marine Corps first combat ace, credited with 18.5 victories over enemy aircraft at the battles of Midway, Guadalcanal, and the Solomon Islands. He served as a Marine test pilot and was the first Marine to fly a jet aircraft. At the age of 82, after finishing his active duty career in 1973 with assignments as CG of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Aircraft Wing, and then Inspector General of the Marine Corps, Major General Carl was murdered at home by a 19 year old thug during a robbery on June 28, 1998.

### **MAG – 13**

The Brigade’s air component, Marine Air Group 13, included Marine Fighter Squadrons 212 and 232, both flew F-8D Crusader jets; Marine Attack Squadron 214 flew

A4B Skyhawk jets; and Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161, flew UH-34D helicopters.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein)**

The Brigade's principle ground force was the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment (Rein). Reinforcing elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines at K-Bay included the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Marines Artillery Regiment; Company B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion; Company B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Antitank Battalion; Company B 3<sup>rd</sup> Engineer Battalion; Company A, 1<sup>st</sup> Amphibian Tractor Battalion; Company B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Shore Party Battalion; Company C, 3<sup>rd</sup> Motor Transport Battalion; Company B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Medical Battalion; and Company B, Dental Detachment, Fleet Marine Force.

During the early 1960s, many Marines considered duty at K-Bay as a plum assignment. The assignment for Marine officers was for two years, but if you were married and were accompanied by your dependents you were obligated to spend three years at K-Bay. For reserve officers that meant an extension of your active duty commitment by about eight months. A small price to pay for a "guarantee" of three years in paradise.

Hawaii is an exciting place for a newly-commissioned Marine second lieutenant to be stationed. Hawaii was legendary and considered a modern-day paradise with a year-round tropical climate, inhabited by exotic hula girls, possessing world-class scenery (including active volcanoes), surrounded by clear blue waters, large "surfable" waves, and white sand (and some black sand) beaches. In the early 1960's, Hawaii was still enjoying its newly-acquired statehood.

### **Chapter 3 - Training**

The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, as part of the FMFPAC, were charged with continuous training to maintain the state of readiness that was expected of all combat ready Marine war-fighting units.

#### **Brigade Schools**

The result of being located with a Marine aircraft group (MAG-13), the air combat element of the Brigade, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines got a lot of training and work with the Group's fixed wing aircraft (F-8 and A-4) and the helicopter squadrons (mostly CH-34s), either on Oahu or off-island, e.g., on Molokai or on the Big Island of Hawaii.

California or Okinawa-based Marine C-130 Hercules turboprop utility (i.e., cargo and passenger) aircraft frequently transited the Pacific, and spent a few hours, days, or weeks at K-Bay. Many of these C-130 deployments were scheduled months in advance and afforded Brigade Marines the opportunity to use them for transportation to and from the training areas on Molokai or the Big Island. The Brigade and the station maintained, staffed, and operated a number of excellent schools which included aerial observer (AO); non-commissioned officer (NCO); nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) defense; and guerrilla warfare; and, annually, an administrative course for prospective captains. In those days, a senior first lieutenant had to pass a written, Marine Corps-wide test primarily concerned with legal and personnel administration matters in order to be eligible for promotion to captain. (Fortunately, that requirement would be waived as a result of Viet Nam and the current crop of lieutenants would not have to take that test or the preparatory classes when they came into the zone for promotion.) Individually and collectively, officers were encouraged to take the correspondence skill courses offered by the Marine Corps Institute (MCI) such as the MCI courses on the 3.5 inch rocket, the M-60 machine gun, the 106mm recoilless rifle, the flame thrower, and personnel administration.

There were several resident courses being taught at Brigade Schools that many of the new officers attended. The NBC Defense Course was a three-week affair dealing with attacks involving the so-called "weapons of mass destruction" and the "gas chamber." Upon graduation, one could now be their company's NBC Officer, a collateral duty that most tried to avoid.

Another course of note was the Brigade's Guerrilla Warfare Course. Major Archie Van Winkle, the Director of Brigade Schools and a former commander of Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, is credited with its establishment. Major Van Winkle was an enlisted veteran of WWII, and was Staff Sergeant when he earned the Medal of Honor for gallantry in action on 2 November 1950 near Sudong, Korea. He was meritoriously promoted to second lieutenant, then completed his studies at the University of Washington, and was

promoted to Lieutenant Colonel on July 1, 1967. He then served as Commanding Officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn., 1<sup>st</sup> Marines in Viet Nam. Colonel Van Winkle retired in February 1974 and passed away on 22 May 1986.

A small shed which served as the school's office, and an outdoor classroom had been established for the Guerrilla Warfare School near the far end of the station. Fortunately, the bulk of the guerrilla warfare training was conducted in the field, for the most part in off-station training areas that included Kuutree Reservoir at the Army's Schofield Barracks; at Waikane, and the valleys and mountains of northern Oahu which began near Kahuku. The OIC of the guerilla warfare course was Pat Carlisle, an alumnus of Co. D, 1/4, assisted by a number of staff non-commissioned officers (SNCOs), most of whom had attended variously the Army's Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina and the Ranger School at Fort Benning, Georgia. A number of the Brigade Schools instructors had also served or operated for brief periods with allied nation militaries involved in counterinsurgency operations; the British Anti-Guerrilla School in Malaysia is a good example. In short, the instructors were all well-trained and knowledgeable in the tactics and field craft they taught. While in school, students learned and constantly practiced immediate action drills to be employed against enemy-initiated ambushes, extensive scouting and patrolling, rope work (such as the building of horizontal traverses and rope bridges over otherwise impassible terrain); cliff and helicopter rappelling, detection and neutralization of enemy booby traps (e.g., tripwires, punji pits, Malayan whips, etc., most of which were introduced to the American public in the John Wayne flick, "The Green Berets"), and the planning, conduct, and support of long-range combat and reconnaissance patrols. Most students would emerge from the course bone-tired, but smarter and much more confident rifle platoon commanders.

The school lasted for one week. Initial training took place on the base, both in a classroom and in a nearby training area. The 'final exam' was a counter-guerrilla exercise in the jungle warfare training area west of the Waikane valley in the foothills of the Koolau Mountains of eastern Oahu. The exercise lasted for two days and one night and involved tracking down and eliminating a group of 'enemy guerrillas.' Students chased those guerrillas both day and night and were subject to ambushes and employed counter-ambush tactics. Eventually students were able to run the guerrillas to ground and complete the exercise. Upon graduation, students were designated 'Little Warriors' on a small card that included a picture of a Mexican Bandito as proof of the fact that they had successfully completed the First Marine Brigade Guerrilla Warfare School.

When not at a Brigade school or in the company classroom for formal instruction, the rifle companies were in the field training. Local field training could be conducted on a limited basis aboard K-Bay which had rifle and pistol ranges, some large, open grass-covered areas, and some shrub and kiave tree-covered fields, and some sandy beach areas. Training with helicopters and landing exercises with landing craft and amtracs

could also be held, and there was an obstacle course and wooden towers to practice going up and down rope landing nets and to rappel off. Local training could also be conducted at Bellows Air Force Station; a small, overgrown and unused World War II airfield located about five miles away from the base. Companies could speed-march to and back from Bellows by using one of the main streets, North Kalaheo Ave., through the neighboring bedroom community of Kailua. In the opposite direction, about six miles distant from the base, was the Waikane Training Area, which, like Bellows, was suitable for platoon and company level training (i.e., scouting and patrolling, tactics, etc). The company-level M-60 machine guns and 3.5 inch rockets could be live fired at a special range adjacent to the rifle range. Larger, battalion-level weapons such as recoilless rifles, 81mm mortars, artillery, and such would have to be transported over to the U.S.Army ranges at Schofield Barracks on the other side of the island in order to live fire. In those days, the Marine Corps in Hawaii did not have tanks but did have the Ontos and amtracs with which to conduct joint training. Ontos means “the thing” in Greek. Only 176 vehicles are known to have been in the Marine Corps at the start of the Vietnam War. (There are more surviving WWI tanks than Ontos.) It served the USMC from 1956 until 1970 (which coincided with the Corps’ use of the 106mm recoilless rifle). The first Ontos (M50A1) test under fire occurred in the Dominican Republic in April 1965. The second test was in Vietnam, and its role would have no relationship to what was originally intended for the little tank killer. This light-weight tracked armored vehicle designed and produced (by Allis-Chalmers) in the early 50s to destroy the main battle tanks of that era using the firepower from its six 106mm recoilless rifles. Four of its six guns had .50 cal. Spotting rifles attached. The flight of the .50 cal. spotting round approximated the flight of the 106 round. The maximum effective range of for the 106 round was 3,000 yards. A total of 18 106mm rounds were carried by each Ontos, which included the 6 in the guns and the 12 in storage racks or storage areas (although more rounds could be carried with the removal of the driver and commander’s seats). Additionally, each Ontos carried a .30 cal. machine gun 1919A4 Browning machine gun attached to the gun mount/turret. One thousand tracer .50 cal. Spotter rounds were carried and 1,000 rounds (or more) for the .30 cal. Machine gun. It was 12 ½ feet long, 8 ½ feet wide, with a cramped crew compartment for its crew of three slightly higher than 4 feet. It weighed 9 tons and had a track width of 20” which allowed it to go on the soft soils surrounding rice paddies.) It was lightly armored and vulnerable to destruction by weapons larger than .50 cal. (The Ontos could expose itself to enemy small arms for the short time it took to empty its guns and depart to a more secure position to reload. (The 51” wide glacis plate on the Ontos is 1” thick and forms the front of the hull and protects the driver from ground level to 27” in height. The sides of the crew compartment are slightly heavier than ½” thick and the floor of the fighting compartment is 11/4” thick. The majority of the remainder of the hull is formed from ½” thick armor.) Ontos could and did drive with the rear doors open on occasions. This mode of travel would roll road dust into the vehicle’s interior making the crews look like pigs. For this reason the crews usually referred to the Ontos as a “pig.” The Ontos

platoons were organized into heavy (3 Ontos) and light (2 Ontos) sections. There were three platoons to a company; and three companies to an Ontos (i.e., Anti-Tank) battalion. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Anti-Tank Battalions saw action in Vietnam from early 1965 to mid-1969. (At the end of 1965, there were 65 Ontos in Vietnam.) There were three men to an Ontos: a driver, a commander/gunner (OC), and a loader. Some commanders wanted to use the Ontos as a minesweeper (which exposed the vehicle to destruction). The back blast from the 106mm recoilless rifle could (and did) kill anyone behind the Ontos to include an Ontos loader from another Ontos reloading outside his machine and any “grunts” foolish enough to wander or maneuver behind a firing Ontos. It is worth noting that the AT company was a unique component of the Brigade and later of RLT-4. Few officers had much experience with or knowledge of the Ontos to begin with and most paid little attention to them. One of the primary jobs of an Ontos unit was to convince the battalion commander to whom they were attached that they could be an important supporting arm for him.

### **Operation Dull Knife**

On a scheduled basis, embarkation training provided by instructors from the Landing Force Training Unit (LFTU), Coronado, CA, was provided to selected officers and NCOs from brigade units. Frequently, amphibious ships or squadrons were in port at Pearl Harbor. So Brigade Marines occasionally got to do some amphibious training and to experience life aboard ship. Operation Dull Knife, one of a series of annual major Brigade landing exercises (LEX) in Hawaiian waters took place during late September-early October 1963. Exercise Dull Knife was to be conducted on the then-pristine, west coast beaches of Molokai, the island to the immediate south of Oahu. It was to be a multi-battalion landing (i.e., two battalions), while elements of the remaining third battalion of the regiment provided the aggressor force. There are two contrasting yet complimenting versions of the Dull Knife landing exercise; one from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon leader from Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion, whose platoon had done much of the pre-D-Day hydrographic and beach studies and another view from one of the landing force participants, a rifle platoon commander from Co A, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines.

Well before the actual exercise, the Brigade requested that the reconnaissance element of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, conduct an administrative hydrographic and beach survey of three potential landing beaches, to perform several HLZ surveys, and to do an extensive road/route survey of the trails and road networks on the west end of Molokai during June. At the time of the administrative survey, the reconnaissance unit did not have any idea about Exercise Dull Knife. To the best of their knowledge, the Marine Corps had either just leased or was negotiating a lease for new training areas.

A hydrographic and beach survey begins seaward of the 5-fathom curve, and then moves inland thru the surf-zone, and across the beach into the hinterland. Its purposes

were to (1) to identify underwater obstacles (natural or manmade) that pose a threat to landing craft; (2) provide an underwater map that displaying the nearshore (inside the 3-1/2 fathom line) water depths, slope and bottom composition, and location of obstacles; (3) report on physical characteristics of the foreshore and surf-zone; (4) identify the soil composition, obstacles and traffic ability to cross the beach backshore; and (5) describe potential beach exits into the hinterland.

The results of the platoon's hydrographic and beach survey conducted between 20 and 22 June 1963 were contained in a report submitted to the Brigade via the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. For Papohaku, the beach that would later be used in Exercise Dull Knife, there were no underwater sandbars or obstacles; and the bottom was sandy and smooth. The nearshore (3-1/2 fathom curve to surf-zone) gradient (1:25-1:37) was moderate, and the narrow foreshore (surf-zone) gradient was even steeper (1:22). Moreover during June 22-23, there was only a single-line of breakers, predominately spilling and plunging, and having an average height of 1.5 feet. Other sections of the report addressed the need for matting to assist wheeled vehicle movement across the beach, but there was no evidence of major problems or dangerous conditions. In the report's conclusion, it was stated that, based on the platoon's observations and measurements in late June, "the beach was suitable for amphibious landing but to be cautious of surf conditions, particularly in disembarking from LCVPs. Be warned about the beach gradient and potential for high surf."

With the conditions at Papohaku on June 20-22, one could reasonably expect landing craft to make a 'dry ramp' landing onto the beach, but *caveat emptor*. While a hydrographic and beach survey provides invaluable information by placing its emphasis on enduring physical terrain and hydrographic features, it is no substitute for current Surf Observations (SUROBS) at the time of landing. The nearshore and foreshore shape of a beach will usually give a good indication of 'what surf to expect.' When the foreshore (surf-line into dry sand) is steep—you can count on the potential for rough surf. And with this shape, as you enter a season with storms, or a predominately on-shore breeze – waves/seas race shoreward and there is an abrupt transition to shallows. The consequence is that the top of the wave moves faster than its base—thus a plunging action (which is not visible from the seaward side). By contrast, when the gradient is less steep and there is an onshore breeze—the top of the wave is blown forward into a spilling breaker -- much better for surfing. The principal reasons for the report on the possibility of dangerous surf were two-fold. First, because of the steep beach foreshore (characteristic of high-surf conditions), and second, because the underwater gradient was so steep that landing craft, instead of grounding by 'sliding along their keel' would nearly 'bump the beach at their ramp' and, with less traction, likely broach in the surf.

During late September and Exercise Dull Knife, the recon platoon had pre-D-Day reconnaissance responsibilities and went ashore on Molokai on D-3(27 September).

According to the platoon's exercise reconnaissance plan, the Group was embarked on the submarine USS Carbonero and landed via rubber boat along the cliff line on the north shore of Molokai, about half-way between Illio Point (the northwest tip of the island) and the Kalapappa leper colony further to the east along the island's northern coast.

Once ashore, the Group operated as four two-man recon teams, and a single four-man radio relay team. The radio-relay team (using Morse code on the old AN/GRC-9) received (AN/PRC-10) reports from the recon teams, and was responsible for re-transmitting those reports to the Navy's Fleet Broadcast System (FBS). The FBS is a powerful radio system that routinely transmitted in the blind. This was the customary method used to get information to an underway naval task force operating in radio silence. The radio-relay team operated basically in a "hide position," but had to move and displace each time they completed a transmission.

The recon team's task priorities were to complete reconnaissance assignments in the beach areas and then, before the Navy arrived, move on toward inland assignments. On D-2 (28 September), they worked the area North and behind Papohuku Beach where they discovered the aggressor force had made preparation and stashed the smoke and CS [tear gas] generators. They completed their assignments and found plenty of 'aggressor force' preparation and activity, and made good progress and were never detected. Things continued to go well throughout D-1. All tasks were completed, reports transmitted, and there were no instances of enemy detection.

Following the helo extract, the helicopter took the recon team to join the underway task force. They landed on an LSD and were then high-lined over to the flagship for de-briefing. As soon as the LVTP-5's/amtracs passed through the surf line, they immediately radioed the flagship about the high-surf. But it was too late. The first three waves of LVCPs [Papa boats] had crossed the line of departure (LOD), were 'on-line,' and headed toward the beach. They could not see the danger ahead, '6-8 feet plunging surf, nor did they have any radio contact with the amphibious ships. There were a number of alternatives considered at that point, many of which involved the use of recon assets, use of other beaches, etc."

The 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, was scheduled to land in a combination of amphibious craft which included "Papa" boats, the small landing craft primarily used to land personnel, LCMs (landing craft medium or "Mike" boats, somewhat larger craft used to land vehicles, artillery pieces, and personnel), and LCUs (landing craft utility, the largest of the landing craft, almost ships themselves, used to land the really heavy stuff such as tanks and heavy materials). Each of these type of landing craft were organic to the amphibious ships which carried them on their large decks or down in the monstrous well decks of LSD class amphibious ships operated by Navy crews of the "Gator Navy." There were LVTP-5s, tracked amphibious vehicles, known as amtracs, in the well decks crewed and operated by Marines.

Once the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines had embarked shipping for Dull Knife, and had set sail, they were doctrinally required to participate in underway drills and rehearsals. These World War II vintage APA troop transports were designed to carry Marines within massive compartments located below deck. You slept in compartments where canvas racks (beds) were rigged six or seven levels high with only two feet between the racks, just enough to turn over in. Unless you were assigned to the top rack, you got stepped on by everybody climbing to their rack above you. And if you had the top rack, you had to be part monkey just to get down. There was very little space to store your rifle, helmet, pack, and other equipment (which you constantly had to keep your eyes on out of fear some sailor would take it). After two days of shipboard living, standing in endless chow lines, taking salt water showers, and participating in the never ending drills for general quarters, man overboard, fire, etc., and the rehearsals of being called away by squads and platoons to debark stations where we'd actually climb down (and back up) rope nets, you were ready to get off the ship.

A rehearsal was conducted, as was as a live-fire naval gunfire and close air support exercise off Kahoolawe Island. During the landing rehearsal, you waited in your compartments, strapped on your gear and equipment and awaited the call over the 1MC (loudspeaker) to go to our debark stations. Once called away over the 1MC and formed up at the top of the designated debark station, you could look over the rail where the rope net was placed down to an awaiting Papa Boat. Then, on order and six abreast, you'd all climb up a couple of steps where you'd pause and make sure your helmet was buckled and your rifle was snugly strapped over your shoulder. All six turned around at the same time, and in the same clockwise direction so as not to turn in to each other, you took your first step over the side. It was imperative that you grasp the vertical ropes of the net; or you would get your hand stepped on by the boots of the guy above. Hanging on to a bobbing net, which moved up and down with the motion of the bobbing ship, you carefully, but quickly, made your way down to the waiting Papa Boat, which was also pitching with the sea. (It was much more of a challenge than climbing down the tower constructed next to the obstacle course at K-Bay with stationary nets to climb down to firm and unmoving ground.) Sometimes the end of the net no longer reached down into the Papa Boat, and you had to wait until the next swell to bring the small boat back up, often so fast as to really whack anyone on the very end of the net, which hopefully, was being held away from side of the ship and over in the Papa Boat. It could be hairy, and I'm sure Marines had been lost in the past doing this maneuver.

After the boat had its assigned compliment of Marines, the coxswain would pull the boat away from the ship and permit the next empty Papa Boat to pull into the vacated spot alongside the ship. The full boats would then form up in the big circles or racetracks with other full boats waiting for the others to fill and join them. A Navy control boat would then call the boats away to form lines or "waves" parallel to the shoreline, and when directed to head, on line, towards the beach. The landing craft formed into waves (lines)

parallel to the shore, and proceeded, as per the schedule, towards the rehearsal beach only to turn away before hitting the surf line. In an actual amphibious operation, against a real enemy force, the rehearsal would have been held at a distant but physically similar beach located well away from the enemy's eyes. Ideally, the combination of the boat's momentum and wave action could put the boat ashore before dropping its large front gate which we could then run down and, if lucky, get ashore relatively dry. Once you got the drills down correctly, you were ready for the exercise landing.

Early on the morning of D-Day, you had breakfast and then returned to your compartment. You had been briefed as to the "enemy situation" ashore, the weather, and the surf conditions. The surf report for the exercise landing indicated favorable conditions for the landings; 1-to-2 feet high surf. The landing began as scheduled with the first waves of LVTP-5s hitting the beach shortly after 0700. But by then, changing weather and sea states, probably due to increased winds overnight or during the early morning hours, had dramatically changed the surf conditions; it was now plunging surf, probably about 6 or more feet high, and very dangerous. The first wave containing landing craft was comprised mostly of the smaller Papa boats, each landing craft carrying perhaps 20 Marines and sailors. There were also some amtracs in the wave. Once caught in the surf, the light Papa boats broached (veered broadside to the line of surf) and were in very real danger of capsizing. There was nothing that the young Navy coxswain steering the craft could do. You debarked as best you could, some over the wooden sides and some out the now-open front ramp of the LCVP. Most found themselves in water over their heads, and, in most cases, fully loaded with weapons, packs, and helmets. Everything was jettisoned; M-60 machine guns, M-14 rifles, boxes of blank ammunition, and other hand-carried equipment and supplies. Marines were now helping other Marines, dragging them ashore half-drowned and fully waterlogged. Other Marines were grabbing the floundering Navy coxswains, one of whom appeared to be unconscious and had a large gash on his head. The next wave of landing craft followed right in on top of the first. In response to frantic signals from the wreck-strewn beach, some were able to turn away before hitting the surf line and head back on out to sea. Those too late in initiating evasive maneuvers, crashed right in on top of our craft, spilling Marines and then breaking up into pieces of wood scrap.

Marines and Navy folks were mustering on the dune line, continuing to tend to the injured and near-drowned. A whole lot of weapons and equipment were lost in the surf. Some of the exercise aggressors had taken the opportunity to release a whole lot of the dreaded CS tear gas. No one in the landing force had a dry serviceable gas mask resulting in a clear case of adding misery to injury. After what seemed a couple of hours (probably a half hour), things settled down, and people were now coming ashore, mostly by amtracs and helicopter, and they got on with the exercise, although still soaking wet, by heading tactically to the east to our assigned objectives. The Navy was now beginning to gather up the pieces of their landing craft off the beach."

According to the headlines in the Honolulu Advertiser, seven Marines and Navy men were injured when the landing craft of the first assault wave ran into “pounding” surf that demolished 15 of 21 small landing craft (not to mention the loss of equipment and weapons). Although some of the injuries had been fairly serious, fortunately nobody had been killed. According to the front page article on 1 October, “The 15 smashed boats littered the beach late yesterday, reduced to wooden wreckage. Pieces of shattered wood and strips of metal were spread over a mile of beach. Keels supporting the 250-horsepower engines washed back and forth in the surf”. The word later got back that the Navy commander in charge of the landing had been relieved of duty. Films taken of that exercise landing were still being shown to the student body at the Marine Corps’ Command and Staff School at Quantico ten years later amid cries of disbelief and the Navy students in the class appeared to sink lower in their seats.

### **Exercise BACK PACK**

During January 1964, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion departed Hawaii to provide the aggressor force for the Okinawa-based 3rd Marine Division’s annual division amphibious landing and exercise to be held on Formosa (now generally referred to as Taiwan). The Exercise was to be known as “BACK PACK.” The plan was to embark at Pearl Harbor for transit to the Far East and arrive about three weeks later, ahead of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division’s scheduled landing, in order to prepare positions and rehearse our aggressor roles (there was actually a very detailed script for this exercise). Our vehicles and equipment were administratively loaded aboard the ships. For actual amphibious operations, or even most exercises, supplies and equipment are routinely combat loaded; that is, in the reverse sequence of their desired off-loading and anticipated need ashore. Furthermore, the supplies and equipment are spread-loaded on several ships so as not to put all one’s eggs in one basket, in the event a ship is lost to enemy action. The CIA’s Bay of Pigs landing fiasco comes to mind as a failure to spread-load. Administrative loading, on the other hand, meant that ships were loaded carefully and securely, but not sequentially, and may or may not be spread-loaded. Everything would be coming off the ships, but the sequence of unloading was not critical to the efforts ashore. Tom Patrick, having departed Co B and having attended embarkation school, was now the battalion embarkation officer. He recalled “loading out the battalion for the trek to Taiwan.

The transit took almost two weeks, some of it through some fairly rough seas and weather. The junior officers of the battalion, i.e., all of the second and some of the first lieutenants, were billeted together in a large compartment on the main deck level known as the “Bull Pen” or “Boy’s Town.” Together most survived the effects of bad weather and rough seas; but got seasick together (led by the battalion’s attached and queasy shore party platoon officer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Pete Ashton), although not all at the same time, but more like sequentially; one would start, the others soon to follow. It was not a pretty sight. Due to the rocking, rolling, and pitching of the deck, the highly waxed and buffed linoleum floors of Boy’s Town was no impediment to the sliding of suitcases and footlockers stored there under the sleeping racks. This baggage would slide rapidly across the deck of Boy’s Town, first to port and then to starboard. To put one’s feet on the floor was to invite serious damage to one’s legs and feet; and this motion would go on for

hours. If you got seasick and nauseous, you best have some kind of container or barf bag in the rack with you.

Finally, we arrived off Formosa and got off that damn ship. Embarkation upon amphibious shipping was probably the secret (indeed, the cause) of Marine victories in the Pacific during World War II. Those Marines were probably so glad to get off those ships after a few weeks at sea; they just needed to be “aimed” at the Japanese defenders ashore.

Once offloaded, our battalion base camp was set up at an old Japanese airdrome built during World War II. A barbed wire fence was established around the camp, and our own Marine sentries were placed on the inside. Nationalist Chinese Marines were on the outside and it wasn't unusual for one of these Chinese Marines armed with M-1 rifles to butt stroke some unwitting but enterprising Chinese peasant trying to sell us some homemade plum brandy. We operated out of that base, daily coming and going to our well-scripted aggressor activities and locations. In the process, we got to see some of the island's smaller cities in the area in which we were operating. These walled towns or cities looked like something out of Pearl Buck's “The Good Earth,” with cobble-stoned streets and alleys, small shops with loud Chinese music playing, and people scurrying about. These people were comprised of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Chinese who had fled there from mainland China in 1949, the native Formosans and the aborigines, who inhabited the jungle-like interior, and were all living under the threat of Communist Chinese (ChiCom) attack or invasion. Regularly, small units of Nationalist Special Forces would conduct forays onto the Chinese mainland, and, of course, the ChiComs continued to shell the off-shore Nationalist held islands of Matsu and Quemoy. The whole thing was exciting. Out in the field, some of us encountered, and successfully evaded, our first king cobras, bamboo snakes, and some kinds of viper and adders (e.g., Russell's viper), all of them deadly.

1<sup>st</sup> Bn CO, Lt.Col Thomas, had directed the attached engineers to line the landing beaches with tank traps, with wide and deep ditches that would impede or stop the passage of tracked vehicles inland or channel their movement into designated kill zones where they could be engaged by the defenders anti-tank weapons. Whether through preD-Day aerial reconnaissance by the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv which detected the obstacles or the action of the on-scene exercise umpires, Lt Col Thomas was directed by the commanding general to have the ditches filled in or at a minimum have passage lanes prepared through the line of tank traps so that the flow of 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv tracked landing vehicles and armor would flow across the landing beaches unimpeded. After all, we couldn't have the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv embarrassed in the eyes of the many civilian and military VIPs, including the Generalissimo himself, in the elaborate viewing stand constructed off to one side of the beach when the Division's landing was forced to a complete halt. Lt Col Thomas complied of course, but was he ever pissed off!

John Albrecht [at the time, the Assistant 81mm Mortar Platoon Commander in H&S Co]: “The platoon I had explored one of the Japanese bunkers. The range cards, hand-painted, were still at the bunker's gun positions. The particular one we occupied as a type of CP had bunks, running water and kitchen area, all hued out of the volcanic formations. The opening to the bunker was fairly large with stairs cut out of coral. After being out all night, we returned early in the morning to find a cobra standing about two feet over our heads guarding the entrance. We never went back. Our platoon sergeant arranged for us to stay in a Buddhist monastery for some

of the time we spent as the aggressor force. We gave them our C-Rations for hot rice, sleeping mats, and comforters. The monks guarded us by day and we operated out of the monastery as a guerrilla base at night. It was not until after we left that we found out all of the monks were women.”

Early on D-Day, 1/4 was scripted to man designated positions on the landing beach or in Japanese-built bunkers overlooking the landing beach. That morning, the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv’s lead elements landed and were able to successfully drive the 1/4 units from beach positions. Later on D-Day morning, we moved further inland to occupy scripted positions which were to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division’s initial Landing Force objectives.

Roger Staley: “As we were withdrawing to our next scripted positions further inland which were to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division’s initial landing force objectives we were moving in two columns, one on each side of the graveled road leading to the beach landing observation bleachers established to accommodate VIPs, we were passed head-on by Chiang Kai-shek’s big, black sedan. I must have been less than arm’s length from the famous Generalissimo. He nodded in my direction.”

That same morning, a platoon led by John Albrecht and his platoon from H&S Co had encountered a team of U.S. Navy Seals, undoubtedly part of the Amphibious Task Force’s pre-landing recon effort, along a wooded road running along the backshore of the landing beach. Albrecht’s platoon had the Seals cornered but the Seals didn’t want to play the game, or by the rules, and started throwing small C-4 (plastique explosive), “bomblets”, which detonated too close to the Marines. The 40-man H&S Co platoon surrounded, and physically subdued, the feisty 6-man Seal unit. The Marines undoubtedly had gotten in a few good licks on these jerks and proceeded to hog-tie them securely. The Marines moved on, having more important things to do that morning, leaving the Seals secured in the middle of the well-used trail. It can only be assumed that somebody eventually found and untied the Seals.

Later on, Albrecht’s platoon setup an ambush on one of the roadways on a hairpin curve. A military 6X6 truck came into the ambush and we detonated the explosive’s captured from the Seals rocking the vehicle up in the air. We didn’t know how much C-4 to use. I then pulled open the truck door and ‘shot’ the driver with blanks, also captured from the Seals, but he turned out to be a Nationalist Chinese soldier (and not part of the exercise). He was shaking so bad I don’t how he was able to drive away.”

Late on D-Day, we had moved to occupy other scripted positions further inland which were to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv’s initial Landing Force objectives. About D+3, when we’d dissolved into a guerrilla force operating throughout the interior of the southern end of the island, Co A’s Second Platoon (Jack Atwood) had established a night ambush/roadblock and stopped a bus containing a chagrined Commanding General of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division (MGen Masters) and part of his division staff, who, when refusing Atwood’s request to produce some form of identification, were promptly declared as being captured, a status supported by the on-scene exercise umpires. We were really beginning to believe, scripting aside, that we might just win this “war.”

Pete Paffrath recalls a predawn attack or probe by Co B of the landing force. At about 0200 of the morning of the attack/probe, Paffrath and his platoon had jumped off on patrol; tensions were high because the platoon wanted to perform their part of the operation well. After

an hour or so of trooping through the high jungle, Paffrath had occasion to look to the rear. Immediately behind him was the tall, lean figure of a man, and Pete began to wonder who the hell this was. It turned out to be BGen Marion Carl (recently promoted and now the Brigade's CG). Paffrath claims that the moment stuck out in his memory because "we are taught that we were one Marine Corps. Everyone went through the same training, but aviators never seemed to get their feet wet. To see General Carl actually walking with my platoon that early morning and getting all cruddy and wet like the rest of us proved that we were one Corps."

Marty Brandtner, reminiscing about the Back Pack experience with Colonel Thomas in a letter over forty years later, related that Colonel Thomas had mentioned Marty's "stellar service as the Battalion's Club Officer, and more often than not, the bartender. What a time. I don't know if you remember or not, but as a member of a so-called 'aggressor hunter-killer team' formed from 'some steely-eyed killers' from the battalion headquarters S-2 staff, I ended up personally capturing MajGen Masters, the CG, of the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, in his tent inside the Div CP. I never heard too much about that afterwards, but I would guess the 'Aw Shits' were numerous. I have no doubt you flew some big-time cover for me over the incident." (And cover for the tank trap on the beach and for Atwood's ambush as well.)

One newspaper story stated that "MajGen. James M. Masters, Sr., commanding general, 3d MarDiv, had high praise for Marines who participated in Back Pack. 'They did their jobs well and absolutely without monkey business,' he said. Gen. Masters singled out the comparatively small aggressor force, the Brigade's BLT 1/4, commanded by LtCol. A.I. Thomas, for special praise. 'They kept us on our toes all the time,' he said. 'They are a highly professional outfit.'"

With the completion of the exercise, we enjoyed a day of liberty in one of Formosa's larger and more modern cities. Capt Sweeney had been around, and to Formosa earlier in his career, and knew exactly what place to take a couple of 6X6 truckloads of us, (Nancy's Harbor Bar in Kao-hsiung), about 40 miles north along the western coast. Impressively, many of the bargirls and the owner Nancy, of course, had remembered Capt Sweeney and we were treated like kings (at our own expense of course). After a day of eating, drinking, and whatever, we returned to base camp in the back of the open 6 X 6 trucks some singing all the way. We then turned to the job of getting our equipment cleaned and packed and back on board the ships, and sailed to Japan for several more days of liberty in Yokosuka.

Upon arriving in Japan, most of the battalion, in pairs or in larger groups, had made their way in to Tokyo and the famous Ginza district with its wall-to-wall neon lights and bars. Roger Staley from Co A recalled that he had been designated the battalion's duty officer aboard ship during one of the days while in port at Yokosuka: "That night I had received a phone call in the ship's small duty office from the U.S. Navy's shore patrol officer alerting me to the imminent delivery of some of the battalion's revelers, all drunk as skunks. Positioning myself on the main deck of the ship at the top of the forward brow (or gangplank), I watched a convoy of shore patrol paddy wagons slowly make the turn onto our pier. As soon as I saw the wagons make that turn, I ordered the sergeant of the guard to get all members of the guard up on deck immediately. There were several wagons full of Marines, all drunk; some were able to walk (more like stumble) peacefully up the brow, others were not so cooperative and required some assistance, ably provided by the corporals and Marines of the guard. Others had to be brought aboard on

stretchers. I admit to having given brief thought to using the ship's crane and cargo nets to getting them aboard, something akin to the movie Mr. Roberts. I collected all the military identification cards and was provided with a roster sheet by the shore patrol officer. Only one of these miscreants had Japanese criminal charges pending; it seems he had "appropriated" some old Japanese gentleman's stuffed sea turtle. I notified each company's duty NCO (usually a corporal or sergeant) to come pick up their "agents," verbally restricting each to their respective billeting areas below. I had the duty corpsman administer mild sedatives (chloral hydrate) to a few of the more boisterous. It was fairly quiet for the rest of the night which I utilized to do the necessary paperwork and get everything into the duty log. It was a busy and somewhat noisy tour as battalion duty officer for me; nothing like I'd ever expect to happen again, right? The trip back to Hawaii had been relatively uneventful other than running into a storm at sea.

**Change of Command.** Colonel Edward P. Dupras assumed command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines on 24 April replacing Colonel Jules M. Rouse. Colonel Ed Dupras, born, raised and educated in Rhode Island, entered the Marine Corps in 1941 upon graduation from Providence College in June 1940. He was commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt in the Marine Corps on 28 March 1942 after completing OCS at Quantico. After attending TBS, he was assigned to Co E, 2/5, (28 September 1941 to 5 March 1942). He then became the commanding officer of Co A, 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion where he saw action on Tulagi and Guadalcanal. He was promoted to captain 4 August 1942. He had been injured in a jeep accident and had also contracted malaria in 1943 and had been transferred to a hospital in CONUS. Upon discharge from the hospital, he was assigned to Marine Corps Schools in October 1943 where he served as the battalion commander at OCS. He joined the Naval Group in China in June 1944 training in guerrilla fighting. He departed China in December 1945. He headed the reconnaissance team to clear Inchon Harbor (S. Korea) in August 1950 for which he was awarded the Silver Star. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel in July 1951. In the time between the Korean War and 1964, he had attended the Senior Course at Quantico, served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division as Assistant G-3, and later as the executive officer of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, as a plans officer at HQMC, then attended the Naval War College at Newport, RI. He was promoted to colonel in 1959. He served as the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1 at FMFPAC from July 1962 until his assignment to the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines in April 1964.

### **Pohakuloa**

Battalion tac tests were administered by regiment, and usually at the Army's Pohakuloa Military Reserve ("Pohak") on the Big Island of Hawaii. The Army's sixty thousand acre Pohakuloa training facility sat in the lava fields between two inactive, (but not "extinct"), volcanoes, Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa, two of the largest volcanoes in the world and some sixty-five hundred feet above sea level. The place where Marines landed on the Big Island when they arrived by ship was Kawaihae Harbor near the town of Waimea. If they arrived by air (C-130s), it was at the Kamuela Airport. Kamuela was a picturesque small town in the middle of the legendary Parker Ranch. The only way to get to the Pohak facility was by truck or on foot and the only road there was the Saddle Road which began seven miles south of Waimea and ended 31 miles later at the facility. The battalion's rolling stock, (trucks, Mechanical Mules, Mighty Mites, trailers, generators, and such), were normally brought over by LST, off-loaded, and then driven up to the camp. (Not unsurprisingly, the Recon Co prided themselves by both walking up and then back down to Kawaihae/Kamuela at the conclusion of the training exercise.) The panoramic view from the

Saddle Road took in the Pacific and much of the Kohala Coast, including the Parker Ranch's rolling pasture lands, Kohala Mountain, and Kawaihae harbor.

Located high above the Kohala coast and with a sometimes snowcapped Mauna Kea in the background, the facility's setting was spectacular. However, the surrounding lava-filled terrain was largely devoid of any trees and supported some very sparse grasses and lichens. It was reminiscent of the face of the moon, (indeed, later astronauts also trained there). Continuous wind which blew stirred up the volcanic rock dust and inflicted a sandblasting on exposed skin, like the face, (normally requiring two bottles of Noxzema skin cream per trip to Pohak). The rocky surface of the ground was nearly impossible to sleep upon and took a heavy toll on Marine utility uniforms and boots. Marines had been training in this area for decades and it was not unusual for someone to find the dog tag of a WWII Marine.

While the view was exceptional, the camp itself was no bargain. Upon arrival, a battalion was housed in a series of Quonset huts built on top of rock and cinder. During periods of field training the Marines would be spending their days and nights struggling through some of the most difficult terrain in the world. There was nothing but the blackened lava of ancient flows for miles around, much of it covered with jagged cinders and volcanic dust. It could be very hot during the day and very cold at night, very "un-Hawaii-like" temperature-wise. It was so cold that wool lined field jackets were frequently required. The lava rock and cinders tore up Marine boots and bodies alike, and in the field it was impossible to find a comfortable place to sit, kneel, or lay or for that matter relieve oneself. As if that wasn't bad enough, the dust got into everything...absolutely everything.

Despite its challenges, Pohak was a Godsend for the Marines, offering them live fire training that could not be duplicated anywhere in the Islands. In the lava fields Marine weapons could be integrated into tactical maneuvers on a large scale giving the infantry battalion's 81mm mortars, 106mm recoilless rifles, 3.5" rocket launchers, M-60 machine guns, M-79 grenade launchers, rifle grenades, and support from artillery battalion 3/12 a workout that elsewhere could only be simulated. It was no less important that each rifleman would have the opportunity to fire live rounds as well. The battalion's officers and NCOs alike realized that the contribution to their unit's readiness by firing live ammunition day after day, over a broad range of targets, was considerable.

Pohakuloa's remote location limited liberty for the troops and restricted their off-duty activity to the enlisted men's club. A facility that was not much more than a corrugated metal roofed Quonset hut, but nevertheless offered the men their only escape from the monotony of the lava fields. Inside, the noise was deafening, and thick smoke hung everywhere like a fog bank. Not much larger than a two-car garage, the club contained about fifty folding chairs set up around a dozen wooden tables, all of them lined up from front to back on the concrete floor, six down one side of the thirty-foot-long Quonset hut and six down the other. During the month or so spent at Pohak there was little relief from duty except the movies and the club. Predictably, the club was a source of a number of incidents related to the over-consumption of beer. Fights were fairly common, usually between different units and based on rivalry, competition, exchange of taunts, etc. Most of these were quickly resolved but there was one incident in 1963 where a heavy metal chair was either swung or thrown at a Marine of Headquarters Battery, 3/12. That

attack was grievous and resulted in extensive damage to the Marine's head, and required helicopter medevac. The injury led to his death within a year. In retrospect, heavy training to a fine edge without a more satisfactory outlet for pressure and aggravated by alcohol may not have been a wise environment."

### **Operation Toolbox**

After Pohakuloa, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines had another landing exercise that summer called Operation Toolbox. It was to take place off Bellows Beach on Oahu.

The artillery support for the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade in Hawaii was provided by a direct support battalion of the 12<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment based in Okinawa. Third Battalion consisted of Headquarters Battery, and firing batteries Golf, Hotel, India and Mortar (known as Whiskey). Although island based, training was constant and intensive. Besides normal garrison training which included physical training, inspections and classroom subjects, the field training was as realistic as planners could make it. Operational training took place aboard Kaneohe Bay, at Bellows Air Force Station, Schofield Barracks, and Kahuku, all located on Oahu. Additional field training on other islands included Molokai for amphibious landings, Kahoolawe for artillery and naval gunfire shoots, and on the Big Island (of Hawaii) at the Army's Pohakuloa Training facility.

One amphibious operation at the Station's Fort Hase beach resulted in the sinking of an LVTP-5 amphibious tractor in to about 60 feet of water. India Battery's Gun 6 and its crew were carefully wedged into that tractor when it went down. Maneuvering a 105mm howitzer into an LVTP-5 is a careful and painstaking event and there is very little room left for personnel. Escaping from a sunken tractor requires letting it fill completely with water before releasing the hatches and swimming out. About six months elapsed before the tractor could be recovered and the gun sent to the Fleet Stock Account's heavy maintenance shop at Pearl City for repair. After about 18 months, the restored gun came back to India Battery and resumed its place in the T/E. Unfortunately, a subsequent helicopter-borne sling-load assault from K-Bay to Bellows AFS requiring separating the gun from its trails for load limits resulted in a sling failure over deep water and Gun 6 fell into the depths never to be seen again.

### **Future Exercises**

Starting in September 1964 the time would fly. Plans were to be on the Big Island of Hawaii during the first three weeks of the month. In October we were to go to Kahoolawe, a small uninhabited island off the coast of Maui, and then in February 1965 a very big exercise at Camp Pendleton in California.

Schofield Barracks, home of the Army's 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, offered live fire capabilities on Oahu and held a lot of history tracing back to the infamous Japanese attack on the Hawaiian Islands on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941. Bullet holes from attacking Japanese planes were left unrepaired in many buildings as a daily reminder about the wisdom of maintaining vigilance against future threats. Coincidentally, the firing positions at McCarthy Flats on Schofield were separated from the vast Dole Company pineapple fields by a fairly deep ravine, but no fencing, so it became an unauthorized target of a few night 'raids' to forage fresh supplies. Marines in those days (1963-1965) normally ate WW II era C-Rations so fresh augmentation of fruit was well received. Penalties for being

noticed, and worse, apprehended, were necessarily severe. (Similar foraging by infantry units bivouacked at the Marine Support Facility on Molokai took place in the pineapple fields maintained by Libby and Del Monte.) Schofield also maintained a very large white cross in the Kolekole Pass area, placed there for Easter sunrise services, that marked the spot where attacking Japanese aircraft transited en route to Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941.

Kahuku training area, on the north coast of Oahu, was ideally suited for jungle training and was very valuable in the year preceding deployment to Vietnam where a range of tactics and operating skills were honed. Motor marches to the Schofield and Kahuku facilities usually merited an escort of motorcycles from the Hawaiian Armed Services Police (HASP). It was enjoyable to watch these escorts leapfrog and race ahead to block intersections and expedite traffic. Unfortunately, underused military vehicles frequently broke down during the road march and mechanics and recovery vehicles were an integral part of every convoy.

Operations on Kahoolawe Island, located just off and to the southwest of Maui, required transport by LST and a simulated amphibious landing on an unpopulated island, unless you consider the population of wild goat herds. This was a shelter-half environment but operating communications and fire direction was normal. Communication off shore to cruisers and destroyers allowed reinforcement of naval gunfire capabilities within the battalion.

The batteries collectively supported their assigned infantry battalions with four forward observer teams, normally an officer, a scout sergeant, two radio operators and a wireman, assigned to each rifle company. Additionally, a liaison team consisting of an officer, an artillery NCO, a communications NCO, several radiomen and wiremen were attached to the infantry battalion's H&S company to serve as that battalion's Fire Support Coordination Center, (augmented by the battalion's other supporting arm's representatives, e.g., 81 mm mortars and air liaison officer, etc). The naval gunfire liaison teams composed of Navy and Marine personnel came from the artillery battalion's Headquarters Battery. On occasion, these forward observers, liaison team, and Naval gunfire spotters were detached to embark aboard an LPH for infantry assault training by helicopter insertion. Sometimes this included a combined surface amphibious and helicopter assault.

### **The Gulf of Tonkin Incident**

The young generation of Marines at the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade in 1964 were very fortunate to have had as their mentors, both in the officer and senior NCO ranks, many men who had fought with distinction in World War II and Korea, who had "been there, done that" in the best traditions of the Corps. They spoke and acted with real authority, and passion for need to prepare the Brigade for the battles yet to come.

The warning shot across the bow turned out to be an attack by the North Vietnamese Navy on US Naval assets in the South China Sea in early August 1964. The official report at the time stated that The Gulf of Tonkin Incident is the name given to two separate confrontations involving North Vietnam and the United States in the waters of the Gulf of Tonkin. On August 2, 1964, the destroyer USS Maddox, while performing a signals intelligence patrol as part of DESOTO operations, engaged three North Vietnamese Navy torpedo boats of the 135<sup>th</sup> Torpedo Squadron. A sea battle resulted, in which the Maddox expended over two hundred and eighty 3-inch and 5-inch shells, and in which four USN F-8 Crusader jet fighter bombers strafed the torpedo boats. One US aircraft was

damaged, one 14.5 mm round hit the destroyer, three North Vietnamese torpedo boats were damaged, and four North Vietnamese sailors were killed and six were wounded. There were no US casualties.

It was originally claimed by the National Security Agency that the second Tonkin Gulf incident occurred on August 4, 1964, as another sea battle, but instead as reported later may have involved false radar images and not actual NVN torpedo boat attacks.

The outcome of these two incidents was the passage by Congress of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which granted President Lyndon B. Johnson the authority to assist any Southeast Asian country whose government was considered to be jeopardized by “communist aggression”. The resolution served as Johnson’s legal justification for deploying US conventional forces and the commencement of open warfare against North Vietnam.

Unofficial rumors at K-Bay about an impending role for the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines in Vietnam continued throughout the fall of 1964.

### **On-The-Job Training in Vietnam**

Life in the Marine Corps brings many surprises, some of them welcome and some not. Towards the end of November several 4<sup>th</sup> Marines officers were asked to “volunteer” for on-the-job training (OJT) in Vietnam. This program, innocuously called “the WestPac (Western Pacific) Orientation Program,” had been in effect for several months for 3rd Marine Division elements on Okinawa but had just been extended to those of us serving at K-Bay. The idea behind it was to familiarize at least a few officers and NCOs with the situation on the ground in Vietnam by assigning us individually to front line South Vietnamese units for a period of about 30 days. Our role was that of “observers” but we were armed and would take part in any battlefield action that might occur.

After arrival in Okinawa, the OJT group was formed up, with half of going north to units in I Corps and the other half going to Saigon for duty with the Vietnamese Marines. One group was assigned to a Special Forces A Team working out of a camp at Gia Vuc in Quang Ngai province. In addition to the twelve Americans in the team and their Vietnamese counterparts, the camp held a battalion of Montagnard tribesmen, consisting of three companies of 100 men each. Normally, each patrol or operation staged from the camp was accompanied by two Americans. There was contact with the Viet Cong every time they went beyond the wire, but no pitched battles.

In retrospect, Gia Vuc seemed to be a microcosm of the then and future war. The corruption and ineptitude of the South Vietnamese, as well as their contempt for the Montagnards were obvious, and relations between the U.S. Special Forces team and their Vietnamese counterparts (a very unimpressive group) left much to be desired. Although the troops based at Gia Vuc could conduct operations into the surrounding countryside, they controlled no territory except for the camp itself and the adjacent Montagnard village where most of their families lived. The camp had an air of siege mentality about it, perhaps for good reason. In general, the winter of 1964-65 was a tough period for the South Vietnamese forces, which were being regularly hammered by the Viet Cong. Of the 20 officers and staff NCOs in the OJT group, seven were wounded during their brief stay in-country. After returning to their units at K-Bay in mid-January 1965, the OJT officers and NCOs were asked to provide training programs for battalion and company leaders.

## **Raider Training**

Accompanied by recon company trainers, after limited training in the surf at K-Bay, a group of officers and NCOs embarked on board a converted Regulus class submarine, the USS Halibut (SSGN-587) on 22 January 1965, at Pearl Harbor. The large external missile pod located forward of the sail aboard the sub had its missile racks removed and replaced with canvass sleeping racks to accommodate all 80 Marines. After learning the basics, they worked off a nuclear missile sub that had room to hold inflated rubber rafts in its' gutted missile compartment on the bow, as well as the troops. The young Marines got a thrill as the sub submerged and floated them off the deck, paddling like hell to avoid the backwash suction! Sailing up to the northwest end of Oahu, the group practiced both dry and wet launches and recoveries from the deck of the surfaced submarine. Launching was easy, you just inflated your boat on the deck, sat in it, and waited for the sub to sink out beneath you.

Several devices were provided to test that would help the sub's sonar detect and then zero in on our position for pick up. It was fairly simple in design; a doorbell buzzer, a length of wire connecting it to an off-on switch, and a battery pack wrapped in waterproof tape. The buzzer portion would be dangled under water alongside one of the boats and the designated operator would "pulse" a pre-agreed upon series of bursts. The bursts would appear upon the sub's sonar scope, often "whitening out" the sonar screen. The sub, alerted to our presence and desire to be picked up proceeded towards us at periscope depth. The first issue of these devices was used during a daylight recovery exercise. When the device was placed in the water and turned on it was surrounded by sharks within a few minutes. That particular device did not return from the exercise.

The tactics involved in the raider raid concept were pretty straight forward. After launching from the submarine at night and paddling to a point just beyond the surf line, the intention was to align the small rubber boats in a straight line perpendicular to the beach. Holding position, scout swimmers entered the water for the swim ashore to determine the security situation on the beach and near shore. Using infrared MetaScopes, the swimmers would signal the main body to come ashore. Once ashore, the boats were hidden out of sight, camouflaging them as much as possible, and posting a small security detail in the beach area. The group would then tactically and as stealthily as possible, proceed to complete the raid mission against a target installation inland and then return to the beach.

Recovering the boats aboard a submarine, particularly at night, was a little more challenging. The intention was to align the boats in a straight line perpendicular to the beach well out to sea, perhaps a distance a half-mile out from the beach. Ten little boats would hook ten-foot ropes with appropriate hardware between boats 1 thru 5 and 6 thru 10, securing them one to the other. And then one much longer rope, perhaps 100 or more feet long, between the lead boats of each of the two the two groups. It was important that the two five-boat groups keep the long rope as taut and straight as possible between them.

Then, on signal, the submerged sub would approach and try to snag the rope with its number two periscope, ideally on either right one-third or the left one third, but preferably never directly in the middle. The forward momentum of the sub would cause the rubber boat groups to be towed and fall in, one group in front of the other at the ends of the long rope. The submarine, still submerged and running at periscope depth, and theoretically beneath any surface radar detection, would tow the boats further out to sea where the sub would surface and recover the team. Once all back aboard, the sub could re-submerge and be on its merry way. Most of this work was done during daylight hours off the northwest tip of the Island

of Oahu, an hour or so sailing time from the submarine base at Pearl Harbor. The group was only out to sea for a couple of days at a time.

After several practice surfaces and launchings in the daytime, it was determined that the team was ready for night operations. The sharks followed the nuclear subs and fed of the garbage. Every time the sub surfaced there were at least a dozen sharks around. Navy personnel kept sharp watch with weapons and needless to say, the team did not stay in the water long. When surfacing on the night operation and given a direction and distance to the landing site, about thirty-some rafts were involved. The sub gave the team three minutes to launch and it disappeared. The ocean was black with deep swells that approximated forty to fifty feet above deep. It did not take them long to put two and two together to figure out where they were, and that they were in an exercise that could take lives. A corporal from Hawaii stood on the bow of the boat and grabbed the bow line. All oars were pulled in, and with the action of the rudder the corporal basically 'surfed' them onto the beach. Only three boats landed, all of the others were rolled in the surface. Some weapons and gear were lost, but all Marines survived.

The SOP was to fasten a line between two groups of rafts and the sub would come by pick you up with their periscope antenna, tow the group beyond the coastal defense weapons range, surface, and recover. In this particular exercise, there were seven rafts and everything went as planned until the pickup phase. The sub 'hooked' up the group and continued to head for open water. The weight was not balanced because of the number of rafts on one side with three was being pulled forward around the antenna. The problem was solved by paddling hard on the four boat side and backing water on the three boat side.

The final exercise was to be a raid on Molokai Island from two diesel subs, (the debacle of the night training exercise at Mokapu Beach was all but forgotten). The group was ordered to the submarine base at Pearl Harbor on 25 January to embark upon two old Guppy III class diesel submarines of World War II vintage that were being used largely as aggressor subs for Navy anti-submarine exercises. They were much smaller than the newer nuclear powered Regulus class sub, so the group was split into two forty-man elements (5 boat teams each), one element to each submarine.

The submarines sailed from Pearl and headed for the southern coast of Molokai Island to conduct a night raid exercise from the sea upon a mock radar station located about a mile inland from the coastal mangrove swamp fronting the beach. The transit, launch, movement ashore, raid, and departure back through the surf were uneventful. It was the recovery of the two groups that became interesting. A second and more sophisticated locating device was to be used during the night recovery/pick up. The Marine officers had been told at some point during the training cycle that submariners do not like to maneuver more than one sub at a time inside the 100-fathom curve on a nautical chart; something about lack of maneuverability. Thus, the first Guppy sub would pick up a five-boat group using the same technique already described, except the long rope now went between boats 2 and 3. The first group got picked up uneventfully at about 3 a.m. Shortly thereafter, just as the second submarine was beginning its run from beyond the 100-fathom curve into the pickup area, frantic radio calls were being received requesting that the pickup be accelerated.

About this time of year, the Hawaiian Islands area of the Pacific experiences a false predawn sunrise. The floating Marines were claiming that the fluorescent plankton wake in the water around their boats contained some really big and potentially hostile shadows moving under the boats. The boats were in position waiting. Suddenly, off to one side of the small rubber craft came a large grey nose which

emerged from the ocean. I thought that the sub was going to surface and hit us. As it turned out, it was not the sub but a pod of whales that had surfaced and were probably wondering what these fools were doing in their domain.

The Navy skipper opined that the reported movement was probably from whales rising from the depths to bask in the warmth of the coming dawn's sunlight. No problem though, the Navy guys insisted that the whales were harmless. The Marines were not so sure. The Navy crew reiterated that whales were considered harmless and probably wouldn't bother the small boats, especially since a submarine was heading in their direction. They would most likely move to get out of the area. There was some pleading over the radio to relax, that the sub was on the way, and that they'd all be picked up in a few minutes. The sub never did find the second group until daylight. The Captain of the sub said later that he had never heard of whales eating live Marines.

### **Operation Silver Lance**

The Brigade began gearing up for Silver Lance in early January 1965. This would be a very large landing exercise scheduled to be held in February and March at Camp Pendleton beaches, with the Brigade reinforcing the 1st Marine Division. Amphibious shipping for the exercise was already at Pearl Harbor, and heavy equipment was loading.

Throughout the late fall and early winter the situation in Vietnam continued to deteriorate, a fact that was not lost on those serving in the Brigade. On 24 October, Viet Cong sappers, (units with tunneling capability), hit the USAF base at Bien Hoa, and on Christmas Eve a VC bomb exploded inside a U.S. BOQ in Saigon. On 7 February the VC attacked U.S. Army installations near Pleiku killing eight Americans and wounding 125. While American losses from these incidents were light by comparison with what they would become in later years, at the time these were major incidents which increased the pressures for introducing U.S. ground troops into Vietnam.

Once again, rumors began to circulate at K-Bay that maybe the Brigade would not be going to the West Coast after all. By mid-February working days were spent continuing to make preparations for Silver Lance. And then, on 18 February a Honolulu radio station broadcast that Silver Lance had been cancelled for the Brigade, but there was no official confirmation of this, and preparations for the exercise continued. February went by, with the ships still in Pearl Harbor, and the 4th Marines still in garrison at K-Bay, and Silver Lance was getting underway on the West Coast. New rumors were that the Brigade would embark on the ships and either conduct a landing exercise off Oahu's Bellows Beach or join elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division, (BLT 2/3), for Exercise Jungle Drum III in Thailand. But there were bigger plans afoot for the 3rd Marine Division. On the 7th of March, a battalion from the division landed at Da Nang, signaling the introduction of U.S. ground troops into Vietnam and the onset of a wider war.

New rumors in late February had the Brigade going to Okinawa for an indefinite period. The loading of ships at Pearl continued including everything the Brigade owned plus thousands of rounds of ammunition. On 10 March the word was passed that the Brigade would depart for Okinawa for a permanent change of station the next day. Before embarking, the troops were to be paid and get haircuts. No destination was disclosed, but it was confirmed that the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines would no longer be based at K-Bay, and that they might be overseas for as long as 13 months, and that dependents might have to leave Hawaii. The shoe, when it finally dropped, fell with a thud, and was particularly hard on dependents. During the weeks of rumors and uncertainty at K-Bay in early 1965, it was assumed that somewhere up

there in the Brigade chain of command senior officers knew what was happening. In fact, the decision to send the Brigade to the Western Pacific rather than to Silver Lance was made 7 March, the day the first Marine infantry units landed in Vietnam. Final preparations for departure from Pearl were made on 11 March. Lieutenant General Krulak, commanding general of all Marines in the Pacific, went aboard ships to inspect the troops. At 1800 a convoy headed west after weighing anchor. "Pearly Shells," the Brigade's unofficial anthem, and "Aloha Oe" were played by the band on the pier. Many dependents were there to see the Marines depart.

### **Westpac**

With Okinawa the apparent destination for approximately 6,000 Marines and Sailors, the "word" was that they'd be offloaded, possibly at Camp Hansen or Camp Schwab on Okinawa. Interestingly, there were troops aboard who continued to believe they were still headed towards California and Exercise Silver Lance, despite being briefed to the contrary. After several days of convincing that when the sun rises on the fantail and sets on the bow you can confirm that the destination isn't California. Once convinced of our true direction, most of the married personnel instantly wanted allotments, powers of attorney, etc., so their families could clear base housing, ship family autos, and household effects and furniture, as well as obtain transportation for their dependents back to the Mainland. Many also wanted to get wills and other legal documents completed. Embarked Marine and Navy lawyers and disbursing (fiscal and pay) people had plenty of business. Even so, there were still some non-believers and procrastinators on board. Reports we received aboard ship enroute to Okinawa indicated that Marine patrols, that had landed at Da Nang during mid-March, had been shooting at each other (no Viet Cong or VC), and the Marines had incurred a wounded in action (WIA) from a booby trap or mine.

Marines aboard troopships were jammed in very tight quarters down deep in the hold of the ship. They were so far down that one needed a guide to find them. The troops were stacked in canvas cots at least six high. They didn't have mattresses for their cots and their gear was close by all jumbled together. The Marines that were below deck were far from comfortable, but no one joins the Marine Corps to be comfortable. What a way to go to war. Their fathers and grandfathers before them went to war that way, so it was really nothing new. However, that didn't make it any easier for them living deep in the hold of a troopship for an extended period of time.

Aboard ship, once we got beyond buckling on our life preservers for the various drills ("man overboard," "general quarters," and "abandon ship"), life for the officers in their cabins (although not for the troops in the airless hold) was not so bad, the main deficit being a lack of exercise. The daily routine was reveille at 0600, breakfast at 0630, muster at 0730, drills at 0845, noon chow at 1100, muster (again!) at 1500 and dinner at 1700. Movies were shown at night -- on 14 March, for example, it was "4 For Texas" with Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and (of more interest to the troops) Anita Ekberg and Ursula Andress. The convoy encountered heavy weather during mid-March. Sailors and Marines alike were ordered below deck and the ship, yawing and shuddering, slowed to eight knots. On 17 March "officers" call was held on the flying bridge at 0800, but it was almost impossible to stand in the gale, and afterwards activities were further curtailed. Fortunately, the weather improved by the 19th and remained good for most of the rest of the voyage.

On 13 March notification was received that there would not be permanent change of station orders after all, and that the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines would remain part of the Brigade and Hawaii would still be the official duty station. Dependents would, therefore, not have to leave Hawaii within 90 days. This change

of word was well-received by most Marines, especially those who were married, and led to speculation that returning to K-Bay would be in four to six months.

On the last day at sea there had a flurry of excitement when General Quarters was sounded after a Soviet ship was spotted off our port quarter. Apparently, someone thought that an attack might be possible. Life jackets were donned, and the crews manned their guns. It was also reported that Soviet subs were tracking us about seven miles off our port and starboard sides. Despite these “threats,” real or imagined, General Quarters was cancelled an hour or so later, and the rest of the voyage passed without incident.

### **Okinawa**

On 26 March, two weeks after departure from Pearl Harbor, the convoy was approaching Okinawa. Reveille that morning went at 0445 and breakfast was at 0515. In the “hurry up and wait” tradition of the Marine Corps, actual arrival at the port of Naha wasn’t until about 1000. The 3rd Marine Division band, playing “Aloha Oe” and “The Hawaiian War Chant” was on the dock. Despite the warm welcome, it didn’t take long to figure out that “Oki” was cold, bleak and depressing by comparison with Hawaii.

The First Battalion, now BLT 1 /4 commanded by Lt. Col Bud Fredericks, had gone ashore on Okinawa at Camp Schwab by a combination of helicopter, amtrac, and small naval craft from the amphibious ships at anchor in Orowan Bay on 25 March. Camp Schwab, the northern most of the Marine camps on Okinawa, was located 35 miles or so from just about everything else. The RLT-4 Headquarters staff, also located at Schwab, was deeply involved in developing plans for operations in the near future. While at Camp Schwab, the battalion officers were afforded the opportunity to read the confidential daily operations reports of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division units. The remainder of the Brigade (less the Brigade staff which went to Camp Hague) headed to Camp Hansen or other camps in the central part of the island. BLT 2/4, commanded by Lt Col J.R. ‘Bull’ Fisher, was posited in Camp Hansen. Upon 3/4’s arrival on Okinawa, it had also been assigned to Camp Hansen and was commanded by Lt.Col David R. Jones.

The officer accommodations at Camp Schwab had two officers to a room, two adjacent rooms sharing a shower unit and a toilet and a shower and “Na-sans,” local Okinawan maids and housekeepers who’d do your laundry, shine your boots, make your bed, and generally keep the room clean, all for \$8 U.S. each a month plus employer-purchased cleaning supplies and laundry soap. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division units still here on Okinawa were now referring to 1 /4 as “Pineapple Marines” and had real difficulties believing 1/4 trained as hard as they did. The 1 /4 Marines were calling the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division guys the “Okinawa National Guard” because it was really believed that BLT 1 /4 would be deployed to Vietnam before they would (as had all the other battalions of the Okinawa-based 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Marines) which really pissed them off.

All hands were restricted to base during the first few weeks after arrival. No liberty. A lot of effort was expended to bring shot records up-to-date, and classes were held on various health related issues. One class was devoted to venereal diseases, and the troops were instructed that the incubation period for the clap was eleven days. The Marine who reported into sickbay nine days after arrival said nothing about the source of his infection.

## Chapter 4 - Vietnam

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 4<sup>th</sup> Marines**

It appeared at first that RLT-4 would be on Okinawa for a number of months, having replaced the Marine units which had left for Vietnam shortly before the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines had arrived. Thus, the rifle range was scheduled for a certain month, as were other events in Okinawa's annual training cycle, including counter-guerilla training in the remote Northern Training Area. However, it was announced on 4 April that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn had been designated the "alert battalion" for the 3rd Marine Division, meaning that they would be the first to deploy if there was trouble in the wind. And so it happened. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn learned that they would be embarking on the attack transport USS Henrico for Vietnam. The Battalion Landing Team was expanded from 900 to about 1,400 people for the journey into harm's way. After a few more days, on 10 April, the Henrico, along with the few other ships, weighed anchor and set sail for Vietnam. The newspapers in Okinawa said our destination was Da Nang, along the central Vietnam coast, but it turned out that after a brief stop off Da Nang, we would end up further north, near the old imperial capital of Hue.

On the morning of 15 April reveille sounded at 0400 and after a skimpy breakfast, (not the traditional steak and eggs that Marines were supposed to get on D Day), the troops formed up by boat teams, and at 0600, while it was still dark, they went over the side and down the debarkation nets of the Henrico into the bobbing landing craft below, heavily laden with field marching packs, flak jackets, weapons and steel helmets.

Far from being opposed by the Viet Cong, however, the landing was met by a warm welcome from the local officials and citizenry who were lined up on shore to greet us. A band played, and there were schoolgirls festooned in the Vietnamese version of the lei. Although this reception may have been received with a sigh of relief in Washington and by our loved ones, the BLT 3/4 Marines had mixed feelings. They thought they looked a little ridiculous in full battle gear. The landing gave new meaning to the word "anti-climax."

BLT 3/4's mission was to defend the airfield at Hue (the third largest city in Vietnam), as well as the 8<sup>th</sup> Radio Research Unit (8<sup>th</sup> RRU), a secret U.S. military intercept unit. The village of Phu Bai and its various hamlets were nearby as was a training area for the 1<sup>st</sup> ARVN division. BLT 3/4's commanding officer was Lt.Col D.R. Jones who had served in WWII, and as a platoon commander in Korea under the legendary "Chesty Puller" in the battles for Seoul and the Chosin Reservoir.

On 18 April (Easter Sunday) the artillery unit, India Battery 3/12 (attached to BLT 3/4) experienced the Battalion's first casualty, a self-inflicted wound from a 45 that proved to be not life threatening. Accidents and casualties by friendly fire became a serious and frequent problem for Marine units throughout the war.

For the next few days the Battalion dug into strategic defensive positions, and established observation posts (OPs). On 25 April it was reported that BLT 3/4 had suffered its first KIAs when a VC unit executed a nighttime assault on a squad of Marines that was part of Company B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion led by Lt. Frank Reasoner. Two Marines were KIA and several others were WIA.

It's very hot and humid on 28 April when Marine Corps Commandant Wallace Green arrives by helicopter to attend a briefing at the nearby RRU compound. He departs about 30 minutes later. During

that time Marine heat casualties were being shuttled in for treatment. The lack of an adequate supply of water and the requirement to wear steel helmets and flak jackets combined with 97 degree temperatures and steaming humidity cause widespread dehydration.

On 1 May intelligence reports suspect 1,500 VC to be located a few kilometers south of the airfield and the prospect of an attack in the near future. The S-3 (battalion operations officer) has ordered battalion units to designate "bug out" positions in the event of a major VC attack. India Company Executive Officer Lt Jack Downing leads Platoon Commanders McConnaughey, Weibel and Walker on a perimeter walk to positions. Tactical retreats (AKA "bug outs") are not a popular concept among Marines.

On 7 May the BLT 3/4 Marines heard that the remainder of RLT-4 is landing 1/4 and 2/4 today at Chu Lai to establish security for a new airfield to be built. Chu Lai is well over 100 miles south of Hue/Phu Bai, with Da Nang located in between. For almost the remainder of 1965 BLT 3/4 and 3/12's India Battery were not augmented with other Marine units. In fact, for much of the time one of 3/4's four rifle companies was sent to reinforce either Da Nang or Chu Lai operations.

During the remainder of May tactical operations of BLT 3/4 were typical of those experienced by Marine units at the Da Nang and Chu Lai enclaves. Defending the airfields, recon patrols, setting up OPs and ambushes. Lt. Jack Downing, Executive Officer of India Company maintained a personal diary of his company's actions from April 1965 until his rotation back to the world April 1966. Many of the reports of 3/4's actions have been contributed by Lt. Downing.

On 20 May, after several days of recon, India Company CO Captain Drost sent Downing back to Lang Xa for the morning resupply and then onto the Battalion CP on the resupply helicopter to obtain information about large scale helicopter operation being planned that would include India Company. After meeting with the battalion S-3, Captain Conrado, about the plan Downing picked of 19 attachments from the flamethrower and demolition sections and flew back to Lang Xa to work with Captain Drost to plan for the next day and set in the defenses for the night.

On 21 May before dawn India Company was organized in two waves of six chopper loads each. The choppers arrived at 0615. After removing a newsman from one chopper the first wave took off for a reported possible "hot" LZ, however the VC did not contest the landing. The rest of the day was devoted to organizing the company to move out of eight foot high elephant grass and settle in for the night. Since no tactical instructions had been received by the morning of 22 May Captain Drost decided to displace south to a certain position along a stream. After an hour on the move India Company received about 20 rounds of automatic weapons fire as they moved along a ridge line. Lt. Downing with two squads pursued the VC for about kilometer but were unable locate any sign of the shooters. The Company moved on to their objective by the stream.

The next few days saw more VC snipers, at least two VC KIAs, and some recovery of equipment and documents. India Company returned to the Battalion CP the morning of 24 May.

The remainder of May was mostly uneventful. A few sniper rounds and returned fire, and patrols sent out to investigate without positive results. Two Marine PFCs out on liberty in Hue failed to return to the battalion CP on 30 May. An armed search located them in Hue. The two Marines were busted to private, restricted to base for 60 days, and fined two-thirds of a month's pay for two months.

On 4 June Lt. Downing and Lt. Bill Parker and about 20 Marines got into a firefight around noon with about 20 or more VC. The result, which was not determined until later from intelligence gathered from captured VC was 27 VC KIAs out of a larger force of 50 men. The VC taken prisoner were turned over to the ARVN (South Vietnamese army) for interrogation. ARVN methods were to take the prisoners up in a helicopter for questioning and when they failed to talk were flung to their deaths.

Martha Raye arrived unannounced at the 8<sup>th</sup> RRU Compound for a welcomed performance on 13 June.

On 20 June 1stLt Dave Usher replaced Captain Drost as India Company Commander. Drost was a fearless demanding CO. Other new replacements included the battalion S-3 Major Ruthazer, and one lieutenant and a first sergeant.

During the last week of June two Marines were killed by accidents involved an artillery or mortar round, and a grenade that were exploded by the men that were using e-tools (entrenching tools). Several men also were evacuated due to malaria.

By early July the routine at Phu Bai had changed to one week per month in the field instead of two. However, in extreme heat the units in reserve at the CP were tasked with improving the perimeter defenses, digging foxholes and sandbagging bunkers all day.

General Victor Krulak made his second visit to Phu Bai on 2 July. He tested the accuracy of a rocket gunner with firing a new rocket launcher never before fired, (by PFC Walsh), with a 900 meter target. Walsh hit a Bulls Eye. The entire command was immensely relieved.

On 9 July Major Watson (AKA the "Bear"), BLT 3/4 Executive Officer was relieved and reassigned without explanation. His replacement was Major Cullen Zimmerman. The Bear had been a hard and volatile man. He was courageous, but unloved. He earned a Navy Cross during the battle for Okinawa in 1945 as an enlisted Marine. And he walked across a minefield at Phu Bai to rescue a wounded Marine and carry him to safety. But his rage and tough treatment was well beyond acceptable.

On 15 July the news reached BLT 3/4 that 1stLt. Frank Reasoner was killed in action near Da Nang while trying to rescue one of his wounded men in a firefight. Frank had recently been transferred from Phu Bai to Da Nang and was serving as Company Commander of A Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion. He would eventually be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery.

During the last two weeks of July the problem of boredom resulting in alcohol abuse and disrespect of officers and NCOs had become a common problem in Phu Bai. Leadership meetings were held at all companies in 3/4 to no avail. Punishment was ineffective. There was no brig and sending an offender to Okinawa defeats the purpose keeping a combat ready force at Phu Bai. It's a reward, not a punishment to send offenders out of harm's way.

In early August the Marine Corps approach to pacification called Joint Action was first tried in Vietnam by BLT 3/4. Each rifle company in the battalion was required to give up a hand-picked squad of Marines (all volunteers) which would be stationed in one of the villages near Phu Bai. They were combined with a local Vietnamese militia unit to form a "Joint Action Platoon", (soon to named "Combined Action"). Americans and Vietnamese would be commanded by a Marine NCO, who in turn along with other such

units in the Phu Bai area would come under the “Joint Action Company” led at the time by a Vietnamese speaking Marine officer, 1stLt. Paul Ek.

The Vietnamese militia units, composed of men either too young or too old for regular service in the army, were generally not very effective. It was believed that their capabilities could be greatly enhanced by the presence of Marines, and their formidable firepower and ability to use helicopters for quick reinforcement of units under attack. When not conducting combat operations, the Marines in the platoon would train the local militia units and assist in civic action projects for improving the village infrastructure. The basic purpose of the joint unit was to strengthen the outer defensive perimeter—protecting the Marine enclave at Phu Bai from VC mortar attacks, denying the VC access to local population centers, and improving intelligence collection at the grassroots level.

With the enthusiastic backing of Generals Victor Krulak and Lew Walt the concept as soon being implemented on a much wider scale and came to be a very important part of the Marine strategy throughout the war.

On 19 August General Krulak visits Phu Bai again. He tells the troops that Phu Bai is not the end of the line, it's the beginning of the line. He talked about the battle raging near Chu Lai. It's the first big battle in the Vietnam war, and except for the Naval gunfire support it's an all Marine show. According to Krulak the VC have lost 550 dead so far, while 20 Marines have been killed and 130 wounded. He added that there are already more Marines in Vietnam than there ever were in Korea.

During the last week of August a firefight occurred when a recon platoon ambushed a patrol of about 15 VC. The VC, armed with Chinese and Soviet weapons, had been carrying out a propaganda mission in the local villages. About 5 VC were killed with no Marine casualties. The survivors of the VC patrol fled, leaving behind the bodies of their dead.

On 6 September India Company 3/4 flew to Chu Lai to take over positions occupied by A Company, BLT 1/7. The next five days included several actions primarily involving India as a blocking force. Five WIAs occurred from one mine explosion. After evacuating the wounded and clearing the area the company took automatic weapons fire. After returning fire and silencing the incoming about 50 VC suspects were escorted under guard to the battalion CP. India Company returned to Phu Bai on 11 September.

During the last half of September the long awaited monsoons arrive. No one is prepared. Drainage ditches fill, and water gushes into the tents. Foxholes and bunkers on the line fill with water. Even though it's damp and cool, the relief from the relentless sun and heat is welcomed. Mosquitos thrive in the monsoon weather, so malaria cases increased. Kilo Company lost a Marine who drowned in a swollen stream crossing. India Company continues to run daytime patrols and nighttime ambushes.

At the beginning of October LtCol Taylor was replaced as CO of BLT 3/4 by LtCol Sumner Vale, a Naval Academy graduate from Rhode Island. Taylor turned out to be well liked and respected and will be taking over as CO of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines at Da Nang.

From 19 October through the end of the month India Company participated in several operations searching for the VC in jungles, along rivers, and on high hills. On 21 October the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon of India Company, in an effort to ambush suspected crossing points on the Song Ta Trach river, opened fire on river boats. When the shooting ended there was one Marine KIA and two WIA's. VC KIA's were not recovered from the swollen river.

On 2 November an embarkation team from the 3<sup>rd</sup> MAF arrived from Da Nang to lay out a plan for the departure from Vietnam of BLT 3/4. It wasn't until Christmas day that 3/4 finally left Vietnam for Okinawa. In between 2 November and 25 December the battalion participated in many operations including the final action on Hill 41 near Phu Bai. In March 1966, BLT 3/4 would return to Phu Bai to join 1/3 and 2/3 under the command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. BLT 3/4 would finally leave Vietnam for good in November 1969.

#### **RLT-4**

By 22 April the press' accounts on Okinawa of action in Vietnam were becoming of some concern. They were naming units, where they landed, and the number of troops involved. Sometimes the newspapers contained reports of action even before it came through official military channels. It was reported that RLT-4 may be in South Vietnam within a week but no one knew how valid this particular rumor was. If it was true, there were going to be an awful lot of 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division Marines, particularly 3/3 (the "Okinawa National Guard"), that will be very upset about the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines getting "down south," as they call South Vietnam, before they did.

Throughout the month of April 1965, the question of American participation in the war preoccupied those in authority. On 20 April, a high-level conference convened at CinCPac headquarters in Honolulu attended by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, his Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, John McNaughton, the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, Maxwell D. Taylor, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler, the Commander, U.S. Military Command, Vietnam (ComUSMACV), General William C. Westmoreland, and the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CinCPac), Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp. The conferees reached a consensus that the relatively light level of Viet Cong (VC) activity was the lull before the storm and recommended the additional deployment of 42,000 U.S. servicemen to Viet Nam, including 5,000 more Marines. Those Marine forces, organized into three reinforced infantry battalions and three jet aircraft squadrons were to establish another Marine enclave 57 miles southeast of Da Nang.

This was the situation on Okinawa when on 23 April 1965 the Third Marine Amphibious Force, (III MAF), received a warning order to prepare to land additional forces into the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). The III MAF, upon receipt of the warning order, directed Brigadier General Marion E. Carl to form a small staff at Camp Hague, Okinawa, and as CG Third MAB and Landing Force Commander, to plan for and execute the amphibious landing of the Third MAB over the beach at Chu Lai, Vietnam.

The Third Marine Amphibious Brigade was a permanently organized task organization assigned aboard the flagship of Commander Amphibious Forces, Seventh Fleet. A small cadre of staff officers was permanently aboard the assigned flagship and augmented during periods of unusual activities. On 23 April 1965, two officers and one enlisted Marine comprised the cadre of Third MAB aboard the USS Estes, AGC 12, flagship of Commander Amphibious Squadron One/Commander Amphibious Forces, Seventh Fleet. The small 3<sup>rd</sup> MAB staff (all of whom were from the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade with the exception of the chief of staff assigned from the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv plus the cadre of two officers and one enlisted from the Estes), were assembled. One advantage enjoyed by this arrangement was that the staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade had just completed a comprehensive four-month planning period with the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines in preparation for Operation Silver Lance, (the cancelled Southern California exercise). The knowledge gained and prior staff coordination from this proved invaluable during the planning and execution of the Chu Lai Landing.

For the Chu Lai operation, Third MAB was to be comprised of one reinforced infantry regiment, which included two reinforced infantry battalions, (BLTs), a divisional reconnaissance battalion (-), and required combat, combat support, and combat service elements, together with one naval mobile construction battalion, (NMCB), one medium helicopter squadron, and supporting Marine air base and communications elements. It was to conduct an amphibious landing on D-day to occupy and defend the terrain necessary to construct and defend an expeditionary air field at Chu Lai, RVN.

Colonel Thomas J. O'Connor, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW) chief of staff at the time, recalled that General Carl at first wanted to employ both the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines and MAG-13, (which had deployed west with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade), for the Chu Lai landings. General Carl and Colonel Ralph H. "Smoke" Spanjer, the MAG-13 commander, attempted to convince General Fontana, the wing commander, to include MAG-13 as part of the Chu Lai forces. According to Colonel O'Connor: "General Fontana listened patiently to the first presentation, but then informed them that, in view of the considerable planning that had taken place before their arrival, MAG-12 at Iwakuni (Japan) was the group that would deploy. General Carl and Colonel Spanjer made at least two appeals of this decision.... General Fontana finally tired of the pressure told Spanjer very firmly that MAG-12 was in and MAG-13 was out.

The task organization for RLT-4 (Col E.P. Dupras), as contained in the 3<sup>rd</sup> MAB Command Diary, included BLT 1 /4 (Lt.Col H.D. Fredericks), BLT 2/4 (Lt. Col J.R. Fisher), Regimental Artillery Group- 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Marines (Lt.Col A.B Slack); 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion (-) (Lt. Col D.H. Blanchard); BLT 3/3 (MAB Reserve) (Lt. Col W.D. Hall); and HMM-161 (Lt. Col G. W. Morrison) which had been with the Brigade in Hawaii as part of MAG-13. Embedded within the RLT and BLTs Co B (-) (Rein), 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion (Capt J. M. Compton); Co C (-) (Rein) 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion (Capt J.P. Sanders); Co B (-) (Rein), 3<sup>rd</sup> Antitank Battalion (Capt Harry Mills); Co B (-) (Rein), 3<sup>rd</sup> Engineer Battalion (Capt R.D. Comer); Co A (-), 3<sup>rd</sup> Amtrac Battalion (Major P.M. Helsher); and Co (-) (Rein), 3<sup>rd</sup> Shore Party Battalion (Maj J.O. Elder).

The selection of the coastal plane area astride the boundary dividing the two southern provinces of the South Vietnamese I Corps Tactical Zone (I CTZ), Quang Tin and Quang Ngai, as the base for the next increment of Marine forces resulted from an extended Pentagon debate which lasted over several months concerning the building of an expeditionary airfield south of Da Nang. The proposal for the construction of the expeditionary field originated with Lt.Gen Victor H. Krulak (who had earlier served as Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency to the JCS and an informal personal advisor to Admiral Sharp "on all Marine matters"). Krulak, then the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Forces Pacific or CG, FMFPac, had selected the site on an inspection tour the previous year and gave the future base its name. According to the FMFPac commander, a naval officer accompanying him on the trip remarked that the place looked good, but was not marked on the maps. Krulak replied that the name was "Chu Lai" but later explained: "In order to settle the matter immediately, I had simply given him the Mandarin Chinese characters for my name." In any event, Krulak suggested that the Chu Lai airfield be built according to a Marine Corps concept still in its early stages which employed metal runways and taxi strips. The short airfield for tactical support (SATS) program had been developed to meet Marine Corps requirements for the rapid construction of expeditionary airfields, in effect shore-based carrier decks. Although the proposed field at Chu Lai would not qualify as 'short,' it would make use of SATS components including catapults and arresting gear. On 30 March 1965, Secretary McNamara tentatively approved the building of the SATS field at Chu Lai but the final decision, according to General Krulak, was not made until late April after the high-level Honolulu Conference.

On 25 April, President Johnson had approved the recommendation of the Honolulu Conference to land the Marines at Chu Lai for the construction of the airfield and the establishment of a third enclave in Vietnam. Three days later BGen Marion E. Carl's Third Marine Expeditionary Brigade Headquarters was reactivated for the second time within three weeks. It had earlier been activated on 14 March to plan and direct the establishment of first Marine enclave at Phu Bai with BLTs 2/3 and 3/4; the date of its deactivation is obscure, and General Carl had returned to Okinawa.

The Government of South Vietnam's (GVN's) northern First Corps Tactical Zone (or I Corps) consisted of five provinces which extended from the South China Sea on the east to the Laotian Border on the west. The northernmost was Quang Tri Province, (north of which was the Demilitarized Zone and North Vietnam). A Vietnamese province was the U.S. equivalent of a U.S. state, although generally smaller. The next province was Thua Thien where the old imperial capital of Hue was located. South of Thua Thien Province lay Quang Nam Province (and SVN's second largest city, Da Nang) and south of Quang Nam was Quang Tin Province. The southernmost province of I Corps was Quang Ngai. South of Quang Ngai was II Corps.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv's 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Force or 9<sup>th</sup> MEB had entered into South Vietnam at Da Nang on 8 March. Concurrently, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade's amphibious shipping closed on Okinawa that same day. The mission assigned to the 9<sup>th</sup> MEB had been to reinforce the defenses of Da Nang Air Base. At the time, General Westmoreland, COMUSMACV, was emphatic that the overall defense of the Da Nang area should remain with the Vietnamese and of such other installations agreed upon with the Vietnamese Commanding General I Corps and I Corps Tactical Zone (I CTZ). Besides its shared responsibility for the close-in security of the Da Nang airfield, 9<sup>th</sup> MEB was given the task of defending about eight thinly-populated square miles of high ground just west of the field. Hill 327 was the dominant terrain feature along with the lower Hill 268 further to the north. A month later, on 12 and 13 April, BLT 3/4 had moved from Okinawa by amphibious shipping to Da Nang, and then by amphibious shipping, truck, helicopter, and C-130 into the Hue-Phu Bai area north of Da Nang, where an airport and an important communications facility were located. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon (1<sup>st</sup> Lt Frank Reasoner), Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, had accompanied BLT 3/4 into Hue-Phu Bai.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines staff had begun preparation of their operations order. Intelligence studies indicated that planning should recognize a large VC concentration in the Chu Lai area and that the landing would probably be opposed. The RLT-4 headquarters issued a classified operation plan during the last week of April. An accompanying and supporting intelligence annex of that plan and the detailed appendixes attached thereto, e.g., an estimate of the enemy situation; a tactical study of the weather and terrain in the area; and a counterintelligence plan, were also published. The appendix dealing with potential targets to be engaged would be issued later. Issued during the last week of April, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines operation plan/order included an intelligence annex and detailed appendixes which provided an estimate of the enemy situation, a tactical study of the weather and terrain in the area, and a counterintelligence plan. The intelligence study and estimate laid out in some detail the composition of generic VC battalions and companies, their unit strengths and combat efficiency, and their disposition, i.e., their location, not their temperament. There were three Viet Cong companies listed as being located within the anticipated regimental TAOR. Collectively, they were considered to be the principal threat with an overall estimated strength of 360. The listing of enemy elements held to be within the "immediate tactical area," however that was defined, appeared to include all VC units known or suspected to be in the largely coastal eastern areas of Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces.

The enemy's arms and armament ranged from machetes, crossbows, spears, and homemade rifles, pistols, and grenades to light mortars, recoilless rifles, machine guns, and automatic weapons. A wide assortment of mines and explosives were listed, as were the recent and present enemy activities against the ARVN and civilian personnel and facilities. Also provided were what was known, (or estimated), of enemy logistics, enemy reinforcements and their estimated capability of reinforcing elements with the TAOR with up to 4 to 6 battalions within a 24 hr. period, and enemy peculiarities, e.g., terror as the major Viet Cong tactic and enemy weaknesses such as material deficiencies. The VC were credited with possessing several AN/PRC-6 and AN/PRC-10s, our current standard tactical radios, and to have an intercept capability. Accordingly, all of our transmissions were to be considered as being monitored by the enemy. The VC were regarded to be masters at communications jamming and radio deception. Those details were followed by a discussion of enemy capabilities and limitations, and concluded with a summary that included among other things that the Viet Cong were consolidating and refurbishing their forces throughout the area with the aim of larger scale operations; that the Viet Cong's span of control had increased and improved to the extent that larger scale (i.e., 1-4 battalions) action could be expected; and that the Viet Cong would continue to strive for neutralization of ARVN influence in the piedmont region and demoralization of RF (regional force) and PF (popular force) elements through isolation of outlying districts.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines' intelligence estimate envisioned battalion-sized Viet Cong operations throughout Quang Tin Province with one VC main force battalion plus one provincial battalion reinforced by one main force battalion, with elements of yet another battalion possibly targeted against ARVN 2d Division elements within the province. It was unclear as to the distinctions between a "main force" and a "provincial" battalion. There was agreement, however, that the major enemy threat near the RLT-4 TAOR came from a VC regiment, one of two such units held to be operating in the two southern-most provinces of I Corps; one possibly located in southwestern Quang Tin Province and the other probably in Quang Ngai Province to the south. Both were held to be directly subordinated to a senior entity called Military Region (MR) 5. The northernmost of these two regimental-sized units was the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment. There was also a detailed listing which included at least two "main force" battalions and main and local force companies within Quang Tin Province. All these so-called main and local force organizations were held to be subordinates of MR-5. There was a similar listing for Quang Ngai Province with the 2<sup>nd</sup> VC Regiment at the head of that list. The G-2 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> MAB had attributed the enemy within the area with the capabilities to mass 2,000 main force troops in 24 hours; to reinforce with another 2,000 main force and local force troops in 72 hours; and to harass the landing force with small unit actions, mortar attacks, sabotage, mines, and ambushes.

Any discomfort the regimental and battalion S-2's at Chu Lai might have experienced during early May 1965 was certainly understandable considering the various intelligence reports they were hearing. They might well have been anxiety-ridden as to just what fate awaited out there beyond the first range of hills, not that anyone actually believed that the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines were going to be driven by the Viet Cong back into the South China Sea.

The area in which RLT-4 was to land was reported to be completely controlled by the Viet Cong. Supposedly, no friendly forces had been in this area in over two years, which was not entirely true as a reconnaissance team operating from the USS Cook had recently been inserted into the area to land and survey the intended landing beach, Beach #9. They were taken under fire after disembarking from their small boats and proceeding well above the beach line with VC entrenched on a hillside overlooking the

beach. The VC fire had resulted in several casualties (one Marine KIA, one USN KIA, and one USN WIA) and had forced the recon team to go back out to sea for extraction. Again, on 22 April, a recon party was taken under fire by the Viet Cong while working a beach in the same general area but by returned fire that drove off the enemy they finished the survey.

The plan had identified the intended landing beach for RLT-4, (known as NIS Beach #9), a 1,000-yard long, smooth, concave, regular beach with adequate beach exits. Battalion Landing Team (BLT) One-Four (1/4) would land directly across Red Beach #1, the left or southern portion of Beach #9, while some elements of the BLT would land by helicopters in one of two planned helicopter landing zones (HLZs) further inland, HLZ Hawk or alternately HLZ Eagle, and then move to occupy and control TAOR #1. BLT 2/4 would land entirely by surface means over Red Beach #2 on the right or northern portion of Beach #9 and then move to assume responsibility for TAOR #2.

At Camp Schwab, a rumor surfaced regarding the possibility of a 1/4 “raider company” strike against a North Vietnamese coastal target located to the north of the DMZ, possibly near Vinh. While not unduly concerned about potentially engaging North Vietnamese ashore, the Bn had much more concern about the denizens which inhabited the South China Sea/Gulf of Tonkin offshore. A review of an area study indicated the waters contained every known type of man-eating shark, salt water crocodiles, poisonous sea snakes, stinging jellyfish, barracuda, and other nasty fish with teeth. And then there was the threat of being picked up by NVN coastal radar and being blown to smithereens while paddling our undefended rubber boats offshore. After recalling all of the problems with rubber boat training in Hawaii, the “raiders” were happy to never be called upon to use this approach in combat, but it did give them confidence and developed self-assurance and unity. The “raider” rumor turned out to be a... rumor.

On 26 April the troops received a second plague shot and a gamma globulin shot, (which made it difficult to sit directly on a bar stool), and a malaria pill, (another omen of imminent departure). Worse yet, the battalion supply guys literally threw grenade and ammo pouches, helmet mosquito nets, and other stuff and didn’t require signatures. That was totally out of character for them. Something was afoot. By 28 April the ships had been loaded at Okinawa’s White Beach, and sailed early the next morning. Once underway from Okinawa, the word was we would be landing in Quang Tin Province, Republic of Vietnam (RVN), about 45 miles south of Da Nang. The weather at on the beach was reported as being hot, (95-110 degrees F), and humid, (75-80%). There was the possibility, some said, of RLT-4 being involved in the first offensive Marine Corps amphibious landing since the Korean War. Indeed, a Marine reconnaissance team had recently been inserted into the area, only to be taken under fire which resulted in several casualties and forced the recon team to go back out to sea for extraction.

On board ship during the course of the movement to Vietnam, intelligence briefings of the landing area were given by the Bn S-2. Overlays of the maps were thick with little red flags in grease pencil. Since the red flags designated the enemy, it looked like it was going to be Iwo Jima or Tarawa all over again. Of course, it didn’t turn out that way, but at the time it sure was sobering. The atmosphere had changed. It was no longer playing at war. The playing was over. The Brigade had trained hard over the past three years, but this was different. No more blank ammunition...no fake wounds...no playing at war.

### **III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF)**

The III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) was established in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) at Da Nang Air Base on 6 May 1965 with the arrival of the Commanding General of the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv (Fwd),

MajGen William R. Collins. Collins would be triple-hatted as CG, III MEF, as CG, 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, and as the Naval Component Commander, MACV. The 9<sup>th</sup> MEB was deactivated as an operational unit, and III MEF assumed 9<sup>th</sup> MEB's responsibility for the Marines at Da Nang and Phu Bai. Initially, the III MEF skeleton staff was augmented by the deactivated 9<sup>th</sup> MEB staff since active operations were in progress. The 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv (-) (Rein) (Forward) was established and assumed command of its assigned units in the RVN. On 7 May, the 3<sup>rd</sup> MEB had landed at Chu Lai to the south along the Quang Ti-Quang Ngai Province boundary. That same day III MEF was re-designated as the III Marine Amphibious Force or III MAF. On 11 May, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Aircraft Wing (Advanced) was established at Da Nang Air Base. All three headquarters were essentially located aboard the Da Nang Air Base. The 3<sup>rd</sup> MEB headquarters would also soon be disbanded. In 1965, Third Marine Division forces had established enclaves in Thua Thien Province (Phu Bai area), in the Quang Tin-Quang Ngai area at Chu Lai, and in the Da Nang area of Quang Nam Province. The Third Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF), a corps level organization headquartered in Da Nang, in coordination and cooperation with the GVN and ARVN, was the senior U.S. headquarters in I Corps, and included U.S. Army, Marine, Air Force, and Navy components from May 1965 until 1970 when that responsibility was passed to the U.S. Army.

On 2 May, the staff received RVN I Corps' operation plan about the Vietnamese pre-landing activities around Chu Lai and advised all Marine and Navy subordinate units that friendly Vietnamese civilians were scattered throughout the area of operations (AOA) in hamlets and villages and that precluded the use of pre-planned naval gunfire and tactical air beach and landing zone preps. The Amphibious Task Force Commander (CATF) would control all tactical air (which was to be provided by Da Nang-based VMFA-531 Marine F-4s) from the shipboard tactic air command center (TACC).

On board ship tensions were high. During the day prior to the landing, ammunition lockers were opened and live ammunition was issued to the troops. That was the first time that most of the younger officers and NCOs had ever seen live ammunition issued that wasn't on a rifle or training range.

On 5 May, RLT-4 had been directed to make a covered landing. And that movement ashore would be screened [covered] by elements of the ARVN 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. The ARVNs had already secured the landing area. The regiment would still go ashore, as planned, in amphibious tracked vehicles (amtracs), helicopters, and small landing craft. Despite the presence of the ARVNs, RLT-4 would retain the same regimental, battalion, company, and platoon objectives ashore; they just wouldn't have to attack to secure them. This whole thing was taking on the characteristics of a big training exercise. Those Marines who had been counting their medals for bravery and heroism ashore were emotionally crushed having to now come across a "safe beach." Nevertheless, live ammunition, flares, and grenades was still being issued to our platoons and squads. Most still believed that there'd be shooting somewhere, someplace in the near future. Each platoon had been issued a couple of sets of dated Michelin map sheets covering the Chu Lai area; one set for the platoon commander and one set for the platoon sergeant. At the time, we had been advised that the Michelin maps would be of limited value since not all the information depicted was current or accurate. But those old French maps were all that was available at the time.

The beaches over which RLT-4 would land were backed by flat lowlands with a nearly two-mile strip of deep sand from the beach to Rte 1. Interspersed in this area were numerous rice paddies and streams. Passage by heavy wheeled vehicles was limited due to deep sands. To the west of Rte. 1, the hill country began and was dominated by Hills 410, 385, and 237. The terrain was heavily overgrown with thick brush but "trafficable" by foot troops in all areas. Temperature maximums were generally in the

mid 90s with occasional extremes of 100 degrees and minimums in the low 70s. Precipitation had been light with infrequent periods of steady rain lasting less than an hour in duration. Rain usually occurred in the late afternoon and early evenings. With three weeks of acclimatization in this locale, tolerance would be acquired and heat would present no severe limitations on normal operations. However, ample water and salt tablets were required and made available. Body armor was predicted to have “a severe limitation effect” under the prevailing climatic conditions.

Chu Lai sat nestled in a concave bay in southeast Quang Tin Province just a few miles north of the Quang Tin-Quang Ngai Province line. Chu Lai physically sat astride a district boundary, Ly Tin District (of Quang Tin) to the north, Binh Son District (of Quang Ngai) to the south. Vietnamese political and administrative entities and boundaries, such as the provinces where Chu Lai was situated, were the U.S. equivalent of states. Vietnamese districts were comparable to U.S. counties and a village or township consisted of a number of associated hamlets or small towns.

The terrain in that area of Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces was divided into three types: a coastal plain; a piedmont region (described as being flat, interspersed with low hill masses); and the mountains. The soil in the region was fertile, composed of light to heavy clay, and almost all of the rice grown in this zone was harvested from the piedmont plateau. The mountains, which comprised the largest portion of the area, were characterized by rugged peaks, steep slopes, and dense jungles. The mountainous region was generally located in the western portion of the area; however, they converged towards the sea, causing compartmentalization along the southern Quang Tin-northern Quang Ngai provincial boundary. Significant waterways and valleys led into the mountainous regions, and although the majority of the population congregated along the coast, substantial population belts paralleled those corridors. The estimate concluded that the terrain in the mountainous region would be a decisive factor affecting enemy activities and a decisive factor in the development of guerrilla warfare. Nearly 4/5's of the mountainous area was heavily forested jungle extending out to the Vietnamese-Laotian border and offered unopposed and unobserved supply and infiltration routes.

The mountainous chain along the Quang Tin-Quang Ngai boundary which extended to within two kilometers of the sea at the proposed Chu Lai air base site could/would reportedly provide the VC with a haven during the day and easy access to the populated areas at night. The fact that the mountain range served as the provincial boundary might also be exploited by the enemy in the hope that friendly operational responsibilities were not clearly delineated. Interestingly, none of the terrain studies even mentioned the irregular nature of the coast, particularly with regards to the islands, peninsulas, and lagoons located there, as these would also become militarily significant to the Chu Lai enclave. Indeed, the unpatrolled coastal areas of Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces had long served as destinations for ship borne infiltration and supply from the North Vietnamese.

RLT-4 Frag Order #1, issued on 6 May had directed BLT 1 /4 to conduct surface landing as planned, then land at LZ Robin [GS 5302] at L-Hour [1030H], and occupy TAOR up to approx 500 meters beyond Phase Line Beer. Then, on order, be prepared to continue advance to occupy rest of TAOR. BLT 1 /4, in the original RLT-4 OPlan 202-65 of 27 April 1965 issued at Camp Schwab, had been directed to secure left, i.e., southern, portion of RLT-4 beachhead, to seize, occupy, and defend RLT Objectives #3 and 4; occupy and control [battalion] TAOR#1 [and] establish a roadblock [vic coords] 563998.

## Chapter 5 – Chu Lai

At H-Hour, 0800H, on D-Day, 7 May, assault companies of BLTs 1/4 (Cos A and C) and 2/4 (Cos F and G) began landing in tracked vehicles (LVTP-5s) over Red Beaches 1 and 2, respectively. By the third wave (and 0808H), which now included LCPs, “Papa Boats,” all the surface assault companies were ashore. At L-Hour, 1030H, the helicopter assault companies of 1/4 would begin landing by helicopter in Landing Zone (LZ) Robin 500 meters west of Rte. 1.

Once ashore, Co A’s amtracs had to be maneuvered carefully to avoid running over Vietnamese women, many dressed in traditional white silky *au dais*, and the children arrayed on the beach to greet us, all throwing flowers. Other than ARVN soldiers in uniform, there were just a few civilian Vietnamese men in the vicinity of the beach area. At the far extent of the dune line were large banners on tall bamboo poles proclaiming in English “Welcome Marines” and so forth. This was the same greeting that the Marines from the 9<sup>th</sup> MEB had received upon landing at Da Nang further north more than a month earlier. There was even a poster erected by the U.S. Army advisers to the local district headquarters welcoming the Marines. Once clear of the crowded beach, Co A had continued inland [west] about 4 kms in the tracked vehicles to seize and secure a helicopter landing zone in grid square (BT 5302) so that the remaining two rifle companies and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion’s command group could land.

It was becoming a long hot and dusty day as wave after wave of helicopters arrived and departed the LZ getting everyone ashore. During the late afternoon, relieved of LZ security responsibilities, elements of Co A returned to the area of the landing beaches. The company was located in a grove of scrubby fir trees located south southeast of where the end of the airstrip of the new airfield would eventually be and where Co A would be located on the evening of 7 May.

That evening the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had attempted to establish and man a north-south oriented defensive perimeter. Co B was to be on the southernmost end, their eastern flank at the water’s edge, then Co A, its left flank tying in with Co B’s right flank, and then bending somewhat north and west to tie in with another 1/4 company on its right flank. Sundown had come and no Co B. Company A and the battalion headquarters folks were trying to locate Co B on the tactical radio. All units were tied in with field phones connecting platoon to companies and companies to battalion. As it was getting dark a two-man listening post (LP) equipped with a battery powered land line telephone was placed about 60 meters to our front. About two hours later, it was pitch dark and the platoon’s light and sound discipline was good, but they were reporting movement to their front. They could offer no description or any sense of direction. The platoon sergeant suspected a pair of overactive imaginations at work, and directed the Marines manning the listening post to calm down, to stay awake and alert, and to report any further movement or noise detected.

All of a sudden, one of my two attached M-60 machine guns and a couple of M-14 rifles on the perimeter cut loose. I could see the red tracer rounds ricocheting off rocks or some object and heading straight up until the tracer elements burned out. ‘What’s going on?’ I asked somewhat rhetorically, not entirely sure that I wanted to know the answer. Somebody shouted back that they had detected movement to their front and had offered a verbal challenge which went unanswered. And it wasn’t the LP they saw or heard; they knew where those guys were. Now the LP phone rang. The LP was complaining that we were getting awfully close with our firing and requesting that we knock it off. The LP stated that

they couldn't hunker down any further in the hasty foxhole they had dug earlier. I got on the phone that connected me with the company commander's position to request some illumination and was told to hold a minute. I could overhear someone loudly complaining to the company radio operator on the battalion tactical radio net that someone was shooting at Co. B. 'Cease fire,' I yelled as I put down the phone's handset. Fortunately all hands survived through the night.

By the end of the first day, Colonel Dupras had established his headquarters ashore and his infantry battalions and supporting arms were all in place. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines' defensive perimeter extended in an irregular arc from the Ky Ha peninsula in the north, to the high ground in the west, and from there seaward to a point three miles south of Red Beach. The southern flank of the TAOR was to be screened by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion (-) through the conduct of recon patrols and the establishment of observation posts. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion (-), which had come ashore about 1330H on the 7<sup>th</sup>, consisted of the reconnaissance battalion's command group (Lt. Col D.H. Blanchard) and two companies. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion (-) CP was initially established vic coord (BT 552042), about dead in the center of where the new airfield runways would eventually be built.

By mid-day 8 May the beaches were littered with abandoned gear. Prominent among the discarded equipment were gas masks; most had held onto the light canvas gas mask carrying case though as they were great for carrying extra C-rats, even extra ammo. All hands were all required to retain and wear our upper torso body armor (flak jackets) although the lower portion (or "diaper") were declared (by someone in authority, apparently) as "optional" and now equaled or surpassed the number of discarded gas masks littering the once pristine beach. The supply guys would undoubtedly recover most of the discards. Both parts of the body armor had been issued and worn while RLT-4 was on Okinawa, and most had found the upper part to be heavy and cumbersome. Nevertheless, the protection the flak jacket afforded far outweighed the equipment's disadvantages. On the other hand, the flak "diaper" caused such horrendous chafing after about a half hours wear that most would rather take their chances without it and hope that any groin wound received would be instantly fatal.

Also on 8 May, Captain Theer, (Company A, 1 /4 CO), sent a platoon to move out of the beach area and head west of Rte. 1 and then climb, seize, and eventually establish a combat outpost (COP) atop Hill 213 vic coord (BT 485005) overlooking the sandy plain and the rice paddies to the east and just to the west of the landing beaches at Chu Lai. Marine engineer units, Navy Seabees, and the civilian construction company were going to build an airfield on that plain, and Hill 213 commanded the area below, along with several other hills further to the west, north, and south. Hill 213 was 213 meters high, about 600 feet above sea level, tree and vine covered, and devoid of any recognizable trails leading to its rocky summit. The old Michelin map sheets of the Chu Lai area issued aboard ship would turn out to not be all that accurate or useful. But then, the old French maps were all that was available at the time. A corporal from Co K, 3/9, who, along with the ARVNS had screened our movement ashore the previous day, had been assigned to move along with the platoon for the first several days to lend a degree of 'combat experience.' Two ARVN non-commissioned officers (NCOs), the equivalent of a couple of corporals, who I assumed knew how to get us up on the top of Hill 213, and who presumably spoke some English were also assigned. Neither assumption proved correct. It was quickly realized that communications between American Marines and Vietnamese, whether ARVN, Vietcong, GVN officials, or the local civilians, was going to become a major difficulty. The Marine from Co K, 3/9, pretty much stood back unable to provide much assistance linguistically.

After about six hours of hand-over-hand climbing, using vines and ropes, in temperatures reportedly in excess of 100 degrees Fahrenheit, the platoon finally reached the summit just before sundown. Had there been a decent map of the area, it would have been noticed that there was a trail on the west side of Hill 213 leading up to its summit. A perimeter defense was established around the rocky crest. Digging foxholes was out of the question due to the concrete-like ground. Instead, boulders and vegetation were utilized for both cover and concealment. To the rear, ponchos were strung from long, pole-like branches to keep off the sun and rain. The new combat outpost was hot and humid; a corpsman had recorded 110 degrees F reading on a thermometer in the shade. There were some flies and mosquitoes, but not nearly as many as down on the coastal plain, although enough to drive you crazy if you didn't use repellent. Occasionally, a wisp of breeze was felt off the South China Sea. No VC yet. The only animal life (other than the birds) appeared to be some rock apes. It would be discovered that these apes had nocturnal habits that had them moving from rock to rock, just like a man, and causing Marines to either throw a frag grenade or nearly empty a magazine of M-14 ammo firing at them.

RLT-4 continued to consolidate and expand its regimental TAOR. BLT 1/4 occupied RLT Objective 3 and conducted surveillance of TAOR 1. The BLT 1/4 CP was now located about 1 km to the southeast of LZ Robin at the base of the foothills 500 meters west of Rte. 1 (vic coord BT 541019). BLT 2/4 continued to consolidate and expand TAOR 2. The BLT 2/4 CP was located on Hill 43. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion (-) screened the northern and southern boundaries of the TAOR. ARVN Forces of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division withdrew from the TAOR to the north towards Tam Ky, the Quang Tin provincial capital. Supplies continued to be off-loaded over Red Beaches 1 and 2, with approximately 2,000 tons received in the first 24 hours.

On 9 May, regiment had directed BLT 1/4 to establish liaison with Capt Long, District Chief of ARVN forces to the south in neighboring Binh Son District, Quang Ngai Province to the immediate south of TAOR 1. The Binh Son District headquarters was in the vicinity of coordinate (BS 603920) along Rte. 1 about 12 kms to the south southeast of Chu Lai and south of the Song Tra Bong river. All supporting fire missions (e.g., artillery and mortar, as well as air and naval gunfire strikes) were to be coordinated through the district chiefs of the respective districts. Ly Tin District, Quang Tin Province, contained the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine TAOR and the Chu Lai area. RLT-4 Headquarters would establish a liaison officer at ARVN 2d Division Headquarters at Tam Ky. BLT 2/4 had established liaison with Capt. Tick, the Ly Tin District Chief, at the Ly Tin District headquarters vicinity of coordinate (BT 467081) along Rte. 1 about five kms northwest of Chu Lai, at about the same time.

While 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, Co A, was on watch up on Hill 213, thus far "enemy free", other units down in the flatlands below, including the 1/4 battalion CP vic coordinate (BT 541019), had been probed three times on the night of 9 May by small groups of 3-4 VC firing small arms and automatic rifles. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Intelligence Summary -INTSUM- #1 (as of 091800H May 65): "Impressive (radio call sign of 1 /4) reports probe of CP perimeter during hours of darkness. One Marine was hit by enemy fire although not serious. Marine on perimeter security threw grenade at enemy, however, grenade was a dud."

The CP of 2/4 and a 3/12 artillery position vic coordinate (BT 545045) were similarly probed and Co B (Capt James Compton), 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, engaged a Viet Cong group estimated at 20 in a firefight with small arms and automatic rifles vic coordinates (BT556017) near where Rte.1 crossed from Quang Tin (P) into Quang Ngai (P). No known casualties to either side in any of these events. Third Recon established a motorized patrol to assist in controlling the local curfew in the immediate beach area. Curfew areas had been set for sunset to sunrise. The RLT-4 Headquarters displaced to the vicinity of

coordinates (BT 526042) which placed it just to the east of Rte. 1. On 8 May, Co C, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Bn (-), had moved into two listening post/observation posts but no enemy contact had been reported. On 9 May, both Cos A and C, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion (-), displaced to outpost positions and at 0020H suspected VC probes of 2 to 4-man elements were reported by both companies. Enemy probes and sightings were reported on 10 and 11 May. At 0230H on 10 May, BLT 1/4 reported another probing attempt at its CP. At 0445H, a Marine of Co H, 2/4, was accidentally shot while walking post, his condition was not serious. At 0100H, Company B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Bn, began a running firefight which lasted for 2 hours until 0300H in grid squares (BT 5602, 5603, 5502, and 5602) in the southeastern portion of TAOR 1 and east of Rte.1. Again, there were no known casualties to either side but now confirmed evidence of VC in the Chu Lai area.

While the Marines at Chu Lai were dealing with nightly VC probes of their CPs and defensive positions and brief and minor contacts which was judged to be VC local force and village/hamlet guerillas, the Vietnamese were reporting on considerably larger (company strength and larger) and potentially more dangerous VC units in the area. Otherwise, depressingly little confirmed information was being collected and/or provided regarding the identity of the VC units that the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines had contact with. Were the May contacts with local hamlet guerrillas, or local force units, or main force? The answer probably was a combination of the first two. The enemy's objective was to apparently size-up Marine positions by using sniping and small probing attacks, and attempt to collect some weapons in the process. These would be missions that the guerillas, and more particularly the local (district) forces, would undertake. There was unquestionably considerable enemy movement and activity within the TAOR, especially at night; AN/TPS-21 ground surveillance radars and the reported probes and contacts confirmed that. But confirmed enemy unit identifications were definitely lacking. For sure, it wasn't the "Chu Lai Welcome Wagon" that had come calling.

Helicopter resupply was a trick up on Hill 213 as a CH-34 helicopter could only get its two front wheels on the side of the hill, the rest of the helo hanging out into space. The helicopter crew-chief had to throw our resupply items about twenty feet into our waiting arms. If we failed to make the catch, or the crew-chief didn't throw far enough, the item went cascading down the hillside and became, most likely, unrecoverable. Drinking water came in metal 5-gallon cans which made the game even more interesting. Another trick was getting passengers off and onto the helo, and was done with a hover and a rope. It was something of a poor man's rappel. The first visitor was the battalion chaplain who, once he got his feet on the ground, conducted religious services for all those who desired to attend.

On 12 May, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion (-) displaced north to a new CP location vic coordinate (BT 525069) about 1 km from the base of the Ky Ha peninsula. The new mission assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion (-) on the 12<sup>th</sup> was to patrol the TAOR north of Rte. 1, and to furnish security for the airfield construction and assist in civilian control by conducting sweeping patrols to clear the area purchased during the period 13 to 22 May. The battalion was placed in general support of RLT-4.

BLT 3/3, whom the "Pineapple Marines" had derisively referred to as the "Okinawa National Guard," commanded by Lt. Col W.D. Hall, had arrived at Chu Lai on 12 May aboard the LPH USS Iwo Jima. At 0800H, Companies K (Captain J.A. Doub) and M (Captain C.M. Morris), with a command party from BLT 3/3, came over Red Beach to take up positions ashore. Co I was commanded by Captain B.D. Webb; Co L by Captain P.W. Fuetterer; and H&S Co by Captain H.T. Kerr. Operational control of BLT 3/3 was assumed by CO, RLT-4 and was assigned a TAOR. The BLT 3/3 CP was established roughly in the center of the 20+ square kilometers allotted for the new airfield.

All battalions continued to aggressive patrol and establish ambushes, and search and clear operations in the lowland villages suspected of harboring VC. BLT 1 /4 was operating in the area of the Tri Binh hamlets located 4 or 5 kms southeast of Hills 410 and 385 near the far southwest boundary of the 4th Marines. The Tri Binh hamlets (vic of grid squares BS 5298 and 5399) lay in a valley full of rice paddies. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of May, 1 /4 engaged an estimated 8-15 VC in a firefight in the hamlet of Tri Binh (2) located 4.5 kms west of Rte. 1 and about the same distance southeast of Hill 410 (in Binh Son District, Quang Ngai Province) vic coordinate (BT 525978). The Viet Cong had opened up on a 1/4 patrol with carbines and automatic weapons. The VC escaped through dense undergrowth and tunnels which were too small for the larger Marines to enter. The VC continued to conduct probes by small units during the hours of darkness on 12 May. The RLT CP was probed at 0400H and one Marine was wounded by suspected sniper fire. (That Marine would die of wounds aboard the USS Iwo Jima the following day thus becoming the regiment's first friendly KIA.)

High performance aircraft imagery was provided by the First Marine Aircraft Wing's composite aerial reconnaissance squadron, VMCI-1, based at Da Nang Air Base. VMCI-1, which had arrived in country earlier in 1965, was originally composed of nine RF-8 photo recon aircraft and nine EF-10B electronic warfare/electronic intelligence aircraft. The Marines on top of Hill 213, recall being startled one night by a series of intense flashes high in the sky (too high to be VC-initiated). The flashes had been from a Marine RF-8 on a photo mission. Tactical intelligence received, especially during 1965, was almost exclusively obtained from South Vietnamese sources such as Government of Vietnam (GVN) officials, e.g., hamlet, village, and district chiefs, National Police, etc., and Army of Vietnam (ARVN) officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), often via the U.S. military personnel assigned to those units in an advisory capacity. There were also contract Vietnamese agents working for the U.S. government. This is not to say that some of the information provided by the Vietnamese was complete, timely, and accurate. But in many more cases, the information was inaccurate in content, largely in failing to correctly locate or identify an enemy unit.

The primary source of information had slowly begun to shift from exclusively Vietnamese as the action level picked up to the reports of Marine units in contact with the Viet Cong such as contact spot reports, patrol reports (including Marine reconnaissance units), after-action reports, and the observations by frontline troops constituted the major (and perhaps the most reliable) source of information. Next were Marine interrogator-translator team (ITT) prisoner/detainee interrogation reports which provided information of Viet Cong unit identifications, procedures, locations, personalities and morale, and the impact and influence of Viet Cong and friendly operations on the local civilian population. Vietnamese detainees were being turned over to the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv Collection Point (not clear if this was located at Chu Lai or in Da Nang) where USMC ITT personnel had the opportunity to initially interview/interrogate. Within days generally, the ITT provided a report back to the regimental S-2 (and the capturing unit's S-2) with information on the detainees. The VC would eventually be evacuated to the local VN district headquarters for interrogation by the district chief and more often never heard of again. The 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade/3<sup>rd</sup> MAB had not deployed to Westpac/South Vietnam with any interrogator-translator or counterintelligence support. According to the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv Command Diary for June 1965, the division had one ITT (1<sup>st</sup> ITT) and two detachments of CIT (from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> CIT) in country.

For intelligence matters, the S-2 officer was the primary point of contact in dealings with the local Vietnamese district and village chiefs. Marine Corps counterintelligence teams (CIT) and subteams were becoming increasingly concerned with the mission of neutralizing the political infrastructure of the Viet

Cong and undertaking human intelligence (HUMINT) missions in the field. They were, at the time, more involved in the security of classified materials and personnel security, which remained very important and necessary functions. As with the ITTs and ITs, the CITs were attached to FMF commands as required and organized to permit attachment of sub-teams to subordinate commands as required. Although there was a strong inclination to retain control of intelligence specialist assets at headquarters levels above the infantry regiment and battalion. In mid-1965, there was clearly an insufficient number of available trained interpreter-translators (IT) and interrogator translator teams (ITT) in the Marine Corps to permit assignment of teams to each of the committed infantry regiments with IT or ITT sub-teams at the battalion level.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Marines (-) (Rein)**

The Chu Lai amphibious operation was officially terminated at 1200H on the 12<sup>th</sup>. RLT-4 was re designated as 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (-) (Rein), and control of 4<sup>th</sup> Marines was passed ashore by Commander, 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet to CG III MAF. Also at 1200H, operational control (OpCon) of 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion (-) passed to CG, 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv. Operational control (OPCON) of Marine forces ashore was passed from the Commander, 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, to the Marines' Commanding General (CG), III MAF. On 13 May, operational control of Co K, 3/9, was chopped from 4<sup>th</sup> Marines and returned to Da Nang.

By the 15<sup>th</sup>, sweep operations were being conducted by 3/3 and 2/4 to gather up those Vietnamese civilians still occupying the purchased land area just inland of the beach. The CP of 2/4 was displaced to an area about 1.5 km west of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines CP (and less than one km southwest of Rte. 1) vic coordinate (BT 512042). Activities during the night were characterized by small groups of VC attempting to probe the TAOR (which may, in part, account for the rash of reflexive CP displacements).

The 14 May 1965 issue of Time Magazine had heralded, "In the largest amphibious landing operation since the Korean War [Inchon], 3,000 Marines and 3,000 Seabees went ashore near Chu Lai to build an airbase for launching more bombing raids into North Vietnam... Chu Lai is known to the 7,200 Marines and Seabees who man it as the 'Gobi Desert.' The base consists of a stretch of white sand dunes, some 40 ft. high, that sprawl for 20 miles along the coast and reach inland another four to a range of low, jungle-smothered hills to the west. It has an 8,000-ft. aluminum-section runway built by Navy Seabees. Resident V.C. have outsmarted Chu Lai's Marines so far, and the local population of perhaps 20,000 Vietnamese is sullen and treacherous."

If Chu Lai was known to the Marines and Seabees who manned it as the 'Gobi Desert,' it was a total misnomer. The Gobi, Asia's largest desert located in northern China and southern Mongolia, is a rock and gravel desert as all the sand has been blown away by the winds (except for a very small portion along the desert's southern boundary). The Gobi received between 8-10 inches of rain annually, and the temperatures range from -40 degrees (Fahrenheit) in the winter to 90 degrees in the summer. That doesn't come close to the 30 inches of rain per month for several months, which is what we expected at Chu Lai and temperatures in May with maximums generally in the mid-90s with occasional extremes of 100 degrees and minimums in the low 70s (which is probably also the average minimum for the year). The base did not consist of a stretch of beach that sprawled for 20 miles along the coast (perhaps 7 miles, north to south from the base of the Ky Ha Peninsula to the mouth of the Song Tra Bong) nor reach inland another four (actually, about 2.2 miles) to a range of low, jungle-smothered hills to the west. The beaches over which we landed were backed by flat lowlands with about a 0.9 mile strip of deep sand from the beach to Rte 1 (which limited trafficability of wheeled vehicles). We never saw "a stretch of white sand

dunes, some 40 ft. high,” the “dunes were rarely higher than 2-3 feet, although there probably were some higher but those were the exception. Interspersed in this area were numerous rice paddies and streams. To the west of Rte. 1, the hill country began and was dominated by Hills 410, 385, and 237 and a number of lesser hills. The terrain was heavily overgrown with thick brush but trafficable by foot troops in all areas. And Chu Lai most certainly did not have an 8,000-foot aluminum (or any other kind of material) runway on 14 May 1965. This all goes to what the press and media were reporting rather than be bothered by researching the facts and actually reporting the truth.

First Battalion had continued to conduct patrols and set ambushes on 16 May in the vicinity of Hill 410 (BS 489997) and just to the west of Hill 213 vicinity of coordinate (BT 495201). There were no contacts. Meanwhile, 2/4 reported a probe of the southern sector of their TAOR by 6-8 VC. When taken under fire, contact was broken by the VC. The Third Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, again conducted a sweep of the purchased area and netted 300 civilians who were taken to the regimental collection point. The hamlet of Tri Binh (3), vicinity of grid square (BS 5398), was searched and cleared on 17 May by elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. The results were negative except for a sighting of 3 VC at the far extent of the TAOR.

The Second Battalion conducted a helo sweep of the TAOR and found it clear. On the 18<sup>th</sup>, 1/4 conducted patrols and set ambushes in an area about one km south of the Quang Tin-Quang Ngai provincial boundary and one km west of Rte.1 vicinity coordinate (BS 543994) and on Hill 410 with negative results. That evening, 2/4 reported several attempted infiltrators near their battalion CP, vic coordinate (BT 518043), in the lowlands to the east of Hill 213, vicinity coordinate (BT 513027), and on a small hill mass to the northeast of Hill 213, vicinity coordinate (BT 507036).

The First Battalion was still conducting search and clear operations in the vicinity of Tri Binh (3), this time using flamethrowers on caves in the vicinity. Third Battalion completed its off-loading at 1930H, and 2/4's patrols and ambushes had no contacts or sightings. The Third Battalion again conducted a ground sweep of the restricted land area and picked up 65 lingering Vietnamese civilians. The remaining personnel and equipment of 3/3 arrived aboard shipping and off-loading was commenced.

The local Vietnamese were reportedly saying that the VC didn't want any part of the Marines, that they're animals. We fight during the day and night. The 'Vietnamese,' an apparent reference to the ARVN's, fight only during the day so this situation is something new for the VC. This all sounded weak and gratuitous and most probably VC propaganda. It was nonsense to think the VC fought only during the day.

On 20 May, 2/4 captured a suspected VC sniper along Rte. 1, about 300 meters south of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines CP, vicinity of coordinate (BT 523039), with the use of the battalion's AN/TPS-21 ground surveillance radar. The VC suspect (VCS) was turned over to the civilian collection point. First Battalion had one Marine wounded by sniper fire while on combat patrol within the 1/4 TAOR. On 21 May, 2/4 had reported VC troops in the vicinity of coordinate (BT 483043), a rice paddy area just east of Ky Phu village, about 2.5 kms north northeast of Hill 213. Artillery fire was called in with a reported 4 VC KIA, 3 VC probable KIA, and 4 VC probable WIA. The latest news making the rounds in 1/4 was that one of the Marine companies in our area got hit by 18 VC and had a big firefight. No casualties on either side. (There was no record of such a contact on 21 May in the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines command chronology.)

A couple of nights later, one Marine stepped on a VC while looking for a place to relieve himself. Before he could charge (cock) his gun, the VC shot him in the arm and got away. It happened right in the

compound and only 30 yards from the tents. You never know; if he hadn't stepped on the guy, we might have had a bunch of dead Marines.

First Battalion continued working in the area of the Tri Binhs and Hills 410 and 385, and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> had apprehended 5 VCS in an ambush along a trail in the high ground 1.5 km north northeast of one of the Tri Binh hamlets vic coordinates (BS 538998). Elements of 1/4 had established a blocking point at Tri Binh (2) vicinity of coordinate (BT 529983) on the 25<sup>th</sup> which resulted in 2 VC KIA and one suspected VC WIA. The 3/3 CP was probed by 5-10 VC with no casualties on 22 May. The next two days, 23 and 24 May, were quiet with no contacts. H&S Co and Cos A and C, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, had displaced from Chu Lai to Da Nang by LST.

Third Battalion (3/3) had an M-14 rifle stolen from a fighting hole (which should have caused concern as to the alertness of their security allowing the "thief" to have gotten that close in without detection). A search of a nearby hamlet proved negative as to the stolen M-14. The next day, a 3/3 roadblock vicinity of coordinate (BT 563999) received sniper fire but had no casualties.

Marines of 2/4 fired at 3 VC detected approaching the Marine position from the south on May 26<sup>th</sup>. They killed one VC who was carrying nine hand-fashioned grenades and a sketch of Co H's defensive positions. Another day (27 May) and it's as hot as it was yesterday and the day before that. There are only two enjoyable times of day; the early morning before the sun gets up in the sky and right after evening chow and before dark. These times don't last long so you have to take advantage of them. We play hearts and shoot the breeze with the Second Battalion's two doctors, a Catholic priest, and a couple of other officers around the doctors' tent. Last night's game was interrupted when the word came in that one of our artillery rounds fell short and on top of a company position [Co E]. It hit two feet away from a foxhole and instantly killed two and injured two others. It was one of those things that you don't expect, but that can always happen. Two helicopters crashed into each other the other morning. They never knew what hit them either. Actually, as one of the officers said, 40,000 a year die on the highways. If you worried about all the things that could happen, you would go nuts. Just for comment, the gnats are literally driving everyone nuts. This has got to be hell on earth. Just got settled and have made it pretty livable and now we have to move.

On 27 May, the 2/4 area was hit from the north in a coordinated attack (15 VC in the assaulting force and 5 VC providing a base of fire). It was to be a costly event: one Marine KIA, 11 WIA, and several M-14 rifles lost. The VC lost 5 VC KIA (with indications of several VC being WIA) and a "large number" of weapons including a modified M-14 rifle, a .45 cal. pistol, and a machine pistol and a large amount of ammunition (140 rds of 7.62mm), and explosives captured. (One Marine WIA died subsequent to his evacuation to the USS Iwo Jima.) This attack was characterized by a relatively small amount of small arms fire and the extensive use of fragmentation grenades. Elsewhere, in an ambush set by 3/3, one Marine was WIA with 3 VC casualties. In this action, the M-14 rifle taken by the VC on the 25<sup>th</sup> was recovered from the VC by the wounded Marine.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had its first non-battle death; an accidental discharge of a rifle being cleaned (a non-battle casualty). The Marine, obviously, hadn't checked to see that it was unloaded before he began to clean it. The weapon discharged and the bullet struck a rock, ricocheted, and hit another Marine in the throat. The Marine died enroute to the hospital ship. Same company, same night, a Marine was bitten by a "poisonous viper." Initially, it was believed to have been a cobra. They evacuated the Marine by helo, and the latest word was that he'd be okay.

On 29 May, 2 Marines from 3/3 were accidentally injured by M-79 grenade launcher fire when the grenadier failed to get the word of a friendly fire team in front of the defensive lines. The two Marines were not seriously injured. Second Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, underwent sporadic probes throughout the night which resulted in two Marines wounded in action. There was no confirmed VC casualties as a result of this action, but observations through a Sniperscope indicated that the enemy did not get away unscathed.

Lt. Staley took his platoon down off the hills on 29 May, and spent the remainder of that day and night as the regiment's Marine liaison officer at the Binh Son District Headquarters vicinity of coordinates (BS 603920), just east of Rte. 1. Capt Long, the district chief was an ARVN captain (or *dai wi*) born in North Vietnam but a professional soldier since coming south a decade earlier. (He was also a Roman Catholic and it was speculated that he had been among the 50,000 or so driven south by the communist North Vietnamese in 1954.) Long was considerably older than most Marine captains and would most likely remain at his present rank for the rest of his career, probably due to the fact that he was a northerner. District Headquarters served a good dinner consisting of hamburger steak (or at least that's what it was supposed to be), fresh garden vegetables, freshly-baked French bread, and some really good and cold Vietnamese beer (the famous Beer 33, *ba mui ba*). One thing noticed at district headquarters was that people seemed to be coming and going most of the night, and holding hushed conversations with Captain Long. These people, apparently, were his intelligence agents. *Dai Wi* Long also maintained a fairly large barbed wire compound in his back yard filled with "detainees," suspected VC, common criminals, and, most likely, GVN and personal political opponents.

Upon departing the next day, the assigned Marine liaison officer was provided with sealed envelope which was to be delivered to battalion's S-2 officer. It was assumed (correctly at the time) that the Binh Son District Chief was one of the S-2's primary sources of information on the enemy in the area, and that much of the information on enemy activity in the area came from the district chiefs who got it from essentially low level agents. Reports also came from local Vietnamese government officials such as hamlet and village chiefs, from ARVN sources through the assigned U.S. Army and Marine liaison officers/NCOs, from paramilitary units such as the Popular Forces (PFs as they were commonly referred), and in some instances from the U.S. Army advisors assigned to the various other Vietnamese organizations. When Marine contacts resulted in VC KIA bodies being recovered, the S-2 sections were directed to provide Polaroid photographs of the deceased's face to the district chiefs for possible identification. The regiment's liaison officers made daily trips to the two local district headquarters, presumably to exchange operational and intelligence information.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines' intelligence estimate had laid out in some detail the composition of generic VC battalions and companies, their unit strengths and combat efficiency, and their disposition, i.e., their location, not their temperament. There were three, possibly four, Viet Cong local force companies listed as being located within the regimental TAOR. Collectively, they were considered to be the principal threat with an estimated overall strength of 360.

The last substantial contact at Chu Lai during May 1965 occurred on the 30<sup>th</sup> when a Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Bn, patrol on Hill 410 led by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Joel Gardner, the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon commander, surprised 5 VC eating C-Rations (which had been buried by a previous recon team in the hill) resulting in 4 VC KIA and 1 VC WIA who escaped. An M-14 rifle and three French bolt-action rifles were recovered. One recon Marine (Joel Gardner) had received a non-serious wound during the contact. The Second Battalion conducted a sweep

of Ky Xuan Island in a combined operation with Vietnamese Popular Forces (PFs) on 30 May. Twenty-six VCS were captured, three VC were KIA and one VC WIA escaped. In the 3/3 area at the southern end of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines TAOR, a rifle grenade was fired at a VC infiltrator who had set off a trip flare. When a fire team went out to search for results, it set off another rifle grenade from “friendly” positions which resulted in two Marines wounded (two more non-battle casualties).

On 31 May, Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Bn, reported that “800 to 900 VC of the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment were in contact with friendly ARVN forces vic grid squares (BS 5776 to BS 5780) [about 5-6 kms northwest of Quang Ngai airfield and north of the Song Tra Bong] and were attacking east. The 72<sup>nd</sup> VC Bn was attacking east from the vicinity of grid squares (BS 6063 to BS 6065), and was in contact with friendly forces. The possible 38<sup>th</sup> VC Bn was moving east from vicinity grid square (BS 5671) [about 4.5 kms west southwest of the Quang Ngai airfield]. An U/I VC battalion was occupying positions along the river from vicinity coordinate (BS 6558) to coordinate (BS 6659) [approximately 7 miles south of Quang Ngai]. Another U/I VC battalion (possibly the 52<sup>nd</sup> VC Bn) was currently located vicinity grid square (BS 7180) [5 kms southwest of the An Ky peninsula to the east of Quang Ngai City]. The Quang Ngai liaison officer reported that at approx 2345H, the VC had occupied Long Dien vicinity coord (BS 7261) [approximately 6 kms southeast of Quang Ngai City] and Kha Do Van vicinity grid square (BS 6959) [about 15 kms south of Quang Ngai City]. A VC force (U/I) was located at the river vicinity grid square (BS 6558) [also about 15 kms south of Quang Ngai City] and moving north to join with the 72<sup>nd</sup> VC Bn. These VC forces were two battalions coming from An Che and Minh Long Districts. Also reported were a large number of refugees who were moving out of the Nghia Hahn District. At 1305H, a VC battalion-sized unit was advancing from vicinity grid square (BS 5774), about 4 kms northwest of the airfield and in the direction of the airfield.

The question arose as to the source of the information which Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Bn, had obtained in the 31 May report. In all probability, most of the information appeared to be from ARVN sources (although at least one report had been received from the “Quang Ngai liaison officer”). All of the information had been either unevaluated or rated F6 (unknown reliability as to source and to validity of content). Nevertheless, Co B, reinforced with a platoon of Ontos, had been directed to conduct a motorized road reconnaissance from Chu Lai to Quang Ngai City and back in response to the report of significant VC activity to the south of Chu Lai. Indeed, Quang Ngai City was reported to be in danger of falling into enemy hands. Co B reported Rte. 1 to be clear and no VC were encountered in or near Quang Ngai City, which seemed strange, considering the nature of the reports received.

The VC spring-summer offensive, which had opened on 30 May, had caught ARVN units widely dispersed in support of the current pacification campaign. As a result, the enemy was able to chew up the ARVN battalions. In I Corps, the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment ambushed the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment, 2<sup>nd</sup> ARVN Division, outside of the small hamlet and ARVN outpost of Ba Gia vicinity coordinate (BS 4979) about 8 miles west southwest of Quang Ngai City (and about 20 miles south of Chu Lai). Of the 500 men in the battalion, only 65 soldiers and 3 U.S. advisors were able to break through the enemy lines. The I Corps commander, General Thi, threw in his last reserves, the 39<sup>th</sup> Vietnamese Ranger Battalion and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Vietnamese Marine Battalion. Marine F-4Bs (from VMFA 531) flew close support for the South Vietnamese units. When the battle ended on 31 May, the South Vietnamese had lost 392 men killed and missing, as well as 446 rifles and carbines, and 90 crew-served weapons. The South Vietnamese claimed to have killed 556 VC and captured 20 weapons. Two battalions of U.S. Marines had been alerted, but were not committed.

There were uncertainties about the number of VC in the Chu Lai area, but one thing seemed certain; the VC who were there had no hesitation in mixing it up with the Marines (or some of Marines, at least). The enemy which had been perpetrating all the sniping and probing of Marine positions and CPs since our arrival at Chu Lai were most probably VC local forces from companies suspected to be operating in the area and/or local village and hamlet guerrillas, although positive identifications had never been made. Depressingly little confirmed information was being collected and/or provided regarding the identity of the VC units that the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines had contact with during the month. The enemy's objective was to apparently size-up Marine positions by using sniping and small probing attacks, and attempt to collect some weapons in the process. These would be missions that the guerillas, and more particularly the local (district) forces, would undertake. Any comparison with earlier estimates of the enemy situation (e.g., the S-2's pre-deployment estimate of late April) would be difficult. There was unquestionably considerable enemy movement and activity within the TAOR, especially at night; ground surveillance radars and the sheer number of reported probes and contacts confirmed that. But confirmed enemy unit identifications were definitely lacking. But for certain, it wasn't the "Chu Lai Welcome Wagon" that had come calling.

Short duration large sweep and cordon and search operations near the Marine enclaves invariably resulted in large numbers of indigenous Vietnamese being encountered with much smaller numbers being considered as suspicious and therefore apprehended. Late that year, the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv established various categories of VC captives (which appeared to have been crafted by the Division's lawyers). Viet Cong Captive (VCC) applied to members of the Viet Cong forces, auxiliaries to those forces, or Viet Cong cadre infiltrated into the Republic of Vietnam in any form or by any means; spies, agents or persons who spoke a North Vietnamese dialect; all persons from other than North or South Vietnam; and any person taken captive while engaged in combat against any 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, RVN, or allied unit under any circumstances:

(a) Very Important VCC applied to important captives requiring flagging and special processing depending upon intelligence requirements. VCC considered "very important" included VC officers (platoon leaders and above), intelligence agents, communications/crypto personnel, district level or higher political (or finance, recruiting, etc.) commissars or cadre. Very Important VCC was to be redefined periodically but soon disappeared altogether, since none were ever so designated.

(b) Viet Cong Suspects (VCS) applied to collaborators, accomplices or others taken captive who, while not directly or conclusively known to have been engaged in combat against 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, RVN, or allied forces were suspected of being Viet Cong, collaborators or accomplices by virtue of their unexplained presence or actions in or near the scene of action between 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, RVN or allied forces and Viet Cong forces; or who, although unarmed, are suspected of having taken part in such action and had been captured in subsequent sweep operations; or persons whose unexplained presence, behavior or actions in or near 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, RVN, or allied unit positions or facilities arouses suspicion as to their legal status and intentions.

(c) Other Indigenous Captives applied to persons captured under unusual circumstances. Their status was generally in question at the time of capture due to lack of identification, their being encountered in an area of operations, or other such circumstances that required further investigation in order to clear them. Often this included aged men, women or children who were not to be categorized as VCS unless there was firm evidence of hostile or suspicious activity. They were not to be indiscriminately evacuated

as VCS. The great majority of captives including suspects were eventually cleared and returned to their villages.

(d) A new category had been introduced, the “rallier.” Rallier applied to those individuals not engaging in combat that had voluntarily surrendered and rallied to the cause of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam under the “Open Arms” or Chieu Hoi policy of the Vietnamese government (GVN). They were also known as “Hoi Chanhs.” Some of the ralliers were employed by the U.S. military in South Vietnam as “Kit Carson Scouts.” These former VC, and to a much lesser extent, former NVA who were residents of North Vietnam could, theoretically, share their knowledge of the identities, loyalties, and activities of the VN populace in an area, VC tactics and units, and in those cases where the individual Hoi Chanhs spoke some English, serve as interpreters.

The truth be told, we never had enough linguists. Marines or otherwise, who spoke both Vietnamese and English, were in short supply particularly at the outset of the ground war. The Marine Corps did not have nearly enough Vietnamese-speaking Marine interrogator translators the entire time we were in Vietnam. All ITT and IT personnel were trained in foreign languages, but not necessarily in Vietnamese, and we had to depend upon Vietnamese translators to do their work, usually ARVN NCOs who did speak both Vietnamese and English. Interestingly, English as a second language had been taught in South Vietnamese schools for years before our arrival.

It was difficult to compute enemy losses during the month of May at Chu Lai. A disturbing practice had begun in the reporting of enemy personnel losses in 1965 which included categories for “possible” and “probable” for both KIAs and WIAs in addition to the standard category of enemy KIAs confirmed by body count. There just wasn’t any such thing as a possible or probable enemy KIA; he was either dead or he wasn’t. It was pure speculation to report possible or probable enemy WIAs. A severe nose bleed might leave a significant blood trail but was rarely, if ever, considered an incapacitating wound such as might be inflicted by a gunshot or shrapnel.

The 31 May report from the recon company, if valid, had been among the more significant entries in the 4th Marines’ INTSUMs during the month of May 1965. While the information regarding the contact was of interest, and was possibly, or even probably true, there was no substantiation provided. The information from the district and village chiefs and the ARVNs during the month was useful but the S-2 section would be hard pressed to adequately evaluate its validity until such time as: (1) a data track over time on the sources was established; and (2), there was feedback received from timely attempts to checkout promising reports on the ground. While getting established and operational ashore had its difficulties, with a considerable amount of information to be sorted through in a new area during the first month in the Chu Lai area, the intelligence effort of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines had to be judged as having been off to a reasonably good start.

At month’s end, there were 5,090 Marines and 433 Navy (291 officers and 5,232 enlisted) in the Chu Lai enclave. By most standards of the Vietnam War, May 1965 had not been a particularly violent month. Within the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, there had been 2 KIA and 5 WIA. Unfortunately, there had been 79 non-battle casualties (48 within 1/4 alone) within the command which was probably indicative of the extant situation: few, if any, Marines under the grade of major or gunnery sergeant had been in combat before 7 May. Live ammunition in the weapons and hands of such “green” or unseasoned troops was an accident waiting to happen, which, unfortunately, all too frequently did.

## June 1965

After an informal promotion ceremony in the Commandant's office and a ceremonial battalion parade at Quantico, Major General Lewis W. Walt left for Vietnam at the end of May. On 5 June, he officially relieved General Collins as CG, III MAF, and Commanding General, 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv. Upon taking command, General Walt toured the three base/enclave areas. Based upon his own observations, supported by available intelligence, he had concluded that the VC were building up their forces in the areas contiguous to the Marine enclaves. Walt decided that the Marines had to extend their TAORs and at the same time conduct deeper and more aggressive patrolling. With the concurrence of General Thi, the I Corps commander, General Walt enlarged the TAORs at all three enclaves. The enlargements gave the units of the division more room for offensive operations and provided distinguishable lines of demarcation on the ground since the trace of the new TAORs followed natural terrain features. With the enlarged TAORs and broader mission in June, General Walt based his concept of operations on the establishment of an elaborate defensive network for the base areas together with forward outposts and extended patrolling in the outlying areas. He envisioned "the creation of a series of dug-in timbered mutually supporting defensive positions into which infantry units might withdraw in the event of heavy enemy attack" as the main defensive line for each enclave. Some 3 to 5 kilometers (kms) forward of this line, Walt wanted the establishment of a "lightly fortified combat outpost line (COPL)" for a more mobile defense. Concurrently, the III MAF commander ordered all units to continue "aggressive patrolling" in all TAORs "as a means of keeping the enemy off balance, forcing him to deploy. And give early warning of any attempts to concentrate along TAOR boundaries."

By the first week in June, after three months of defensive operations, the Marines [which included the Marines at Da Nang and Hue-Phu Bai] had suffered nearly 200 casualties, including 18 killed in action. It had become increasingly apparent that they were engaged in more than static defense. As early as 28 April, during a visit to Da Nang, the Commandant of the Marine Corps [General Wallace Greene] had told the press that the Marines were not in Vietnam 'to sit on their ditty boxes,' they were there to 'kill Viet Cong. In Washington, the press asked the State Department to redefine the U.S. military role in Vietnam. On 5 June, Robert J. McCloskey, speaking for the State Department and indicating his statement had the approval of highest departmental officials, said:

- As you know, American troops have been sent to South Vietnam recently with the mission of protecting key installations there. In establishing and patrolling their defensive perimeters, they come into contact with the Viet Cong and at times are fired upon. Our troops naturally return the fire.
- It should come as no surprise therefore that our troops engage in combat in these and similar circumstances. But let me emphasize that the Vietnamese Government forces are carrying the brunt of combat operations. Those United States forces assigned as advisers to the armed forces remain in that capacity.

At that time, of the 51,000 American servicemen in Vietnam, some 16,500 Marines and 3,500 Army Airborne troopers [at Bien Hoa, near Saigon, the newly-arrived 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade] had 'defensive' missions: the rest might be said to be in an 'advisory capacity.'

President Johnson had met with the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, Maxwell D. Taylor, and his top political and military advisers. A meeting of the National Security Council, in itself a rare event,

was held. It was obvious that neither the air war, nor the ground war, nor the political war was going well. The original hope, that with Americans securing the major bases, the South Vietnamese could successfully carry the fight to the Viet Cong, was fading fast. With the coming of the summer monsoon (not in I Corps, but on the other side of the Annamites), various advantages would accrue to the Viet Cong. There was great concern over the Pleiku-Kontum area in the Central Highlands [of II Corps], where there were as yet no U.S. combat troops. There was talk now of the eventual commitment of 300,000, even 500,000, U.S. troops to Vietnam.

On 8 June the State Department issued a statement which was widely construed to mean that, in recent weeks, President Johnson had given General Westmoreland authority to order U.S. ground forces into offensive combat. On 9 June the White House came out with a statement which partially contradicted and partially confirmed the previous day's release. It said in part:

- There has been no change in the mission of United States ground combat units in Vietnam in recent days or weeks. The President has issued no order of any kind in this regard to General Westmoreland recently or at any other time. The primary mission of these troops is to secure and safeguard important military installations like the air base at Da Nang. They have the associated mission of...patrolling and securing actions in and near the areas thus safeguarded.
- If help is requested by the appropriate Vietnamese commander, General Westmoreland also has authority within the assigned mission to employ these troops in support of Vietnamese forces faced with aggressive attack when other effective reserves are not available, and when in his judgment, the general military situation urgently requires it.

The above statement was, of course, consistent with the instructions given by General Westmoreland to General Collins, and later repeated to General Walt.

The question had arisen concerning the circumstances under which U.S. combat troops would go to the aid of the South Vietnamese. It had been answered by the 8 June White House statement. Despite his new authorization, there was little General Westmoreland could do to alleviate the situation (referring to the demise of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment, 2<sup>nd</sup> ARVN Division, at the hands of the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment 20 miles south of Chu Lai on 30 May). Other than III MAF, he could only call upon one other U.S. infantry formation, the U.S. Army's 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade, which had arrived at Bien Hoa near Saigon during May. By June, the South Vietnamese Army was losing the equivalent of one infantry battalion a week to enemy action.

General Westmoreland had come to the conclusion that the South Vietnamese, by themselves, were incapable of holding back the Viet Cong, who were being reinforced by North Vietnamese regulars. In a message to the Joint Chiefs on 7 June, the MACV commander painted a stark picture depicting enemy strength and corresponding ARVN weakness. Westmoreland told the JCS, "I believe that the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam, i.e., the North Vietnamese] will commit whatever forces it deems necessary to tip the balance, and the GVN cannot stand up successfully to this kind of pressure without reinforcement." Specifically, General Westmoreland asked for the immediate approval for the deployment to Vietnam of those forces already being considered in various plans. These forces included the remaining two battalions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, as well as two Army brigades and an airmobile division. In addition, Westmoreland requested the deployment, already under consideration, of a Republic of Korea division to South Vietnam, as well as the possible deployment of more U.S. forces at a later date.

By this time, two supposedly conflicting 'strategies' were being debated in the press. One strategy emphasized mobile operations; not only should U.S. troops go to the rescue of beleaguered SVN forces, but there should also be U.S. 'search and destroy' operations, actively and aggressively seeking out the Viet Cong. The other, labeled the 'ink-blot' strategy, held that U.S. forces should secure 'coastal enclaves,' such as Da Nang, and from these gradually reach out, in carefully conducted 'clear and hold' operations.

The first strategy became known as the 'Army' strategy, and the second as the 'Marine' strategy. Each had its vociferous advocates who failed to see that the two strategies were not necessarily mutually exclusive. There were some critics who said that the Marines had become cautious and defensive-minded. It was true that at this time General Walt regarded the defense of Da Nang air base as his first and most important mission since the orders he had received so stated.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines had begun the month of June 1965 with the mission of maintaining a secure base area at Chu Lai for the construction of an airfield and to conduct aggressive patrolling throughout the assigned TAOR. On 1 June, the Seabees, Marine engineers, MABS-12, and the contractors had completed the SATS airstrip at Chu Lai and had it ready to receive the first of MAG-12's A-4 aircraft enroute from out of country air bases. It officially opened at 0800H on 1 June and was ready to receive the eight A-4 Skyhawk aircraft arriving from Cubi Point in the Philippines. The first plane was piloted by Colonel John D. Noble, commander of MAG-12, which was to operate from the field. The Skyhawks were from VMA-223 (Lt.Col Robert W. Baker) and VMA-311 (Lt.Col Bernard J. Stender). At 1329H on the same day, the first combat strike was flown when four A-4s were launched in support of the ARVN against targets 7 miles southwest of Chu Lai. A third attack squadron, VMA-214 (Lt.Col Keith O'Keefe) arrived shortly thereafter. Planes were now taking off and landing day and night generating lots of noise.

Also at the beginning of June, Lt. Col Hall's 3/3 was in position within its assigned TAOR conducting patrols, ambushes, village searches, and generally improving positions. On 1 June, 3/3 began expanding its assigned TAOR in accordance with 4<sup>th</sup> Marines Frag Order No. 6 which directed the battalion to expand, occupy, and control TAOR #3 and to coordinate occupation with the provincial chief of Quang Ngai Province. On order, the battalion was to establish a traffic control point on Rte 1 vicinity of coordinate (BT 540027) and immediately west of the airfield to check the entry of civilians and vehicles into the regimental TAOR. The battalion CP displaced to a new location vic coordinate (BT 566044) along the beach near the water. Upon completion of the moves, the battalion began saturation patrolling of the added area. Daily village searches were conducted and a civil affairs program was instituted in the hamlets and villages. The period was characterized by small VC probes of one or two individuals at night with intermittent small arms fire against all positions. Searches and sweeps resulted in the apprehension of several civilians in the purchased area who were delivered to the collection point for processing.

As one of Bud Fredericks last actions as 1/4 battalion commander, Lt Peter Paffrath was directed to rejoin Co B as a platoon commander, having returned from H&S Co on 2 June. Pete later recalled that, "On one of the first patrols I took out, we encountered about 6-8 VC on a small hill maybe 50 to 75 yards in front of us. We opened fire and wounded at least two. One died and the other got away. We followed the blood trail for 50 yards. I was not frightened at the time of the fire fight and maybe even felt elated that we had done our job. But the killing stayed with me for several days and when I got a chance I talked to the chaplain about killing another human. The Catholic chaplain helped to resolve my feelings. I also remember how well the troops reacted to this fire fight. Everyone did their job and their firing was extremely accurate. At one point, we used the M79 and a 3.5 inch rocket launcher.

On 2 June, one of the Regiment's battalions (2/4) participated in its first large joint operation with an ARVN unit. The VC had recently blown bridges and cut Rte. 1 north of the village of An Tan vicinity of coordinate (BT 500066). The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (-) (Lt. Col Fisher) and the ARVN's 8<sup>th</sup> Airborne Battalion were to conduct the operation. Parts of the command group of 2/4, to include two company commanders, were helilifted to the Tam Ky District headquarters north of Chu Lai to conduct liaison with ARVN commanders pertaining to the operation. The mission assigned to 2/4 was to conduct a mechanized reconnaissance/attack north from 2/4's Chu Lai position to clear Rte. 1 and linkup with the ARVN forces (the ARVN 8<sup>th</sup> Airborne Battalion) attacking south. Upon linkup and destruction of VC forces, near Rte. 1, 2/4 was to return to TAOR 2.

The concept of the operation for "Pearly Shells II," as described in 2/4's Operation Order 35-65, was to conduct the mechanized reconnaissance/attack north utilizing the Ontos 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> AT Bn (1<sup>st</sup> Lt Terry), Company F (Capt Bill Reilly) reinforced with a section of 81mm mortars, a section of 106mm recoilless rifles mounted on trucks, and the 2/4 command group (Lt.Col Fisher). The operation was late in commencing, beginning at 1325H (attributed to short notice). The lead elements moved north on Rte. 1 passing the IP (initial point) the south end of the bridge over Rte. 1 just north of An Tan village vic coordinate (BT 498067) departing the 2/4 TAOR at 1400H. At the Ly Tin District Headquarters, Captain Tic, the District Chief, and two platoons of Popular Forces (PFs) were picked up and integrated into the Marine rifle platoons. The column continued north at 1425H.

It was discovered that the road surface on both sides of the bridge, vicinity coordinate (BT 452087) had been dug away. The column bypassed the bridge and continued north. At 1455H, the first serial of the column received 3 rounds of sniper fire from the vicinity of coordinate (BT 447097) about 300 meters east of the column with no casualties. At this point, the 2/4 battalion commander directed Co F to dismount two squads to move on foot, one on either flank to provide flank security. The road had been dug up in many places and movement was slow. At 1515H, the aerial observer (AO) reported 20 men assembled in the vicinity of coordinate (BT 440118) about 1,100 meters to the east of Rte.1. The district chief stated that there was a company of VC known to be in that area and approved the use of artillery. Before the request for fire could be submitted, the AO reported that he had discovered between 50-75 armed men crossing the small river in the vicinity of coordinate (BT 436113) about 700 meters east of Rte. 1 and moving towards Objective A, the bridge across Rte. 1 vic coord (BT 430109). The district chief agreed that it was VC trying to escape and authorized the use of artillery. The AO aircraft opened fire on them with its onboard M-60 machine guns to slow the enemy's movement while artillery was adjusted. The AO observed 5 VC in a boat killed by machine gun fire. Three volleys of 155mm artillery were used to cover the entire area. No further activity was detected in this area and a physical check could not be held to check results of the artillery fire due to a lack of time.

At 1555H the leading elements secured the south end of Objective A. It was discovered that VC had blown the bridge and it was impassable. Three straw huts found in this area were burned by the VC resulting in an explosion estimated to be about one pound of TNT. Other secondary explosions came from the huts. At 1620H, two incoming 81mm mortar rounds were received landing near the mechanized/motorized column, the fire believed coming from Hill 22, about 2 kms to the south of the column and west of Rte. 1, vicinity coordinate (BT 425091). Naval gunfire was requested on Hill 22 and fired, ending at 1700H.

Since the ARVN 8<sup>th</sup> Airborne Battalion was still 1,500 meters beyond Objective A, the 2/4 and PF force was to remain in position until 1715H. At 1650 H, 15-25 armed men were observed entering a house in the vicinity of coordinate (BT 425105), but since this was across and just north of the agreed upon no-fire line (a river), the VC were not immediately fired upon. It was determined that the observed personnel were VC and the 8<sup>th</sup> Airborne authorized 2/4 to take the VC under fire. Four rounds of 106mm recoilless rifle fire from an Ontos destroyed the house (probable 15 VC KIA, bodies not observed). At 1725H, movement back to the TAOR commenced, all units returning by 1800H on 2 June.

On 3 June, Company C of 1/4 had been helilifted to Hill 410 [vicinity of coordinate (BS 525982)] clearly demonstrating there were other, better ways of getting to the top of hills, while the engineers continued work on the future road to the eastern base of Hill 213 (which wouldn't go up that hill but made it somewhat easier to get to).

On 4 June, Staley's platoon had gone out on another night ambush, only to have the battalion's 81mm mortars start dropping rounds on them. There were two rounds, one of which was a dud. The other round landed and exploded about 20 feet from Staley in some sand, but a lot closer to one of the corporals. There was lots of dust, sand, smoke, and flying debris, but fortunately, no damage was done, just a now hysterical, but otherwise uninjured, corporal. Contact was instantly made on the radio to battalion and the mortar platoon screaming for a ceasefire. Later, I found it was confirmed that our prescribed ambush site was on the same exact coordinates as one of the battalion's H&I (harassment and interdiction) fire targets, a dry creek bed. Somebody, either at company or at battalion level, or both, had not done their jobs and 'deconflicted' the targets, patrol routes, and ambush sites for time, location, and activity. Friendly fire accidents had become a serious and growing problem.

Friendly fire notwithstanding, we were now beginning to enjoy some of life's modern conveniences such as toilet seats carved or otherwise fashioned out of wooden mortar round shipping cases, two hot meals every ninth day (officers and SNCOs were actually eating off plates with real forks, knives, and spoons), and fresh drinking water that came from the beach support area where they were most likely using reverse osmosis of sea water since the water didn't taste of gasoline or creosote (which came from it having been filtered through burlap, although it frequently still was).

On 4 June, Lt. Lynn Terry received word that PFC Aaron Western, at 0845H, after an all-night vigil at An Tan, had accidentally shot himself with a .30 cal. machine gun. He is quite seriously injured as it hit him in the stomach and he lost a lot of blood. He is a real good kid and one of the best privates. Nobody knows exactly what happened, but he hadn't cleared the weapon and had it pointed at himself while trying to remount it on his Ontos. They will investigate and try and burn somebody. There are not supposed to be any weapons loaded (this comes from Regiment). However, on the front lines you have to choose for yourself, risking the chance of not being attacked at all, or, that you will be able to load the weapon in time, against the risk of accidental discharge. At the very same position, about five nights earlier, Hotel [Co] killed a VC no more than fifty yards from where Western shot himself. The VC was carrying nine grenades.

The emphasis on this type of accident is being placed in the wrong line of thinking. First of all, it is obvious that that most of these senior officers worry about people being shot because of their own hides career wise. The first question is always why did he have a round in the chamber, not how seriously is the man hurt or will he be all right. Secondly, I feel that when to lock and load has got to be up to the

immediate person in charge, not someone sitting within the safety of the CP. Real experience says that they can get right on top of you before you know it.

Golf [Co] had a Marine killed when his position in the hills was overrun by four VC. They went right by him before he could put his magazine in and load, and they threw four grenades in on him. A Golf platoon leader has requested to be relieved because he cannot obey the order not to lock and load after dark. The Captain said there is no need to have any magazines in the weapons where the men are set in. That's because he is not out there. This is just a lousy war. You chase people you can't even distinguish from the civilian populous and you can't shoot at them unless they shoot at you.

A search and clear operation of Tri Binh (1), vicinity coordinate (BS 555986) was begun on 5 June when Co C, 1/4, was helilifted from Hill 410 to Tri Binh (2) hamlet vic coordinate (BS 525982) over 2 kms to the west of Tri Binh (1) where they remained in a defensive perimeter for the night. Also on 5 June, all companies of 2/4 switched positions. The battalion CP was now located vicinity of coordinates BT 514042) about 500 meters west of Rte. 1 and generally centered west of the new airfield. The process would be repeated on 10 June with Co E to vic coordinate (BT 495035) about 2 kms southwest of the battalion CP with a hill mass in between the two positions. Co F moved to vicinity coordinate (BT 534042) about 500 meters to the west of the airfield (and east of Rte. 1). Co G located vic coordinate (BT 530032) along Rte. 1 and 2 kms southeast of the battalion CP, and Co H went to vic coordinates (BT 519040) about 400 meters southwest of the battalion CP and (BT 530002) in the mountainous area along the Quang Tin-Quang Ngai provincial border but well west of Hill 410.

On 6 June, at 2137H, Co E, 2/4, received small arms fire from 7-8 VC and requested 81mm mortar fire. At 2150H, rocks were thrown in to Co E's positions and one frag grenade was thrown back. At 2200H, 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, Co E, reported receiving heavy small arms fire from the vicinity of coordinate (BT 508030). The platoon returned fire and during an 81mm mortar illumination mission three bodies were spotted in the position's defensive wire. By 2250H, only one body remained in the wire and occasional small arms fire was still being received. Also on 6 June, Co K, 3/3, reported one of his Marines had been bitten by a snake and requested helicopter evacuation. The bite was subsequently determined to be an insect bite. At 0508H, 3/3's 81mm mortar position reported observing two helicopters from LPH-2 (USS Iwo Jima) collide and burst into flames and crash into the South China Sea.

On the 6<sup>th</sup>, Company C, joined by a platoon from Co B, and the battalion's attached recon platoon, had moved into blocking positions near Tri Binh (1) under cover of darkness and at first light commenced a search and clear operation with the local police chief, Marine counterintelligence (CIT) personnel, and the battalion's civil affairs officer [later to be known as the S-5]. Of the 783 VN civilians encountered, 14 were forwarded to the collection point as VCS. Company C then conducted overnight operations which extended to the morning of 7 June in the valley vicinity of Tri Binh (2). They were then helilifted back to the battalion CP.

At 0545H on 7 June, Cos M and Co K, 3/3, commenced search and destroy operations in conjunction with local forces in the hamlets of My Hue (1) (BS 613983), My Hue (2) (BS 606983), and My Hue (3) (BS 604983), all lying about 10 kms southeast of Chu Lai, to the east of Rte.1, and along the northwest bank of the Song Tra Bong. Four hundred eighty VN civilians were screened. Co K had provided the blocking positions vic coordinates (BS 600985) to (BS 610984) to the north of the three My Hue hamlets while Co M swept west to east.

The heat is always bad from the time the sun comes up until it goes down and the bugs are unbearable most of the time. The mosquitoes buzz all night, and as soon as you get up in the morning the flies and gnats are on you. They just won't leave you alone. The only pleasurable time of the day is when we go over the hill to the mess hall, eat a good meal and shower. On 8 June, an enjoyable evening of hearts games at the 2/4 Battalion Aid Station [BAS] was broken up when the news came in that a short 105mm howitzer round had fallen in on Co E, at 1845H, vicinity of coordinate (BT 497035) killing two Marines and wounding two others.

It was the 8<sup>th</sup> of June and the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines were still not drawing hostile fire pay, about \$55 per month. Seems that someone, most possibly the regimental commander, didn't think there was enough enemy activity here to warrant the extra pay. It also seemed that someone, presumably the enemy, threw a frag grenade in to the regimental CP area (no damage or injuries). Purportedly, a recommendation for hostile fire pay went forward almost immediately, and we started drawing hostile fire pay two weeks later.

Shortly after the beginning of June, the regiment had been given the mission to expand its TAOR along with a modified concept for the defense of the Chu Lai complex. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (-) (Rein) reacted by consolidating its defensive positions by defending the FEBA (the forward edge of the battle area), with each of the three battalions to establish and maintain a COPL (combat outpost line) along the FEBA (more appropriately, along a main line of resistance or MLR). The terms (or concepts) of FEBA and COPL were decidedly conventional tactics which presupposed that the front and rear areas of the battle area were clearly distinguishable and that the enemy was located in a particular direction. As we were soon to learn, there was no forward edge of the battle area in Vietnam; the unconventional enemy in Vietnam was all around and perimeter defenses were more appropriate and effective. Yet once again it seemed, we were employing the tactics and strategies of previous wars (as had our French predecessors in Indo-China). Fortuitously perhaps, the initial Marine missions in Da Nang, Phu Bai, and Chu Lai had been basically defensive in nature and the long-ago learned conventional tactics were appropriate.

The northeast monsoon season appeared to have arrived a little early; it had been raining "cats and dogs." We had to trench inside and outside the hoochs (a poncho lean-to) in order to channel the rainwater away. The rain, besides hiding sounds, invited almost everyone to climb under their ponchos to keep dry, and security alertness on the frontline was almost nonexistent. The VC knew this and could be expected to step up their probing activity. Rainy night security lapses cost one company on our flank eleven WIA casualties (no KIAs, fortunately).

Platoon leaders and platoon sergeants, must continually be out in the rain checking the lines. More Marines were killed at night than any other time, largely by other Marines accidentally. In one company, a sergeant found two Marines asleep in their foxhole. The sergeant had thrown his helmet into the hole to awaken them. They woke up, sure enough, shooting, filling the sergeant's chest full of 7.62mm holes. He was probably dead before he had hit the ground. There was another recent case resulting from the use of infrared sniper rifle scopes for night observation. One night a corporal crawled from his foxhole to the next hole but had forgotten to put on his helmet. The battalion was using the infrared reflections off helmets as a recognition device when using the infrared scopes to distinguish between the good guys and the VC. Somebody to the immediate rear using a "scoped" rifle had spotted this body without a helmet crawling towards a Marine in a foxhole and cleanly shot a Marine corporal through the arm and head. Miraculously, the corporal survived.

An early-June Fourth Marines Frag Order (#7) directed, in addition to continuing to conduct aggressive combat and recon patrols, search and destroy operations, sweeps, counter guerrilla operations, and population control measures, that:

- The First Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, was to move from its current positions to occupy and defend a new TAOR [#1] located on the north and north east (or right) portion of the regiment's TAOR, an area previously the responsibility of 2/4, which included the islands of Ky Xuan and Ky Hoa, the Ky Ha peninsula, and the coast in the east. It was to establish and maintain a COPL, and was to continue to maintain liaison with the Binh Son District and with the provincial chief of Quang Ngai Province;

- The Second Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, was to essentially stay in place and occupy and defend the new TAOR [#2] or the central portion of the regiment's TAOR. It was responsible for defending construction units and aviation facilities of the new air field and to coordinate all defense efforts within the TAOR. It would continue to provide liaison personnel to Ly Tin Dist and now with the provincial chief of Quang Tin Province, and maintain a COPL within sector;

- The Third Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, was to occupy and defend the expanded area of the regimental TAOR, now expanded to include an area to the northwest of the Song Tra Bong and the coast and associated peninsulas-Trung Phan and such, new TAOR [#3] on the south (left) portion of the regimental sector. It was to provide external security for the logistical support area, to provide liaison personnel with the 2<sup>nd</sup> ARVN Division in Quang Ngai, and initially, to provide one company for regimental reserve. It was to establish a COPL within sector; and

- The combat outpost line or COPL was to be organized in a series of squad, platoon, and company strong points along the general line of the COPL coordinating points utilizing the terrain to best advantage. Each outpost was to provide for all-around security, to be heavily fortified utilizing land mines, and include overhead cover to provide protection.

When the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had received the regimental frag order it would change the battalion's TAOR from its present location to what was generally known as "the peninsula area" and in the process altered the battalion's concept of operations. FEBA (forward edge of the battle area) positions were to be constructed. Aggressive patrolling would continue, but now there would be an almost equal emphasis on the preparation of defensive works including preparation and manning of outposts along Rte. 1 specifically to defend the same bridge on Rte. 1 just northwest of An Tan village that 2/4 had used for its IP on 2 June vic coordinate (BT 498066), and a traffic control point along Rte. 1. And, also a requirement for surveillance of the seaward approaches to repel counter-landings and prohibit the entry of infiltrators. There had been discussion of a FEBA as if there were a frontline with a conventional enemy beyond. First Battalion would now also provide a permanent liaison officer to the Ly Tin District Chief to provide "positive" coordination. The company would also conduct numerous sweeps of the area and the neighboring islands, either singly or in multi-company efforts. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines were now defending along a line running generally on the Ky Ha Peninsula centered on grid coordinate (BT 525100) then southeast along Rte. 1 and northeast to the beach. First Battalion was now the northernmost element, with 2/4 occupying and defending the center portion of the regimental defensive sector, and 3/3 occupying and defending the easternmost (i.e., seaward) portion of the sector.

The First Battalion prepared for displacement on 9 June with an advance communications echelon displacing to the future CP centered on the Ky Ha Peninsula vic coordinate (BT 526092) with a platoon from Co B providing security. And on the 10<sup>th</sup> the battalion CP displaced from its old position vic coordinate (BT 538022) to about 1 km west of Rte. 1, the new Ky Ha Peninsula CP. Co A temporarily displaced from the hill masses vic coordinates (BS 493999) (BS 507997), and (BS 511992) which had delineated the Quang Tin-Quang Ngai provincial boundary to the southeast of Hill 410 to the old battalion CP, coordinate (BT 538022). Company B (-) displaced to a FEBA location in the vicinity of the new battalion CP. Co C displaced with one platoon outposted at Hill 69 (squad-sized) where the ARVNs had maintained a position vic coordinate (BT 468068) about 1 km west of Rte 1, and a platoon (-) position vic coordinate (BT 499067) (the An Tan bridge), also along Rte. 1. Company C (-) would be located on the FEBA from coordinate (BT 530085) to the south of the Ky Ha Peninsula about 1,100 meters further south to coordinate (BT 530071). Co D (now Capt Sweeney) displaced to the FEBA vicinity coordinates (BT 523074) about 1 km west of Co C then southwest to Rte. 1 vicinity coordinate (BT 511056). The emphasis was on defense. The battalion (-) adjusted along the FEBA while Co A remained at the old CP to "protect the tail." [The term MLR was rapidly supplanting the term FEBA in both battalion and regimental frag orders and SITREPs.]

On 8 June the driver of a truck belonging to the tank company was attacked by four VC within the TAOR just off Rte. 1. He was driving alone when the VC threw a grenade. He caught it and threw it back. He was hit by some of the fragments but not seriously hurt. They are getting bolder because we are getting lax.

And at 1130H, on 9 June, Co K, 3/3, was directed to investigate suspected VC occupation of a hill vic coordinate (BT 614009) within one km of where the Song Tra Bong entered the South China Sea and about 2.5 kms north of the My Hue hamlets. A sweep of the area was made with negative contact, however, as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon of Co K fanned out in a skirmish line and moved towards the Song Tra Bong to search some sampans, a heavy burst of fire was received from the vic of coordinate (BT 619010) to the north of the suspect hill. A second burst of fire was received fatally wounding one Marine. Artillery fire was called in and 6 rounds of 105mm white phosphorous (WP or "Willy Peter") caused the enemy to discontinue firing. Forty VCS were apprehended, interrogated, and nine VCS were forwarded to the collection point. The rest were released as their papers were in order. During the exchange of fire, Co K sustained one KIA and one VC was seen to fall as a result of small arms fire. The enemy had fired an estimated 800 to 1,000 rounds of small arms fire, while Co K fired approximately 1,100 small arms rounds, six 40mm M-79 rounds, and two 3.5" rounds.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division G-2 for 9-10 June provided comment on the recent rash of reports from 26 May to 9 June of Chinese advisors (and units) operating with VC units in Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces. The G-2's comment: "Presence of Chinese advisors with VC units is accepted as probably true, however, no indications have been received of organized Chinese units in RVN. Presence of any such units is improbable."

On 10 June, the liaison officer at Binh Son reported "intensive movement" vicinity of coordinates (BS 475943) and (BS 465966) believed to be the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 104<sup>th</sup> VC Regt. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 104<sup>th</sup> Regiment, was reported to be vicinity of coordinates (BS 506964), and the 90<sup>th</sup> Battalion's CP was located vicinity of coordinate (BS 472962). According to the report's source, the battalions were operating in mutual support. Movement was to the north with six platoons of "main force guerrillas" covering the

moving units' right flank. The district chief had rated the information as B-3; the source as "usually reliable", and the accuracy of the information as "possibly true", (INTSUM #32). There was no accompanying comment from the S-2, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. If the 90<sup>th</sup> Battalion referred to in the report was the 90<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> VC regiment, then the location reported was highly unlikely in the light of earlier reporting on that regiment's recent activities and reported location. The district chief didn't seem all that enthusiastic with the information either.

On 11 June, 3/3 commenced execution of 4<sup>th</sup> Marines Frag Order #7. Cos K and L began constructing positions on the MLR (Main Line of Resistance), while Co I began constructing a series of combat outposts on the COPL. Co M was placed in regimental reserve and began constructing defensive positions west of the airfield. A river checkpoint was established at the mouth of the Song Tra Bong vicinity coordinate (BT 612020) near where Co K had their contact on 9 June. Control of river traffic was begun in addition to the population control measures in practice within the battalion sector. Extensive patrolling was conducted forward of the MLR to the limits of the battalion sector. A company-sized patrol was conducted every day during daylight hours, and a minimum of two squad-sized patrols in addition to layouts and ambushes were conducted every night. A roadblock was established along Rte. 1 by Co I about 1 km south east of the Co G, 2/4, position vicinity coordinate (BT 540027). The roadblock checked all traffic between the hours of 0601H and 1900H and halted all movements from 1901H to 0600H.

At 2120H on the 11<sup>th</sup>, 2/4 had artillery neutralization fires delivered upon a estimated three VC platoons deployed along the railroad tracks from coordinates (BT 589910) to (BT 6000905) west of Rte 1 and located 1,200 to 1,500 meters southeast of the Song Tra Bong. Effect on target was good but due to darkness surveillance was impossible. Again on the 12<sup>th</sup>, artillery fire was requested by 2/4's Binh Son liaison officer on suspected enemy at vicinity coordinates (BS 634956) to the east of the Song Tra Bong at 1730H. Thirty VC were reported killed. A half hour later, fires were requested in the same general area vicinity coordinate (BS 638953) with 3 VC reported killed and on 3 junks vicinity coordinate (BS 628970) in a tributary of the Song Tra Bong with one junk reported destroyed.

On 11 June, Co A began its movement towards the Ky Ha peninsula to platoon positions extending from vicinity coordinates (BT 526100) to (BT 520115) north of the new battalion CP and the northern end of the peninsula. The Co A CP was to be located on Hill 51 vicinity coordinate (BT 528110). The positions to be occupied were to be more or less permanent and engineers were cutting and grading a road into our new area where we would be digging and building permanent-type bunkers as well as living and storage areas. Installation of a protective minefield was even under discussion.

On 12 June, last night at Lt Col Fisher's meeting, we were told that a large Army Special Forces camp north of Saigon was shelled and overrun with no known survivors. He characterized the attack as a "real professional job and that we must be ready for the same." He said that in our area the VC have the capability of throwing twelve battalions at us and supporting them with mortars and 105s.

The battalions conducted squad-sized daylight patrols and night ambushes. Lt. Col Fisher's 2/4 provided security for the Seabees while they constructed the airfield. Shotgun riders from one rifle company were assigned to every vehicle day and night. Two of Lt. Col Fisher's other rifle companies and his H&S Company manned the main defensive line, while his fourth rifle company manned forward outposts and conducted patrols. The other infantry battalions at Chu Lai made similar dispositions.

At 1100H on 13 June, artillery was fired on an unidentified "VC unit" vicinity coordinate (BS 640936) in Binh Son District. An estimated 30 to 40 VC were reported as killed, 4 of which identified as "hard core VC."

Also on 13 June, during a swim/shower party at the beach support area (BSA), Co D had a grenade accident resulting in two dead Marines. One critically wounded, (and not expected to survive), one seriously wounded, one diagnosed with a compound fracture, and 17 others evaluated as being in good to excellent condition. Supposedly, one of the troops was playing with a grenade. He had only two days to do. Two officers and a first sergeant were with them, there was no indication if they were killed, among the wounded, or unhurt.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, Co A participated in a two-company sweep with Co B of a nearby Ky Xuan Island, center of mass (BT 487100). The sweep progressed from south to north with a blocking force established between Rte, 1 and the south shore of the Song Ben Van opposite the island vicinity coordinate (BT 483076). Staley was placed in charge of operating the collection and screening point and the prisoner compound. About 650 Vietnamese civilians, mostly women and children, were checked by the several ARVN interpreters and PFs (Popular Forces) assigned to the company for the sweep resulting in 16 suspected village guerillas being apprehended and turned over for safekeeping. The 14 VCS were eventually turned over to regiment later that day. Eventually they would be turned over to the Ly Tin District Chief for further "processing," and more often never heard of again. A VN Navy junk patrol failed to show up for blocking force duty (it was later determined that the Junk Fleet could not patrol north and west of the island because of insufficient water depth).

The headquarters of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment moved from coordinate (BT 526042) to coordinate (BT 531089) on the Ky Ha Peninsula in the midst of 1/4's area on 14 June. A probe of Co L's position on 15-16 June had resulted in 2 USMC WIAs.

On 15 June Staley was designated the company's new "engineering project officer." The job was to oversee the digging and construction of the company's portion of the COPL to include individual, machine gun, tank, and anti-tank weapon positions, as well as communications bunkers, supply and ammunition (ammo) dumps, CP fortifications and hardened OPs (observation posts), some kind of billeting facilities, and the stringing/emplacing of over 5,400 feet of barbed wire fence (double apron as well as coiled German tape, the successor of concertina wire), and possibly some land mines. On the map our new location was identified as Hill 51.

The engineers blasted six machine gun positions on 16 June, using 40 pounds of C-4 in each hole. They blasted craters for three of the four bunkers using shaped and cratering charges. The bulldozers cleared out holes in the side of the hill for ammo and supply bunkers, and also cleared a road down the side of the hill so that trucks will be able to bring our ammo and supplies right into our position. We then used the bulldozers to scrape out flat strips in order to erect Southeast Asia huts or canvas squad tents for the troops, CP tents for platoon offices, 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant's office, and tentage to store sea bags. All had to have good drainage for the rainy monsoon season. Sandbags will be used to fortify fighting holes (also known as foxholes) and machine gun pits. The battalion commander has set a completion date for all of this for late July. A lot of hard hours and days lay ahead. There were three hamlets located about 1,500 meters from our position, and the RVN government and our own intelligence people reported these villages were hostile and VC-controlled. Somebody is going to have to make a decision relative to whether or not to relocate those folks.

We were now being fed B-rations (canned foods), and next week we are scheduled to get A-rations which would include fresh eggs, fresh vegetables, iced tea, cold milk, and meat. The food was to be prepared in the battalion's field kitchen (as there are no cooks and bakers in a Marine rifle company), and then trucked out to the field in special containers. No mosquitoes on Hill 51 yet, just a few flies (the national bird of VN), and some big scorpions and foot-long centipedes (both of which bite and are quite painful).

The field docs sometimes listened to Peking Patty, also known as Hanoi Hannah, on the radio. She is unbelievable. When you listen to her, you really get a picture of how ignorant the masses are. She claimed that millions of 'imperialist dogs' (that's us) and the puppet army (the ARVNs) have been annihilated. According to her, we have taken four times more casualties than have "we have people." And, that we also have had unbelievable numbers of people who have deserted and defected. We also heard that another coup has taken place in Saigon.

On 17 June, a combined sweep operation involving one Marine platoon from 2/4 and one PF platoon was conducted in An Thien and Long Phu vicinity coordinate (BT 510043) near the 2/4 CP. A reinforced platoon from Co G, 2/4, was helilifted to the top of Hill 213 to conduct a combat patrol and harbor overnight to return about noon the next day. No contact was made (not surprisingly).

On 19 June, regiment had directed that 1/4 recall its unit on Hill 69, vicinity coordinate (BT 468068), because of a lack of sufficient ARVN reinforcement after the ARVN's unannounced withdrawal. On 20 June, because of reports from Ly Tin District Headquarters and their withdrawal to the 2/4 CP, the First Battalion was placed on 100% alert status and a reinforcing force was assembled in case the bridge outpost, vicinity coordinate (BT 497067), should it be attacked. The battalion was placed on 50% alert at 2100H, and the reaction force secured at first light.

Construction of defensive positions on the FEBA and COPL continued despite the limited availability of construction materials. On 21 June, a probe of Co A's position resulted in one Marine WIA, and on the following day Co D, the southernmost of the 1/4 units, was hit by sniper fire while conducting a patrol resulting in one Marine WIA. On 22 June, Co C re-manned Hill 69, vicinity coordinate (BT 467068), with a reinforced platoon. On 24 June, Co C conducted a combat patrol in a portion of the extended TAOR. Because of sniper fire along the planned route, it had to be shortened to finish before dark. Artillery and mortar missions were fired in support of the patrol which was operating west of Rte. 1 vicinity coordinate (BT 447079). One incoming 60mm mortar round was received and there were no confirmed enemy casualties. There were two Marine WIAs (from unreported causes).

Got word today that the Marine who accidentally shot himself [PFC Aaron Western] died on the 16<sup>th</sup>. All the men have a real empty and helpless feeling, he was well liked. No one understand how it happened.

Co A (-) commenced a 2-day operation on Ky Xuan Island vicinity coordinate (BT 489100) on 25 June. No enemy contact was made and no shots were fired. Co A returned from the island on 26 June. The Second Battalion reported that construction of positions along the FEBA and its outpost line of resistance (OPL) had been halted due to the possibility of the battalion shifting positions.

On 26 June, 1/4 conducted a battalion (-) search and clear operation (Cos A and B) on Hill 22 west of Rte. 1 and just south of the Song Trai vicinity coordinate (BT 425091). Air and artillery fired in

support. No friendly or confirmed enemy KIA/WIA. Vietnamese Popular Forces also conducted a sweep of a nearby hamlet/village vicinity coordinate (BT 429093) with the battalion supporting from blocking positions. Sporadic sniper fire was received during the day, although the hill and the hamlet/village were not defended by VC. The village and trails had many bunkers, tunnels, and foxholes. The presence of bunkers was not necessarily indicative of VC presence since most inhabitants had constructed "family" bunkers next to their huts for protection against both friendly and enemy fires. Tunnels and fox holes were entirely different issues.

On 26 June, Co E (-) departed the 2/4 battalion CP by helicopters at 0900H with the mission of searching for VC, fresh diggings, future ambush sites, and to observe the attitude of the local populace. Due to an error in map reading, the company was landed some 2,000 meters west from their scheduled LZ. The flights were made in two plane waves. Upon arrival of the fourth wave, they were taken under fire by at least two VC with automatic weapons. Again on the sixth wave, the helos were taken under fire by heavy rifle fire and automatic weapons. Marine machine guns were then set up to cover the remainder of the helos. Artillery and air support were requested and utilized; the effect could not be determined due to heavy undergrowth. A sweep of the area fired upon by artillery and air was conducted in a hammer and anvil fashion; however, the "anvil" platoon was ambushed by about 5 VC, a heavy volume of fire delivered by the platoon's point caused the VC to scatter. The surveillance team had great difficulty in moving due to the heavy undergrowth about 8 feet in height. Shell casings were found but no bodies or remains. The remainder of the operation was uneventful.

On 28 June, 1/4 conducted a one day sweep and clear operation of the area surrounding coordinate (BT 449053) two kilometers southwest of Hill 69. Co C (-) (Rein) and 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon (-), Co B Recon, were helilifted into the area following a 15-minute artillery fire prep and air strike. Armed Huey helos directed fire on selected targets. Because of sniper fire being received, Co B, 1/4, was also dispatched to the area in support of Co C. Results of the operation were 2 VC KIA, suspected VC wounded, and 22 VCS turned into the regimental collection point. Caves and tunnels were destroyed about 100 meters to the southeast of the landing zone vicinity of coordinate (BT 450050). There was one Marine WIA.

Lt.Col. Fisher, the 'Bull,' summoned Lt. Hopkins to assign him another of those thankless tasks. The Bull wanted him to develop some Fougasse defensive mines for placement around the various combat outposts, particularly Catfish I, II and III. He explained to me what Fougasse mines were and that he had used them in Korea. After our interview, I went to the sergeant in charge of the flamethrower section for help in developing and building this mine. Since the mine was to employ napalm with and an explosive charge, it made sense to look to the flamethrower section for help. We spent several days experimenting with various aspects of the mine. We needed a metal casing for the mine and found just the thing with the empty cases that artillery shells came in. The cases were about three feet long and about 8-10 inches in diameter. We ended up putting a ¼ pound of C-4 in the bottom of the case and then pouring in the napalm up to a few inches from the top. Then we put a WP grenade at the top to finish the mine off. We used an electrical blasting cap in the C-4 and replaced the fuse in the grenade with another blasting cap. After repeated experiments, the Fougasse mine was finished. We demonstrated the final version of the dug-in mine to Lt.Col. Fisher. He gave his approval for placement of the mines around the various outposts.

The company commanders who occupied the combat outposts were consulted, and with their consent, selected likely enemy avenues of approach as the location for the Fougasse mines. We then

rigged up the various mines with communication wire back to the outpost CPs and hooked up a battery with contact points. It was a lot of work, but a job well done.

Between 1300 and 1500 Vietnamese villagers had been processed by the battalion during sweeps or apprehended by Marine patrols during June. Of these, 65 were turned over to the regiment as VC suspects. There were 2 VC KIA on 28 June. They probably stood as reminder of the sparse enemy contact the battalion was enduring here at Chu Lai.

At 0630H on 29 June, 3/3 (-) commenced an operation, Co L landing by amtracs vicinity coordinate (BT 623023) along the South China Sea beach on the east side of the Song Tra Bong and two hours later, at 0830H, Cos I and K were helilifted in to an LZ located at coordinate (BS 652986) about three kms east of the north-south Song Tra Bong and about 1,200 meters north of a small east-west river tributary of the Song Tra Bong (the Song Thai Can). This area would become known as the Trung Phan Peninsula, center of mass (BT 6500). The lift was completed at 0910H and the two companies formed on line to commence sweep operations. Co I flushed three VC as the Marines swept south with one VC killed as he tried to escape by swimming the unnamed river vicinity coordinate (BS 641972). No weapon was recovered due to silt on the river bottom. Two prisoners were taken to the west vicinity coordinate 639981). Company I continued to move.

Shortly after noon, two more prisoners were taken by Co I in the vicinity of coordinate (BS 636975) and four more at (BS 683984). A burlap bag containing medical supplies and a modified, rusted, bolt-action rifle (less trigger group) was uncovered during a search of Thuong Hoa (1) hamlet vic coordinate (BS 627974) at the Song Tra Bong. An unspecified number of VCS were spotted, pursued, and eight killed as they attempted to swim the river. Two additional VC were killed near the hamlet and 24 VCS were taken prisoner, two of whom were wounded. Small arms fire was then received from vicinity of coordinate (BS 625982) about a kilometer to the north of Thuong Hoa (1). The Marines returned fire and pursued the VC who again attempted to evade capture by swimming the river and 4 more were killed. Eleven others were taken prisoner. At 1710H, Co I was lifted to a landing zone vicinity coordinate (BT 565043), the Chu Lai airstrip under construction, and returned to the company's base by 1830H.

After landing at 0805H that morning, elements of Co K had sighted two VC in a bunker vicinity coordinate (BS 637986), about 1,500 meters to the west of the LZ. An air strike was called with the bunker being destroyed. Co K continued their sweeping action and at 1505H had sighted three VC vicinity coordinate (BS 626991) along the Song Tra Bong. The VC were taken under fire with negative results. Co K was then helilifted back to base, the lift completed by 1920H.

As earlier noted, Co L (Rein) executed their portion of the operation in amtracs. At 0700H, the first amtracs went ashore carrying elements of Co L to their assigned blocking positions on the high ground 2.5 kms south of the landing beaches vic coordinates (BS 633997) to (BS 640994) arriving about 0742H. No contact with the enemy had been made. At approximately 1020H, the platoon commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, Co L, departed the blocking position by amtrac along with a 4-man engineer detail and a reinforced rifle squad to search and destroy caves along the Song Tra Bong vicinity of coordinate (BT 620003) and about 1 km northwest of the blocking position.

Upon debarking from the amtrac, the patrol started a sweep of the area and received four rounds of sniper fire. At approximately 1340H, a tunnel was located and one of the engineers and a fire team returned to the amtrac to pick up demolitions. While proceeding to the amtrac, the small group received

sniper fire. The platoon commander and the rest of the detail returned to the amtrac where the firing was occurring. Upon reaching the amtrac and the small group, they held up while artillery was firing in the area. The patrol then proceeded back through some hamlet huts and then into a rice paddie at about 1430H. As they proceeded through the rice paddie, the patrol was taken under fire from all directions, but could not detect the specific origins of the fire. The initial burst had been about 15 rounds and the Marines took cover where they continued to receive sporadic enemy fire. One Marine was detailed to return to the amtrac and get it up to the rice paddie position.

Back at the blocking position, the platoon sergeant from 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon boarded an amtrac along with a squad and arrived at the rice paddie. Four additional amtracs were dispatched to the scene. The platoon commander and the detail boarded the other amtracs (loaded with M-274 "Mechanical Mules" loaded with supplies and equipment and started back to the company position. Enroute, one of the amtracs threw a track. Defensive positions were established in order to expedite repairs to the amtrac. While working on the disabled amtrac, two amtrac crewmen were hit by sniper fire. They reported that they could not affect further repairs and the order was given to destroy the disabled amtrac. The amtrac was then stripped of all gear, saturated with fuel, and ignited. An LVTP-5 and two M-274s (Mechanical Mules) were destroyed to prevent enemy utilization.

A big investigation started about the burning amtrac/mules incident. The Bull said it didn't look like the Marine Corps to him and the platoon commander certainly agreed. He said we will never destroy one piece of equipment unless he gives the word and then it would only come if a division was about to overrun a company. He also said we would not leave one wounded Marine if it takes the whole battalion, including himself, to go get him and we won't leave one dead Marine either. We all feel the same way.

On 30 June, 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon (Rein), Co B, 1/4, with an amtrac platoon (-) and supported by a PF platoon, conducted a sweep of the northern tip of Ky Xuan Island and then patrolled south. Three VC were apprehended on the island and turned over to regiment. Three Co B night ambushes were established on the island with no enemy contact. However, a PF ambush on the westernmost promontory on the island, vicinity coordinate ((BT 516096), apprehended three VC attempting to leave the island.

Co F (-), 2/4, departed its CP vicinity coordinate (BT 528032) at 1000H on the 30<sup>th</sup> with the mission of searching for VC, fresh diggings, future ambush sites, and to observe the attitude of the local populace (which apparently qualifies it as a reconnaissance in force operation). The movement of the two platoons and company headquarters was accomplished in four waves of four helicopters to the selected LZ vicinity coordinate (BT 455023) about 7.5 kms west of the company CP. The LZ was located on some high ground to the south of a valley containing a small river (the Song Truu), numerous rice paddies, and numerous hamlets, principally Thanh My Trung hamlets (1) and (2). The company patrol set out to the north and crossed the valley without contact until the point of the lead platoon crossed a stream vic coordinate (BT447036) and attempted to enter a rice paddy at the western bank of the stream. At this time, 1100H, the point was engaged by carbine fire by an estimated 5 VC positioned to the southeast (or the patrol's left rear) in a treeline to the southwest and at about the maximum effective range of the carbines vicinity coordinate (BT 440023). Fire was immediately returned with the patrol's M-14s and M-60 machine guns and air and artillery support was requested. The company also maneuvered both of the platoons. The carbine fire continued in a decreasing rate until air arrived on station at about 1140H.

When the air strike began, all enemy fire ceased. When the air strike had been completed, about 1215H, the patrol commenced to sweep through the target area using the river as the right flank. Seven

dead cows were found, but no dead or wounded VC could be located. Trenches, punji sticks, fox holes, and barbed wire were situated within the hamlet area included in the sweep before contact had been made. The VC fire was primarily harassing with no well aimed shots being delivered. The foxholes and trenches in the area located along the trails are probably used by the VC as well as the civilians when artillery was being delivered, although civilians usually vacated the area in which they suspect an engagement. Few civilians were seen along the patrol route, although some older people and children were observed in houses along the patrol route. The remainder of the patrol was uneventful.

Rocks, reportedly thrown by the VC, were received in Co E positions on both the 29<sup>th</sup> and the 30<sup>th</sup>. A challenge was rendered, illumination thrown, then a frag grenade thrown, all with negative results. At 0310H on 30 June, Co E personnel were hit by rocks and noises heard to their front. Again, a challenge was rendered, illumination thrown, followed by a frag grenade (again with negative results). It is interesting that the only company reporting rock throwing incidents in June had been Co E, 2/4. It had also been Co E that had reported the first such incidence on 6 June. There are several possible explanations for the rock incidents, two of the three explanations attributed to the VC. The first possible explanation was that the VC were probing the company's perimeter to determine the location of machine guns, and automatic and semi-automatic M-14 positions by drawing the Marines' fire without giving away their own positions by muzzle flashes. Certainly feasible but the Marines did not open fire with those weapons but instead "returning fire" by frag grenades thrown from concealed positions; a dangerous and seemingly unproductive response to the rocks. A second possible explanation was the Viet Cong were experiencing local "material deficiencies" and were attempting to achieve their objectives on the cheap. Again, an extremely dangerous methodology when all they had to do was "scope out" the Marine positions during daylight hours using local women and children to "innocently" reconnoiter the positions as they had been doing for years. To Co E's credit, they had shown discipline in not returning fire in response to the rocks being received. But the third possible explanation was that the rocks weren't being thrown by the VC after all. The location of the rock thrower was always difficult to pin point and there were never "positive results" from the Marine's frag grenades or illumination. Sitting alert in a foxhole night after night can become a boring albeit necessary task. One more possible explanation was that the rocks were *not* thrown by the VC. In fact, the rock thrower(s) were merely pissed off farmers who recently had their farms confiscated by foreign troops. Marines had already observed the hostile reception received from the poor farmers that had been run off their land. They were all very angry. It was understandable that they would be angry if someone went into homes and kicked them out without so much as a by your leave. Another 2/4 observation in their June 1965 command diary regarded the numerous movements of cattle noticed prior to all firing in the TAOR. The battalion S-2 believed the VC were using the animals to breach defensive wire and cause confusion.

The intelligence reporting for the remainder of June 1965 dealt with enemy unit movements and identifications, mostly district-level main and local forces, most of which was specifically foisted by the VC to mislead and disorient GVN and U.S. commanders and their intelligence advisors as to VC units' true identities and locations.

Continuing the progressive civic action program begun by 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv in May, all infantry units of the Division participated in one or more special projects. At Chu Lai, 800 pounds of clothing collected by 4<sup>th</sup> Marines dependents still resident at Kaneohe were distributed to villagers displaced by the purchase of their properties for the Chu Lai air strip. Engineer units of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines continued to assist these villagers by digging wells, grading roads, and leveling home sites in new locations. There were growing

indications that the policy of helping the Vietnamese help themselves within the limits of the mission and organic capabilities was beginning to pay dividends. The villagers were increasingly appreciative and cooperative, and in several instances, had been the source of information which had led to the killing or capturing of VC within the TAOR.

With a combination of extended patrolling and civic action within the villages in the TAOR, by the end of June 4<sup>th</sup> Marines CO Colonel Dupras was confident that his troops had eliminated the ability of the Viet Cong to mass and attack the airfield. Enemy action was limited to small probes against the outposts, sniping, and occasional hand grenade incidents. During June 1965, the Regiment and its supporting arms were credited with 147 VC killed, 72 VC wounded, and 85 VC captured while suffering four dead and 23 wounded.

A total of 876 Vietnamese civilians were processed through the Regimental Collection Point during the month of June. Roadblocks located at the Rte. 1 entry and exit points in the TAOR aided a great deal in eliminating the ever-present possibility of infiltration and sabotage. A fruitful source of intelligence was discovered in the establishment of liaison with various local hamlet and district chiefs. Local (Vietnamese) military commanders were eager to participate in [combined] operations with Marine units. The presence of Marine units seemed to have instilled a small degree of security for the local farmer who does not choose to support the VC but who is rarely offered a choice. In the course of operations [during June], the Regiment and its supporting elements have sustained 4 KIAs, 23 WIAs, 7 killed in accidents, and 26 injured in accidents.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein). The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, the lead element of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, departed Camp Pendleton, CA, in May. RLT-7 (Colonel Oscar F. Peatross), comprised of three BLTs: BLT 1/7, (Lt. Col Van Cleve); BLT 2/7, (Lt. Col Leon N. Utter); BLT 3/7, (Lt. Col Charles H. Bodley); the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn (-) (Rein), 11<sup>th</sup> Marines, (Lt. Col Peck); and a Logistic Support Group (LSG), (Lt. Col Nelson) had embarked on assigned shipping in Southern California, combat loaded, and prepared for commitment as an RLT, or as separate battalion landing teams (BLTs), to land one BLT via amtrac, one BLT via landing craft; and one BLT via helicopter. The RLT contained a logistic support group (LSG). By nature of the shipping in which embarked the landing means available, the RLT could best execute an amphibious assault with two BLTs landed in column across a single beach and a third BLT landed by helicopter. The RLT was also prepared to execute amphibious raids from platoon (-) up to BLT in size. The regiments arrival during June at Camp Schwab, Okinawa, permitted the Navy and Marine Corps to embark one battalion on amphibious shipping and reconstitute the special landing force (SLF) of the Seventh Fleet.

By the end of the month, the Joint Chiefs informed ComUSMACV and CinCPac that what Westmoreland had asked for in his 7 June and subsequent requests had been approved. This decision allowed for the movement of 8,000 more Marines to Vietnam including the 9<sup>th</sup> Marines headquarters. It also permitted deployment of the airmobile division then being formed at Fort Benning, Georgia, as well as the already deployment of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Brigade and a brigade from the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division.

At the same time he had requested more troops, General Westmoreland also asked for the authority to employ American forces in offensive operations against the enemy. He claimed that the:

“The enemy’s shift to big unit war was drawing ARVN troops away from heavily populated regions...American and Allied troops... would have to assume the role of fighting big units, leaving the ARVN free to protect the people. No more niceties about defensive posture and reaction...we

had to forget about enclaves and take the war to the enemy.” This concept was soon to be known as the search and destroy tactic, with the aim of searching out and destroying the main force units. On 26 June, Westmoreland received permission from Washington to commit U.S. force to battle ‘in any situation...when in ComUSMACV’s judgment, their use is necessary to strengthen the relative position of GVN force.’ This in effect gave the MACV commander a relatively free hand to employ his forces.

General Westmoreland’s particular concern at this time was the military situation in South Vietnam’s II Corps. Intelligence reports indicated that North Vietnam regular units were infiltrating through the Central Highlands in the western provinces of Pleiku and Kontum, while the coastal provinces of Binh Dinh and Phu Yen remained sources of enemy manpower and food. Westmoreland placed the highest priority on preventing the linkup of the North Vietnamese regulars in the mountains with the VC on the coast.

In making his plans to counter the expected communist offensive, General Westmoreland relied heavily on the arrival of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (Airmobile) which had been specifically designed as a mobile force that could be moved from one trouble spot to another. As early as April, Westmoreland contended such a division was ideally suited to conduct helicopter borne operations in the Central Highlands. The MACV commander maintained that the division could be supplied overland from the coastal logistics bases at Qui Nhon and Nha Trang via Rte. 19, and augmented by aerial supply. Finally, Westmoreland argued, “If the VC chooses to mount a major campaign against Highway 19, this is a better place than most for a showdown.”

Because of the serious situation in II Corps in June, General Westmoreland had to make difficult decisions. Faced with the fact that the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division would not arrive until September, he considered, but finally rejected, moving two III MAF Marine battalions into the Central Highlands. Moreover, the MACV commander was concerned that the security for the Army’s Qui Nhon logistic base was no longer adequate and so informed Admiral Sharp [at CinCPac] on 21 June. In his message, he stated that he could not divert units from III MAF, or from the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa, for base defense in II Corps. Although a brigade from the Army’s 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division was to arrive at Qui Nhon in mid-July, Westmoreland feared that the existing U.S. Army logistic buildup there offered too lucrative a target for the VC. Consequently, he requested that a Marine battalion be flown to Qui Nhon from Okinawa as soon as possible. Admiral Sharp agreed to the request for reinforcement, but suggested a modification to the deployment of the Marine battalion. Sharp Proposed that the SLF land at Qui Nhon, rather than employ another battalion by air. This alternative would allow the Marines to reembark in their own shipping when they were relieved by the Army’s 1<sup>st</sup> Division brigade. The Joint Chiefs agreed with Sharp and ordered him to land the SLF at Qui Nhon on 1 July.

### **July 1965**

According to plan, on 1 July, BLT 3/7 (Lt. Col Bodley) landed three infantry companies and the attached 107mm Mortar Battery from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Marines at Qui Nhon. The fourth infantry company, Co L, and other attachments remained on board ships as the BLT reserve. By 1700H, the amphibious phase of the operation was over and the battalion had established positions on the high ground south of the city.

The SLF battalion’s stay at Qui Nhon was shorter than anticipated. On 2 July, General Westmoreland advised Admiral Sharp that, with the mounting enemy offensive in II Corps and northern

III Corps, he believed it was necessary to release the [Army's] 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade from its static mission of protecting the Bien Hoa airfield [near Saigon] and use it as a mobile reserve. He recommended that the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division brigade scheduled for Qui Nhon be diverted to Bien Hoa and that one of the Marines battalions slated to reinforce III MAF relieve BLT 3/7 at Qui Nhon so that the SLF could once again function as a floating reserve. The incoming Marine battalion would remain at Qui Nhon until relieved by Republic of Korea (ROK) troops scheduled to arrive later in the year. Admiral Sharp approved the request and General Krulak assigned Lt. Col Leon N. Utter's BLT 2/7 for the Qui Nhon mission.

The Marines of BLT 2/7 had been embarked in the dock landing ship Alamo (LSD 33) and the attack transport Okanogan (APA 220) at Okinawa since 30 June waiting permission to deploy to South Vietnam. When the battalion received its new mission, the ships sailed, arriving off Qui Nhon on the evening of 6 July. At 0800H the next morning, the first troops landed and the relief was completed by that evening. Supplies and equipment of Utter's battalion were brought ashore during the night and the entire operation was over by daybreak. BLT 3/7 reembarked in its own shipping on the afternoon of the 8<sup>th</sup>, but the amphibious squadron remained off Qui Nhon for several days in position to reinforce BLT 2/7 if the need arose. Upon arriving at Qui Nhon, [BLT 2/7] came under the operational control of III MAF. General Walt directed the battalion to deploy its forces about "the key terrain in Qui Nhon in order to reinforce the RVNAF and to defend the airfield, port, logistic facilities, and U.S. supporting installations."

To fulfill the requirements of his mission, on 6 July Lt. Col Utter issued a three-phased concept of operations; the first phase was completed on the afternoon of the 7<sup>th</sup> with the relief of BLT 3/7, the second began on the 8<sup>th</sup> with the occupation of Hill 586, the dormant ridgeline running north and south, while the third phase was to consist of aggressive patrolling of the TAOR. The defensive perimeter consisted of three concentric areas: close-in defensive positions around the airfield, a defensive zone out to mortar range, and an outer zone to the limit of organic artillery range.

The establishment of the Qui Nhon enclave had made General Walt's mission in I Corps more difficult. Not only did he lose the services of one infantry battalion, which he could have used either at Phu Bai or Da Nang, but he had to position a detachment of 10 UH-34s from HMM-161 at Qui Nhon to provide helicopter support for the Marines there."

In late June, the Regiment had received a series of additional missions. One was to be prepared to provide one battalion (-) for operations anywhere in the Division area. A second was to be prepared to deploy one battalion (-) for the defense of the Quang Ngai airfield. A third mission was assigned to be prepared to provide one battalion (reinforced) for offensive operations against the VC in the Quang Ngai area. Another mission was assigned ordering the establishment and maintenance of liaison with all local Vietnamese military commands and civilian leaders. (Continuous liaison had proven to be an invaluable source of intelligence not otherwise available.) The Regiment was further (and repetitiously) directed to conduct aggressive day/night patrolling in conjunction with counter guerrilla tactics and lastly, to conduct search and destroy operations.

With the consolidation of the Chu Lai base area, Colonel Dupras gradually extended the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines TAOR so that the air facility was out of the range of enemy mortars and light artillery. Lieutenant Colonel Fredericks, the commanding officer of 1/4, recalled that initially the Marines had to operate in a very restrictive zone and that the enemy was aware of this restriction.

As of 1 July 1965, the mission assigned to the Commanding Officer of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (-) (Rein) by the Commanding General, 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv had remained to defend the Chu Lai air field and supporting logistical facilities within the TAOR assigned. The trace of the MLR (main line of resistance) established extended from the Xuan Trung Peninsula (AKA, also known as, the Ky Ha Peninsula) vicinity grid square (BT 5210), southwest across Rte 1 running along the high ground immediately west of Rte. 1, southeast to the southern edge of the “purchased area” (BT 5602) and terminated on the coast of the South China Sea. A mobile line of resistance was ordered and established forward of the MLR on principal avenues of approach into the TAOR. Each outpost was to be heavily fortified and capable of withstanding friendly artillery fire. The MLR was to be 3,000 to 5,000 meters from the air field. All defensive efforts in the Chu Lai Battle Area were to be coordinated by the Commanding Officer, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (-) (Rein).

Offensive operations reached a crescendo during the month of July as operations from fire team to battalion level were conducted. Every facet of counter guerrilla operations including ambushes, combat patrolling, and search and destroy missions were conducted. Deep reconnaissance missions were conducted by elements of the reconnaissance company and a detachment of the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company. The daily use of helicopter borne forces in conducting operations had proven to be a sound concept for counter guerrilla operations. Supporting arms were used to their fullest extent to support all operations. Throughout the month each day was characterized by at least one company-sized operation. Maximum use of available naval gunfire support was also utilized. On 8 July, the USS Galveston (CLG) had fired two missions in support of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines operations. On the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of July, the USS Oklahoma City (CLG) supported operations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion by firing four missions each day. Again on 21 July, the USS Ingersoll (DD) fired four harassment and interdiction (H&I) missions in support of operations.

With the extension of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines zone of responsibility, the “new” TAOR now included the Song Tra Bong River and its tributaries on the southeast. In the north, the islands of Ky Hoa and Ky Xuan dominated the seaward and central portion of the bay area. Both islands were low with the highest elevation of 44 feet (Hill 15) found on Ky Hoa Island. That island consisted of low trees and brush running through 80% of the center of the island, while the shores were of sand running 100 to 200 meters inland. Ky Xuan Island consisted of numerous rice paddies with many small hamlets in the southern portion of the island. Along the northwest shore, the land became mucky, impeding travel by tracked vehicles. The terrain in the northwest sector consisted of many rice paddies and small villages/hamlets. The dominant terrain feature in this area, other than Rte. 1, was Hill 69.

The terrain east of the Song Tra Bong included rice paddies from the edge of the river inland approximately 1,000 meters, and small hamlets bordering the ocean and river. Throughout the majority of the peninsula, known as the Trung Phan Peninsula, were found ridges with heavy underbrush and trees. The highest terrain was Hills 83 (BS 648989) and 141 (Nui Nam Tran-BT 665048) which borders the South China Sea at the extreme northeastern tip of the peninsula. Vehicular traffic in this area is limited due to the lack of roads, ridgelines running throughout the area, and rice paddies. The most outstanding terrain features in the area of responsibility included the high hills running on the western border, the Song Tra Bong River on the southern flank, and the inland water area in the northern portion.

The Marines’ tactics and strategy that seemed to be working in the Chu Lai area thus far in protecting the new air field from Viet Cong attack seemed to have developed some cracks in the Da Nang area. On 1 July, a VC demolition unit, later to be identified as sappers, had gotten on to the Da Nang Air

Base and hit the south end of the field with mortar fire. VC-emplaced explosives and 57mm RR fire had resulted in the destruction of two C-130 transport and one F-102 fighter aircraft, damage to one C-130 and two F-102 aircraft, and the death of one USAF airman and three Marines being wounded. Chu Lai Air Base sat in the midst of a “depopulated” U.S. government- purchased strip of land in the middle of a sandy lowland plain. Its location would not necessarily protect it from attacks by sappers or suicidal demolition teams, or for that matter, from VC indirect fire weapons (i.e., mortars and rockets) which would later become the *de rigueur* form of air base attack.

During July, Maj J.L. Gibney, the executive officer of 3/12, assumed command of the battalion upon departure of Lt Col Slack. Maj Gibney then turned command over to a new CO, Lt Col L.L. Page

On 1 July, 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon (1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Ed Nash), Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, in support of 2/4, had moved west on a trail leading to the crest of Hill 410 vicinity coordinate (BT 473000) when the patrol met approximately 10 VC believed to be the point element for a larger unit. Three VC were killed and one weapon captured. There were two Marine WIA. The enemy was dressed in black shorts and shirts. That same platoon observed 6-8 VC moving west along a trail to the east of the crest of Hill 410 vicinity of coordinate (BT 484001) wearing green uniforms on 2 July. Several rounds of M-79 (40mm grenade) and small arms were fired with unknown results.

According to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, command diary for July 1965, “Commencing at 020700H, Co A (Rein) landed vicinity coordinate (BT 440072) [LZ 1 km northwest of Hill 51] and moved out along patrol route over Hill 51 [BT 447065] and into a [unnamed] hamlet at (BT 4405), where they were taken under fire by estimated 1-2 automatic weapons and at least 4 VC riflemen. As platoons maneuvered into position heavier small arms fire was received from (BT 440060) [high ground about 600 meters to the northwest] and (BT 437053) [Ky Long (1) hamlet about 500 meters to the west and across a large intervening rice paddy]. At 021430H, a return helo lift was commenced from an LZ at (BT 438053) in the rice paddy area about 100 meters to the east of Ky Long (1), but heavy enemy small arms fire precluded completion of the lift. Air strikes by CAS [close air support] and armed HU1E aircraft neutralized enemy activity. A total of eight USMC WIAs were sustained during the fire fights. Co B (Rein) and a battalion command group landed in LZ (BT 443057) about 200 meters northwest of the unnamed hamlet at 021730H, and Co A was lifted out for return to MLR positions. Co B established night perimeter defense on Hill 51 and returned on the following day. No enemy contact.”

As of 050900H July, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines would claim the following cumulative enemy casualties (i.e., since 7 May): 201 VC KIA (152 credited to artillery fire) and 14 VCC. A total 1,933 indigenous Vietnamese had been “processed” with 185 retained as VC.

On 5 July, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion conducted Operation Zulu, a battalion (-) search and destroy operation, on the Trung Phan Peninsula, center of mass (BT 6500). At 0715H, Co I was lifted by helicopter to their assigned positions on the west bank of the Song Tra Bong with one platoon occupying a position on the high ground vicinity coordinate (BT 614009). Co K landed by amtrac and the search and destroy operation commenced in an area enclosed by coordinates (BT 619023) [west bank of the Song Tra Bong] to (BT 635024) [northern beach area of the Trung Phan Peninsula] to (BS 639997) [hill mass in central Trung Phan Peninsula] to (BT 625997) [east bank of the Song Tra Bong] to (BT 614008) [where a reinforced platoon from Co L had been placed in a blocking position on the west bank of the Song Tra Bong opposite the Trung Phan Peninsula to the east]. The mission was to destroy all Viet Cong facilities within the area and kill or capture all Viet Cong found. A detachment from the 1<sup>st</sup> Amtrac Battalion accompanied the operating

forces to recover the LVTP-5 that had been burned and abandoned on 29 June. A light section (2) of tanks, plus a flame tank, were transported in a LCM-8 (Mike boat) provided by Naval Beach Group #1. At 0645H, a Co I Marine triggered an M-26 fragmentation grenade employed by the VC as an antipersonnel mine emplaced atop the position vicinity coordinate (BT 614009) resulting in eleven Marines WIA (three requiring evacuation to B Med). The operation was concluded at 1830H with one confirmed VC KIA, thirteen VC captured, and numerous caves destroyed. The amtrac was successfully evacuated.

On 6 July, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion conducted a battalion (-) operation on a peninsula centered on coordinate (BT 445110) in the area east of Rte. 1. Commencing at 0700H, Co B (Rein) landed in an LZ in the a large sand dune area about 500 meters northeast of Rte. 1 near the base of the peninsula vicinity coordinate (BT 439098) and Co D (Rein) in an LZ about 2.5 kms to the southeast of Co B vicinity coordinate (BT 445093). The two companies promptly formed on line east and west and commenced a sweep north towards a block formed by Co A (-) (Rein) near the northeast tip of the peninsula vicinity coordinate (BT 457118). During the operation, amtracs conducted waterborne patrol around the peninsula. The two company sweep was completed by 1030H and resulted in 5 VC KIA and 68 VCS detained for further interrogation.

This particular area of operations had a humorous side. There was a sniper on the hill and he apparently could never figure out the windage on his rifle. His elevation was correct but he would constantly shoot between us as we crossed the rice paddies and after a while we just kept on walking. A visiting colonel called in A-4 fire or artillery on him and it was sad to see him go.

On 8 July, another search and destroy operation was conducted by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion on the Tung Phan Peninsula (now also known as the "Zulu area" after the operation conducted there on 5 July). At 0620H, the first elements of the battalion were helilifted into the objective area. All elements of the battalion with the exception of the Recon element were lifted into the objective area by helicopter. At the conclusion of the mission, two companies were withdrawn by helicopter and two by amtrac. The operation concluded at 2030H with one Marine KIA and nine WIA. There were eleven confirmed VC KIA and 47 VC captured.

Early on the morning of 9 July, 1/4 reacted to intelligence and incident reports indicating that Junk Fleet 15 Headquarters located on Ky Hoa Island, the island due north of both Ky Xuan Island and the Ky Ha Peninsula vicinity coordinate (BT 502128), had been overrun by an estimated force of two VC companies. At 0500H Co A was alerted and at 0900H was transported by amtracs to the besieged island, landing on the island's west end vicinity of coordinate (BT 456137). Moving north to Binh An (2) hamlet and then about 1,500 meters east of the landing site vicinity of coordinate (BT 471141) where they received heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire from the vicinity of Hill 12 (BT 476145) about 400 meters to the company's northeast and from Xuan My hamlet 600 meters to the due east. Artillery fire was called on both locations. Two platoons laid down a base of fire while a third platoon commenced an assault on Hill 12. One squad of the attacking platoon was heavily hit by incoming 81mm mortar fire, and a second squad received machine gun fire while cutting the barbed wire at the base of Hill 12. A total of three KIA and 14 WIA were sustained. Armed HU1E helicopters arrived on station and attacked enemy positions with M-60 and rocket fire. Positions on Hill 12 in the hamlet were quickly secured and six VC KIA were found. Co A continued the attack east, finding two more VC KIA at Hill 15 vicinity of coordinate (BT 493140). Blocking positions were formed just north of Hill 15 vicinity of coordinate (BT 495142).

A 9 July entry in the 3/3 command diary observed that Co I had departed 1120H that day with the mission to conduct a search in the vicinity of coordinate (BS 610991) for two missing Marines reported to have been killed and buried at that point (a wooded area of Vinh An (5) hamlet about 600 meters west of the Song Tra Bong). According to the battalion S-3 radio log, the I Co patrol (apparently the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon) attempted to depart the battalion CP at 1120H but was delayed until 1215H due to amtrac trouble.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Lt Frank Reasoner**

##### **Medal of Honor**

During July, word was received of the death of 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Frank Reasoner. At the time (12 July 1965), Frank had been the CO of Co A, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, and operating with a recon patrol at An My hamlet 4 kms southwest of Hill 55 south of DaNang when he was killed. He would become the first Marine to be awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously in the Vietnam War. He'd been a Marine sergeant in 1958 when he'd received a congressional appointment to West Point from his home state (Idaho) senator. He graduated 6 June 1962 and after completing TBS in January 1963, he was assigned to Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion. He'd been assigned as commanding officer of Co A on 20 June 1965. Frank's Citation reads: "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. The reconnaissance patrol led by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Reasoner had deeply penetrated heavily controlled enemy territory when it came under extremely heavy fire from an estimated 50 to 100 Viet Cong insurgents. Accompanying the advance party and the point that consisted of 5 men, he immediately deployed his men for an assault after the Viet Cong had opened fire from numerous concealed positions. Boldly shouting encouragement, and virtually isolated from the main body, he organized a base of fire for an assault on the enemy positions. The slashing fury of the Viet Cong machinegun and automatic weapons fire made it impossible for the main body to move forward. Repeatedly exposing himself to the devastating attack he skillfully provided covering fire, killing at least 2 Viet Cong and effectively silencing an automatic weapons position in a valiant attempt to effect evacuation of a wounded man. As casualties began to mount his radio operator was wounded and 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Reasoner immediately moved to his side and tended his wounds. When the radio operator was hit a second time while attempting to reach a covered position, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Reasoner courageously running to his aid through the grazing machinegun fire fell mortally wounded. His indomitable fighting spirit, valiant leadership and unflinching devotion to duty provided the inspiration that was to enable the patrol to complete its mission without further casualties. In the face of almost certain death he gallantly gave his life in the service of his country. His actions upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the U.S. Naval Service."

At 1440H, the patrol reported they were using local civilians to dig for graves in Vinh An (5) and that if no bodies were found at the end of the day, the patrol would return to the CP with the civilians. At 1500H, the I Co patrol reported that the civilians complained of being tired having searched the ground for two hours. At 1525H, the patrol reported having moved their search to Vinh An (4) about 800 meters to the north northwest and would return to the amtracs as soon

as finished. According to 4<sup>th</sup> Marine SITREPs for 9 and 11 July, the patrol was searching for two Marines from MAG-12 at Chu Lai. Co L also was involved in the search on the 11<sup>th</sup>, also unsuccessfully, and ordered to withdraw from the area at 1650H.

On the 10<sup>th</sup>, Co D landed at 0930H near Hill 12, scene of the previous day's contact, and commenced a sweep eastward finding three automatic weapons just to the southeast of Hill 12 vic coordinate (BT 478142). Co B found three caves near their defensive perimeter of the previous night vicinity (BT 5115) and requested engineer support. The two companies joined in the late afternoon and conducted coordinated search and clear operations for the remainder of the day with no enemy contacts. A total of 49 VC were apprehended during the day. Both companies departed the island by amtrac about 2000H with the exception of one reinforced platoon from Co D which remained as the security force for the Junk Fleet Headquarters. (The Co D platoon would be relieved at Junk Headquarters on the late afternoon of 11 July by a rifle company from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> ARVN Regiment.)

Just after midnight 13-14 July, the ARVN company at the old Junk Fleet Headquarters on Ky Hoa Island reported that they were under attack by an estimated two VC companies. The Marine artillery forward observer (FO) at the headquarters quickly called in artillery. Surveillance units sent out after first light on the 14<sup>th</sup> found ten wounded civilians and no VC. On 16 July, the ARVN company at the old Junk Fleet Headquarters was carried by junks across the narrows separating Ky Ha Island from the Ky Ha Peninsula. Vietnamese Junk Division 15 was now based on the northern tip of the Peninsula and was undergoing reconstruction.

On 16-17 July, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion conducted a battalion (-) search and destroy operation, the operational area near the west bank of the Song Tra Bong and just south of the South China Sea and 3/3's river check point, included the hamlets of Hai Minh (1), Hai Minh (2), Vinh An (1), and Vinh An (2) all of which were located in grid square (BT 6001). Co I conducted an unprecedented river crossing operation onto the eastern bank of the Song Tra Bong and onto the Trung Phan Peninsula. The landing was covered by elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion in support on the western bank. Attention was being focused during operations to detect the VC logistical support within the Trung Phan area.

On 18 July, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was assigned the mission of occupying and defending along the trace of the MLR in the central sector of the regimental TAOR and to maintain an OPLR within this sector. In addition, 2/4 was assigned a mission of establishing traffic control points along Rte. 1 as necessary to control movement of civilians and vehicles through its sector. Liaison personnel were sent to the Binh Son District Headquarters to affect position coordination with the district chief. A further mission assigned was to be prepared to provide a battalion (-), on order, for deployment as a reaction force to be helilifted or road transported anywhere in the Division Zone.

On 19 July, the Commanding General ordered the Regiment to increase combined offensive operations with the ARVNs (Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces). The Regiment had continued the mission of maintaining positive liaison with elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ARVN Division; the district chiefs; and local hamlet and village chiefs. On that day, Co A and a platoon from Co B

landed by amtracs to linkup with two platoons of Co B (already on Ky Hoa Island) to conduct a two-company sweep of the island. A total of 62 locals were detained for interrogation. All 1/4 units had departed the island by 1630H.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, the S-2 of 3/3 issued a report on the activity on the Trung Phan Peninsula. "As a result of continuous patrolling for the last seven days, the following information has been determined:

- a. There appears to be a buildup of VC strength, possibly hard core, on the Trung Phan Peninsula. On three different occasions on 19 July 1965, groups of 20-30 armed men wearing black and brown uniforms have been spotted. First group at (BS 663981) along a northwest-southeasterly, oriented fair or dry weather, loose surfaced road near the base of the peninsula, moving in a southerly direction; second group at (BS 642998) [along the ridgeline running northwest from Hill 83] dispersed when observed by helicopter; and the third group at (BT 638007) [about 500 meters southwest of the Son Tra 94] hamlet in the west central sector of the Trung Phan Peninsula] moving in a northeasterly direction.
- b. In grid squares (BT 6200 and BT 6300) [i.e., along the northwest terminus of the improved, loose surface road central sector of the peninsula] numerous holes have been dug in the last few days with the following specifications: tactical location, well-camouflaged, circular, four to five feet deep and leading into tunnels, and sturdily constructed.
- c. Several booby traps have been discovered on the peninsula, especially in grid square (BT 6201) [near the northwest tip of the peninsula in the vicinity of a VC tunnel]. A Chinese manufactured hand grenade was found at (BT 624008) [in a heavily populated area along the east bank of the Song Tra Bong].
- d. Large volumes of sniper fire have been fired at companies patrolling on the western side of the peninsula, and two reports of mortars have been received. On 19 July as Co L was departing from the beach at coordinates (BT 621006) [along the east bank of the Song Tra Bong] by LVT, a large volume of fire, including at least one automatic weapon, was received from the beach.
- e. Intelligence sources (Binh Son District) have reported one hard core VC company operating along the high ground [extending] from coordinate (BS 633964) east to the coast [just to the south of the Song Thai Can, the tributary forming the base of the peninsula]. Also, two guerrilla platoons and two hard core VC platoons are reported operating in the area directly south of the high ground.
- f. Small arms fire [received] has been extremely accurate indicating that the persons firing are not run of the mill guerrillas.
- g. There has been a definite effort to reconnoiter company night positions. Two members of such a reconnaissance team were captured by Co M on 19 July.

On 23 July at 1530H, Co B (-) (Rein) was helilifted into an LZ vicinity coordinate (BT 445045) about 2 kms east of Hill 270 and had commenced a combat patrol when approximately

fifty armed VC were observed fleeing the hamlet of Ky Long (2) and heading south towards Ky Long (1). Artillery missions were called. One fleeing VC was killed at 1745H vicinity coordinate (BT 438038), 700 meters to the south of Ky Long (2). Several elaborate caves and tunnels were discovered vicinity coordinate (BT 438043) along a trail about 200 meters to the south of Ky Long (2) and were subsequently destroyed by engineers. One VC was apprehended vicinity of coordinate (BT 438046). Upon completion of the search of both Ky Long hamlets, Co B (-) moved to a harbor site at 2130H vicinity coordinate (BT 437056) just to the northeast of Ky Long (1). At 0200H on the 24<sup>th</sup>, the company moved to positions at coordinates (BT 414075) along a trail in a valley about 2 kms northwest of Ky Long (1) and (BT 425077) a trail in a valley about 3 kms north northwest of Ky Long (1). At 0640H, the Co B platoon at coordinate (BT 414075) ambushed seven VC, killing three with two weapons, an M-1 carbine and a French MAS-36 rifle, recovered. At 0745H, the other Co B platoon at coordinate (BT 415077) fired at four VC fleeing along a trail vicinity coordinate (BT 421079) further west of the platoon's position wounding two, one critically. One wounded VC, leaving a blood trail, and two others, escaped into the underbrush. One M-1 carbine, two grenades, and several uniform items were picked up as a result of the encounter. The wounded VC in critical condition was DOW. The platoons continued their movement north and east and observed groups of four, eight, and fifteen VC. Artillery fire was directed on the fleeing targets with unreported results. Co B (-) arrived at Rte. 1 and was picked up by trucks for return to their MLR positions by 1300H.

### **Change of Command**

On 25 July, Colonel Edward P. Dupras was relieved as the Commanding Officer, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (-) (Rein), 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division, by Colonel James F. McClanahan. That same day, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion conducted a combined operation with its elements (Cos A, B, and D, reinforced with amtracs and helicopters) and elements of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 2<sup>nd</sup> ARVN Division, along the coastline of the South China Sea to the northwest of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines TAOR vicinity of grid squares (BT 4218 and 4318). A total of forty-one local nationals were detained by Marines during the operation. Upon screening and interrogation by IT and CI personnel, twelve were determined to be VCC and twenty VC. The remaining nine local nationals were released. Also on 25 July, Co I patrolling on the Trung Phan Peninsula discovered a tunnel system under construction vicinity coordinate (BT 624014) 400 meters east of the Song Tra Bong in the Son Tra (1) hamlet. Investigation of the system revealed three separate tunnels leading from a shaft that opened near the top of a hill located at coordinate (BT 624014). One of the tunnels branched into two separate tunnels about 20 feet from the shaft, with the beginning of a room at the face of the branch tunnel. Another tunnel leading from the shaft was identical in construction and it appeared that the plan was to make one large room with two entrances. The tunnels were supported by bent five foot metal stakes with a shaft opening approximately six foot square. There was no apparent attempt at camouflage. Lt. Col Muir, the 3/3 battalion commander, believed the tunnel system was being constructed by a VC paramilitary force (since the failure to camouflage was an error that "professionals" would not allow). The size of the shaft, the tunnels, and the rooms were much larger than any other previously encountered. It was presumed (by

3/3) the system was being built to specification and may have been planned for use in storing bulk supplies. The tunnels were in close proximity to the Song Tra Bong which was an alleged supply route (as was the whole Quang Ngai Province South China Sea coastline). The tunnels were destroyed by demolitions.

On 27 July, Co A (-) (Rein) commenced a two-day extended combat patrol in the western portion of the TAOR, landing by helicopter at 0740H in an LZ vicinity (BT 468068) in a rice paddy just north of several hamlets at the foot of the high ground and about 3 kms southwest of Hill 69. The platoons had proceeded along parallel axis from the landing zone and in rapid succession encountered three booby traps, resulting in five Marine WIA, including 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt James W. Morgan, Jr., platoon commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon. (Morgan had received fragmentation wounds to his right hand and right leg and was evacuated and treated locally at B Medical Battalion, and eventually evacuated to CONUS on 20 August 1965.) One booby trap was believed to be either a grenade attached to a trip mine chest-high or a bouncing type mine. The other two traps were identified as grenades of "foreign manufacture" tied to trip mines and concealed in hedge rows. Once the medevacs were completed, the patrol continued on with very little contact with the enemy, receiving a few sniper rounds. This was not the first time Marines had been in that particular area. On 28 June, Cos B and C, as part of a First Battalion sweep and clear operation, had been in the area and had received a "less than friendly reception." The locals must have anticipated a return of the Marines in the future, hence the booby traps.

During the period 28-29 July, the Second Battalion participated in a combined operation (Operation Lien Ket-4) with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Vietnamese Marine Corps, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment, 2<sup>nd</sup> ARVN Division. The command group for this operation was the Commanding Officer, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Col James McClanahan) and the Commanding Officer of the 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment, ARVN. Second Battalion (-) consisted of Cos E and F (Rein), two platoons of PFs, and the 2/4 command group. The operational area was in the hill area of central Binh Son District north of the Song Tra Bong and 7 to 10 kms west of Rte. 1 vicinity of grid squares (BS 4992, BS 4991, BS 5091, BS 5092, BS 5191, and BS 5394), about 14 kms south southwest of Chu Lai.

At 0845H on 28 July, Companies E (Capt J.M. Ledin) and F (1<sup>st</sup> Lt C.F. Preuss), 2/4, moved into their assigned zones of action and commenced sweeping in a westerly direction. At 1100H, Co F located on a slightly elevated but open area in the midst of three Phuoc Lam hamlets (1-3) vicinity coordinate (BS 491922) received heavy automatic weapons fire from an estimated 15 VC with automatic weapons and machine guns in three positions located approximately 400 meters to the east of Co F's position [coordinates (BS 496921, BS 496922, and BS 496923)]. Co F assaulted the VC positions although the VC remained in position until the Marines were on top of them. Co F killed three VC in fighting holes while the surviving VC retreated across a rice paddy to the high ground about 400 meters to the north and in the vicinity of Duc An (2) hamlet vicinity coordinate (BS 502922). Co E had chased the VC retreating from the Co F assault and killed two VC to the southwest of Duc An (2) vicinity of coordinate (BS 499918) and contact ceased. As a result of the contacts, one Marine was WIA, nineteen others were heat casualties, five VC were

KIA, two M-1 carbines, one .38 cal. Pistol, one M-79, one Thompson submachine gun, one 7.62 mm ChiCom submachine gun captured, and 12 hand grenades were destroyed in place. The Second Battalion remained in position while eating the midday meal, evacuating casualties, and receiving water resupply. At 1415H, Cos E and F moved on line and at 1500H, Co F in the vicinity of Duc An (1) (BS 504912) came under heavy automatic weapons fire from an unknown number of VC located at coordinate (BS 501916), 400 meters north of the company's position. Co F assaulted the position killing two VC. One of the VC was killed while throwing grenades from a tree.

At about the same time (1515H), one VC was killed while sniping at Co E with a Soviet-made 7.62mm weapon with Chinese markings (recovered). The incident occurred at Duc An (3) vicinity of (BS 509915) and about 500 meters east of Co F. There were no USMC casualties. At 1530H, Co E reported sighting two men "digging" near Binh Yen (2), about one km north of Co E's position, vicinity coordinate (BS 509917). Co E requested 81mm mortar fire on the position and the two men fled in an easterly direction. At 1630H, Co F received automatic weapons fire from an enemy position located west of Duc An (3), vicinity of coordinate (BS 507920), which wounded three Marines. Fire was returned and the VC fled east. At 1700H, Co E entering Binh Yen (1), vicinity of coordinate (BS 513915), received heavy automatic weapons fire. Fire was returned with organic weapons to include 3.5' rocket firing WP rounds(white phosphorous) and simultaneously launched an assault demolishing the hamlet, killing nine VC, and capturing 30 hand grenades (destroyed in place by the engineers), ten carbine magazines, and ten BAR magazines. Co E incurred two USMC WIA, one ARVN interpreter WIA, and one PF WIA. At 1725H, Co F moved to Co F's location with the battalion CP group to a position 400 meters north of Duc An (3) vic coordinate (BS 513921). The battalion was resupplied with water, ammunition, wire, and engineer tools and set in defense for the night. At 1745H, a med evac helo in flight received heavy fire from an enemy position located about 600 meters southwest of the battalion position, vicinity coordinate (BS 509915). The fire was returned by M-60 machine gun from the accompanying UH1E escort helo and the firing ceased. Fixed wing air was called in on the suspected enemy position with good coverage of the target. No post-strike surveillance was made. When the Marine positions had been dug, H&I fires were registered and fired throughout the night, along with 81mm illumination fired every 15 minutes until first light. There was no enemy contact during the hours of darkness.

At 0755H on the 29<sup>th</sup>, 2/4 jumped off from their night defensive position and commenced moving to the northeast without incident. At 100H, 2/4 had moved about 4 kms along a trail from the previous night, position. Now in Thanh Tra (2), vicinity coordinates (BS 537948), and at 1125H, three heat casualties were evacuated. The battalion remained in Thanh Tra (2) until 1300H without incident. Resuming their move to the northeast at 1305H, 2/4 moved along the trail about 4.5 kms to its intersection with Rte. 1, arriving there without incident. At 1530H, transportation arrived to truck the battalion back to its original positions within the TAOR.

In assessing the results of operations during July 1965, the Headquarters, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, concluded that, "The Viet Cong had been prevented from massing an attack on the Chu Lai Air Field and supporting logistical facilities. Viet Cong activity had been reduced to sporadic long range sniping and feeble attempts to penetrate the MLR by small groups of guerrillas. The Marine challenge to engage 'hard core' VC units had not been accepted by the enemy. Effective counter guerrilla operations by the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines continued to highlight the effectiveness of Marine combat power. Saturation patrolling of the TAOR had all but eliminated the Viet Cong's will to engage the superior Marine forces. The MLR had been firmly established and preparation of defensive positions continued commensurate with the materials available. The outpost line of resistance had been heavily fortified to withstand the threat of any enemy capability. Combined operations to search for and destroy the enemy had been successfully conducted by Marine units and the ARVN. Effective counterintelligence teams surreptitiously screened and identified 126 Viet Cong suspects separated from the numerous (657) Vietnamese apprehended by 4<sup>th</sup> Marine units and processed through the regimental collection point during the month of July. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines recorded 64 VC KIA and 28 VC captured. Marine losses sustained included, five KIA, eighty-eight WIA, two MIA, and fourteen injured in non-combatative action (two of these accidents were fatal)." According to the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines Command Diary for the month of July 1965, the most significant single effort during the period in the area of civil affairs concerned the relocation of the approximately 2,500 Vietnamese from the land purchased for construction of the airfield to the New Life Hamlet of Chu Lai located just west of Rte. 1 and one km southeast of the An Tan bridge vicinity coordinate (BT 505057). In addition to assisting ARVN and district forces in the physical movement of these people, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines constructed ten wells in the new village, a drainage ditch on the periphery, and had provided trucks to haul dirt with which the villagers were constructing a new road and marketplace.

Throughout July evidence had accumulated showing a VC buildup in southern I Corps, especially in the area south of Chu Lai. By the 21<sup>st</sup> [of July], General Westmoreland's intelligence staff, assessing enemy capabilities, stated that the Viet Cong could attack Chu Lai with as many as three regiments. The American command doubted that the enemy was ready to risk such a large concentration of forces against American firepower; a more likely course of action would be a sudden hit-and-run attack against the Marine base in regimental strength.

On 30 July, General Westmoreland told [General] Walt that he expected the Marine commander to undertake larger offensive operations with the South Vietnamese against the enemy at greater distances from his base areas [enclaves]. General Walt reminded Westmoreland that the Marines were still bound by the [ComUSMACV] 6 May Letter of Instruction that restricted III MAF to reserve/reaction missions in support of South Vietnamese units heavily engaged with an enemy force. The MACV commander replied: 'these restraints were no longer realistic and invited General Walt to rewrite the instructions, working them into the authority he thought he needed, and promised his approval.'

## August 1965

During the first week in August, another conference was held in Honolulu, attended by representatives of the Joint Chiefs, CinCPac, and ComUSMACV to determine what units would be deployed and when. For the Marine Corps, the immediate result of the conference was the decision to reinforce III MAF with the regimental headquarters and the remaining two battalions on Okinawa, the First Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, and the newly designated 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines (formerly 2/5). The arrival of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines at Chu Lai in mid-August was to signal the beginning of the first major Marine offensive against a main force Viet Cong unit.

At the beginning of August, the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv's zone of operations was separated into four tactical areas of responsibility, with one at Hue-Phu Bai, 35 miles north of the city of Da Nang; another at Da Nang itself; a third at Chu Lai, 65 miles south of Da Nang, and a fourth at Qui Nhon, 146 miles south of Da Nang. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines with 1/4, 2/4, 3/3, and 3/12 plus attachments occupied the Chu Lai TAOR until a portion of the TAOR was taken over by the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines and 1/7. BLT 2/7 continued to occupy the fourth TAOR at Qui Nhon. By the fifth of the month, however, the number of enclaves under 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv control had been reduced to three when BLT 2/7 was re-designated 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein), and operational control of the battalion was passed to the newly-created Task Force Alpha (U.S. Army). Second Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines continued to operate from its positions at Qui Nhon for the remainder of the month and BLT 3/7 was to remain at sea as the Special Landing Force (SLF) and available should the need or an opportunity for employment arise.

During August the infantry battalions continued aggressive combat and reconnaissance patrols and established ambushes throughout the TAOR. During the hours of darkness, H&I fires dissuaded the VC from penetrating the TAOR although occasional sniper fire was reported. On 3 August, small enemy probes were reported throughout the day. One Marine died of wounds sustained by an enemy grenade thrown into his position on the MLR in Co B's area.

In August, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, in company with elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ARVN Division, tried a number of small-scale operations west of Chu Lai. As field exercises against negligible resistance, they were moderately successful, but demonstrated conclusively that, without unity of command, operations could best be described as 'coordinated,' not as 'combined.'" According to the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines Command Diary for August 1965, the coordination of projects in the New Life Hamlet of Chu Lai such as programs designed to improve the hamlet's water supply, health, education, sanitation, and economics, and the direct and concerted efforts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, had assisted in the development of the new hamlet. Inauguration of the hamlet was scheduled for 7 September.

On 4 August, a waterborne amtrac patrol from 1/4 apprehended thirty-two Vietnamese for violation of curfew. All Vietnamese were turned into the regimental collection point for further screening. And on 5 August BGen Karch, ADC, 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, displaced his CP from Da Nang to Chu Lai and relocated within the perimeter of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines perimeter.

By 6 August, the 3<sup>rd</sup> 155mm Battery had arrived and the artillery batteries from the 11<sup>th</sup> Marines supporting 7<sup>th</sup> Marines had also begun to arrive. During August, a 3/12 Artillery Battalion Group was formed and contained 62 artillery pieces. Also on 6 August, General Walt received official permission to take the offensive to the enemy. With the arrival of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines a week later, he was prepared to move against the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment. In early July, the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment had launched a second attack against the hamlet of Ba Gia, 20 miles south of Chu Lai and about 8 miles west of Quang Ngai City vicinity of grid square (BS 4979). The first attack by the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment on Ba Gia had occurred on 30 May and had involved the ambush of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 51<sup>st</sup> ARVN Regiment, outside the small hamlet and ARVN outpost. The South Vietnamese on that occasion had lost 392 dead and missing and well over 500 weapons. The ARVNs had claimed 556 VC KIA and 20 weapons captured. In early July, the garrison had been overrun, causing 130 casualties and the loss of more than 200 weapons, including two 105mm howitzers. After the attack on Ba Gia, American intelligence agencies located the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment in the mountains west of the hamlet. Disturbing reports indicated that the enemy regiment was once more on the march.

### **Operation THUNDERBOLT**

Acting on this intelligence, a planning conference for a combined/coordinated operation with ARVN forces, code-named Thunderbolt, was conducted on 2 August. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines conducted a one-battalion [3/3] combined search and destroy operation with the 51<sup>st</sup> ARVN Regiment and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Vietnamese Marine Corps Battalion in search for the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment south of the Song Tra Bong River. The operation lasted for two days, 6-7 August, and extended 7,000 meters south of the river in an area west of Route 1.

A command group from the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Col McClanahan) and ARVN command group deployed and established a combined tactical CP within the Binh Son District Headquarters coordinate (BS 595918). By 060730H, the first elements of Marine units from 3/3 (-) (Rein), the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 51<sup>st</sup> ARVN Regiment (2d ARVN Division), and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Vietnamese Marine Corps supported by deployed Marine and ARVN artillery began landing in their respective helicopter landing zones located to the south of the Song Tra Bong and about 12 kms to the west of Rte 1 and the Binh Son District Headquarters. The 3/3 LZ, Wolf, was the furthest south and west of the three landing zones vicinity coordinate (BS 523854); the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 51<sup>st</sup> ARVN landed in LZ Fox, the northernmost, vicinity coordinate (BS 553873) in a mountainous area about 2 kms due south of the Song Tra Bong; and the Vietnamese Marine battalion in LZ Bear, the westernmost sector of the area of operations, vic coordinate (BS 504869). All of the helicopter borne forces had touched down by 060905 and were moving northeast in their assigned sectors. The first incoming fire was directed at elements of 3/3 and originated from the village of Tra Binh vicinity of coordinate (BS 535858), about one km to the east northeast of LZ Wolf. At about 060920H, 3/51 ARVN reported sighting an estimated VC platoon exiting to the east of Tra Binh, although this VC element was never seen or reported upon again throughout the operation.

At 0940H, a Vietnamese aerial observer reported spotting one or two VC platoons moving in column about one km to the northeast of LZ Bear, but the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Vietnamese Marines, operating in the area could not confirm the sighting. It was concluded that the AO might have mistaken friendly units as VC. A 3/3 patrol operating just west of Tra Binh village vicinity of coordinate (BS 533857) discovered 4 VCS and 3 VC packs containing civilian and uniform clothing, medicine, cooking utensils, rice bags, VN identification cards, and letters to parents and sweethearts. The packs were turned over to Marine counterintelligence personnel accompanying 3/3. At about the same time, a report was received of a VC platoon located about one km southwest of LZ Fox vicinity coordinate (BS 549862) (and behind or west of 3/3). Artillery fire was requested and fired; however, no surveillance of the target was available.

At 1100H, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Vietnamese Marines were approaching their first objective located along the south bank of the Song Tra Bong vicinity of coordinate (BS 550890, and requested ARVN artillery preparation of the objective. By this time, 3/3 had reached coordinate (BS 547854), a hilly area about 2 kms due south of LZ Fox without establishing enemy contact, and the Vietnamese Marines had reached their objective (Objective 3) also without contact. From Objective 3 they reported VC moving northeast away from the area just prepped by ARVN artillery and parallel to the Song Tra Bong. Artillery was again fired and adjusted (by USMC artillery forward observers) but no enemy casualties could be confirmed.

Co L, 3/3, reported finding eight bounding-type anti-personnel mines at coordinate (BS 547856). Engineers attached to the company destroyed the mines in place. And at 1340H, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines forward CP at Binh Son received a message from the CO of 3/3 that "the terrain is rigorous, movement slow, heat oppressive (more than 110 degrees), and companies holding at the phase line." At this time, 3/3 had incurred over 30 heat casualties. Before the operation concluded, they would suffer a total of 43. Third Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, held at the phase line for 1½ hours due to the oppressive heat.

At 1620H, the Vietnamese Marine Battalion made contact at coordinate (BS 565897) along a road paralleling the Song Tra Bong, about 6 kms to the southwest of the Binh Son District Headquarters where they reported receiving incoming hand grenades. Moving ahead about 300 meters, they shot and killed one VC and captured his carbine. By 061750H, all elements had reached the limit of advance for D-Day prepared for resupply and assumption of night defensive positions. The Vietnamese Marines were now located at coordinate (BS 570904) about 500 meters of the Song Tra Bong and 4 kms southwest of Rte 1 and the Binh Son District Headquarters; the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 51<sup>st</sup> was located at coordinate (BS 574880) and about 2 kms south of the Vietnamese Marines; and 3/3 at coordinate (BS 578860) and about 2 kms south of the 3/51<sup>st</sup>. Another air strike utilizing HU-1Bs was called by the Vietnamese Marine battalion against VC sighted moving vic coordinate (BS 570910) along the south bank of the Song Tra Bong. A patrol in the area, upon completion of the strike, found 3 dead VC and one Thompson submachine gun. At 1845H, two 3/3 Marines were wounded slightly after one of them had activated a mine. The mine was a pressure detonated, non-fragmentation device with low

explosive content. At 1850H, 3/51<sup>st</sup> ARVN reported receiving small arms fire from the vicinity of coordinate (BS 578888) in the mountainous region about 2 kms northeast of LZ Fox. A HU-1B strike was called for but the aircraft was unable to locate the enemy and returned. The remainder of the evening was uneventful.

On 7 August at 0650H, 3/3 commenced movement towards the next phase line, followed by the Vietnamese Marines at 0820H and the 3/51<sup>st</sup> ARVN at 0840H. There was no VC contact that morning. By 1126H, the two Vietnamese battalions had reached the limit of advance (LOA) for D+1 and were arranging for their motor convoy back to Quang Ngai. By 1300H, all 3/3 elements were ready for helicopter retraction and the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine forward CP displaced back to the Chu Lai area at 1425H. The ARVN and Marines found little sign of any major VC force in the area and encountered only scattered resistance. Nevertheless, Colonel McClanahan, the Commanding Officer of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, remembered at the time that the “operation was considered a successful experiment in command and control.” The only friendly WIAs had been incurred by 3/3, although the battalion had 43 heat casualties (considered non-battle casualties). For most, it had been a long, hot walk in intense heat that had yielded 4 VC KIA (all attributed to the Vietnamese Marines) and 1 VC wounded (by 3/3). Nine VC had been apprehended and 5 weapons captured. Not much for a commitment of the approximately 1,965 U.S. and Vietnamese people committed to the operation in this particular area. A debriefing of Operation Thunderbolt took place on 8 August.

On 8 August, the RLT-7 Headquarters (Colonel Oscar F. Peatross) and BLT 1/7 (Lt. Col James P. Kelly) had embarked aboard assigned amphibious shipping at Okinawa for movement to Chu Lai.

On 9 August, Co C, 1 /4, was moving to secure an LZ in the vicinity of coordinates (BT 452050) when a bounding-type explosive charge detonated and eleven Marines sustained wounds. Co B (-), 1 /4, operating in conjunction with Co C, observed thirteen VC in the vicinity of coordinate (BT 421037) and called for an artillery fire mission resulting in 3 VC KIA. A short time later, Co B (-) encountered enemy mortar and rocket fire (possibly from the Soviet-made AT rocket grenade, the RPG-2, which hadn't been found in VC units to date). Co C once again encountered a pressure-release type VC booby trap resulting in two Marines wounded. Shortly after, the VC were observed and taken under fire. One VC was killed and two weapons captured.

The 10<sup>th</sup> of August was a relatively quiet day in the Chu Lai enclave. The highlight of the day was the visit of General Westmoreland, accompanied by Maj Gen Walt and BGen McCutcheon, and a group of civilian dignitaries from Asian countries. A static display of infantry company and artillery weapons was provided.

On 11 August, Co I, 3/3, operating on the Trung Phan Peninsula engaged the enemy in several fire fights. The company sustained 3 WIA as a result of small arms fire. Artillery fire silenced the enemy fire, but confirmation of enemy dead could not be made. At 1615H, the company CP received five rounds of 60mm mortar fire (no casualties). Artillery silenced the

suspected VC mortar position but VC small arms fire was again received at 1845H (again, no casualties). During the hours of darkness, a Co D waterborne patrol landed by amtrac and reported one Marine missing, presumably drowned in the vicinity of coordinate (BT 476087). Search and rescue missions were conducted without retrieving the body.

On 12 August, the search for the missing Marine from Co D continued (the body would eventually be discovered by a member of the Vietnamese Popular forces and turned over to 1/4 on the 13<sup>th</sup>). Advance parties from Headquarters, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, and 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, arrived at Chu Lai.

On 14 August, a coordinating headquarters located within the perimeter of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines CP was established at Chu Lai under the Assistant 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv Commander BGen Frederick D. Karch. According to a III MAF message of 17 August, the coordinating headquarters had been established “so as to anticipate and alleviate actual or possible conflicts of interest before irreversible actions, plans, or commitments are taken that would adversely affect another command or commands; relationships with the Vietnamese government or the local populace; real estate allocations; or overall long-range military construction and programming and security aspects of the Chu Lai enclave.

Eight days after Thunderbolt, the allies finally confirmed the location of the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment. On 15 August, a deserter from the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the enemy regiment surrendered to the South Vietnamese 2<sup>nd</sup> ARVN Division. During his interrogation at General Thi's headquarters, I Corps, Da Nang, he revealed that the regiment had established its base in the Van Tuong village complex on the coast, 12 miles south of Chu Lai. It planned to attack the American enclave. The deserter told his interrogators that the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment at Van Tuong consisted of two of its three [infantry] battalions, the 60<sup>th</sup> and the 80<sup>th</sup>, reinforced by the 52<sup>nd</sup> VC Company and a weapons company from the 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion, approximately 1,500 men in all. General Thi, who personally questioned the deserter and believed the man was telling the truth, relayed the information to General Walt. At about the same time, the [III MAF] G-2 Section had received corroborative information from another source. Convinced of the danger to the airfield the III MAF G-2 and G-3 advised a spoiling attack in the Van Tuong region. On 13 August, reports from a number of agencies, primarily Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Province officials, the Quang Ngai National Police, U.S.Army Sector Senior Intelligence Advisors, Tam Ky and Binh Son District Headquarters, the Vietnamese Military Security Service, and the ARVN I Corps and 2d Division, all of whom indicated a relocation of VC units west and south of Chu Lai, especially in a village complex on the Van Tuong peninsula 15 miles to the south. The regiment was thoroughly familiar with the people and terrain of Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces and to the ARVN units operating in those areas.] The information was consistent with III MAF's OOB holdings on the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment.

On 14 August, RLT-7 and BLT 1/7 arrived at Chu Lai. Unloading commenced as soon as the five ships were anchored in the stream and, at 1340H, the first elements of BLT 1/7 began moving to an assembly area ashore along the Chu Lai beach just to the southeast of the airfield in the vicinity of coordinate (BT 574036) and to the rear of 3/3 to await completion of offloading

and receipt of an assigned mission. The RLT-7 CP initially satellited on the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines CP as construction of the regimental command post site began a little further to the north and about 300 meters inland from the beach at coordinates (BT 560048). The First Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, temporarily established its CP along a road just to the east of the runway in the vicinity of coordinate (BT 563032) RLT-7 (and BLT 1/7) had been assigned a TAOR on the southern portion of the Chu Lai enclave. On 16 August, the battalion was issued a verbal order to effect relief of the MLR and TAOR assigned to 3/3 by 17 August.

On 17 August, 1/7 would move to the 3/3 CP. Co A (Capt J.S. Tardy), Co B (Capt P.J. Fehlen), Co C (1<sup>st</sup> Lt B.R. Goodwyn) (which would move northwest into the 1/4 TAOR at 1000H on the 18<sup>th</sup> to occupy a defensive area along the Song An Tan north of Rte. 1 and the An Tan Bridge), and Co D (Capt J.B. Airola), initially to positions to the east and southeast of the airfield. H&S Co (Capt W.J. Brooks) was located with the 1/7 CP. The battalion commenced active aggressive patrolling.

By the 16<sup>th</sup>, the G-2 of III MAF had alerted all units then in I Corps (both U.S. and Vietnamese) that 19 August was VC "National Liberation Front (NLF) Revolutionary Day," and based upon receipt and analysis of intelligence from reliable sources, the period 17-20 August might see a sudden increase in VC activity. The principal theme appeared to be VC attempts to attack the Da Nang Air Base and or/or U.S. facilities and force especially in the Da Nang TAOR, but that the other enclaves, including Hue/Phu Bai and Chu Lai, might be subjected to VC activity during the same period. Activities and techniques which were singled out in the possible "all out effort" included: a reported infiltration from North Vietnam into Quang Nam Province of at least two main force battalions since June for operations with local VC forces and special "raider" squads and sabotage teams to infiltrate Da Nang Air Base to destroy aircraft, POL, petroleum oil lubricants, and ordnance dumps. The III MAF G-2 commented that the enemy had the capability to attack the Da Nang complex with at least four main force battalions with a regimental command structure superimposed. As for the Phu Bai enclave, the G-2 stated that the enemy retained the capability of attacking Phu Bai airfield with and estimated three main force battalions supported by local guerrillas. Within the Chu Lai area, "numerous reports" indicated the buildup of VC forces in eastern Quang Tin and northern Quang Ngai Provinces. The enemy retained the capability of attacking Chu Lai with possibly two regiments with an estimated total of 8 to 10 battalions supported by local guerrillas. Special security precautions were to be instituted in all three Marine enclaves.

Commencing on the night of 18 August, local night patrolling was stepped up in intensity in view of the fact that 18-20 August commemorated the revolution of the Viet Minh and the fall of Saigon to the Communists during the French Indochina War, and would thus be a likely time for attacks on U.S. military installations. First Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, platoons were transported by amtracs to Ky Xuan and Ky Ha Islands at 1800H and established patrol bases and conducted continuous squad patrols during the night. Platoons in defensive positions also conducted continuous squad patrolling along the forward MLR. A squad patrol from Co B reported 80-100

men with helmets and dark uniforms in the vicinity of An Tay (2) (BT 516083) at 2210H. The First Battalion was placed on 100% alert. Another patrol was sent through the hamlet with an interpreter. Several villagers were questioned and all reported that they had seen no VC in the hamlet. First Battalion was returned to 50% alert just after midnight. Scheduled artillery and mortar illumination concentrations were fired every twenty minutes in front of the MLR positions.

Agreeing that the situation in the Van Tuong village complex on the coast, 12 miles south of Chu Lai called for action, General Walt, III MAF/3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv commander, flew to Chu Lai and held a hurried council of war with his senior commanders there: BGen Karch, (Chu Lai Coordinator as of 5 August), Colonel McClanahan (4<sup>th</sup> Marines), and Colonel Peatross (RLT-7). According to Colonel Peatross, 'General Walt laid the situation out rather plainly...' The III MAF commander remarked that 'General Thi thought this was the best information he's had in the corps area throughout the whole Vietnam War.' Two obvious courses were open to the Marines: they could remain within their defenses and wait for the enemy to attack, or they could strike the VC before the enemy was ready to move. The latter course of action meant reducing the defensive forces manning the Chu Lai perimeter, but the arrival of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines and BLT 1/7 on the 14<sup>th</sup> made the risk acceptable. Walt told the assembled officers:

'At most, all we're going to do is dig up two battalions. If we dig up as many as two battalions, we've got to have the amphibious means of making a landing and our ultimate action depends upon how we come to grips with this thing.'

He then turned to Colonel Peatross, and then, according to the latter, stated, "Pete, you're the only one available." General Walt then returned to Da Nang and had further consultations with his staff, "going to General Westmoreland for permission to carry out the plan."

### **Operation STARLITE**

On 18 August, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines issued a frag order [11-65] which set forth the defense plan while two of the regiment's three infantry battalions (2/4 and 3/3) were away participating in Operation Starlite. The frag order contained instructions for an increased defense posture during the period 18-25 August, which was considered critical. First Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, and First Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, had nothing unusual to report. Second Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines had departed by helicopter at 0630H for the Starlite operational area. Lieutenant General Krulak accompanied by Maj Gen Walt arrived at the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines CP where General Walt, at the appropriate time, would give the order to land the SLF, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines.

Artillery consisted of the 107mm Mortar (Howtar) Battery, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Marines, helilifted into a position (LZ Yellow) vicinity of coordinate (BS 682973), within a 100 meters of Co M (Capt C.M. Morris), 3/3, ridgeline blocking position established early on 18 August on the north edge of the operational area. The mortar battery had commenced its helilift at 0921H on 18 August. Battery K (155mm howitzers, SP), 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Marines, displaced from its original position on the night of 17 August to an advanced position vicinity of coordinate (BT 605018)

along the west bank of the Song Tra Bong opposite the Trung Phan Peninsula but within the Chu Lai TAOR.

At 0615H, 15 minutes before H-Hour on D-Day, 18 August, Battery K, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Marines, began 155mm preparation fires of the helicopter landing zones. The artillery fire was soon reinforced by 20 Marine A-4s and F-4s which dropped 18 tons of bombs and napalm on the LZs. The Marines limited their preparation of Green Beach to 20mm cannon strafing runs by MAG-12 A-4 Skyhawks because of the proximity of An Cuong (1) to the landing site. As the air and artillery fires lifted, the ground forces arrived. The first waves of BLT 3/3's LVTs landed over Green Beach with Co I (Capt B.D. Webb) on the left (south) and Co K (Capt J.A. Doub) on the right (north) in LVTs, and Co L in reserve landed in LCMs and LCUs (along with tanks and Ontos), while a simultaneous heliborne assault by BLT 2/4 commenced at Landing Zones Red, White, and Blue shortly before 0700H on 18 August.

At 0630H, Co I, 3/3, upon landing, had pushed through the beach-side hamlet of An Cuong (1) while Co K had moved through the northern edge of the hamlet without incident and secured Hill 22, vicinity coordinate (BS 715924), about 600 meters north of the landing beach. On the beach, Lt. Col Muir had moved his CP ashore, and was joined by Col Peatross at 0730H. Tanks and Ontos rolled off the LCUs and LCMs and made their way forward to support the assault companies. Co L was to come ashore and establish perimeter security for the supply area on the beach, however, Co L (Capt J.E. Mc David), in the second wave, had received heavy small arms fire from the right flank of the beach upon landing. Once committed to the attack, the enemy firing had ceased although Co L had incurred two Marine WIAs. The command and control elements of the RLT-7 Headquarters landed at Green Beach at 0730H.

At 0645H on the morning of 18 August, despite "necessary (and substantial) alterations" to the landing plan as a result of shortage of available helicopters, Co G (1<sup>st</sup> Lt F.G. Pearce) landed unopposed west of LZ Red (BS 666955) and at 0730H, Co E (Capt Jerry Ledin), 2/4, and the 2/4 command group had landed in LZ White (BS 675933) under small arms fire about 2 kms to the southeast of Co G and LZ Red. Co G searched two hamlets in the vicinity of LZ Red, Phu Long (1) and (2) to the immediate north and northeast of LZ Red, and just beyond the southern base of the Truong Phan Peninsula, which contained many tunnels, trenches, and fox holes most of which were located in hedgerows and were difficult to locate. Eight VC were picked up in and around the village. Co G then advanced about 1,800 meters to the northeast and linked up with Co M (Capt C.M. Morris), 3/3, and the Howtar battery without incident.

Co E maneuvered the remaining platoons to seize the 500 meter-long ridgeline. During the attack, Co E (-) and the command group received 60mm and 81mm mortar and automatic weapons fire from an estimated 60 VC. The ridgeline was secured at 1000H. Enemy casualties were unknown. Co E reorganized and attempted to evacuate their 2 KIAs and 15 WIAs. By midmorning Co E again began moving northeast. At one juncture the Marines spotted about 100 VC in the open and asked for artillery fire. The 107mm Mortar (Howtar) Battery shelled the enemy force. Lt. Col Fisher, who later flew over the impact area, estimated that the artillery

mission had accounted for 90 enemy dead. Co E continued to push forward, finding only occasional opposition.

At 0745H, Co H (1<sup>st</sup> Lt H.K. "Mike" Jenkins) landed in LZ Blue (located about 2 kms southeast of LZ White) and set-up in a 360 degree perimeter. In Mike Jenkins' own words, "The UH-1E helicopters who were flying security for our landing immediately took the VC to our southwest under fire with the machine gun and rocket strikes. We gained fire superiority immediately with our M-14 and M-79 fire. Three VC KIAs were counted at this position before we moved out in the attack in a northwesterly direction. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoons were in the attack with the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon as rear security. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon was on the left flank and was engaged in a heavy firefight with VC on Hill 43 (BS 686918). The 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon was ordered to attack the village with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, located in the vicinity of Nam Yen (3) (BS 690924) to the immediate north of the LZ, providing a base of fire. At this time, there had been no fire from Nam Yen (3). At 0840H, the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon moved into the village and came under intensive small arms fire. After moving past the first row of houses in the village, the First Platoon was pulled back out of the village for an air strike. We were still receiving small arms fire from the village even as the air strike continued. Immediately after the air strike, Co I, 3/3, swept the village of Nam Yen (3). Two M-48 tanks arrived at our position at 0945H and the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon and the two tanks made a coordinated tank-infantry attack to relieve pressure on 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon who were at this time pinned down by enemy small arms and mortar fire. The tank-infantry attack caused the VC to break contact and fall back to the west. An air strike was called to the west to hit the fleeing enemy.

During this attack, one VC .50 cal. machine gun and one .30 cal. machine gun were knocked out but due to heavy small arms and mortar fire were not recovered. Automatic fire was coming from a house and one tank moved over to get a shot at the house when the tank was hit by some type of recoilless weapon. The second tank moved over to get a shot at the house and was also hit but the house was destroyed and no more small arms fire was received from that area. The tanks were not damaged severely and were back in action in approximately five minutes. We then began receiving heavy small arms fire from a hedgerow. At this time, a flame tank arrived at our position and was moved within range of the hedgerow and burned it out. For approximately 30 minutes after this, we received no incoming fire from any direction. By 1000H, a total of five tanks and three Ontos had joined me (the Co H commander, Mike Jenkins) at my position.

First Lieutenant Bill Maher who had replaced Lynn Terry as the platoon commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> AT Bn, in mid-July recalled that "The first instance where the Ontos proved its ability to withstand enemy action was during Operation Starlite. The op order called for me to use only a heavy section. I used Frenchy [Cpl Robert G. Bousquet, a French Canadian American], B.J. [Cpl Jose Balajadia], and [Cpl Isaiah] Nelson [as individual Ontos commanders]. We landed with 3/3 and drove inland to join up with Co H, 2/4 which had earlier landed by helicopter to a position very near the enemy's regimental headquarters. After we linked up [with

the Ontos and tanks in support], we started pushing in a sweep and clear operation. Ed [Roski] was with me. The first VC we killed was killed by Storey.”

Mike Jenkins recalled that “All friendly casualties were evacuated at this time [11 WIAs and one KIA] and approximately 50 VC weapons and one VC PW was sent out by helo also. The 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, while giving us security to the southwest inspected numerous VC fighting positions and found as many as 6 VC in the previous .50 cal. machine gun hole and numerous VC KIA in other small fighting holes. All fighting holes were observed in the hedgerows and were well camouflaged.”

“At 1100H, we moved out again in the attack with 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon on the right and the 3<sup>rd</sup> on the left with the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon as rear guard. We moved out in a northeasterly direction, bypassing the village of Nam Yen (3) believing it was cleared by Co I, 3/3. As the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoons moved out, the tanks were immediately behind the assault line with the Ontos to the rear and on the flanks in general support. Shortly thereafter, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoons began receiving heavy small arms fire and heavy mortar fire [81 and 60mm].”

“Co H, augmented by tanks and Ontos, were emerging from the Hill 43 area into the open rice paddy between Nam Yen (3) and An Cuong (2) where they were observed by Co I, 3/3, emerging from An Cuong (2). As the assault line reached the stream and rice paddies to the east of Nam Yen (3), the VC suddenly opened up with small arms and machine gun fire from positions in Nam Yen (3) [to the company’s rear] and Hill 30 [about 500 meters to their northeast], catching the Co H rear guard (1<sup>st</sup> Platoon) in a murderous crossfire. Then the mortar shells began bursting upon the lead platoons. Co H was taking fire from all directions.”

“The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoons moved across the rice paddy and set up a defense to protect the tanks and Ontos as they looked for a place to cross the rice paddy. The paddy was searched in both directions with no crossing point located. The Ontos tried to cross the paddy at the same place the troops had crossed. The first Ontos made it across with the second getting stuck in the mud. Under heavy enemy automatic weapon and mortar fire, the second Ontos was pulled from the mud and both Ontos recrossed the paddy to join the up with the tanks.”

Bill Maher recalled: “We started to receive heavy small arms fire and the grunts began to fall like flies. Eventually, we found ourselves surrounded. Hotel Company had taken more than 50% casualties and the tanks that were with us were knocked out and the tank platoon commander, Lt Little [Hvy Sect, 2<sup>nd</sup> Plt, Co C, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Bn], was shot in the neck. The VC had 57mms and 3.5s that they had taken from the ARVNs and they, the VC, really had a ‘turkey shoot.’ If the tanks had moved like we did, instead of buttoning up and sitting there, they wouldn’t have been knocked out. I had told my Ontos to keep moving unless they had a definite target. We must have looked like a wagon train. However, the grunts were all around us and I couldn’t let the Ontos button up because they would have hit the grunts [with 106mm RR backblast] and they couldn’t fire effectively.”

"I saw 15-20 VC behind a tree line and called B.J.'s Ontos over. The grunts were trying to envelop the VC but were pinned down. Before I would let B.J. fire with his 106s, I had to be sure he was on target because the grunts were about 30 yards from the VC. He stopped his vehicle and stood up in the OC's hatch and fired his .50s until he was on target. While he was stopped, a tank about 7 feet to his left was hit with a 57mm and one to his right rear was also hit. B.J.'s vehicle was hit by machine gun fire that knocked out his lights and his number 5 gun and made it ineffective. He was also hit with mortar fire that knocked me into a rice paddy. I was OK, a little shook-up but really pissed off."

"B.J. got on target with his 50s and really let them have it. All five guns yet! When I saw the bodies, it looked like an atomic bomb hit them. We then decided to make a break for the hole B.J. had put in the VC lines. I sent Frenchy first; then Nelson, with B.J. to cover. Frenchy was hit in the helmet and in the chest and told LCpl Spradling [Frenchy's driver] to keep on going, and then died."

"Ed Roski was walking beside Nelson's vehicle when it was hit by machinegun fire. Nelson and Ed were both hit but Ed was only hit by shrapnel in the legs. He pulled Nelson out of the OC's hatch and jumped in. [Nelson was stuffed into the loader's spot.] Everyone was firing their 30s and I even killed one [VC] with my .45."

"Meanwhile, the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon had initially been pinned down behind a dike by enemy small arms fire from Nam Yen (3) and from the vicinity of An Cuong (2). The 1st Platoon then moved one squad around to the northwest of Nam Yen (3) and killed 9 VC who were operating the 81mm mortar. The small arms fire then became so intense that the squad had to pull back in closer to the tanks and were unable to recover the mortar. At this time, the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon had cut across the rice paddy toward [Hill 30]. Numerous helicopters were landing in this area so they moved out toward that high ground. The lead platoon was forced to alter course when medical evacuation helicopters tried to land in the midst of the unit. As it maneuvered off to the flank of Co H, the platoon became separated from the main body of the company and was engaged by the Viet

Cong. Lance Corporal Joe C. Paul, a fire team leader in Co H, would receive the Medal of Honor for his actions during this action:

**Lance Corporal Joe C. Paul**

**Medal of Honor**

**“Paul’s platoon had sustained five casualties as it was temporarily pinned down by devastating enemy mortar, recoilless rifle, automatic weapons, and rifle fire delivered by the Viet Cong forces in well-trenched positions. The wounded marines were unable to move from their perilously exposed positions forward of the remainder of their platoon and were subjected to a barrage of white phosphorous rifle grenades. Corporal Paul, fully aware that his tactics would almost certainly result in serious injury or death to himself, chose to disregard his own safety and boldly dashed across the fire-swept rice paddies, placed himself between his wounded comrades and the enemy, and delivered effective suppressive fire with his automatic weapon [M-14] in order to divert the attack long enough to allow the casualties to be evacuated. Although critically wounded during the course of the battle, he resolutely remained in his exposed position and continued to fire his rifle until he collapsed and was evacuated.”**

At this juncture, the platoon unexpectedly linked up with the helicopter security detail from Co I, 3/3, which had started to move toward its parent company after the downed helicopter had been repaired and flown out. [A UH-34D had been downed by small arms fire in the vicinity of coordinate (BS 712972). The helo was destroyed and the crew evacuated. The small force was quickly engaged by a Viet Cong unit, but together the two Marine units fought their way to An Cuong (2). Upon arriving on the high ground the platoon had been met by the Bravo Command Group under Major Comer [the BLT 3/3 Executive Officer]. Major Comer ordered the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon to secure the hill and wait for him to return with Companies I and L from 3/3.”

Mike Jenkins recalled: “At 1630H, the remainder of Co H had moved back towards LZ Blue and had received instructions from the battalion commander to coordinate with Co I, 3/3, and set in a defensive position. Contact was made with one platoon of Co I, 3/3, but the remainder of the company could not be located. At 1715H, that [Co I] platoon pulled out to head towards the Regimental CP.” Two of the tanks returned to the Regimental CP with the platoon from Co I. Friendly WIA and KIA were also being evacuated by helo under intense enemy fire. While evacuating the wounded, Nam Yen (3) was hit by artillery and the high ground [Hill 43] was hit by an air strike. All that were not evacuated by helo were loaded on the tanks which had begun the pull back toward LZ Blue. Co H (-) flanked the rice paddy in order to get around it with the armor.”

“Co H (-) received further instructions from Battalion Operations directing the company to set in a defense at LZ Blue for the night. Prior to receiving this instruction, another air strike

was made on Hill 43 to insure that VC dug in positions were not still there and also to prepare it as a possible night defensive position.”

“At that time, it was unknown that a large ditch was between LZ Blue and Hill 43 which prevented the armor from getting to this hill. We were still getting sporadic small arms fire from the village of Nam Yen (3). At this time the Ontos and tanks proceeded to level all houses which remained standing, so all small arms fire ceased. At 1800H, we were resupplied with food, water, and ammunition. We also received a section of 81mm mortars. Still unable to affect liaison with Co I, 3/3, we set in a defense about 100 meters east of Nam Yen (3) with 24 infantrymen, 1 section of 81s, three Ontos and three tanks. We had constant illumination throughout the night with no enemy probes or enemy action of any kind.”

Bill Maher recalled: “We got to an LZ and helicopters evacuated the wounded and dead. I ended up as an OC. There were 24 grunts left from Co H and we set up in a wagon train defense for the night in the middle of a dry rice paddy. Ed, Nelson, and Frenchy were evacuated and we set in for the night. I thought for sure we’d had the ‘cock’ but were only hit with sniper fire.”

At 1100H, Co E and the 2/4 command group had continued the sweep to the northeast of the ridgeline, in their assigned sector, and at 1200H, while moving into a small unidentified hamlet vicinity coordinate (BS 687944), received enemy 60mm and 81mm mortar, 57mm RR, machine gun, and small arms fire from an estimated 50 VC located to the north and east. Fire was returned by all organic weapons including one .50 cal. machine gun attached to Co E. The hamlet was secured at approximately 1300H. The action had resulted in eight friendly WIAs. One VC mortar forward observer was shot from a tree and carried away with other casualties by the retreating VC. During this period, the command group received enemy mortar, 57mm RR, machine gun, and small arms fire which resulted in 2 WIAs. BLT 2/4 reported encountering a concrete pillbox containing a VC machine gun.

Cos I and K, 3/3, had continued their movement westward and both reoriented to the northeast. Co I while executing a flanking movement to the northeast just south of An Cuong (2) encountered heavy enemy fire from the left flank of 2/4’s zone of action. An Cuong (2) vicinity of (BS 701928), sat on a ridgeline fronted by streams on three sides, the north, east, and south. The hamlet was located about 1,800 meters inland (west) of the landing beach. “Air strikes called earlier by Co H, 2/4, against Nam Yen (3) had momentarily halted the advance of Co I at a streambed east of Nam Yen (3), and bomb fragments had wounded two Co I Marines. After the bombing run, Co I moved north along the stream for 500 meters to a point opposite An Cuong (2). Under fire from the hamlets, the Co I commander (Capt Bruce Webb) requested permission to attack An Cuong (2), although it was across the stream’s bank in 2/4’s the area of responsibility. Lt.Col Muir approved the request after consulting with Colonel Peatross.

An Cuong (2) was a fortified hamlet, ideally suited to Viet Cong combat tactics. The BLT 3/3 Executive Officer, Maj Andrew G. Comer, in charge of 3/3’s rear command group at the RLT-7 CP, described the area surrounding the hamlet as heavily wooded with severely restricted fields

of fire. The only open areas were the rice paddies and 'even these were interspersed with hedgerows of hardwood and bamboo thickets.' An Cuong (2), itself, consisted of 25-30 huts, fighting holes, and camouflaged trench lines connected by a series of interlocking tunnels. Reinforced by a heavy section of tanks, the company commenced the attack. As Co I cleared the first few huts, a grenade exploded, killing Capt Webb and wounding three other Marines. No sooner had the grenade exploded, than two 60mm mortar rounds fell on the advancing troops, inflicting three more casualties.

Co I, 3/3, squad leader Corporal Robert E. O'Malley killed eight VC single-handedly that day. For his action, O'Malley received the Medal of Honor:

**Corporal Robert E. O'Malley**

**Medal of Honor**

**'For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action against Viet Cong forces at the risk of his own life and beyond the call of duty while serving as Squad Leader in Company I, Third Battalion, Third Marines...near An Cuong 2... on 18 August 1965. While leading his squad in the assault against a strongly entrenched enemy force, his unit came under intense small arms fire. With complete disregard for his personal safety, Corporal O'Malley raced across an open rice paddy to a trench line where the enemy forces were located. Jumping in to the trench, he attacked the Viet Cong with his rifle and grenades, and singly killed eight of the enemy. He then led his squad to the assistance of an adjacent Marine unit which was suffering heavy casualties. Continuing to press forward, he reloaded his weapon and fired with telling effect into the enemy emplacement. He personally assisted in the evacuation of several wounded Marines, and again regrouping the remnants of his squad, he returned to the point of the heaviest fighting. Ordered to an evacuation point by an officer, Corporal O'Malley gathered his besieged and badly wounded squad and boldly led them under fire to a helicopter for withdrawal. Although three times wounded in this encounter, and facing imminent death from a fanatic and determined enemy, he steadfastly refused evacuation and continued to cover his squad's boarding of the helicopters while, from an exposed position, he delivered fire against the enemy until his wounded men were evacuated. Only then, with his last mission accomplished, did he permit himself to be removed from the battlefield....'**

After An Cuong (2) was secured, Co I was now under the command of 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Richard M. Purnell, the company's executive officer. "Making a hurried survey of the battlefield, Purnell counted 50 Viet Cong bodies. He then radioed his battalion commander for further instructions. Lt. Col Muir ordered Lt Purnell's company to join Co K, which was heavily engaged 2 kms to the northeast." At 1115H, as the company was preparing to move from An Cuong (2), a disabled UH-1E (from VMO-2) landed near the Co I position, its crew recovered, and ten Marines with three

tanks were left behind to secure the aircrew and the aircraft. As Co I departed, it could see Co H, 2/4, moving off Hill 43 and advancing on the left flank of Co I.

Just before noon, Lt Col Muir had ordered his executive officer, Maj Comer, to dispatch the mobile (amtrac) resupply to Co I, which at the time was only a few hundred yards in front of Comer's command group position. Maj Comer recalled that he had briefed both the five amtracs and the section officers of the three flame tanks, the only tactical support vehicles at the time, on the location of the company and marked the routes they were to follow on their maps. The supply column left the CP shortly after noon but got lost between Nam Yen (3) and An Thoi (2).

At 1225H, the five amtracs full of supplies (rations, water) for elements of 3/3 were ambushed, taken under small arms fire, mortar, and recoilless rifle fire in the vicinity of coordinate (BS 698932) near An Tho (2) just beyond (i.e., northwest of) the ridgeline where An Cuong (2) was located. The amtracs had followed a trail that was flanked on one side by a rice paddy and the other by trees and hedgerows. As the two lead vehicles, a tank and an amtrac, went around a bend in the road, an explosion occurred near the tank, followed by another in the middle of the column. Fire from Viet Cong recoilless rifles and a barrage of mortar rounds tore into the column. The vehicles backed off the road and turned their weapons to face the enemy. Using all of the weapons at their command, the troops held off the closing VC infantry. The rear tank tried to use its flamethrower, but an enemy shell had rendered it useless. Throughout the bitter fighting, the convoy was still able to maintain communications with the command post. Co I was dispatched to the scene to assist the ambushed amtracs at 1305H. At approximately 1300H, Co I was again taken under heavy fire in the vicinity of coordinate (BS 703927) which inflicted several casualties. Co I recovered the ten Marines at the downed UH-1E helicopter and a platoon of Co H, 2/4, which had been pinned down by enemy fire and was continuing the advance to reach the ambushed amtracs but was suffering heavy casualties which impeded their progress somewhat.

"At the rear CP area, Major Comer received 'word on the amtrac command net that the column was surrounded by VC and was about to be overrun.'" Comer recalled, 'The amtrac radio operator kept the microphone button depressed the whole time and pleaded for help. We were unable to quiet him sufficiently to gain essential information as to their location. This continued for an extended period, perhaps an hour.'

"Major Comer relayed the information about the ambush to Lt. Col Muir. The battalion commander replied that he was returning Co I to the rear CP and that Comer was to gather whatever support he could and to rescue them as rapidly as possible. Major Comer then told Colonel Peatross about the proposed rescue mission. The regimental commander, well aware of the vulnerable positions of both Co H and the supply column and fearing that the enemy was attempting to drive a salient between the two battalions, heartily approved and provided Comer with 'the single available M-48 [gun] tank for support.'

“When Co I arrived at the rear CP, Comer held a hurried briefing with Lieutenant Purnell and the other leaders of the improvised rescue force. The plan was to use ‘a rapidly moving tank, amtrac, and Ontos column through the previously cleared An Cuong (2) area.’ Before the meeting broke up, one of the flame tanks which had been in the supply column arrived at the CP. According to Comer, ‘The crew chief, a staff sergeant, reported to me that he had just passed through An Cuong (2) without being fired upon and that he could lead us to the supply column.’

“Shortly after 1300H, Comer’s force moved out. Just after cresting Hill 30, the M-48 tank was hit by recoilless rifle fire and stopped short. The other vehicles immediately jammed together and simultaneously mortar and small arms fire saturated the area. Within a few minutes, the Marines suffered 5 dead and 17 wounded. The infantry quickly dismounted and the Ontos maneuvered to provide frontal fire and to protect the flanks. Major Comer called for artillery fire and air support. With the response of supporting arms, the enemy fire diminished but did not stop. According to Comer, ‘It was obvious that the VC were deeply dug in, and emerged above ground when we presented them with an opportunity and withdrew whenever we retaliated or threatened them.’

“With the letup of the action on Hill 30, Comer ordered Co I to resume its advance toward An Cuong (2) leaving a small rear guard on Hill 30 to supervise the evacuation of the casualties. The company entered An Cuong (2) against surprisingly little resistance, but Comer and the command group were caught by intense fire from a wooded area to their right front and forced to take what cover they could in the open rice paddies. At the time, the Marines came upon the two reinforced squads from Co I which had been left to guard the downed Huey and the platoon from Co H, 2/4. The two squads from Co I fought their way to Hill 30 where they were evacuated while the Co H platoon remained with Comer in the rice paddies. At this point, Comer recalled; ‘When it became obvious that I could not move the [command group] in either direction I radioed instructions to Lt Purnell to extricate the supply column as rapidly as he could as I deemed that the most urgent matter, and that I would support him from my present position as best I could I also advised Lt. Col Muir of our situation as I had been doing all day.’

Cos K and L had continued their attack to the north and at 1525H became engaged in a firefight which resulted in several friendly casualties, however, Cos K and L assaulted the hill just to the southeast and overlooking the hamlet of Van Tuong (5) vicinity of coordinate (BS 713942) and established a perimeter defense against a possible counterattack by the VC at about 1550H. The BLT 3/3 command group soon joined them on the hill. Co K, 3/3, was now receiving a heavy volume of automatic weapons fire in the vicinity of coordinate (BS 714938), about one km north of Hill 22, and attacking to overcome the resistance.

The VC resisted the Marines using small arms (most VC were found to be armed with French MAS-36 rifles), automatic weapons, 60mm and 81/82mm mortars, 12.7 mm AA guns, and 57mm RR fires from strong and organized positions. Most of the VC encountered were wearing the standard black PJs, but some had mixed uniforms, camouflaged with foliage, and wearing

U.S. steel helmets with helmet liners. The enemy had even entered Marine tactical radio nets. The attitude of the villagers had not been hostile (as had been anticipated); the villagers were cooperative and volunteered info on the VC. Marine units reported a high degree of cooperation from the local populace as civilians pointed out Viet Cong concentrations, fortifications, caves, and tunnels.

While Co I maneuvered through An Cuong (2) encountering periodic strong enemy resistance, Colonel Peatross committed one company of his reserve battalion to the battle. Cos I (1<sup>st</sup> Lt W. D. Marshall) and L (Capt Ronald A. Clark), 3/7, aboard the LPH Iwo Jima along with HMM-163), arrived offshore after 0930H. Colonel Peatross ordered a halt to the advance of the 2/4 units from LZs Red and White and along the coast (3/3) to prevent the overextension of his lines. He ordered Co L, 3/7, to be landed. This company was helilifted to the regimental CP at 1730H. There it was placed under the operational control of Lt. Col Muir, who ordered Capt Clark to reinforce Major Comer's group and then join Co I in the search for the supply train.

Supported by two tanks, Clark's force moved out. As the company advanced through the open rice paddies east of An Cuong (2), it came under heavy fire, wounding 14 and killing four Marines, while killing an estimated 16 VC. The Marines persevered and the VC broke contact as night fell.

The addition of a third Marine infantry company to the area, coupled with the weight of supporting arms fires available, evidently forced the 60<sup>th</sup> VC Battalion to break contact. The Marines radioed the Galveston and Orleck requesting continuous illumination throughout the evening over the Nam Yen-An Cuong area. As darkness fell, Colonel Peatross informed General Walt that the VC apparently intended to defend selected positions, while not concentrating their forces.

Lt. Col Muir decided that it was too risky to continue searching for the supply column that night, although immobilized, was no longer in danger. Muir ordered Capt Clark's Co L to move to Phase Line Banana and join Cos K and L, 3/3, and establish a defensive perimeter there. Cos K and L had assaulted a hill just to the southeast and overlooking the hamlet of Van Tuong (5) vicinity of coordinate (BS 713942) and established a perimeter defense against a possible counterattack by the VC at about 1550H. The BLT 3/3 command group soon joined them on the hill.] Muir also ordered Co I, 3/3, to return to the regimental CP. Co I had remained in the hamlet of An Cuong (2) in contact with the VC until 0145H when it began its return to the battalion's secondary command post arriving at 0500H on the 19<sup>th</sup>. It was then assigned the mission of providing security for the RLT CP and the beach area. For all intents and purpose, the fighting was over for Co I; of the 177 men who had crossed over the beach earlier that morning, 14 were dead (including the former company commander), and another 53 were wounded, but the company could claim 125 dead VC.

As of 1540H on the 18<sup>th</sup>, U.S. casualties, which included Marines, Navy, and Army personnel, were 14 KIA and 79 WIA. The VC casualty count was incomplete but a minimum of

100 KIA and much materiel captured. Marine and Army helicopters had been receiving considerable battle damage from VC small arms and automatic weapons fire. And one UH-34D had been downed, subsequently destroyed, and the crew evacuated. The enemy was well organized in depth with entrenchments and fortifications, including numerous concrete bunkers. At 1600H, an optimistic III MAF had notified ComUSMACV that, "The enemy is now encircled by Marine forces. He can elect to stay in place and fight or he can attempt to breakout. He also has the capability of attempting reinforcement from the west."

The major action on 18 August, concluded Shulimson and Maj Johnson, had developed in the south near LZ Blue, at the junction of Lt Cols Fisher's and Muir's units. This area, roughly one square kilometer, was bound by the hamlets of An Thoi (2) on the north, Nam Yen (3) on the south, and An Cuong (2) to the east. It was a patchwork of rice paddies, streams, hedgerows, woods, and built-up areas, interspersed by trails leading in all directions. Two small knolls dominated the flat terrain, Hill 43 (BS 685916), about one km to the southwest of LZ Blue, and a few hundred meters southwest of Nam Yen (3), and Hill 30 (BS 698390), 400 meters north of An Cuong (2) (BS 701928). LZ Blue was just south of Nam Yen (3), between Hill 43 and the hamlet. Co H's LZ was almost on top of the 60<sup>th</sup> VC Battalion. The enemy had allowed the first helicopters to touch down with little interference, but then opened up as the others came in. One of the pilots from HMM-361 had stated that 'You just had to close your eyes and drop down to the deck.' Three U.S. Army UH-1B gunships from the 7<sup>th</sup> Airlift Platoon took the VC on Hill 43 under fire while Co H formed a defensive perimeter around the landing zone. One UH-1E had been downed in LZ Blue but had been repaired by 1156H and returned to the Chu Lai Ai Field.

During the night of 18 August, Colonel Peatross brought the rest of the SLF ashore. Co I (1<sup>st</sup> Lt W.D. Marshall), 3/7, arrived at the regimental CP at 1800H, followed shortly by Lt Col Bodley and his command group. At 0205H on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>, Co M (Capt Richard H. Schwartz) landed across Green Beach from the Talladega. With the arrival of his third battalion, Colonel Peatross completed his plans for the next day. Marine forces maintained contact with the enemy during the hours of darkness. No reports were received which indicated the VC had attempted to breakout.

The regimental commander's concept of action remained basically the same; squeeze the vice around the VC and drive them toward the sea. As a result of the first day's action against the 60<sup>th</sup> VC Battalion, Colonel Peatross readjusted the battalions' boundaries. At 0730H, Lt Col Muir's battalion, with Cos K and L abreast and Co L from Lt Col Bodley's battalion following in reserve, was to attack northeast from Phase Line Banana. Simultaneously, Lt Col Fisher's unit, with Cos E and G, was to drive eastward to the sea, joining Muir's force. Lt. Jenkins' Co H, Comer's group, and Co I, 3/3, were to withdraw to the regimental CP. The remainder of Lt Col Bodley's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, was to fill the gap; Cos I and M were to move out of the regimental CP, extract the ambushed supply column and then move toward An Thoi (2) to establish a blocking position there which would prevent the VC from slipping southward. Co M, 3/3, was to hold its blocking positions further north. The enemy was to be left no avenue of escape.

The Marine assault had continued through the night of the 18<sup>th</sup> and into the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>. By 0700H on the 19<sup>th</sup>, Marine casualties were listed as 36 KIA and 154 WIA. RLT-7 estimated 400-500 VC KIA to date. Three Marine tanks (one flame and two gun) and four LVTs were damaged. Of the 18 Marine helos hit on 18 Aug, all but five were back in action by the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>. The following VC units were identified in the Starlite objective area: the 40<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Battalions, and elements of the 90<sup>th</sup> Battalion, all known subordinates of the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment. A VCC stated that the 450<sup>th</sup> VC Battalion (AKA 400<sup>th</sup>), the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment's heavy weapons unit, was also in the area. The presence of a 45<sup>th</sup> VC Battalion was also reported. These were the same VC units which had been reported in contacts with the ARVNs in late May and again during July. At 0700H on the 19<sup>th</sup>, Following intensive prep fires, BLT 3/3 and BLT 2/4 crossed the lines of departure for attacks supported by on-call air, artillery, and naval gunfire. Gains of 800 to 1,000 yards were attained before enemy resistance stiffened.

The I Corps Advisory Group had released six O-1B light observation aircraft and placed under the operational control of III MAF for the duration of the operation. Five of seven flyable U.S. Army UH-1B helicopters were placed in direct support. Regional (698<sup>th</sup> RF Co) and Popular Force units from Binh Son District provided ambush sites west of the objective area for the night of 18-19 August. A Vietnamese interrogation team from Binh Son District Headquarters assisted the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines tactical command post. The Vietnamese Junk Force was at sea off the objective area to aid in stopping VC attempts to escape in that direction.

After a day long fight against stubborn resistance, the last Marine unit reached the final objective on the beaches of the South China Sea extending from the beach about 2 kms northwest of the Phuoc Thuan Peninsula vicinity coordinate (BS 692982) to the Van Tuong Peninsula vicinity coordinate (BS 942954) when Co E, 2/4, had swept the Phuoc Thuan Peninsula. All units were conducting mopping up operations and destroying caves, tunnels, bunkers, trenches, and other VC installations in the objective area. During this time escape by the VC to seaward had been blocked by the fire support ships. The 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv called for the retraction of 2/4 and 3/3 to Chu Lai and the deployment of 1/7 to replace the forces retracted.

Mike Jenkins recalled: "At 0900H on the 19<sup>th</sup>, we received more supplies and orders to move to Green Beach. Our movement to Green Beach was uneventful. At Green Beach we received a further order to report to the Regimental Command Post. Upon arriving at the Regimental CP, we were directed to set in a defense around the CP for the night. At 1400H on the 20<sup>th</sup>, we moved to the beach and loaded aboard a ship to return to our positions at Chu Lai."

Bill Maher recalled: "The next morning we blew up a house that had VC in them, were refueled by helicopter, and drove to the beach. The Bull gave us a pat on the head, told us we did a great job, and sent us back to Chu Lai with the rest of the battalion."

On 20 August (D+2), BLT 2/4 was helilifted back to its normal position in the Chu Lai enclave. The return trip of the helicopters from Chu Lai was utilized to lift BLT 1/7 into the BLT 3/3 area on the high ground near Van Tuong (5) vicinity of coordinate (BS 717942). BLT 1/7

relieved BLT 3/3, and BLT 3/3 was retracted by surface craft from Green Beach. Upon retraction of BLT 3/3, Co L, 3/7, was returned to the control of BLT 3/7. Companies A, B, and D, and the battalion command group of BLT 1/7 and 50% of Co C were helilifted in to the area. The remainder of Co C was helilifted to the regimental CP complex. The balance of Co C moved overland to close upon the regimental CP at 2100H. Co C, 1/7, was to provide security not only for the logistics installations, helicopter landing zone, and command post contained in the RLT-7 complex, but also security for Green Beach. The 107mm Howtar battery displaced on August 20<sup>th</sup> to a firing position within the RLT-7 CP perimeter to support continued operations to the south and to provide cover for the eventual retraction of units over the beach.

Prior to completion of the helilifts, TAORs were assigned and both BLT 1/7 and BLT 3/7 were assigned the missions to conduct search and clear operations within their TAORs, to confirm the VC KIA count, to collect any material of intelligence value, and to eliminate VC resistance that might remain in the area.

An ARVN operation conducted in conjunction with Operation Starlite, code name Tu Luc 168, commenced at 0600H on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The ARVN task organization included the 3<sup>rd</sup> Vietnamese Marine Battalion; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 51<sup>st</sup> ARVN Regiment; three platoons of 105/155mm artillery; the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Personnel Carrier Troop, 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron; one company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> ARN Regiment; and the 11<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalion. The ARVNs operated in a square-shaped area which extended east nearly to Nam Yen (3) and (4) and about as far south as Quang Ngai City. The ARVNs planned to attack northeast in the planned 2-day operation. A VC captured by the 11<sup>th</sup> ARVN Ranger Battalion during the mopping up revealed that he was a former member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 51<sup>st</sup> ARVN Regiment, captured by the VC back in late May. He was retrained as a member of the VC 80th Battalion. He stated that the Marines had "completely destroyed" the 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and had "badly mauled" two companies of the 80<sup>th</sup> Battalion and one company of the 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion. A third company, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Co, 80<sup>th</sup> Battalion, had suffered "only 20-30 casualties" and had attempted to exfiltrate the battle area only to be turned back by an ARVN blocking force along Rte. 1.

Civilians in the combat zone had presented complications. The first attempts to evacuate them were difficult: the people were frightened and did not trust the Marines. Eventually most of the local populace was placed in local collecting points where they were fed and provided medical attention. Although attempts were made to avoid civilian casualties, some villages were completely destroyed by supporting arms when it became obvious that the enemy occupied fortified positions in them. Colonel Peatross commented:

'No... [supporting fires] were utilized unless called for by one of the units and each had a forward air controller, naval gunfire teams, and forward observes. All weapons were controlled and no fire ashore was conducted unless it could be observed; consequently, neither our craft nor naval gunfire made judgments on military necessity. Only ground units being supported made such judgments.'

There could be no doubt, however, that the hamlets in the area were used by the Viet Cong as staging areas for their operations. Lt. Col Kelly [1/7] provided the following description of Van Tuong (1):

‘The village was encircled with a trench line and double apron fence. The streets had punji traps for personnel and vehicles, as well as spider traps. There were numerous caves throughout the village.’

Accumulated evidence indicated that this hamlet had served as the CP of the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment. The Marines found communication equipment, numerous documents, munitions, rice, and propaganda leaflets in Van Tuong (1).

As for casualties on both sides; BLT 2/4 claimed 342 VC KIA (156 attributed to Co H), 2 VC WIA (and 2 VCC, 33 VCS, and capturing 58 assorted small arms, one ChiCom 3.5” rocket, one 81mm mortar, one 57mm RR, and one .50 cal machine gun, and 110 grenades (apparently all destroyed). Friendly casualties were 18 KIA (Co H had 15), 95 WIA including those not evacuated (Co H had 30) and 9 heat casualties. BLT 2/4 had 3 platoons of PFs assigned from the Binh Son District Headquarters. The PFs had incurred 6 KIA and 6 WIA. A Vietnamese interpreter had been wounded, as had a civilian photographer. BLT 3/3 reported 215 total VC KIA (Co I had 125). Friendly casualties were 19 KIA (14 were in Co I) and 85 WIA (52 in Co I).

BLT 3/7 claimed 60 VC KIA (confirmed), 23 VC KIA (estimated), 17 VCC and 80 VCS captured (3 VC captured were WIA). They also reported capturing 21 weapons and considerable ammunition and explosives, equipment and foodstuffs and a VC headquarters building in An Phuoc (2) destroyed. For friendly casualties, they reported 4 KIA (all in Co L), 18 WIA evacuated, and 3 WIA not evacuated. BLT 1/7 reported 3 WIA as a result of friendly fire. At 202355H, a 5” shell from a NGF support ship had landed on the eastern edge of the battalion CP resulting in 2 died of wounds (DOW) and 1 WIA. Reported enemy casualties were 4 VC KIA and # VC WIA. RLT-7 would claim friendly casualties of 46 KIA, 204 WIA, and 5 DOW. Enemy casualties were 688 VC KIA (which included 115 estimated) and an estimated 263 VC WIA.

The Marines came out of Starlite with a renewed faith in their ability. They had passed their first big test. What they did not fully appreciate was that veteran RVN commanders had seen more than one enemy unit supposedly disappear, only to reappear on the battlefield at full strength a few months later. The 60<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> VC Battalions had taken a beating, but they would be back.

The III MAF G-2 was still receiving reports on VC casualties from Operation Starlite as late as mid-September. The Hoa Vang District Police Chief near DaNang, quoting one of his sources, reported that the VC finance chief for VC Quang Nam Province, presumed to have maintained the VC’s personnel pay records, claimed 1430 VC KIAs. The MAF G-2 rated the report as possibly true, F-3.

Casualties (official) during Operation Starlite according to III MAF:

<u>USMC</u>		<u>VC</u>	
KIA	45	KIA (Confirmed)	614
DOW	6	VCS	25
WIA	203	VCC	9
		Wpns Capt'd	127*

\*Included: 26 M-1's, 4 M-14's, 1 U.S. carbines, 1 ChiCom carbine, 1 Russian carbine, 1 French MAS-36, 9 BARs, 2 ChiCom SMGs, 1 ChiCom RPG-2 (rocket propelled grenade launcher), misc ammunition, grenades, explosive charges, a U.S. AN/PRC-10 tactical radio with antennas, and misc documents (1/3 mailbag filled with captured docs had already been forwarded to 3<sup>rd</sup> ITT with more to follow).

It was believed, based on ITT [Interrogator Translator Team] interrogations of PWs that the VC encountered were remnants of the 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion and possibly the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion (unconfirmed). Reports received through interrogation of not only VC PWs, but also civilians, indicated that the staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment located in Van Tuong (1) split and fled upon the landing of RLT-7. Undoubtedly, a considerable number of the enemy staff was killed or wounded during the initial battle while trying to escape. Positive identity of enemy units remained pending the results of III MAF ITT interrogation of PWs. However, III MAF ITT had stated that BLT 2/4 landed in the middle of the 60<sup>th</sup> VC Battalion and that both the 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the T-121 Heavy Weapons Company (a possible AKA for an element of the 400<sup>th</sup> Heavy Weapons Battalion) were almost completely destroyed. The 80<sup>th</sup> VC Battalion had been confirmed by the III MAF ITT to have been two-thirds destroyed.

Operation Starlite undoubtedly accomplished its mission, for the enemy in the Van Tuong Village complex that once posed so great a threat to the Chu Lai enclave no longer existed as an effective fighting force. The truth of Colonel Peatross' conclusion could not be immediately tested. However, there could be little doubt that Operation Starlite had been the Marines', and possibly the U.S.'s, most significant offensive action to date.

The supply of water proved to be the largest logistic problem encountered during Operation Starlite. Indeed, BLT 2/4 had complained in their after action report that Co G had not received any water or food for 1½ days and that Co E and the command group had received no food and only 30 gallons of water for 1½ days. RLT-7 believed that part of the water resupply problem could be attributed to the shortage of helicopters available to accomplish the supply mission. Another part was the localized shortage of 5 gallon water cans. Units normally hold enough water cans to carry two gallons of water per man per day. This was considered to be inadequate in the Vietnamese climate at this time of year or for fast-moving operations where water trailers, known as "water buffalos" were necessary. Over 1,500 gallons of water per day were supplied to units of RLT-7. Two recommendations regarding water evolved from RLT-7's experience during Operation Starlite:

- (1) That any unit coming into Vietnam, and particularly those conducting operations outside an enclave, should bring enough water cans to provide four gallons per man per day. [Full five gallon water cans weigh 25 lbs.]
- (2) That front line commanders be impressed with the fact that if empty water cans were not collected and returned after resupply, their units may not be resupplied with water. Along that line, it was recommended that litter bags be employed if the situation permits, (e.g., a night defensive position), and the empty water cans could be returned in the same transportation (e.g., amtracs and/or helicopters) that brought them.

While Operation Starlite was going on to the south, units within the Chu Lai enclave continued their increased defensive posture in view of the Viet Cong threats concerning an attack on the Chu Lai airfield during the anniversary of the overthrow of the Japanese and French domination. The Second Battalion's positions on the MLR were occupied by units not involved in Operation Starlite, i.e., Co E's positions were occupied by Co A, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Bn; Co G's positions were occupied by Co L, 3<sup>rd</sup> /4; Co H's positions by Co H, 2/3; and Co F, who did not participate on Starlite occupied their regularly assigned positions on the MLR. On 19 August, Co B, 1/4, had dispatched a patrol to An Tay (1) located in the south-central part of the Ky Ha Peninsula to investigate reports of 80-100 helmeted troops located in the village. The search failed to discover any enemy. Units on the MLR maintained security and no enemy contacts were reported. For the second day in a row, Lt. Gen Krulak, MajGen Walt, and BGen McCutcheon (CG, 1<sup>st</sup> MAW) visited the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines CP.

On 20 August, both 2/4 and 3/3 returned and 1/7 reverted to the operational control of their parent unit. All units conducted aggressive combat patrols and operations without making contact. Those units external to the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines who had occupied MLR positions while 2/4 was away on Starlite returned to their parent units and enclaves. On 21 August, Co C, 1/4, was designated as regimental reserve and Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, was deployed in 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's area to bolster defensive positions (occupying the defense sector vacated by Co C, 1/7, which had been earlier helifted out of the defense area). 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, did not man the MLR but were placed in reserve after returning from Operation Starlite. A report received from the Marine liaison officer at Binh Son indicated two VC companies were inside the southern portion of the TAOR caused an immediate alert of all units. Flare plane and artillery illumination were used, although no enemy could be observed. The alert was ceased by the early morning hours. Aggressive combat patrolling continued.

On 22 August, at 1030H, a platoon from Co M, 3/3, and three squads of engineers with mine detectors searched the beach area from the MLR to the Song Tra Bong for indications of mine emplacement. Reports had been received of large numbers of VC moving north from Binh Son with intentions of mining the area. Investigation had proved negative. Co A, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, Co H, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, and Co L, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, were relieved and departed for their parent units. Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon, completed their defensive mission at 1300H and

was helilifted out of assigned defense sector. At 2200H, an air strike was conducted on the western slope of Hill 270 in grid square (BT 4104). Secondary explosions were observed and the target continued to burn until morning. At 23113H, Co L, 3/3, located on high ground about 600 meters east of Rte. 1 and just north of the Hoa Van hamlet, vicinity of coordinate (BT 564011), received an incoming mortar round resulting in one WIA (evacuated with no further incidents).

### **Operation OLD GOLD**

On 23 August, aggressive patrolling and ambushes continued in the TAOR without making enemy contact. Co I, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, was assigned the mission as regimental reserve. Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, commenced an operation (Old Gold) to gather intelligence of Viet Cong movement outside the western border of the TAOR. During the early morning hours, Co D received three rounds of small arms from the rear of their location. It was determined that MAG-12 personnel around the airstrip were shooting dogs because of a rumor that the VC were using dogs with satchel charges to infiltrate the lines.

On 24 August, artillery fired on a Viet Cong platoon at 0812H and reported killing four VC. Activity within the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines TAOR remained calm throughout the day.

On 25 August, at 1205H, a Co C, 1/4, platoon patrol had completed a helilift to an LZ in a rice paddy just to the south of Khuong Nhon (1), about 1,500 meters southwest of Rte. 1, vicinity of coordinate (BT 437081). Helicopters and troops received moderate sniper fire from the vicinity of Hill 22 (BT 425090) and from Khuong Binh (2) hamlet 600 meters to the east, vicinity of coordinate (BT 443083), while operating in the western part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's sector. The patrol aggressively returned fire, attacked the suspected location, and apprehended four VCS. Helicopters were requested to evacuate the VCS and as they were loading, came under small arms fire. The patrol was also taken under sniper fire and reacted by calling in artillery and an air strike. The patrol advanced after the fire mission without receiving fire. No casualties were sustained nor were any VC bodies discovered. At 2153H, a battalion radio operator in 2/4 reported a "bogey" [i.e., bogus] radio station and tried to establish contact by using the call sign of Perch II. Authentication was requested. Bogus station gave 'wait out' and did not come up again. The radio operator said the bogus radio operator had an oriental accent.

Third Marine Division Order 327-65, dealing with the realignment of the TAOR and assignment of a TAOR to the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, was ordered to be executed. First Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines was providing two rifle platoons to K Battery (SP), 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Marines, which was supporting ARVN operations to the south of Chu Lai. Co C, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion, had returned from Operation Starlite. One tank had been destroyed while engaged with the Viet Cong and other tanks in the company sustained damage and were in need of repair. Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion's Operation Old Gold continued with success. Numerous VC sightings were reported. An air strike was called upon a VC gathering of about 150 personnel. Due to the time of day and the distance from the target, confirmation by body count could not be made; however, air was on target.

On 26 August, enemy probes increased throughout the day; however, no penetrations of the MLR were made. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion employed one flame tank for a night mission to burn brush and to act as a psychological deterrent against the VC. Third Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, relocated its CP in preparation for the final withdrawal from the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines TAOR and Co L conducted a daylight search and clear operation on the Trung Phan Peninsula. There was no contact and the company returned to the MLR by 1500H. First Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, had one rifle platoon each of three rifle companies (Cos A, B, and D) under the operational control of 3/3 employed in their positions on the MLR. This was in preparation for 1/7 moving to occupy the 3/3 positions.

After Operation Starlite, III MAF entered a new stage of operations aimed at striking at enemy main force units. Having eliminated the threat posed to the Chu Lai base by the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment, General Walt considered the time opportune to complete the destruction of the enemy regiment. His intelligence sources indicated that its remnants had withdrawn to the Batangan Peninsula, eight miles south of Van Tuong. After consulting with General Thi [the I Corps commander], General Walt issued a warning order on 26 August to Colonel Peatross for the Marines to plan for a coordinated operation in the area. The Commanding Officer of RLT-7 and the executive staff were briefed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv command post in DaNang of a forthcoming operation.

On 27 August, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, were relieved at 1530H on the MLR by the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines (1/7) and moved behind the MLR awaiting the assignment of a mission. The Third Battalion was directed to deploy two companies around the Chu Lai Airfield for close-in defense and the other two companies placed in a tactical bivouac. The battalion was not to move into an assigned TAOR until completion of a forthcoming operation.

Co C, 1/7, was assigned the mission of 1/7 battalion reserve to conduct continuous daylight motorized patrols behind the MLR. Amtracs in direct support were ordered to furnish all available amtracs to Co C during the hours of darkness to facilitate the movement of the company, if needed, to relieve the OP or to move to a blocking position to contain any penetration of the MLR.

First Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, continued waterborne patrols to prevent enemy infiltration by sea and inland water ways. Small probes occurred during the hours of darkness without injury to the front line Marines. Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon battalion, was retracted from their observation post upon completion of a successful operation; over three hundred VC were sighted in their area of reconnaissance.

On 28 August, enemy contact was reduced to one incident during the day. Co D, 1/4, platoon patrol was fired on by snipers located in an unnamed hamlet between Ky Long (1) and Ky Sanh (1) about 6 kms west of Rte. 1 in vicinity of coordinate (BT 440055). A squad aggressively assaulted in the direction from which the fire came, but the enemy withdrew without a trace. At 1615H, the Marine liaison officer at Binh Son reported that an informant indicated 2,000 Viet Cong had moved to the vicinity of coordinate (BT 4400), a ridgeline about 1 km west northwest

of Hill 661 (Nui Hon Rom). The area was immediately saturated by artillery fire and radar-directed TPQ-10 air strikes were planned for a twelve hour period. Co H, 2/4, departed with a platoon from Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, to the area. Co H had nothing to report. Co B remained in the area the following day. At 1920H, the Ly Tin District Headquarters requested fire missions on VC platoons reportedly located in sandy areas just west of Rte.1, vicinity of coordinates (BT 435096) and (BT 438105). The district intelligence officer reported two VC KIA and 8-10 VC wounded.

On 29 August, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines conducted aggressive squad and platoon patrols without locating the enemy. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, Co C, 1/4 conducted a patrol on Ky Xuan Island accompanied by a local informant and interpreter in anticipation of locating Viet Cong caves and arms caches. The Third Battalion remained in the tactical bivouac behind 1/7's MLR. Co I and two platoons from Co L provided airfield defense and the new 3/3 Battalion CP was established along a road about 1 km southwest of Rte. 1 opposite the south end of the airfield, vicinity of coordinate (BT 530022). Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, reported capturing 12 VCS while seeking information concerning the movement of the 2,000 Viet Cong reported the previous day in the vicinity of grid square (BT 4400) while Co H, 2/4, continued its patrol in the area for the second day without making a contact. In the early evening hours of 29 August, 1/7 was told to be on increased alert because of a possible attack on 2/4, the adjacent unit on the right flank. The expected attack did not materialize.

On 30 August, in response to an intelligence report from the Ly Tin District Chief, 1/4 dispatched a platoon to Khuong Tho (1) hamlet 2 kms west of Rte. 1, vicinity of grid square (BT 4407). The platoon received automatic weapons fire and attacked in the direction of the fire; however, the Viet Cong had already eluded the attackers.

Plans had been underway on 30 August to establish 3/7 within the Chu Lai TAOR, and at 0900H Colonel Peatross issued his concept of operations and initial planning guidance to subordinate commanders and supporting arms representatives for the forthcoming operation.

On 31 August, a Co D patrol sustained 2 KIA and 4 WIA when it ran into a suspected minefield in the far western area of the 1 /4 sector at the junction of two trails vicinity of coordinate (BT 420084). Upon initial discovery of a booby trap, members of the patrol advanced about 800 meters to the east. In doing so, one of the Marines detonated a mine (an M-49 type AP mine) along a third trail vicinity of coordinate (BT 428084) which caused the six casualties. Among the dead was 1<sup>st</sup> Lt James M. Mitchell, Jr., the platoon commander, who had been struck in the chest with fragmentation from the mine. The casualties were evacuated and the remaining patrol members were directed to retrace their steps back to Rte. 1 for pick up. The area of the incident was then taken under artillery zone fire in an area of 600 by 900 meters. No further action was reported in that area. (Lt Larry Faughn, 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, Co A, 1 /4, claimed he was "gardening" on Hill 213 on 31 August. Faughn later defined "Marine Gardening" as "the digging of holes and the planting of mines.")

At 1811H, an Ontos from Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> AT Battalion, returning to its position with Co H, had an accidental discharge. Two civilian construction workers riding in a vehicle behind the Ontos were injured from the back blast and flying glass from their vehicle windshield. They were treated by a corpsman from Co H and released. At 1935H, Headquarters, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, received word of a suspected VC attack of the Chu Lai area. One hour later, a "flash" report was received stating that the VC were located in the high ground between Hills 385 and 237 in the vicinity of coordinate (BT 509002), and in the hills just to the south of Tri Binh (2) vicinity of coordinate (BS 530975). Immediate area saturation fire by artillery commenced, as did numerous air strikes. Due to the onset of darkness, no surveillance was possible. As of 2400H, no attack had materialized.

BLT 3/7 started offloading from the Special Landing Force at first light. Unloading was to be completed on the morning of 1 September.

During August, no specific dates provided, five high altitude B-52 carpet bombing strikes were conducted against the suspected location of the headquarters of Military Region 5 (MR-5) along the Quang Tin-Quang Ngai provincial border 25 kilometers southwest of Tam Ky. Marine and ARVN reconnaissance units were inserted to check out the areas struck and were able to confirm that the strikes had indeed hit the areas requested but were unable to uncover any widespread casualties or equipment damage.

On a somewhat lighter note, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines reported that a recon patrol (NFI) had heard elephants trumpeting in the high ground between Hills 410 and 661 in the vicinity of coordinate (BS 470997) approximately 6 miles southwest of Chu Lai on 31 August.

During August 1965, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines reported 511 VC KIA and 28 VC captured and friendly casualties of 41 KIA, 5 DOW, 239 WIA, and two deaths and one seriously wounded as a result of non-battle accidents. These figures include 2/4 and 3/3's activities in Operation Starlite.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv issued orders on 31 August directing RLT-7, with BLTs 1/7, 1/4, and 3/7, in coordination with two ARVN battalions, to conduct an assault on Cap Batangan and An Ky Peninsula about 8 miles southeast of the Van Tuong complex (and about 23 miles south of Chu Lai). The unclassified code name for this operation was to be Operation Piranha.

Of Operation Starlite, Time Magazine (7 January 1966 issue) had reported that, "On a peninsula below Chu Lai, 5,000 Marines, aided by rocket firing Cobra helicopters, jet fighters and naval guns from Task Force 77, killed close to 700 guerillas. But this, they soon learned was Vietnam. No sooner did Operation Starlite end, said an exasperated officer, than the surviving Viet Cong 'seeped back in like water through a wet rag.'"

### **September 1965**

The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines conducted no regimental-size operations during the month of September. Instead, operations were to be conducted as directed by the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines

Headquarters up to and including battalion (-) in size. Individual battalions were also to conduct company-sized and smaller operations during the month.

The stabilized battalion trans-placement system terminated in September, thus necessitating a shift to a system of individual personnel replacement for all units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv. The majority of incoming replacements would be flown to Da Nang via Military Air Transportation System (MATs) special aircraft beginning in October 1965. Additionally, the termination of the unit trans-placement system in September made it mandatory to reassign personnel among all units of the Division in order to preclude the simultaneous rotation of large numbers of personnel from any given unit. An inter-battalion transfer of platoons and battalion H&S Co elements for units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Marines had been commenced in July and would continue until November when battalions of those regiments would have only 200 of their original personnel remaining. Planning had begun in September for a dilution program designed to spread the rotation tour dates (RTDs) of personnel of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. The dilution would be accomplished by an intra-battalion transfer of rifle companies and H&S Co elements to begin in October 1965. Final spread of RTDs would be accomplished by selected short touring of personnel in specific MOSs.

Several morale-enhancing benefits for those serving in Vietnam took effect on 1 September. All members received a substantial increase in base pay as a result of a recently approved Pay Bill. In addition to the raise in base pay, the Special Pay for Duty Involving Hostile Fire [hostile fire pay] was increased from \$55 per month to \$65. Secondly, a "free mail" privilege was established which allowed all persons to dispatch letter-type mail to any state, possession, territory, APO or FPO address, without charge.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv G-2 released their analysis of Marine casualties incurred by enemy action in Vietnam in September, which showed an increasing reliance of the Viet Cong on booby traps and mines to impede friendly operations. Marine casualties during September accounted for over 60% of the total; indeed, over 50% (14 of 28) of the Marines killed in the Da Nang TAOR during the month had resulted from mines and booby traps. The G-2's study thus far revealed the following:

- The VC employment of mines and booby traps was widespread but tended to be unplanned and oftentimes indiscriminate. A great array of devices had ranged from crude to sophisticated. Emplacement had followed both conventional and ingenious methods.
- The VC were primarily using materials picked up from the ARVNs and Marines, such as fragmentation grenades, artillery duds, U.S. manufactured shape charges, U.S. comm wire, explosive detonators, discarded radio batteries, TNT and Composition 4 (C-4) explosives. Intelligence had revealed that shipments to North Vietnam of basic chemicals for explosives from Communist Bloc countries would ultimately give the Viet Cong substantial stocks of explosives for both tactical and terroristic purposes.
- The VC had marked mine and booby trap emplacements by various means to warn other VC and local villagers. Some markings could be located by alert observation. Some

villagers had voluntarily informed Marines of locations of emplaced mines and booby traps throughout the area. Whether this was motivated by patriotism or a desire to remove danger from themselves was yet unclear.

- The requirement for continuous friendly patrolling day and night afforded the VC the opportunity for indiscriminate planting of mines/booby traps throughout the areas of operation and still have reasonable assurance of detonation by Marine patrols and offensive actions.
- As Marine patrols were usually small and operated separately, there had been too much caution in areas suspected to have been booby trapped which enhanced the vulnerability of these patrols to ambush.
- The VC had no qualms in emplacing mines and booby traps in areas inhabited even by their own people.
- Exhaustion from constant patrolling could reduce the fine edge of alertness necessary to discern the presence of mines and booby traps.

During September 1965, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines had recorded 6 VC KIA and 73 VC captured and friendly casualties of 6 KIA, 29 WIA (many due to booby traps and mines), and 8 non-battle seriously wounded and one non-battle death.

While the RLT-7 elements including 3/3 (-) had been away from the Chu Lai enclave 6 to 10 September for Operation Piranha, a composite unit, consisting of Co I, 3/3 detachments from MAGs 12 and 36, and Force Logistics Support Unit #1, defended the airfield. Co L defended that part of the MLR vacated by 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, in cooperation with Co I, 3/4 (which had arrived from the Hue-Phu Bai enclave on 5 September for that purpose).

### **Operation PIRANHA**

On 3 September, the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines published Operation Order 423-65. In contrast to Starlite, the planning and preparations for the new operation [unclassified code name Piranha] were extensive. CG 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv had issued Operation Order 330-65 on 31 August 1965 and from 31 August to 2 September, Marine and naval commanders traveled between Da Nang and Chu Lai to be briefed by both the III MAF and 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv staffs, coordinated their activities with the South Vietnamese, and prepared detailed plans.

Operation Piranha was launched based on intelligence which indicated the Cap Batangan area, roughly 11 kms to the south southeast of the Chu Lai enclave, was a major VC infiltration route. Historically, it was a reception point along an infiltration route designed primarily for moving supplies and equipment rather than personnel which were more apt to come overland down the Ho Chi Minh trail to the west. Since 1959, the supplies and equipment being sent south from NVN, resupply by sea to this area had become fairly routine. In 1965 and 1966, more than 50 percent of VC/NVA supplies came by sea. Ports of entry along the coast of Quang Ngai Province were in the vicinity of Cape Batangan, Duc Pho, and Sa Huynh.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv's G-2 had established the enemy currently in that area to consist of VC main and local forces, supported by an undetermined number of guerrillas. Among the main force elements held to be in the immediate objective area were two elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment; the 90<sup>th</sup> Battalion [with a reported strength of 350] which had been identified in the Van Tuong complex just prior to the commencement of Operation Starlite, had reportedly escaped intact and still possessed its full combat potential, and had moved south to the Cape Batangan area as early as 15 August. The second element was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Co of 80<sup>th</sup> Battalion [with an estimated strength of 100]. The past actions of the 80<sup>th</sup> Battalion, which had been badly mauled during Starlite with its 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Cos decimated and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Co (which had reportedly incurred 20-30 casualties) and its attempted exfiltration only to be turned back by an ARVN blocking force on Rte. 1 had already been established by a former VC member captured by the 11<sup>th</sup> ARVN Ranger Battalion during Operation Starlite. The VCC had claimed that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Co was presently operating in the area immediately northwest of Cape Batangan.

Another major force believed to be in the general area of the objective area was the 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion; a local force unit which normally operated south of the Chu Lai TAOR and east of Rte.1, presently held to be located 7 kms west northwest of Cape Batangan with an estimated strength of 500. Believed to be armed and equipped about the same as the main force 90<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was earlier held to be subordinate to the Quang Tin Provincial Local Force headquarters and then suspected to be located well north. It now was considered to be subordinate to the Quang Ngai Provincial Local Force (although not identified to have been in the Van Tuong battle area).

The Quang Ngai Provincial Local Force Headquarters, along with four subordinate specialty companies and platoons (i.e., recon, liaison, engineer, and transportation units), was believed to have been directing the fortifications of the Cape Batangan Peninsula and environs. Initially, the VC defenses had been found to be oriented westward, but recent photography indicated that during July and especially in early August, the VC had extended their fortifications to include sea approaches. Several suspected VC installations were also listed as being located within the objective area: an arms factory; two arms and ammunition caches; and a radio station.

As for the terrain in the amphibious objective area, the high ground on the rocky headlands southeast of the landing beach afforded excellent observation of sea approaches and the beach. Long range fields of fire for direct fire weapons were excellent and enfiladed the beach along its entire length. The high ground on the peninsula proper provided excellent fields of fire over the eastern approaches. Observation and fields of fire over beach exists were limited due to scrub growth and scattered pine. Conversely, this same vegetation affords concealment for individuals and small units, as did the built- up areas. The terraced paddies on the peninsula provided protection from direct fire weapons.

The primary obstacle to a Marine landing force were the small rivers, the Song Cho Moi which joined with the Song Chau Me Dong vicinity coordinate (BS 763832) to form the Song Sa Ky, would become the demarcation line between the U.S. Marine and ARVN sectors. The bridges

over the Song Chau Me Dong, all in the ARVN sector, were also considered key terrain. The pine growth paralleling the landing beach would be considered an obstacle to vehicular movement south and wet rice paddies in the neck of the peninsula were obstacles to both wheel and track vehicles.

The RLT-7 mission was to execute a combined amphibious and helicopter borne assault in conjunction with RVN forces on the Cape Batangan and An Ky Peninsula to destroy Viet Cong forces and positions. The RLT-7 concept of operations for Piranha was similar to that of Starlite. Two Marine battalions, Lt.Col Kelly's 1/7 and Lt. Col Muir's 3/3, would be embarked on Seventh Fleet shipping, while another battalion, Lt. Col Bodley's 3/7, would conduct a heliborne assault of the objective area. On D-Day, Kelly's battalion would land across White Beach, north of the Batangan Peninsula and push southwest while Bodley's helilifted Marines would set up blocking positions 4,000 meters inland. Muir's battalion would remain at sea as a floating reserve. Participating Vietnamese battalions, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 4th ARVN Regiment, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Vietnamese Marine Battalion, would be moved by helicopter into the region south of Bodley's position. There the South Vietnamese would conduct a search and clear mission on the An Ky Peninsula which was separated from Batangan by the Song Sa Ky river. The ARVN portion of the coordinated search and destroy operation was designated as Lien Ket 8.

On 6 September, the amphibious task group, consisting of the attack transport Bayfield, two dock landing ships [LSDs], Belle Grove and Cabildo, and three tank landing ships [LSTs], sailed for the amphibious objective area. They arrived early the following morning and were joined by the naval gunfire ships, the cruiser Oklahoma City (CLG 5), and two destroyers, Prichett and Orleck. In addition, the high-speed destroyer, Diachenko (APD 123) stood offshore prepared to provide direct fire.

On 7 September, the assigned forces would conduct simultaneous surface and helicopter assaults on the objective. The helicopter assault forces were to secure the high ground to the west to block the escape of Viet Cong forces and to protect the main attack. The surface force would land by amtracs over the beach to destroy Viet Cong forces on Cape Batangan Peninsula. Two Vietnamese battalions would enter the objective area to destroy enemy on the An Ky Peninsula. Small boats from the South Vietnamese Navy's Junk Division 15 would screen the local fishing craft from the American naval task group. By 0500H on the morning of 7 September, all amphibious forces were in position, except for the amphibious assault ship Princeton (LPH-5) with Muir's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion embarked. It arrived later that day.

Air operations over the objective area began with the 0520H arrival of a Marine KC-130, configured to function as an airborne DASC, the first combat use of an airborne DASC, until one could be established ashore [3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv would provide a DASC to operate with the RLT-7 FSCC]. Shortly afterwards, a U.S. Air Force C-123 flare plane reported on station to provide illumination [sunrise would occur on 0635H on 7 September]. Under the light of the flares, eight A-4s from MAG-12 strafed the landing beach with 20mm cannon fire from 0555 to 0615H to detonate mines along the water's edge and to deny the VC the opportunity to plan additional moves. At 0620H,

a lone A-4 laid a smoke screen across the promontory on the south flank of the beach to cover the assault of the landing force. Beginning at 0620H, eight F-4s and 4 A-4s dropped eight tons of 'Daisy cutter' bombs to prepare the helicopter landing zones. And also at 0628H on 7 September, the first scheduled wave consisting of two LVTE-1s came ashore on White Beach to clear enemy mines on the beach. The second wave sprayed the beach with machinegun fire from 0625 to 0635H in order to protect the two LVTEs in the first wave. The assault elements of Co A and C, 1/7, in amtracs, landed at 0635H. The troops dismounted at the water's edge, deployed, and secured the beach to the dune line. The enemy's reaction was a few sniper rounds.

The entire battalion was ashore within 20 minutes and enemy resistance continued to be very light. The tractors proved their worth in plowing paths through the numerous hedgerows where any booby traps were likely to be hidden. The battalion CP was initially situated along the backshore of the landing beach on the edge of the seaside hamlet of Chau Me (2). The companies set about seizing and securing their assigned battalion objectives.

At 0741H, Cos A and C, 1/7, seized Hill 33 (Objective A) about 1,200 meters southwest of the landing beach without enemy contact. They did, however, encounter approximately 190 frightened elderly people and children civilians who had fled from Chau Me (2) and sought refuge on the sandy part of the beach. Two civilians had been killed in the air strike and two more were wounded and evacuated for medical aid. At 0842H, Co D, 1/7, landed and began a search and clear operation in Chau Me (2). One male suspected of being a VC was detained. Co B, 1/7, was ordered to seize Objective B, along the northwest coast of the Cape Batangan promontory. In so doing, they found forty or fifty carrier pigeons in Chua Thuan (1). Once Battalion Objective B was secured (by 1230H), the company was then directed to seize and secure Battalion Objective F, the high ground to the south of Chau San (1). At 1030H, a LVTE-1 detonated two explosive charges at the southern end of Chau Me (2) where the beach ended and the pine growth began, which damaged one of the teeth on the LVTE-1's plow. Then at 1200H, in the same general vicinity, a Vietnamese male, suspected of being a Viet Cong, emerged from a cave and was captured. Co D moved to seize Objective D, the hamlet of Chau Me (1). While searching and clearing Chau Me (1), Co D destroyed three small tunnels. The objective was secured by 11536H and a platoon was detached to provide security for the Beach Support Area (BSA).

At 1430H, Co B found nine VC in a cave in the vicinity of Objective I (India) along the northeast coast of the Batangan promontory. In the only reported fire fight (albeit short fire fight) in the 1/7 area on D-Day, three VC were killed and six captured. Simple Viet Cong training aids such as wooden rifles and manuals were also found in the cave. This was also the location of a suspected radio station.

Between 1700 and 1800H, the BLT 1/7 CP and the 81mm mortar platoon were displaced to a new location near Objective C (i.e., along the road cut overlooking the trail on the southern flank of the beach area and about 1,400 meters from the landing beach). At 1707H, Co A displaced to the northern edge of Chau Thuan (2) and along the beach on the northern coast. After sunset, their route of advance was illuminated by 81mm mortars. They reached their

objective at 2150H and tied in with Co C. During the night, Cos B and C conducted security patrols of assigned sectors but no contact was made.

After the landing of the first wave of BLT 3/7, sixteen of the UH-34Ds flew to Quang Ngai and began shuttling the two South Vietnamese battalions into their landing zones, LZ Birch (2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> ARVN Regiment) located between Rte. 521 and Hill 85 and LZ Pine (3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Battalion VNMC) along the Song Van Giang in a rice paddy to the east of Dap My (2), 6 kms west of the An Ky Peninsula (and about 5 kms southwest of Hill 42 and the U.S. Marines of BLT 3/7). The Vietnamese began landing at 0715H and immediately set up defensive blocking positions before conducting search and clear operations in a northeasterly direction. These were the only opposed helicopter landings of the day. Four U.S. Army Huey gunships and two of the Marine helicopters were hit by ground fire. As the Vietnamese troops moved out of the landing zones, the enemy firing stopped.

Co I, 3/7, commenced landing at LZ Sparrow at 0720H. They immediately set up a blocking position and spent the remainder of the day improving their position. At 1800H, a two platoon ambush was set up along the dry weather road lying to the north of the hill (and about 2 kms southwest of the hamlet of Chau Me (12) and the positions of BLT 1/7). At 2200H, the remaining platoon of Co I set up a blocking position overlooking Phu My (2) along the southern end of the high ground containing LZ Oak and the battalion's blocking positions. Co L, 3/7, landed in two heliborne waves at LZ Eagle on Nui A Linh at 0800 and 0845H. At 1330H, the company conducted search and clear operations in the hamlets of Phuoc Son (2) and Lien Quang (2). A French carbine and material for constructing booby traps were found during the search.

Elements of Co M, 3/7, landed at LZ Kiwi at 0700H, followed by the rest of the company at 0930H. A fire team reconnaissance patrol which was sent to check out Lein Quang (3) at 0800H had returned at 1000H and reported that they had received about 10 rounds of sniper fire from the village. There were no casualties. A reinforced platoon was sent to search and clear Lein Quang (3) at 1145H, but met with no enemy contact nor found anything of intelligence value. At 1330H, a platoon of Co M was helilifted about 5 kms to the northwest to conduct a sweep of the heavy timber area on which a ten minute air strike had been conducted prior to their landing. Two suspected arms and ammunition caches were reported in the area; one at Chau Binh (2) and the other a km to the east of the Chau Binh hamlet. Two Vietnamese, hiding in a likely ambush site, were fired upon when sighted. They both fled, apparently unharmed and with no visible weapons. At 1800H, Co M set up blocking positions on and to the south of Nui Lon along Rte. 521, about 3-4 kms to the west northwest of the landing beach. At 1830H, a platoon of Co M reported finding the body to the south of Phu Nhieu (4) of a Vietnamese male who had apparently died of shrapnel wounds.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, RLT-7 established a CP ashore just to the west of Chau Thuan (2) near the eastern end of the pine growth behind the landing beach. Two 107mm Mortar (Howtar) batteries, one from 3/11 and one from 3/12, both in general support of the RLT, were located nearby.

At 0945H on 8 September, Co B, accompanied by news reporters began search and clear operations on the coastal side of Cape Batangan. At 1230H, six VCS were captured in a cave 300 meters to the southeast of Chau Thuan (1) in the vicinity of coordinate (BS 789847). From this cave four VC were captured immediately. Other VC started firing from the mouth of the cave. After a futile effort to get the occupants of the cave to cease fire and surrender, demolitions were exploded in the mouth of the cave. Sixty-six VC were killed with none surviving the explosion. The cave contained a quantity of Chinese medical supplies, twenty-five grenades, VC uniforms, two M-1 rifles, small arms ammunition, money (6,000 Vietnamese piasters), and some packs. During the search of the cave, a lieutenant and eight Marines were overcome by the lack of oxygen. The lieutenant did not recover and died of asphyxia. Near the cave, Marines from Co B exchanged fire with two snipers in spider holes. The snipers were wounded and captured.

On 9 September, Co A, 1/7, captured fifty-one VCS in An Hai (1) while searching. The company administered first aid to the people of the hamlet as a gesture of good will, however, the villagers became hysterical when the fifty-one VCS were marched away. At 1800H, Co A established a night defensive position on the southeastern portion of the battalion defensive perimeter at Hill 38.

BLT 1/7 began returning to White Beach at 0800H on the 10 September, in order to commence back loading on the USS Bayfield (APA-33). All elements of the battalion were on board by 1430 and had returned to Chu Lai by 2100H. By 1715H, all elements of BLT 3/7 had been helilifted back to Chu Lai. Lt. Col Muir's 3/3 had remained at sea as the floating reserve and was never committed ashore. It had been an RLT-7 and ARVN operation. Only scattered concentrations of VC forces were encountered during the four-day operation, and most VC casualties resulted from the discovery and destruction of caves and fighting holes, e.g., 66 were killed in a single cave. During the operation, contact was made only with local guerrilla units and field medical personnel. VCC taken during the operation were primarily guerrillas who were unable to add significantly to the Marines' knowledge of the VC. According to the 2<sup>nd</sup> ARVN Division G-2 Advisor, the operation resulted in the disruption of a VC guerrilla "concentration battalion" [sic] which had been operating in the area for the past few months. This battalion was supposedly a loosely organized unit made up of guerrillas from the coastal areas of Quang Ngai."

On 3 September, General Walt's headquarters had provided firm guidance to all concerned regarding the civilian populace in the Operation Piranha objective area. "Population census statistics indicate approximately 20,000 civilians in and near the objective area. This situation demands firm control of all combat elements and in particular fire support units to insure positive identification of targets as hostile before they are taken under fire. Indiscriminate destruction of villages or hamlets [is] absolutely forbidden."

A total of 15 artillery missions, mainly illumination and H&I fires, had been fired (expending 216 rounds). Surprisingly, none of the approximately 3,300 dwellings located in the Marine portion of the objective area were destroyed and there were only two civilian casualties (2 WIA). This was attributed by III MAF as a direct result of troop indoctrination and the prudent

use of supporting arms. Lt Col Kelly of 1/7, in his after action report for Operation Starlite, had noted that “more concern must be given to the safety of the villages. Instances were noted where villages were severely damaged or destroyed by napalm or naval gunfire, wherein the military necessity of doing so was dubious.”

It appeared once again that elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment might have slipped the noose. “The target of the operation...had withdrawn from the Batangan Peninsula before Operation Piranha began. Local villagers told the Marines that Viet Cong units had been in the area but had left, some less than 24 hours before Piranha started. Intelligence reports later indicated that the enemy regiment began leaving the area on 4 September, coinciding with the increased movement of the amphibious ships at Chu Lai and the increased activity of the South Vietnamese naval junk force.” According to the BLT 3/7 after action report, “Two of the VCS interrogated by the S-2 section stated that VC told them of the impending Marine landing prior to their departure from the area. The number of ships off NIS 12 for one week prior to 3 September was 12. Four days prior to D-Day there were approximately 22. These ships and vehicles, troops, and equipment staged on the beach for loading aboard LSTs [was] an obvious indication of an impending landing.” The battalion then went on to recommend that tighter security precautions be taken to prevent dissemination of information to forces other than U.S. concerning upcoming operations until the last possible moment; that the time element between commencement of planning and execution of an operation be reduced to a minimum; that visible indications of large scale operations in a particular sector be reduced by shifts of forces between enclaves and by use of the SLF in conjunction with helilifted land-based forces; and that in order to move effectively and conduct surprise operations against the VC, a certain amount of over-flight reconnaissance should be eliminated.

On 2 September (almost a week before the scheduled D-Day), Lt. Gen Krulak in Hawaii had sent a message to CMC stating that after having reviewed the array of messages thus far on Operation Piranha, “There is justification for the deduction that there has been too much talk, and the likelihood of compromise has been correspondingly increased. Of equal concern is the large number of people at many levels who know, the human predilection to discuss, and the consequent danger of a word getting to the wrong ears. Not mentioned... is the fact, unlike Starlite, Piranha has been in planning for about two weeks. Even more significant, Vietnamese forces are to take part, and some Vietnamese commanders have information on the project. The Vietnamese are not noted for security consciousness. This adds up to an estimate that achievement of surprise, at the Starlite level, is not likely, and that Piranha may well come up empty, the VC having moved out.” He accorded that conclusion with a 75 per cent probability.

Whatever success attained by Operation Piranha “revolved around the locating, searching, and destruction of the numerous well-hidden tunnels and caves throughout the area. In carrying out these operations, it was apparent that the searching units would have to be furnished with additional equipment such as battle lanterns, rope, lightweight telephone communications from the searching party to the mouth of the cave, Navy oxygen breathing

apparatus (Type A-3 with canister), and tear gas. Although tear gas had been prohibited, its use would save lives of civilians and Marines alike and provide a more discriminatory method of clearing enemy positions than did the use of white phosphorous or high explosive grenades. The water shortages that had plagued RLT-7 during Starlite had not been entirely resolved during Operation Piranha. The RLT's engineer company had established an open well that had been cleared and excavated in the BSA area. The well water only needed chlorine treatment to be potable. A total of 18,000 gallons of potable water were issued during the operation. Headquarters Co, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, including attachments, carried 150 five-gallon water cans, one lister bag, and five 400-gallon water trailers on this operation. The average consumption of water was 1½ gallons per man per day. As for the BLTs, 1/7, which had come across the beach, had carried 244 five-gallon water cans and one 400-gallon water trailer and the helicopter-borne BLT 3/7 had carried 250 water cans. Both battalions consumed an average of two gallons of water per man per day. No doubt about it, the level of combat activity significantly impacted upon water consumption. Nevertheless, difficulties in keeping enough water cans for resupply was again experienced during Piranha and it was recommended that each battalion carry 300 five-gallon water cans on future operations. It was further recommended that more lister bags and water trailers be utilized by headquarters and CP units in order to free up additional water cans for use by assault units.

According to unconfirmed reports, the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment had moved north into Quang Tin Province after operating for four months in Quang Ngai Province. The probable reasons given for the move were that the regiment required a safe area for re-grouping and training and that it needed rice that was available in the Tien Phuoc area. A captured VC operations order indicated that the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment's original move from Quang Tin to Quang Ngai had been part of a five-phase plan which was to terminate on 20 August with an attack on Binh Son District Headquarters.

It had been nearly four weeks since Operation Starlite and it was believed that in an additional four weeks the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment would once again be able to conduct regimental-size operations. This conclusion was based on an analysis of previous attacks in which elements of that regiment had suffered heavy losses. The build-up of its force would be accomplished by transferring the unit's name to a relatively new unit composed of local forces and elements of other units superimposed on the skeleton of the original unit, which pretty much echoed the earlier opinion of the I Corps Advisory Team opinion vis-à-vis the 108<sup>th</sup> Regt. There had also been reports that the 400<sup>th</sup> Battalion (the heavy weapons battalion in the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment) had been disbanded in September of 1965 and its companies directly subordinated to the regimental headquarters, e.g., an anti-aircraft co, a 75mm RR anti-tank co, an 81mm mortar co, etc. The III MAF G-2 continued to hold the 108<sup>th</sup> Regt in the same general area west of Chu Lai. The III MAF analysts were also detecting what appeared to be a reorganization of the structure of VC forces involving the integration of North Vietnamese troops into the existing units within the III MAF TAORs. The PAVN (or North Vietnamese Army) troops were reportedly being sent in to be integrated into local main force units to boost morale which had been deflated by Starlite.

First Battalion conducted a two-company search and destroy operation 1-4 September. The operation involved combat patrolling before and after the main event. The scheme of maneuver consisted of having one company patrol from the north and establish a blocking position. The following day, the second company landed and maneuvered south to north to the western portion of the TAOR and vicinity of Ky Long (1) and Ky Long (2) (BT436054). The operation resulted in three Marines WIA and three VC killed, with one French MAS-36 rifle captured. During this operation it was worth noting that the 60mm mortar was tactically employed by elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines for the first time since World War II.

John Albrecht: "... we were spread out moving north and observed the enemy but were under orders not to fire unless fired upon. They had pith helmets and were in a tree line in front of us. We took heavy automatic weapon fire and Sgt Hunter and I took cover in a grave yard with a cement fence around a burial site. The fence opening faced the enemy, and the rounds were rattling around in side of the enclosure. Sgt Hunter said he could see the SOBs and held his weapon over the wall and let go with a full magazine. We then got the hell out of there. A four man team stayed behind and called in fire support. This particular area of operations had a humorous side to it. There was a sniper on the hill and he apparently could never figure out the windage on his rifle. His elevation was correct but he would constantly shoot between us as we crossed the rice paddies and after a while we just kept on walking. A visiting colonel called in A-4 fire or artillery on him. It was sad to see him go."

The Third Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, saw action in September with its participation in Operation Piranha to the south and Operations Rice Straw and Golden Fleece with the 9<sup>th</sup> Marines to the north in the Da Nang area. On 4 September, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion embarked Cos K and M aboard the USS Iwo Jima as the RLT-7 reserve during Operation Piranha on the Batangan Peninsula. However, the conditions were such as to preclude the need for the commitment of the reserve element, and the battalion was returned to the operational control of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines on 8 September. Two days later, on 10 September, the Regiment received a verbal frag order from CG, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division to move the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, to Da Nang. This move found the Third Battalion under the operational control of the 9<sup>th</sup> Marines and participation in Operations Rice Straw and Golden Fleece. The operation lasted a total of four days and resulted in three Marine KIAs and 18 WIAs with four VC killed. The majority of the casualties were results of mines and sporadic sniper fire. No large VC units were encountered. The most costly single booby trap during the operation caused the death of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Commander, Lt. Col Joseph E. Muir, his radio operator, and wounded four others.

On 2 September, Colonel William G. Johnson, the MAG-36 commander, established his headquarters on the Ky Ha Peninsula, just north of the SATS field where construction had begun on a helicopter facility for the Chu Lai base. When the group arrived, the helicopter pad had been fully graded and about one-third or more of the matting laid. MAG-36 would provide its own security force for the defense of the facility. Even with the arrival of MAG-36 in the Chu Lai

enclave, helicopter support during the period [the month of September] had decreased considerably as compared to the previous four months. It was reported that the reduction of support is due to the overall commitments of helicopters throughout the area resulting from more units and increased tempo of operations.

During the absence of major units from the Chu Lai area, a Co C, 1 /4, platoon, operating to the south west of Rte.1 near coordinate (BT 450070), 6-7 September, detonated a homemade type booby trap at 1755H on the 6<sup>th</sup> resulting in one WIA. The next morning at 0850H, two more casualties were sustained (one KIA, one WIA) when a Marine stepped on a pressure type mine south of the hamlet of Ky Sanh (1) vicinity of coordinate (BT 451052). At noon, a third WIA was incurred by a grenade type booby trap nearby vicinity of coordinate (BT 450053). An hour and a half earlier, the platoon had heard what sounded like .45 caliber fire near Ky Long (1) to the west of Ky Sanh (1) at (BT 445053) and had sent a squad to investigate. At coordinate (BT 451059), the squad encountered several VC and a fire fight ensued resulting in 2 VC KIA. The squad found what appeared to be a VC mine factory.

On 7 September, Co I, 3/3, while on a combat patrol on the Trung Phan Peninsula, incurred one KIA as a result of long range sniper fire from the Son Tra (2) hamlet along the eastern bank of the Song Tra Bong vicinity coordinate (BT 626014) at 1330H. At 1600, Co I suffered an additional casualty to sniper fire (one WIA), this time along the beach north of Son Tra (1) vicinity coordinate (BT 0625022).

At 2240H on the 8<sup>th</sup>, Third Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, returned from Operation Piranha by helicopter from the Princeton (LPH-5) and bivouacked in the vicinity of the battalion CP. The following day, the Third Battalion had some unanticipated "welcome home" activity when they helilifted Cos K and M about noontime to Trung An (2), 2 kms east of Rte. 1 and just south of the Quang Tin/Quang Ngai Province line vicinity of coordinate (BT 585001), in response to a report that 100 VC were looking for members of the PF and threatening to burn the village. Eleven tanks and five Ontos were dispatched on Rte. 1 to act as a blocking force vicinity of coordinate (BT 557010) along Rte. 1 and about 2 kms northwest of Trung An (2); however, the two-company sweep netted nothing and ended at 1700H. Also on the 9<sup>th</sup>, Co I, 3/4, conducted a hammer and anvil operation in the hamlets just west of the mouth of the Song Tra Bong. As a result of the sweep, four WIAs were sustained when an M-26 booby trapped grenade was detonated. The company returned at 1135H with fifty-five VCS in tow. By 1130H on the 11<sup>th</sup>, Co I, 3 /4, had been helilifted back to Hue Phu Bai. At 0615H on the 9<sup>th</sup>, Co I, 3/3, sustained four WIAs as a result of a booby trapped M-26 grenade in a rice paddy area along the western bank of the Song Tra Bong vicinity coordinate (BT 614007).

The last units of the RLT-7 headquarters and BLT 1/7 had debarked from assigned shipping at the Chu Lai enclave. First Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, went immediately to its assigned positions on the MLR relieving units of 3/7 that had temporarily filled the gap on the MLR after being retracted from their zone of action in Operation Piranha. After being relieved by 1/7, 3/7 resumed its position as regimental reserve. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, 1/7 resumed active deep patrolling in its assigned

area. The Third Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, assumed control of a portion of the Chu Lai MLR and deployed three rifle companies into position. Co I deployed to the Chu Lai Airfield to provide a static defense and was now under the operational control of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, developed their defensive positions, manned observation posts (Ops), and conducted patrols in their TAOR. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and Third Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, worked on establishing a mutually agreeable boundary between their respective TAORs.

The First Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, launched a battalion (-), one day sweep and clear operation at the northern limits of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine TAOR on 12 September. The area of operation was Hoa Xuan Island (BT 430150). The scheme of maneuver had Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion via LCM in a blocking position on the east bank of the Song Truong Giang opposite Hoa Xuan Island. Cos B and D were helilifted into landing zones in the west central portion of the island vicinity coordinate (BT 417156) and commence patrol action to the south east. Meanwhile Co C, reinforced with 107mm Howtars and 106mm RRs, established a second blocking position at the easternmost tip of the island vicinity coordinate (BT 461145). Sporadic sniper fire was received; however, the VC broke contact immediately thereafter. The operation concluded with no casualties to either side.

By 2050H on 14 September, all elements of 3/3 had returned to Chu Lai. Cos I and M moved into the airfield defensive positions while the two remaining companies were administratively bivouacked near the battalion CP along the beach just north of the airfield (BT 535075). With few exceptions during September, enemy activity along the Chu Lai MLR had consisted of repeated attempts by individuals to conduct probes and/or penetration of the defensive wire of Marine positions, throwing grenades (and/or rocks) at Marine positions, sniping with small arms, and planting booby traps and mines.

Also on 14 September, a crater analysis team from Battery I, 3/11, investigated five incoming artillery rounds that 3/7 had received the previous night. The five rounds had impacted 30 meters forward of the 3/7 position about one km west of Hill 213 vicinity coordinate (BT 522002). There were signs they had definitely been incoming 105mm artillery rounds. Late on 14 September, Co I returned to the operational control of 3/7.

Early on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September (0530H), 1/7 commenced Operation Zipper by deploying Co A by amtracs to the vicinity of Tan Hy on the Trung Phan Peninsula. Zipper involved the establishment of a reinforced company-sized combat base on a hill vicinity of (BT 623004) and conducting search and clear operations in the village and surrounding areas (although Co A would be relieved by Co C on the 14<sup>th</sup> and return by amtrac to the first MLR position). At dusk on the 15<sup>th</sup>, the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, Co C (Rein), 1<sup>st</sup> Recon Battalion, had been inserted by helicopter on the Trung Phan Peninsula to establish a CP/OP on the high ground about 800 meters east of the Song Tra Bong in the southwest portion of the peninsula vicinity of coordinate (BT 628983). The recon platoon's intent was to determine the supply/communication routes, both land and water, used by the VC to enter and exit the TAOR and attempt to find specific areas used by the VC to stage and store supplies.

The monsoon, expected to begin in I Corps during September, would not come on in force until October. Nevertheless, it had rained continually for 18 straight days in September, from 13<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup>, a total of 17.54 inches. The heavy rains would wash out sections of the MSR and Roads were impassable for several days following the rains. Flying weather was poor during periods of rain, however, helicopter support was available usually around noon when the weather would break for several hours. The lowlands and the rice paddies became full of water and patrols were wet for the duration. The drying of clothing was a problem which was partially solved by using locally purchase charcoal for warming tents. Some troops wrote home for rubberized suits which were excellent for keeping dry during the night watches in the bunkers. Tom Hopkins: "One night during a very heavy downpour, our battalion CP began to receive a high volume of incoming artillery fire. Shrapnel was hitting all over the place. The air was alive with the crack of bursting shells. Our GP tent was hit many times with flying shrapnel and I remember one that hit a desk and sent it flying. We didn't have slit trenches for shelter, so we just had to hug the ground and pray. After about 15 minutes of receiving this incoming fire, it stopped. As it turned out, the fire was coming from our own direct support 105mm artillery battery stationed on the beach side of the highway. The artillery had been using super quick fuses and the heavy rain was causing the shells to arm shortly after leaving the guns. This caused the shells to detonate over the battalion CP. That was a time when "friendly fire" was not so friendly."

The execution of 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv Order 327—65 with Change 1 resulted in a split of the Chu Lai TAOR with the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, which caused 4<sup>th</sup> Marines to publish its operation order 305-65. The "new" TAOR of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines was (again) divided into three separate sectors:

- (1) Northern Sector- The northernmost sector was dominated by Ky Hoa Island in the north, Ky Xuan Island in the southern part of the sector, and the Ky Ha Peninsula in the east. The western border of the sector ran along the mainland coastline. The most dominant terrain in the sector was Hill 51 located on the peninsula. The islands were lowlands consisting of rice paddies and villages. The Northern Sector was retained by 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines.
- (2) Central Sector- The central sector was dominated by Hill 69 and Rte. 1. The Central Sector was assigned to 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Third Marines.
- (3) Southern Sector- The dominant terrain in the southernmost sector was located in the western portion of that sector: Hill 410, Hill 213, and Hill 385. The Southern Sector remained with the Second Battalion, Fourth Marines.

Road improvements continued westward in the Southern Sector and on the islands in the Northern Sector. Most areas in the Central Sector were presently accessible by road. Fourth Marines Operation Order 305-65 was executed on 20 September. The major impact of Operation Order 305-65 fell upon 3/3 which moved the two companies participating in the local defense at the airfield to occupy outposts along the MLS, i.e., Co I to the combat outpost on Hill 69 and the An Tay Bridge on Rte.1, and Co M to establish an MLR between the two flanking battalions about 800 meters east of the bridge and Rte. 1 vicinity of coordinate (BT 506066), and the two

companies administratively billeted near the battalion CP (Cos K and L) to assume the responsibility of protecting the airfield and the Class V (ground ammunition) storage area.

On the 20<sup>th</sup>, Co A, 1/7, had relieved Co C on the Trung Phan Peninsula in order to continue Operation Zipper. (In turn, Co C assumed Co A's positions on the MLR.) By the 21<sup>st</sup>, it had become apparent that the present weather conditions were impeding the foot movement of troops and limiting visibility. Amtracs were used extensively to deploy troops. At 0630H, a Marine from Co C was injured by an artillery air burst about 1,200 meters southeast of the end of the runway vicinity of coordinate (BT 572029). An investigation was conducted by Battery M, 4/11, who had been firing H&I fires on the Trung Phan Peninsula to the east of the Dong Le (1) in the east central portion of the peninsula vicinity of coordinate (BT 665992) using fuze quick which are seldom prematurely detonated. Although an occurrence of this type was considered highly improbable, owing to the extreme weather conditions prevailing, the round may have been detonated by the rain, resulting in the air burst that superficially wounded the Marine.

On 21 September, 1/4 repositioned its units to assume the new TAOR as set forth in the Regiment's operation order. The platoons at the checkpoints/outposts at An Tan Bridge and on Hill 69 were relieved by units of 3/3. Co D (-) (Rein) established a patrol base on Ky Xuan Island near the northern end of the island vicinity coordinate (BT 488103). Co C (rein) established a patrol base on Ky Hoa Island near the southeast tip of the island at (BT 512125). The most dominant piece of terrain in the Northern Sector was Hill 51 located on the Ky Ha promontory and Ky Hoa Island dominated the main routes of ingress and egress to the inland waterways of the Truong Giang and Song Ben Van Rivers in this sector. The remaining companies on the Ky Ha Peninsula maintained patrol bases and observation posts along a line from the northern end of Hill 51 (BT 525115) to the small bridge on the north/south road which traversed the peninsula near the southern base of the peninsula (BT 530080) west to about 1,500 meters southeast of the An Tan Bridge (BT 509059). Continuous aggressive patrolling was conducted from these bases westerly to the MLR at water's edge. Liaison with the province Chief, Tam Ky Province, commenced on 22 September. A liaison officer and a radio operator remained at the province headquarters in Tam Ky. A Co I patrol set off a booby trap consisting of a ChiCom hand grenade attached to a trip wire along a trail in the western part of the battalion's sector vicinity of coordinate (BS 522971) on 21 September. The company commander (1<sup>st</sup> Lt Marshall) was wounded and evacuated and replaced by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Bill Van Zanten.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Co C, 1<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion, reported that while attached to units participating in Operation Zipper they had destroyed three tank traps, four bunkers, 23 caves, and 67 fighting holes over a period of a week. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, Co C, 1<sup>st</sup> Recon Battalion, conducted an operation working from a trail south of Tay Phuoc (2) leading to Thanh Tra (1) to the east southeast vicinity of coordinate (BS 504941) then in to Thanh Tra (1). They noted several sightings of VC and VCS. At 1505H on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the platoon was ambushed in Thanh Tra (2). The first VC burst of fire killed one Marine and wounded two others. A nearby hamlet located to the south of Thanh Tra (1) then opened up with automatic weapons fire. Two armed UH-1Es arrived within 40 minutes to

expend their ordnance on the hamlet destroying it. At 1615H, the recon platoon was extracted and it was confirmed that they had killed 17 VC with small arms fire. At 2313H on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Co L, 3/3, sustained one WIA when an incoming mortar round was received from the Hoa Van hamlets about 600 meters east of Rte. 1 vicinity of coordinate (BT 564011). The WIA was evacuated with no further incidents.

During the late afternoon of 23 September, Co I, 3/3, heard an explosion occurring just to the east of Khuong Tho (2) vicinity of coordinate (BT 467063). Vietnamese were then observed carrying a body out of the area. The explosion had probably been a booby trap detonating.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, ended Operation Zipper and began Operation Hardrock with the movement of Co C at 0800H on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September from its combat base located along the eastern shore of the Song Tra Bong to the south of Tan My (1) (BT 623003). Operation Hardrock had the mission to search and clear the northeastern portion of the Trung Phan Peninsula and to destroy any caves, tunnels or fortifications encountered. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, Co B, 1/7, was helilifted into the peninsula. The battalion had left their portion of the MLR at Chu Lai to be manned by Cos C and D and a reinforced platoon from Co L, 3/7, in order to support Operation Hardrock. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, Operation Hardrock continued as the destruction of enemy fortifications slowed the momentum of the operation and late that day, Co A was retracted from the operation by amtracs and returned to the battalion CP. Hardrock, with Co B, would continue on in to October.

At 1400H on the 26<sup>th</sup>, 2/4 reported sighting fourteen armed VC about 2,500 meters to the southeast of Hill 410 vicinity of coordinate (BS 498983). An artillery mission was called. No body count was taken. On 27 September, the companies of 2/4 changed positions for their CPs: Co E on Hill 49 (BT 496036); Co F on Hill 43 (BT 517041); Co G on the high ground north of Ky Long (2) (BT 510048); and Co H on the high ground to the southeast of Ky Long (2) (BT 517041). The battalion continued to maintain platoons on Hills 410 and 385.

Bill Maher, platoon commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> AT Bn, regarding the utility of the Ontos, recalled we had hit a mine a few weeks after Starlite. Our patrols had regularly headed north on Rte. 1 past a small village just outside the compound. The VC started to mine the road. On one occasion, we were going slow through the village when a small bus with only civilian passengers passed us. It hit a mine about a quarter mile past the village. The bus was demolished with no survivors. A few days later we were driving up the same road to set up a blocking force. "As we were driving I was looking for a place to cross the railroad tracks to our left. The Ontos' greatest vulnerability was to break track while crossing certain obstacles. I saw an area where the railroad tracks were covered with dirt. I decided to cross there. With the lead Ontos taking up positions past the area and the last Ontos taking up positions before the area, I climbed on the middle Ontos and we drove over 'a little dirt bridge.' It was mined and we lost the track that I was so intent on saving. No one was injured except for a loud ringing in our ears. I walked back to my vehicle, obviously following the tracks the Ontos made and radioed for the tank retriever. I assume the same people who blew up the bus used the same explosives

to blow up the Ontos but with significantly different results. "We did have an accidental discharge within the compound after returning from patrol. I'm not sure when it happened and I was not informed of any injuries. The impact area was an embankment. The only investigation I remember was someone who came to my tent and asked me what happened. I told him it was probably a 'cook off' and that was the last I heard of it. I think it might have been Cpl. Nelson's Ontos and he forgot to open the breach, as was SOP when we reentered the compound. "On a different note Major Ernie DeFazio, the 2/4 battalion XO [assigned to 2/4 on 28 September] with whom I had a great relationship, probably because of my Boston accent, visited me after the mine incident. He asked me what happened and when I told him, he lit up a big cigar and with a large grin on his face asked me only one question: "Who do you think built the bridge over the tracks?"

### **October 1965**

Lt. Col R.L.Trevino, upon his promotion to that grade, relieved Lt.Col J.R. Fisher as commanding officer of the Second Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, on 15 October. As a result of this reassignment, Major A.W. Wallach was designated as the Regimental S-3 Officer. Upon the joining of Capt J.C. Gilman, he was assigned as the Regimental S-4 Officer replacing Major Wallach. On 1 October, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt E.P. Roski, commanding officer of Co B, (Rein), 3<sup>rd</sup> Antitank Battalion, was relieved by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. M.H. Chang.

During the month of October, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines directed operations up to and including battalion (-) size. Individual battalions conducted numerous battalion (-) and company (rein) operations during the period. A total of 17.92 inches of rain fell in the Chu Lai area in October. There were ten days with measurable rain and seven with just a trace of precipitation. The mean temperature for the month was 82 degrees while the high for the month was 94 degrees and the low was 69 degrees. The average relative humidity for the month was 92%. (When precipitation occurs during the month of November, it will primarily be of the drizzle and light, steady rain variety.)

The month of October opened with the regiment in a two hour alert as a result of a 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv operation order which called for two companies to helilifted to the Qui Nhon area to conduct offensive operations or to relieve or reinforce committed units. By 1640H on the 1<sup>st</sup>, the alert was reduced to six hours and the following day the amplifying message pertaining to the operations was cancelled. The highlight in company-sized operations was conducted by Co K, 3/3, on 7 October. This operation evolved upon the receipt of an intelligence report which placed two VC companies within the battalion's area (Central Sector). Reacting immediately, the company was helilifted to the hamlet of Ky Long (1) vicinity of coordinate (BT 435055), and set into the landing zone under the illumination of a flare plane dispatched from the Chu Lai Air Field. Upon landing, the company came under sporadic small arms fire. However, upon assaulting toward the source of the fire, the VC broke contact. No other contacts were made throughout the night. The company was retracted the following day at 1530H. Although no large scale contact was encountered, it proved once again that night helicopter assaults were possible. This

had been the second such night helicopter assault under combat conditions in the history of the Marine Corps. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, Co M, 3/3, had been airlifted to Da Nang as the result of a CG, 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, message.

The Regiment's overall plan was to increase ground operations during the ensuing northeast monsoon season. The first of such operations was conducted by 3/3 from 18-19 October. The plan consisted of a two-day search and destroy operation north of the battalion's TAOR, to the far west of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's area in the vicinity of Duc Bo (BT 380154). The operation utilized two rifle companies and a battalion command group. The assault companies landed by helos in two landing zones south of Duc Bo and then searched northward through the village complex, then reversed course and re-swept the same area, spending the night on the high ground just south of Duc Bo. During the first days operation, eight VC were killed, six captured, and eighteen VCS apprehended without sustaining Marine casualties. On the second day, however, the Marines sustained two minor WIAs as a result of grenade fragments. Only one VC was killed during the day. Numerous VC tunnels and booby traps were destroyed.

The second battalion (-) size operation was conducted by the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 23-25 October. The scheme of maneuver consisted of a cordon of Ky Xuan Island (BT 430150) by USMC amtracs and reconnaissance units, Vietnamese Junk Fleet, Regional and Popular Forces, and People's Action Teams. Once the island was cordoned, the battalion landed Cos A and B and conducted a search and clear sweep across the island from southeast to north to southwest. Four VC were killed, one VC was wounded, and sixty four VCS apprehended. In addition, 300 feet of cave complexes were destroyed and a number of VC booby traps blown in place. The operation was a success. There were no Marine casualties. Although no large scale contacts, the mission of the battalion had been accomplished. The battalion was retracted and returned to their MLR positions.

The most significant activity of the month was the VC attack on the Chu Lai Airfield on 28 October. The assault conducted by approximately two squads of VC, although causing some damage, was expeditiously repelled. The attack commenced at 0013H on the 28<sup>th</sup> and the VC broke contact twenty minutes later. However, only four Marine WIAs were sustained, all wounds being slight. The infiltrators suffered eight KIAs and one WIA which later died of his wounds.

During the evening of 27-28 October, the Viet Cong had conducted a series of coordinated operations culminating in attacks in East Da Nang on the Marble Mountain Air Facility, the nearby U.S. Naval Hospital (still under construction), and the cantonment areas of two Navy Mobile Construction Battalions (MCB 8 and MCB-9). At Chu Lai, a VC force estimated at 15-20 infiltrated into the Air Base and laid down heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire. The Viet Cong then placed demolitions and grenades on the A-4E attack aircraft parked on the flight line and withdrew west across the runway incurring KIAs in the process. The attack was carried out by an apparently well-trained and equipped demolition team. During the previous month there were numerous low level reports of units up to battalion size moving toward Chu Lai. Although there were no specific or reliable reports concerning an attack of the type conducted, this had always

been a recognized VC capability. According to the S-2 of 2/4, a report of 12 October from the intelligence Chief of Ly Tin District indicated that demolition teams had been coming into the Tich Tay and Chu Lai hamlets several times each month for "reconnaissance" purposes. Several different agent reports during the days immediately preceding and following the attack indicated the imminent possibility of an attack against Marine outposts and the Chu Lai New Life Hamlets. Those reports, coupled with recent sightings by Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion, and documents captured 30 October indicating a planned attack, enforced the belief in the possibility of Viet Cong activity in the area. No reports received, however, had provided information on the approximate time of a move against Chu Lai.

As described by General Walt in his report to General Krulak (and eventually, Admiral Sharp), the defense of the Chu Lai airfield entailed two distinct perimeters. One, the outer perimeter, was occupied by a minimum of one infantry battalion headquarters and two rifle companies. On the night of 27-28 October, the outer perimeter was manned by Cos I and K, 3/3. The second and inner perimeter was manned by provisional companies (there were 12) organized from within Marine Air Group-12, 2<sup>nd</sup> LAAM Battalion, and MCB-10 [Seabees]. This inner perimeter was manned in varying degrees depending on the hour of the day and the condition of readiness required. Condition four, set during daylight hours, involved one provisional rifle platoon from each provisional company on an alert status to take position on the inner perimeter on 30 minute notice. The conditions graduate to condition one, where provisional companies man all positions on the inner perimeter. In addition to the perimeter defenses, 146 men were assigned to the flight line area on internal guard duties (i.e., the Group Guard). In the aircraft parking area, three men are posted for every six aircraft. During condition four, one man is awake, the other two asleep.

It was believed that the VC unit infiltrated the defense perimeter from the northwest. Bare feet prints in the sand, found after daybreak indicated that the VC had approached the airfield from the northwest. After arrival on the northwest end of runway 32/14, the VC unit apparently split into two groups. One group crossed the runway about 1,200 feet from the north end of the runway and near the middle and rear of the VMA-224 flight line. The MAG-12 sentry on Post #4, standing at the rear of a revetment, challenged a group of four VC as they walked slowly towards the parked aircraft. A VC threw a grenade at the sentry on Post #4, who ran behind the revetment to the front of the flight line to escape the grenade's fragmentation pattern. As he reached the front of the revetment, the grenade exploded. As the sentry on Post #4 ran towards the VMA-224 hangar, he spotted one VC in front of the aircraft. The sentry tried to fire one shot from his shotgun but the gun misfired. The VC threw a satchel charge at him which did not explode. The sentry from Post #4 took up a position behind a piece of ground support equipment alongside the VMA-224 hangar. He then fired two shots at the VC in front of the aircraft who was firing a grease gun at the aircraft. The VC disappeared behind the aircraft. The sentry from Post #4 then saw several explosions under the aircraft to his front. He remained at this position until the attack was over. He did not see any more VC during the attack.

The sentry manning Post #5 was standing near the tail and south of A-4 aircraft WK16 when he heard a challenge from Post #4. He then heard an explosion and automatic weapons fire. The sentry fired at the automatic weapon muzzle flashes, then ran to the front of the aircraft. There he saw a VC running south towards him firing an automatic weapon at the line of aircraft. The sentry from Post #5 fired two shots at the muzzle flashes and returned to the tail of the aircraft, where he spotted one VC at the next aircraft firing an automatic weapon. He fired two shots at the VC. The VC stopped firing his automatic weapon and staggered. The sentry then ran over to the ground support area between the VMA-224 hangar and the H&MS-12 hangar to reload his shotgun. He did not see any more VC during the attack.

The sentry on Post #6 was standing 30 feet south of the tail of A-4 aircraft WE-19 when he heard a challenge from a post north of him followed by explosions and automatic weapons fire. He took up a position facing the runway. The Sergeant of the Guard and one supernumerary came out of the VMA-214 hangar, crossed the taxiway, and set up in positions facing the runway. A few seconds later an explosion on A-4 aircraft WE-22 set the aircraft afire. A VC ducked under the tail of A-4 aircraft WE-19 and the sentry on Post #6 turned to his right and shot the VC in the face and chest. The VC fell on the ramp and tried to get up. The guard shot him again. The VC was dead when examined minutes later. At the same time the sentry on Post #6 shot the VC, the Sergeant of the Guard and the supernumerary took three VC under fire. The VC crossed the runway and went over the hill on the other side. The crash crew (from MABS-12) moments before had taken this group of VC under fire. One dropped mortally wounded and the other two staggered as if hit. One led the remaining group of three across the runway shouting to them as they went. (This was the group taken under fire by the Sergeant of the Guard and the supernumerary.) Two of this group of VC were found dead just west of the runway. One guard supernumerary sleeping outside the VMA-214 hangar, north side, was awakened by the blast on WE-22. As he got up to grab his rifle and magazine, he saw a VC crouching between the H&MS-12 hangar and a jet engine. The VC spotted him and pointed his automatic weapon at him but did not fire. The VC ran between the tents towards the MSR. The supernumerary recalled that this VC was the same man he had handed a letter to when the Vietnamese were building two culverts on the MSR behind the VMA-214 hangar.

A MOREST man on duty at the east MOREST engine located near the northern end of runway 32/14 heard the guard shout "Halt" twice, followed immediately by automatic weapons fire and explosions on the VMA-224 flight line. The MOREST personnel who were in a tent and at the MOREST engine on the west side of the runway heard the explosions and firing on the flight line. Another group of VC had approached the MOREST tent from the northwest side. Seconds later, a grenade exploded against the west side of the MOREST tent; the interior of the tent was shielded from the blast by a wooden box, and one man was knocked down but no one was wounded. In the morning an unexploded grenade was found beside the MOREST engine. Crash crew personnel were located in two tents and on the MB-1 crash vehicle. They heard explosions and automatic weapons fire from the VMA-224 flight line area. The crash crew NCOIC shouted to put out lights and set up a hasty defense outside around the tents. The NCOIC observed three

or four VC running south on the flight line area, one firing an automatic weapon and dropping something behind several aircraft. The crash crew personnel deployed around the tents and the MB-1 crash vehicle. Immediately after the explosion on the VMA-224 flight line, the crash crew members saw four VC coming from the direction of the runway, going east toward the flight line. The VC were first observed at a range of only 10-12 feet. A VC threw a grenade or explosive charge over the heads of three crash crew men and against the side of the MB-1 truck; the explosion wounded one man (fragment in the leg) and injured one when it knocked him down. The MB-1 truck was badly perforated with fragments. The VC did not fire any weapons and the four VC then moved southward, angling back toward the runway. One was hit and fell. The crash crew continued firing at the VC as they crossed the runway. As they crossed the runway, the VC shouted in Vietnamese several times. Two observers believed at least one more of these VC was wounded. Three VC passed by the south side of an amtrac parked on the west side of the runway (witnessed by an amtrac crewman in cover under the vehicle and by the crash crew) and then disappeared over a sand dune. Two dead VC were later found beyond this point. A wounded VC was found near the runway beyond the amtrac (He was captured, but later died). An unexploded grenade was found near the MB-1 truck. The MOREST man at the easternmost MOREST engine saw one VC move south of the MOREST and angle across runway heading west. Footprints, an unexploded grenade, and a blood trail were found in the morning.

The MAG-12 Group Commander arrived on the scene approximately five minutes after the attack and directed subsequent actions. A-4 aircraft WE-22 was burning and one attached bomb exploded (low order detonation) and drove itself through the top of the hangar. Another bomb cooked off shortly thereafter (and was the one which knocked down the crash crewman). The ramp was saturated with JP-4 fuel from two badly leaking aircraft which caused a further serious threat until fires were extinguished, bombs defused and removed, and the leaking aircraft towed out of the line area. At about 0030H, and upon bringing the fire on WE-22 under control, maintenance, ordnance, and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) people were directed to sweep the entire flight line area and to make a detailed inspection of each aircraft in order to locate satchel charges, hand grenades, and other demolitions. Five unexploded satchel charges were found on the aircraft and six satchel charges and hand grenades were found in the immediate area on the taxiway. All were disarmed and collected by EOD. At about 0100H, the Group's reserve company was directed to make an infantry sweep, from south to north, from the dunes just west of the runway area through the flight line area for the purpose of locating VC dead/wounded and weapons/demolitions. Later, at 0500h, this same company made a sweep from the MSR to the beach in search of the missing VC believed to be in the area. The Group S-2 was directed to start tracing foot prints, blood stains, etc at first light to determine positively entry/exit points. Concurrently, the Group Maintenance Officer was directed to conduct a detailed damage assessment of the aircraft. All inspections were completed, debris cleaned up, and the Group was ready to conduct normal flight operations by 0730H. At first light, two sets of bare foot prints were found in the ditch beside the MSR, one large and one small. No direction of exit could be determined. Also at first light, three sets of bare foot tracks were noted leading

back along the same path from which the VC had entered the airfield complex. One set of tracks showed a trail of blood from the left foot. Several grenades and satchel charges were found along the escape route.

At 0013H, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines operations watch officer heard explosions and sporadic small arms fire. Upon investigation it was learned from 3/3 that a firefight was in progress on the airfield. At 0015H, Battery C, Battalion Artillery Group, reported receiving small arms and rocket fire. At this time, a flare plane was requested from 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, and the Regiment went on 100% alert.

The First Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, was extremely active the night of the attack on the airstrip. One platoon from Co C, set in an ambush position at the northwest of the airfield vicinity of coordinate (BT 518077), engaged and killed one VC at 0035H and captured an RPG-2 (B-40) rocket launcher with the warhead intact and one M-26 grenade. Shortly after, the platoon observed two additional men moving down a rice paddy dike vicinity coordinate (BT 515075) about 1,200 meters to the northwest of the airstrip. When challenged, the lead man opened fire with a Thompson submachine gun. Fire was immediately returned, killing the first VC. With the assistance of the second VC, they retreated and ran across the stream bed. Additional fire was delivered and appeared to hit both VC. Illumination was called for and the VC were observed attempting to crawl away. Fire was again directed at them. One man fell instantly on the shore, and the other was seen face down in the stream. A search of the area revealed one French submachine gun, three magazines of ammunition, and four homemade grenades. The second body was never recovered.

At 0150H, 3/3 reacted to the attack on the airfield and several contacts were made. Co I killed one VC and captured his Thompson submachine gun. Co K, 3/3, took five VC under fire at the north end of the airfield killing two VC and capturing two Thompson SMGs and five grenades. At 0245H, Battery C, Battalion Artillery Group, accounted for 1 VC KIA. At 0450H, Co K accounted for 1 VC KIA. At 0625H, 3/3 (Co K) started a sweep operation from the airfield to Rte. 1, with no contact.

U.S. Losses:

Casualties- 0 KIA, 1 WIA. Aircraft and Equipment Losses- 2 A-4 aircraft destroyed, 3 A-4 aircraft major damage, and 3 A-4 minor damage. 1 MB-12 crash truck damaged, 1 aerology damaged.

VC Casualties:

15 KIA (9 by MAG-12, 6 by 3rdMarDiv elements) and 2 WIA (VCC).

The following is a complete listing of the various ordnance items found scattered throughout the airstrip area on dead and wounded VC: 1- U.S. cal .45 pistol #978264; 4- Thompson submachine guns; 1- submachine gun, French 7.62mm; 8- TNT satchel charges, small 200 gram-

2 blocks; 5- TNT satchel charges, large 200 gram -3 blocks; 6- concussion grenades; 6- frag grenades; and 1- B-40 (RPG-2) rocket launcher with 1 round.

A diagram of the 28 October attack on the Chu Lai Air Base, borrowed from the extensive III MAF report to CG, FMFPAC, is included here. Some of the conclusions from that report:

- The overall size of the Chu Lai force was estimated at 15-20. There was no evidence to corroborate one district chief's statement that the VC were from North Vietnam. To the contrary, the evidence indicated the VC were from Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces. The group guard supernumerary had recalled that he had recognized one of the VC as one of the Vietnamese who were earlier building two culverts on the MSR behind the VMA-214 hangar. After the attack, evidence began to accumulate that the attackers were from the local villages of Ky Xuan, Ky Lien, and Ky Khuong. The 2/4 battalion chaplain reported after seeing one of the captured VC that he had seen him in services held in the Chu Lai Hamlets the preceding Sunday.
- The size of the force, scheme of maneuver, completeness of plans, analysis of weapons, examination of the VC killed, among other factors, indicated that a "hard core," main force VC unit, well-trained and resolute in purpose, had attacked the Marble Mountain complex. The same factors, and other evidence, suggested that the Chu Lai group was not as highly trained as the northern group.
- The time of the attacks, in conjunction with the method of attack, substantiated the thesis of a planned coordinated attack in the two enclaves, with the strong possibility that a third attack was planned but unexecuted on the Da Nang Air Base.
- The skill exhibited by the infiltrators indicated that permanent barriers of a type utilizing double apron cyclone fences, augmented by carefully placed minefields, sensitive electronic or seismic intrusion devices, and powerful lighting are required around all military installations where critical equipment and materials were kept.
- The quick response of the Marines on duty prevented the VC from inflicting considerably more damage. At Chu Lai the group which had proceeded down the west side of the runway turned back from the aircraft parking area by the actions of members of the crash crew.

The last of the operations during the month was conducted by the Second Battalion (Cos E, F, and G) and commenced at 0800H on 29 October and continued to the 30<sup>th</sup>. The combined USMC/ARVN operation, Lien Ket 10, took place in a mountain valley about 10 kms west of Hill 69. It was conducted in coordination with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> ARVN Regiment, located at Tam Ky. Premature retraction was commenced at 1600H on the 30<sup>th</sup> as the result of the combined action of the airlift of Co M, 3/3, to Da Nang and the absence of any large scale contact by the Second Battalion in the area of operations. During October, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines reported no combat deaths and 12 WIA. There were also two serious non-battle casualties. There were 7 VCS and 25 VC KIA and eight weapons captured during the month.

Unlike August and September, there were no regimental size operations conducted by the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines during the month of October. Efforts were concentrated on conducting several battalion

size operations and planning for forthcoming operations in conjunction with ARVN forces. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, maintained a company size combat base on the Trung Phan Peninsula throughout the month of October. The first company assigned was Co B and it had the mission to search and clear the northeastern portion of the peninsula and to destroy caves and tunnels. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, Co B conducted a search and clear operation in the villages of Phuoc Hoa (5) (BS 679991) near the eastern shore of the peninsula, Le Thuy (1) and Le Thuy (2) further to the south. The company found old punji traps, a tank trap (10 feet by 10 feet), and a trench line (200 meters long). Co B captured two VCS with the following material: one hand drawn map, one bag of VC propaganda, and one Mk-26 grenade. On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, Co B searched a village in the central portion of the peninsula (BS 654008) and found several trenches and an extensive barbed-wire fence around the village. In addition, the company found foxholes, punji traps, and tank traps near the village.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> through the 4<sup>th</sup> of October, two companies of 3/7 conducted Operation Quickdraw which involved the companies being helilifted into landing zones to the west of Rte 1 where the platoons alternately established blocking positions and or swept through hamlets and villages in the area. On 4 October, Co C, 1/7, landed by amtrac over Red Beach (BS 624998) and commenced Operation Taciturn on the northwestern portion of the Trung Phan peninsula. Co C established a combat base on Hill 30 overlooking Tan Hy (2) near the west central sector of the peninsula at coordinate (BS 626990) and conducted search and clear operations of hamlets in the surrounding area. During the remainder of the month, Co C maintained this combat base and from it supported several battalion operations. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, Co K, 3/7, was committed by helicopter to reinforce elements of Co C, 1<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion, operating in the Reconnaissance Area of Responsibility (RAOR), who reportedly had sighted 67 VC. Co K helilifted by platoons into three LZs in an attempt to encircle the VC. When one of the platoons of Co K landed in an LZ south of Phuoc Lam (3) to the north of the Song Tra Bong and about 11 kms west of the Binh Son District Headquarters (BS 490915), the platoon commander was wounded twice by punji stakes and was med-evaced. Later that evening, two more Marines from Co K were wounded by punji stakes. The company never made contact with the reported VC and was retracted the following day by helicopter.

On 6 October, a 1/7 recon patrol engaged an unknown number of snipers near the hamlet of Thuong Hoa (2) in the southwest corner of the Trung Phan Peninsula vicinity of coordinate (BS 638975) and killed two. On 9 October, a Co L patrol reported encountering (or at least, hearing) three elephants and on the 11<sup>th</sup>, killed one VC and captured one VCC (WIA) and two carbines and one frag grenade. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of October, Co M, 3/7, was lifted into the southwest portion of the TAOR to conduct Operation Rhino, a search and clear of several hamlets and hamlet complexes in the southern portion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion's TAOR. At 1002H on the 18<sup>th</sup>, one of the "Rhino patrols" near Than Tra (2) killed 3 VC and captured two automatic weapons and various documents. Co M continued its operations until the 24<sup>th</sup> of October when Co K began Operation Camino in the southeastern portion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion's TAOR. Co K conducted combat patrols, ambushes, and search and clears in its zone of action. On 21 October, the First Battalion operating near two Thuong Hoa hamlets (BS629973) and (BS 634972) found a cave containing one U.S. Enfield, 1917, cal .30-06, bolt action rifle; a Japanese bayonet;; one 57mm RR round:

and several belts of M-60 machine gun ammunition. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, a 1/7 patrol on the northern bank of the river inlet forming the base of the Trung Phan promitory south of Thuong Hoa (2) near (BS 635972) received fire from 12 VC in a "V" type formation. The Marines returned fire, killing two, while the remainder broke contact and fled into heavy brush.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion commenced Operation Hercules employing Cos I, K, and L to conduct a three company heliborne landing to search and clear the area north of the Song Tra Bong located in the vicinity of the My Loc hamlets and Long Thinh (further to the north). Co K(-) landed in an open area between My Loc (2) and My Loc (3) and about one km north of the Song Tra Bong. Co L landed to the west of My Loc (3) and the confluence of the Song Tra Dong and the Suoi Sa (at the head of the Song Tra Bong). Co I and the command group landed on the high ground between My Loc (4) and My Loc (1). Co I established blocking positions in the easternmost portion of this area and Cos K and L simultaneously conducted sweeps in their respective zones of action to the south towards the Song Tra Bong and then east paralleling the river towards Co I's blocking position. Co K captured a VC tax collector and intelligence gleaned from this source provided information that a VC battalion headquarters was located at Thach An Dong (3) just to the south of the Song Tra Bong (and opposite My Loc (3) on the northern bank) vicinity of coordinate (BS 500880). Proceeding on this information and initiating an additional helilift, the battalion initiated a search and clear of the area at Thach An Dong (3) concluding this final phase of the operation on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October. Two companies and the battalion headquarters group returned on 28 October.

The First Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, commenced Operation Neptune on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October. Co D conducted a search and clear operation moving to the southwest towards Binh Son (BS 600922) in an area bounded by Rte. 1 to the west, My Hue Island to the east, and the Song Tra Bong River to the south. A platoon from Co C provided a waterborne blocking force in small boats on the Song Tra Bong from the Binh Son Bridge (BS 596926) on Rte. 1 to the hamlet of My Hue (3) two kms to the north northwest (BS 601945). Other supporting units, including a platoon of tanks from Co B, 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion, and Popular Force units, provided blocking forces on Rte. 1 and My Hue Island. The operation resulted in one VCS (an ARVN deserter) captured.

On 28 October, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion conducted Operation Saturn as a follow-on to Operation Neptune. Co D established blocking positions to the south, west, and east of Phu Le (1) located adjacent to the railroad berm just west of Rte. 1 (BS 575938). Co B established blocking forces to the north, west, and east. At 0640H on the 28<sup>th</sup>, the two companies began a methodical search and clear of the village. At the conclusion of the search and clear, Operation Saturn ended and the battalion reestablished the companies in their respective MLR positions.

During the month of October, 7<sup>th</sup> Marine battalions captured a total of 239 VCS (three of whom were reclassified as VCC), 23 VC KIA, and 33 VC WIA. Three rifles, six carbines, one shotgun, one French submachine gun and one .45 caliber pistol were captured. Friendly casualties for the battalions totaled 14 WIAs (no KIAs).

By 22 October, the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> Marines had placed the 60mm mortar in service, which left

the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines as the only in-country Marine regiment without the 60mm mortar.

In peacetime, replacements to the Western Pacific were built around a 'trans-placement' system. This was essentially a rotation, on a 13-month cycle, of infantry battalions and aircraft squadrons between the West Coast and the Western Pacific. It was decided that the trans-placement of infantry battalions would cease after the deployment of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, in September 1965. Rotation of aircraft squadrons would be limited in the future to squadrons introducing new types of aircraft and the return of squadrons with older aircraft. Canceling trans-placement made it necessary to 'homogenize' the carefully 'stabilized' battalions and squadrons. Otherwise, everyone in a unit having the same rotation date would have resulted in unacceptable peaks and valleys of experience. This smoothing-out process, nicknamed Operation Mixmaster, involved the inter-unit transfer of thousands of Marines, took place over the next several months. While there would be no more rotation of units between the West Coast and the Western Pacific, there would be a limited rotation of units between Vietnam and the Western Pacific reserve based on Okinawa (and some air units in Japan), and it would be able to maintain the 13-month tour for individual Marines.

On 15 October, Co I (Capt K.R. Gannon, Jr.), 3/7, had been reassigned to 2/4 and re-designated Co G. The "new" Co I [the former Co G, 2/4] was commanded by Capt J. Clements. This was the first phase of the newly-established intra-division reassignment program of rifle companies. On 6 November 1965, longtime Co A platoon commander, Larry Faughn, was reassigned to the battalion S-3. He would serve there until 6 Jan 1966 when he was again reassigned, this time to be the Liaison Officer Quang Tin Province HQ at Tam Ky. He would return 12 February 1966 when he was assigned to be a platoon commander in Co C.

### **November 1965**

Third Marine DivBul 1300 dated 12 November 1965 directed the reassignment of rifle companies and elements of H&S Co from 1 /4 on 19 November and 10 December 1965. The first of these reassignments occurred as directed. On 19 November, Co E (1<sup>st</sup> Lt. J.J. Clancy, III), 2/7, was exchanged with Co A (Capt R.E. Theer and including 1<sup>st</sup> Lts Kent Valley and Fred Brown, but less Larry Faughn) and elements of H&S Co, 1 /4. On 30 November, Co A (Capt J.S. Tardy), 1/7, was exchanged with a company from 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, (Co K, Capt G. Marino). The transfer was accomplished by issuance of individual orders to each officer and man (a total of 239 were transferred out of 1 /4 and members of H&S Co); this necessitated fitness reports on all officers and NCOs, transfer marks, and long unit diary entries, on all hands. DivBul 1300 of 12 November precluded re-designations of units which would have greatly simplified the reassignment. Lessons learned included making closer liaison with other organizations involved, and minimizing paperwork by re-designating units rather than by transferring individuals. Of note, now in Co E, 2/7, Capt Theer requested and received twenty Yorkshire pigs from his mother's farm in Iowa which were flown to Vietnam and Chu Lai aboard Military Assistance Command (MAC) aircraft during November. The pigs were used to stock the battalion's civil affairs project farm.

Lt. Gen Victor Krulak, CG, Fleet Marine Forces Pacific, who retained administrative and logistical control of the Marines in Vietnam (operational control belonged to General Westmoreland as COMUSMACV, through III MAF), argued that;

"It is our conviction that if we can destroy the guerrilla fabric among the people we will automatically deny larger units the food and intelligence and the taxes and the other support they need," and later, "There is no virtue at all in seeking out the NVA in the mountains and jungle; that so long as they stayed there they were a threat to nobody, that our efforts should be addressed to the rich, populous lowlands."

Time would have proven him correct and the Marines would only have to engage the NVA if and when the NVA came down out of the mountains and into the lowlands for food or whatever.

"But General Westmoreland had a different perspective, contending that the introduction of North Vietnamese units into the south created an entirely new situation. The MACV commander believed the Communists wanted to develop multidivisional forces in relatively secure base areas while at the same time continuing extensive guerrilla actions to tie down friendly forces. He had doubts about the thrust of the Marine Corps pacification campaign. He believed that the Marines were 'stalled a short distance south of Da Nang' because the ARVN was unable to 'fill in behind Marines in their expanding enclaves.' He wanted the Marines 'to find the enemy's main forces and bring them to battle, thereby putting them on the run, and reducing the threat they posed to the population.'"

As one III MAF officer observed: "Westmoreland's view was 'Yes, we accept the Marine Corps' concern about pacification, but we want you to do more...' General Walt's [CG, III MAF] position was 'Yes, I will engage the enemy's main force units, but first I want to have good intelligence.'" General Walt's comment was quoted accurately and in 1965 pretty well described the situation Walt confronted. He hadn't been getting much intelligence he could use to operate. Nobody could tell him who the enemy was, let alone where the enemy was located and how that enemy was armed and organized. And the ARVNs, truth be told, weren't sure we could tell the difference between an innocent villager and a VC. They were correct.

Under the terms [of a] November 1965 MACV instruction, the Marines were to defend and secure their base areas; to conduct search and destroy missions against VC forces that posed an immediate threat and against distant enemy bases; to conduct clearing operations in contiguous areas; and, finally, to execute contingency plans anywhere in Vietnam as directed by COMUSMACV. Working within these 'all-encompassing' objectives and general guidelines, Gen. Walt developed what he called his 'balanced approach.' This consisted of a three-pronged effort employing search and destroy, counter guerrilla, and pacification operations...." The Marines ended up doing all three, some of those missions better than others.

The monsoon, expected to begin in I Corps during September, had not come on in force until October. By November, rain averaged an inch a day (e.g., Da Nang, 27.46 inches and Chu Lai, 30.55 inches). There were 20 days with measurable rain and 3 days with just a trace of precipitation. The mean temperature for the month was 78 degrees while the high for the month was 93 and the low for the month was 71 degrees. The average humidity was 86%. The weather had restricted cross country movement, and close air, helicopter, and artillery support. Despite the monsoon rains, III MAF/ 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division offensive operations intensified to counter the increasing threat of Viet Cong activities. In spite of what were termed favorable conditions for VC offensive actions, the continued pressure of small unit Marine patrols, ambushes, and search and destroy operations thwarted such actions by the Viet Cong. Aside from isolated guerrilla activities and nuisance type mining, the VC appeared determined throughout the month to avoid contact with the Marines. The monsoonal rains had probably affected them to some degree as well.

Two major offensive operations were conducted in November. These were search and destroy operations coordinated with ARVN forces: Operation Black Ferret/ Lien Ket 12, 3-6 November, involving the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, southwest of Chu Lai, and Operation Blue Marlin, a two-phased, coordinated, amphibious search and destroy operation launched 10-12 November involving the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines along the coast between Tam Ky and Chu Lai in Quang Tin Province, and the follow-on second phase, 16-18 November, a little further north up the coast between Hoi An (Quang Nam Province) and Tam Ky. Neither operation developed significant enemy contact.

During the month of November, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines conducted numerous operations commensurate with its assigned missions. The largest single factor influencing overall operational planning was weather. Combination of inclement weather throughout the month and the correlating reduction of helicopter availability resulted in a reduction of large scale operations. However, numerous company size operations, utilizing armored column convoys and overland foot marched to objective areas, continued to keep the enemy off balance and on the defensive. This momentum prevented their capability of massing troops within close proximity of vital areas within the enclave.

The First Battalion continued to pursue the missions assigned by the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines to:

- Defend along the trace of the MLR within its assigned TAOR;
- Maintain a COPL within assigned TAOR;
- Conduct and maintain surveillance of seaward approaches within sector to repel landings and preclude infiltration;
- Conduct aggressive operations and patrolling within TAOR;
- Be prepared to conduct operations unilaterally and/or bilaterally with RVNAF outside the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines TAOR;

- Provide tactical security for Btry A, 2<sup>nd</sup> LAAM Battalion, firing site on Ky Hoa Island; and
- Provide liaison personnel to affect positive coordination with the Province Chief, Tam Ky.

Cos A (Capt R.E. Theer until 18 November) and B (Capt R.B. Alexander) manned MLR positions and conducted combat patrols forward of the MLR, while Cos C (1<sup>st</sup> Lt E.E. Cossaboon) and D (Capt R.B. Sweeney until 17 November and then Capt P.A. Lo Presti) conducted aggressive patrolling on Ky Hoa and Ky Xuan Islands respectively in conjunction with an active pacification program. Both companies conducted Marine/PF patrols. H&S Co (Capt P.A. Lo Presti until 17 November then 1<sup>st</sup> Lt J.M. Myatt) continued their defense of the battalion CP and provided Marines nightly for security on the waterborne patrol and to accompany the PF platoon in Ky Ha Village on their nightly ambushes to ensure positive coordination.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Plat, Co A, 1<sup>st</sup> Amtrac Battalion, conducted nightly waterborne patrols to enforce curfew. The amtracs also provided logistical support of the patrol bases located on Ky Hoa and Ky Xuan Islands.

Between 4 and 6 November, Co E, 2/4, and Co L, 3/3, were placed under the operational control of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines during the latter's participation in Operation Black Ferret. The two companies augmented the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines' positions.

On 6 November, at 1538H, the Regiment received verbal orders which resulted in the airlift of Co L, 3/3, to Da Nang. The company departed at 1630H, and like Co M (which had departed in October) had not been returned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion by the time the battalion embarked for Operation Blue Marlin.

On 10 November, Co E (Capt J.W. Ledin), 2/4, moved into their new positions at Hill 69 and at the An Tan Bridge. On 13 November, Co F (Capt B.D. Moore), 2/4, was relieved in place by Co H (Capt M.E. O'Connor), 2/7, and commenced moving to their new segment of the MLR stretching from (BT 513054) just to the west of the New Life Hamlet of Chu Lai to the An Tan bridge (BT 518068) and tied in with 2/7 on the left flank. Co G (Capt H.R. Gannon), 2/4, was relieved in place by Co E (Capt A. Lee), 1-5 November, Capt F. Tolleson, 6-19 November, and Capt R.E. Theer, 19-30 November), 2/7, and commenced moving to their new segment of the MLR from the An Tan bridge (BT 518066) and the about 1200 meters north east to the north of Long Binh vicinity of coordinate (BT 525076) where it tied in with 1/4 on the right flank. The battalion CP displaced and turned operational control of the old CP to 2/7. Co H (1<sup>st</sup> Lt H.K. Jenkins until 7 November, then Capt L.P. Andrews until 18 November, and finally, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt C.F. Preuss 18-30 November), 2/4, was relieved in place by Co F (Capt M.F. Welty, 1-17 November, then Capt J.M. Nolan, 18-30 November), 2/7, and reverted to regimental reserve and was physically located just to the north of the airfield and very near the beach vicinity of coordinate (BT 535078) where it

provided security for the new battalion CP until assumed by the 2/4 headquarters commandant (Capt R.S. Pyne).

On 13 November, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, was detached from the administrative and operational control of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines and reported to the operational control of Commander Landing Force, Blue Marlin. Upon departure, a platoon from each attached unit also deployed with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. During the first week of November 1965, amphibious shipping had lifted 2/7 out of Qui Nhon enroute to Chu Lai. The same shipping then transported 3/3, which had detached from the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines on 13 November, and had debarked at Hoi An south of Da Nang. Simultaneously, the Second Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines assumed control of the vacated 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, TAOR and airfield defensive positions. Accordingly, the Regiment relinquished that portion of their basic mission pertaining to “local defense of the Chu Lai airfield with one infantry battalion headquarters and a minimum of two rifle companies.” Throughout, the Regiment had successfully executed all phases of its assigned mission and denied the VC freedom of movement in and around the vital areas within the Chu Lai enclave.

On 13 November, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines relinquished the responsibility for the Chu Lai Airfield defense to the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. From 13 November 1965 on. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines’ assigned mission had been to:

“Occupy and defend the Northern Sector of the Chu Lai TAOR to protect and defend the Chu Lai vital areas in sector; conduct unilateral search and destroy operations within assigned sector; be prepared to provide one (1) mobile reserve company for deployment as directed; conduct patrols and ambushes throughout assigned sector of the Chu Lai TAOR; be prepared to conduct unilateral and/or coordinated operations with GVN Armed Forces within and beyond the periphery of the Chu Lai TAOR; be prepared to conduct counterattacks to restore the integrity of assigned sector; and provide external security to the LAAM Battery located on Ky Hoa Island (BT 5115).”

The platoons and remaining detachments of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, displaced from the MLS. Subsequently, the Second Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, assumed control of the vacated zone of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. 2/4 had earlier conducted a relief of lines on 11 November with 3/3 and with 2/7 on the 12<sup>th</sup> and reorganized defensive positions within a newly assigned TAOR.

On 14 November, the initial receipt of 20 Seismic Intrusion Devices (SIDs) was received by the Regiment. Upon receipt, immediate on the job training commenced and by 21 November the first issue of sensors had been employed. The distribution was to be 20 per battalion and 8 per headquarters company, infantry regiment. The M-72 (LAW- light antitank weapon), and the “shoot and discard” 60mm anti-tank rocket and launcher also became operational within the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines during November. The weapon would become as common as linked machine gun ammunition and it was not unusual for each member of a Marine rifle squad to carry several M-72s. It was essentially the successor to the 3.5” rocket launcher and in the absence of any enemy

armor, became the weapon of choice for bunker busting and as an anti-personnel weapon with its high explosive warhead.

On 17 November, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, responding to a CG, 3<sup>rd</sup>MarDiv message of 162145H November 65, that had directed the Regiment to be prepared to execute Division Operation Plan 337-65. Accordingly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines was directed to be prepared to execute Regimental Operation Plan 307-65 which supported Division Operation Plan 337-65. In addition, CG, 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, had directed that the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines place one rifle company on a one-hour alert status to assist the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines in the execution of 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv Operation Plan 338-65. Accordingly, Co H was attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines and then returned only to be reattached four days later on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The company was returned to its parent organization on 24 November in apparent response to the 17 November move by elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment which had moved north into the Hiep Duc-Viet An area to the northwest of Tam Ky. The VC regiment had attacked an ARVN outpost and district headquarters at Hiep Duc and apparently hoped to ambush relief forces moving along a ground route from Que Son or Viet An based upon their ground dispositions east of Hiep Duc. In addition, the Viet Cong met helicopter reinforcements with a heavy volume of ground fire from well-located positions, thus indicating their preparedness for this reinforcing technique. On 20 November, the 2/4 battalion commander's helo reconnaissance flight was fired upon and forced to land in a sandy area about 200 meters east of Rte. 1 and about 7 kms northwest of the 2/4 TAOR vicinity coordinate (BT 438106). Lt.Col Trevino had received a minor wound and was treated at B-Med. Co H provided security for the downed helicopter until it was recovered. On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the CO, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, dispatched a message to the Ky Ha Peninsula support facility commanders designating the First Battalion commander as the Peninsula Defense Commander (PDC) and to designate a major as assistant PDC. Newly-promoted Major R.M. Sweeney was designated as Assistant Peninsula Defense Commander. The PDC was directed to construct a control bunker on Hill 51 (BT 5210) of a design to withstand 81mm mortar and 57mm recoilless rifle fire. The bunker was to have communications facilities to provide direct communications with all units included in the defense of the Peninsula.

The basis for this additional mission assigned to the commanding officer of the First Battalion was felt necessary to further enhance the security of the vital facilities on the Peninsula, particularly in the vicinity of the MAG-36 helipad. In conjunction with the establishment of a defense commander, whose primary responsibility would be to coordinate defensive measures among the units in the vital areas. The peninsula was being readied for employment of mines, defensive wire barriers (a fifty meter wide swath along the MLR with triple roll concertina being laid along the enemy side), and lighting to assist in measures against individual/small unit infiltration attempts by the Viet Cong.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines during the month of November incurred one KIA, 29 WIA, and 36 non-battle casualties (3 resulting in death). During the period, a total of 13 VC were killed with 100 VCS, 11 VC, and 2 weapons captured by 4<sup>th</sup> Marine units.

The most significant event in the 7<sup>th</sup> Marine TAOR during November was the return of the Second Battalion to the operational control of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. Since 7 July 1965, 2/7 had operated in the Qui Nhon area under the operational control of the U.S. Army's Field Forces Vietnam. On 3 November the battalion returned to 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv control and sailed from Qui Nhon to the Chu Lai area where they participated in Operation Blue Marlin. On 12 November, upon completion of their role in that operation, the battalion returned to the operational control of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines and began moving into the Chu Lai enclave to assume responsibility for a sector of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines TAOR.

There was one regimental size operation conducted during November, Operation Black Ferret which took place 3-5 November. Cos B (Capt P.J. Fehlen) and D (Capt J.B. Airola) of 1/7, Cos K (Capt D.E. Thomas), and L (Maj R.A. Clark, 1-28 November, then 1<sup>st</sup> Lt D.M. McEwen, 28-30 November), and M (Capt T.G. McFarland) of 3/7, and supporting elements participated in this operation in an area southwest of the Chu Lai enclave. The Viet Cong in the area of operation, the central portion of Binh Son District, were held to be the 192<sup>nd</sup> VC Main Force Battalion (est. 350), the T-19<sup>th</sup> VC Local Force Co, (est. 100), an unidentified VC Main Force Co, (est. 100), plus local village and hamlet guerillas (est. 200), totaling 750 VC. The enemy had been recently harassing USMC and ARVN position, collecting rice tax, and extending VC control over the population in the area. Although no major VC forces were encountered, the operation did accomplish several significant objectives. The lack of major contact itself established that there were no major forces operating in the objective area, and those few Viet Cong encountered provided confirmation of unit identifications which had been previously suspected. Portions of the objective area had never been frequented by Marine units and civil affairs activities conducted by the Regiment as it passed through did much to discredit VC propaganda and extended Marine influence into a Viet Cong dominated area. The operation opened the road from Binh Son to the CIDG camp at Tra Bong (BS 345877) and enabled the ARVN to establish a permanent outpost at An Dong (2) along the south bank of the Song Tra Bong in the vicinity of coordinate (BS 555895). The operation produced a total of two VC KIA, 5 VC WIA, one VCC, 79 VCS, and two weapons captured. Marine casualties were one KIA and 13 WIA.

While conducting Operation Black Ferret, the AN/PRC-25 radio was used for the first time by 7<sup>th</sup> Marine units. The performance of this radio was outstanding, with thoroughly reliable communications being maintained with all units at distances up to 15 kms in hilly terrain.

Company C (1<sup>st</sup> Lt B.R. Goodwyn), 1/7, continued to man the battalion's company size combat base on the Trung Phan Peninsula (BS 624991). Throughout the month, aggressive squad, platoon, and company (-) patrols and search and clear operations were conducted:

- At 0725H on the 6<sup>th</sup>, the company apprehended one VCS suspected of being a VC squad member believed to have been in Thuong Hoa (1) in the southwest corner of the peninsula, coordinate (BS 629973). The next day at 0815H, a platoon combat patrol along the east bank of the Song Tra Bong about one km north northwest of the company's combat base saw two VCS that appeared to have a weapon. The patrol made efforts to

stop the men by shouting and firing warning shots; the two men did not stop and the patrol killed one VC and the other escaped into same nearby heavy brush. A hand grenade was found in the immediate area of the fallen VC. At 0950H, the patrol engaged the VC in a short, but furious fire fight in the vicinity of Son Tra (4), coordinate (BT 641011) that resulted in one VC killed, one VC captured, and one rifle captured.

- At 0430H on the 13<sup>th</sup>, the company's defensive perimeter received one hand grenade from the southeast vicinity of coordinate (BS 627989). Later that morning (0815H) a patrol received 10-15 rounds of small arms harassing fire from the direction of Tan My (1) hamlet to the north of the combat base vicinity of coordinate (BT 634008). The patrol reacted by immediately assaulting the VC position. The VC broke contact and fled from the area. One Marine was wounded in the exchange of fire.

- At 2000H on the 15 November, the company defensive perimeter received two incoming grenades from the same general location of the grenade throwing incident of the 13<sup>th</sup>. The company fired 81mm mortar illumination and observed four VCS fleeing over a ridgeline towards the south. At 2055H, the company fired its defensive artillery and mortar concentrations to counteract small but numerous probes. During the firing of the defensive fires, the VC broke contact. At 0120H on the 16<sup>th</sup>, a short 81mm mortar round fell into the company CP slightly injuring two Marines. The short mortar round was caused by defective increments and a defective base charge.

- At 2235H on the 17<sup>th</sup>, the company OP to the northeast of the perimeter vicinity of coordinate (BT 629991) observed one VC moving toward their position, and the Marines threw one grenade at the feet of the VC. A second VC appeared, and another grenade was thrown knocking him down. At this point, 81mm mortar illumination was fired and the first VC was observed getting to his feet. The Marines fired several rounds of M-14, knocking the VC into a hedgerow. Soon two additional VC appeared in the hedgerow and, covered by a burst of small arms fire from the hedgerow were successful in retrieving the two wounded VC and their weapons. More illumination was called and four VC were observed dragging two bodies just to the south of the hamlet of Tan Hy (2) near (BT 631990). The OP was retracted and 81mm mortars were fired for effect. Further attempts to reestablish the OP were met by harassing small arms fire and grenades, so more 81mm mortar and 106mm recoilless rifle fire was brought upon the area. One additional sighting of eight VCS was made very early on the 18<sup>th</sup> but no contact was made and the OP was returned to position at 0230H.

- During the night of 22 November, Co C received several probes. At 1940H, one VC was observed near the defensive wire where the grenade throwing incidents of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> had occurred. Again at 2000H, VC were observed near the defensive wire except at this time the VC fired 30 rounds of small arms fire and threw a grenade into the company's position. In both instances, the Marines fired at the VC with unknown results. At 2015, 81mm mortar illumination was fired and four VC with weapons were observed. The

Marines fired at the VC wounding three of the four. The VC managed to escape into the heavy brush before the Marines could apprehend them. At 2040HH, three VC were observed lying among some rocks to the northeast of the company perimeter vicinity of coordinate (BS 628988). The Marines fired 3.5" rockets and M-79 rounds and saw two wounded men being carried away. Ten minutes later, eight VC were seen moving east towards a trail. Again the M-79 was fired along with small arms and 81mm mortar illumination and high explosive. Three VC fell during the fight, but were later carried away. At 2115H, two VC ran toward the perimeter. The Marines opened fire with machine guns and wounded both VC.

- A Co C patrol, returning up river at 1650H on the 24<sup>th</sup> was fired upon by two groups of VC with automatic weapons on the west bank of the Song Tra Bong. Approximately five VC were located at Vinh An (1) vicinity of coordinate (BT 615008) and four others about 700 meters further south at (BT 618012). The patrol incurred one WIA and returned fire with unknown results.

- On the night of 26 November, Co C's combat base perimeter was probed by two VC. At 2020H, the two VC were seen near the protective wire. The Marines fired small arms and threw three hand grenades that resulted in one wounded VC. Before the wounded man could be apprehended, he was helped away by the other VC and both were able to escape in the heavy brush.

- At mid morning on the 29<sup>th</sup>, a Co C patrol located in Dong Le (2) at (BS 650998) observed two VC in green uniforms and hard covers moving into position on a hill top about 600 meters to the north of the hamlet at (BT 650004). The patrol fired on them, wounding one, although they were both able to escape in the heavy brush down the opposite side of the hill.

- At 1055H on the 30<sup>th</sup>, a patrol observed about 20 helmeted VC troops near the northwest tip of the peninsula north of Son Tra (1) vicinity of coordinate (BT 621022). The company immediately dispatched a reinforcing element to help trap the VC. At 1145H, the battalion dispatched a reaction force of two tanks, two infantry squads, and three amtracs to the objective area. The VC troops dissolved into the hamlet of Son Tra (1) and no contact was made.

Co C, 1/7, was responsible for two VC KIA, 13 VC WIA, and 3 VCS captured during the month, at a loss of five Marines wounded.

Blue Marlin was an extensive coordinated U.S. Marine Corps and Vietnamese Marine Corps operation conducted in two separate phases under the operational control of the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv and the first combined USMC/RVNMC amphibious landing in history. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, was one of the major assault elements of Phase I, landing across the beach 8.2 kms north northeast of Tam Ky vicinity of coordinate (BT 348298) in the early morning of 10 November. The battalion moved inland to Rte. 1, then turned southeast and swept down toward

the Chu Lai enclave. Co A, 1/7, provided a security escort for a motorized convoy which moved north on Rte. 1 to link up with 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion elements north of Tam Ky, and then moved back toward the enclave with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. This phase of Blue Marlin was concluded on 12 November when all units were returned to their Chu Lai positions. During Phase II of the operation, Co A was attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, for the period 14-17 November.

During Operation Blue Marlin, Co F, 2/7, had four VC approach their lines. The company received 15 rounds of small arms from the VC. They returned a heavy volume of fire and one of the platoon commanders reported that they had hit one or two of the VC. There were no friendly casualties. A patrol was sent out immediately and found one VC KIA with a 7.62mm Russian rifle, a cartridge belt, and two grenades. The area was further checked and another VC was found with one U.S. M-1 carbine, two grenades, and assorted small arms ammunition. Due to the two weapons not being retrieved by other VC, it was believed that at least one of the other VC and possibly a fourth may have been wounded.

Early on the morning of 16 November, BLT 3/3 landed over Orange Beach 21 kms north of Tam Ky and 19 kms southeast of Hoi Ann vicinity of coordinate (BT 265435) and commenced a search and destroy operation north to the Song Cau Dai. Once ashore, BLT 3/3's actions were coordinated with ARVN forces which searched north and west of Rte. 1. Phase II ended on 18 November and slight contact was experienced with VC elements. Following the operation, 3/3 was repositioned from Chu Lai to Da Nang permitting increased security for the Marble Mountain Air Facility and the Division's Ammunition Supply Point (ASP) #1.

Upon completion of Blue Marlin, task elements of BLT 2/7 (Lt. Col Leon N. Utter) were detached and operational control of the battalion passed to the Commanding Officer, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein) on 12 November. CO, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, directed that CO, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Seventh Marines, occupy and defend the right third of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines MLR. They were also to man the assigned OPLR and assume responsibility for the Chu Lai Airfield and the RMK contractor area. A special billet was established, that of the Airfield Defense Commander, and Major R.D. Smith was assigned. His group included one rifle company each from 2/7 and 3/7, and one rifle platoon from 1/7. On 9 November, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's Co B, maintaining a security platoon in then hamlet of Trung An (1) to the west of the Song Tra Bong and Trung Phan Peninsula vicinity of coordinate (BS 595998), captured five VCS while searching the nearby hamlet of My Hue (1).

On 10 November, BGen Jonas M. Platt had assumed the duties as ADC Chu Lai replacing BGen Frederick J. Karch.

At 2300H on 16 November, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines was notified by 7<sup>th</sup> Marines of the possibility of assuming a 16-hour alert status. Co M was called in from its patrol status and Co H, 2/4, and the regimental provisional company relieved Cos L and K, 3/7, of front line positions. The alert was called off at 1630H on the 17<sup>th</sup> and everyone returned to their original positions/duties. On 19 November at 1455H, a Co A patrol reported that they had been taken under fire while moving toward the hamlet of Phu Le (1) along the railroad tracks west of Rte. 1

vicinity coordinate (BS 575938). They were initially hit by four VC from their front, and after deploying and assaulting they began receiving fire from the right flank and rear. During the fire fight one VC was observed climbing into a tree carrying a carbine. One round of 3.5" white phosphorous was fired and the VC fell from the tree in flame. The rest of the VC unit broke contact and fled. On 19 November, 3/7 conducted search and clear operations in the hamlet of Tri Binh (4) just to the west of Rte. 1, vicinity of coordinate (BS 560997). Co M moved into positions covering all exits to the hamlet during the night of the 18<sup>th</sup>, with all units in position by 0100H on the 19<sup>th</sup>. At 0550H, one platoon from Co L departed by truck to the objective area, and the sweep was begun at daybreak. By 1215H the sweep was completed, and 54 VCS were turned over to the Chu Lai compound for interrogation by ITT personnel.

On 21 November at 1200H, 3/7 issued an order for the battalion to depart the enclave by helicopter at 1400H to relieve or reinforce elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ARVN Division in the Hiep Duc area west northwest of Tam Ky. At 1300H, Co B, 1/7, and Co H, 2/4, had relieved Cos M and L, 3/7, of frontline positions. When the battalion first went on alert it was in response to intelligence derived from a VC operation order captured by the ARVN which involved an attack on a Popular Force outpost in the vicinity of (BS 710420). The attack was conducted in order to entice the ARVN to make an attempt to reinforce the outpost. The main VC force was to be in positions to ambush ARVN relief columns that attempted to enter the battle area by either of the two possible surface avenues of approach to the outpost or by helicopter. These forces were deployed and operating in a manner very similar to the scheme of maneuver described in the captured VC operation order. Enemy forces participating in this operation included three main force battalions and two heavy weapons companies commanded by a regimental headquarters unit. It was estimated that this force was the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment. Third Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, was alerted to the possibility of being deployed in the vicinity of the Hiep Duc Special Forces outpost located a little over 3 kms to the north east of the district headquarters at (AT 9325). At 1415H, Co L had departed from the battalion HLZ, only to return a half hour later due to inclement weather in the objective area. The operation was postponed.

In implementing Operation Quick Time, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, was alerted again on 22 November, this time to support an ARVN ranger battalion in the southeast portion of Quang Ngai Province near Thach Tru (30 kms south of Quang Ngai City). This was in response to an ARVN request for units to reinforce the 37<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalion position on Hill 74 located at (BS 756470). The 37<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalion had repulsed a heavy Viet Cong attack on the night of 21 November. The Third Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, was finally committed on 22 November At 1610H, Co L departed the battalion LZ and by 1830H, all of Co L, half of Co K, and the forward battalion command group had conducted unopposed landing on Hill 74. The weather was poor. There was considerable rain and fog which limited helicopter employment and observation. The lift was interrupted by darkness and completed the following morning with Co M and the remainder of Co K.

Initial contact and discussion with ranger battalion personnel indicated that a large VC force (estimated to be a VC battalion) had attacked Hill 74 from all sides, with the main thrust coming from the northeast along the long axis of the hill. Several VC had penetrated the four rows of barbed wire entanglements encircling the hill and were killed as close as three meters from friendly positions. These VC were armed with baskets of grenades and were apparently employed as suicide assault forces. All VC wore khaki or grayish uniforms of military cut. Weapons collected from dead VC around the hill included Chinese copies of Russian AK-56 assault rifles and Russian-type SKS carbine rifles. The weapons, equipment, uniforms, and general appearance of dead VC indicated that the attack was conducted by hard core main force VC units. In conjunction with the VC attack on Hill 74 on the night of 21-22 November, a simultaneous attack was conducted on a nearby CIDG outpost. From the number of VC dead located around this outpost, it appeared that the attacking force was at least battalion size. The attack on this outpost was probably the main effort of the VC operation. The mission of the units involved was probably to kill or capture ARVN personnel, weapons, and equipment, in particular the one 105mm howitzer manned by the ARVN at this outpost. On the morning of 23 November, 3/7 began a sweep of the area west of Hill 74 to Hill 61 (located two kms to the west at (BS 734471). Cos L and M led the sweep to Hill 61 followed by Co K and the command group. In the course of this sweep, the battalion accounted for two VC KIA and the capture of two VCC, 16 VCS, one RPD light machine gun, two AK-56 assault rifles, five SKS carbines, one 75mm recoilless rifle round, and a large quantity of individual equipment including several grenades. The two VC KIA were first encountered hiding in a cave. Upon the approach of USMC personnel, they threw several grenades from the cave and tried to flee taking advantage of the confusion created by their brief grenade attack. One Marine was KIA as a result of this encounter.

Interrogation of one of the captured VCC revealed that the man was North Vietnamese and an aid man in the 7<sup>th</sup> Co of the 512<sup>th</sup> Battalion, a regular North Vietnamese unit. This unit had infiltrated South Vietnam three months earlier by foot. Interrogation of the other captured VCC revealed that the man was a private in the 405<sup>th</sup> NVA Regiment which had come to South Vietnam just a few months before his capture. The ARVNs identified the attacking force as NVA, the 18<sup>th</sup> NVA Regiment reinforced by the 45<sup>th</sup> VC Heavy Weapons Battalion, which was reported in the III MAF Command Chronology for November 1965.

In and around Hill 61, four large caves were located and destroyed. Three of these caves appeared to be bomb shelters. One was about 300 feet long and had several side tunnels leading off the main passage. From the size of these structures, it was estimated that between 500 and 1,000 personnel could be housed in these caves in the event of an air attack or if an effort were being made to conceal personnel during daylight hours. Interrogation of both VCC captured revealed that three platoons and some wounded VC had occupied the caves on Hill 61 on the night of 22-23 November and had withdrawn at first light on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Night positions were established by 3/7. The Third Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, was relieved by the 11<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalion on the 24<sup>th</sup> and retraction of the battalion was begun at 0855H on the 24<sup>th</sup>. The operation had

resulted in one Marine KIA and two WIA. Retraction was completed by 1530H and by 1800H, the companies had either returned to their frontline positions or reassumed their patrol duties.

During November, 7<sup>th</sup> Marine units captured 241 VCS, three rifles, five ChiCom type 56 SKS carbines, and two ChiCom submachine guns. Eighteen VC were KIA and 11 WIA. The Regiment incurred 4 KIA, 9 WIA, and 10 nonbattle casualties.

The headquarters staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv had relocated during November from their initial CP in the Marine Compound aboard the air base where they had been located in “close proximity” to both the Headquarters, III MAF and the Headquarters, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Aircraft Wing, to their new bunkered CP on the eastern face of Hill 327, vicinity of coordinate (AT 954751) about 4 kms west of the air base. Maj Gen Walt remained double-hatted as the Commanding General, III MAF (with the headquarters still aboard the Air Base) and Commanding General, 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv.

### **December 1965**

During the month of December, there was a total of 10.05 inches of rain with 26 days of measurable rain and two days with a trace of precipitation. The maximum temperature was 89 degrees; minimum temperature was 62 degrees; and the mean temperature 75 degrees. The relative humidity was 82.8%. The weather during December included several prolonged periods of rain and increased frequency of the crachin (French for coastal drizzle and fog). Similar in effect to the previous month, these conditions resulted in frequent deterioration of roads and restrictions of mobility and air operations. The continuing objective of destruction of Viet Cong forces was pursued during the month by three major operations.

During this period, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (-) (Rein) conducted operations commensurate with its newly-assigned mission. Operations up to and including battalion (-) in size were conducted. Individual battalions conducted company sized and smaller operations frequently during the period. The largest single factor limiting the extent of operations was Operation Harvest Moon, 8-18 December, to the west and northwest of Tam Ky (which lay about 15 kms north northwest of the Chu Lai enclave). Operations were curtailed during this period due to the commitment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion to provide one company to the MLR of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, and one company to Harvest Moon (Co G, 2/4). During the course of the operation, platoon size units were utilized to provide convoy security, downed helicopter security, and security for an artillery battery in Tam Ky. Also limiting the extent and size of operations was the unavailability of helicopters due to the operation and inclement weather.

December opened with the Regiment on a 16-hour alert status to be prepared to assist the SLF (2nd Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marines) in the execution of a Dagger Thrust operation. At 0259H, the Regiment was alerted for possible execution of 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv Operation Order 337-65, which tasked the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (and Co B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion) to provide, upon request of CG, 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, one reinforced infantry battalion (- 1 company) as a mobile strike force to conduct offensive operations and/or relieve or reinforce committed units and required a sixteen hour

alert status of forces involved until further notice) from 1-5 December. At 0312H on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, the alert had been increased to six hours. Both alerts were cancelled on 2 December.

On 5 December, Co E, 2/4, was lifted to a landing zone about 17 miles south of Quang Ngai City vicinity coordinate (BS 793142) to retake an overrun Popular Forces outpost and to provide security for a helicopter which was downed there. During the night at 0150H, the Viet Cong attacked from the west using 60mm and 81 mm mortars, 57mm recoilless rifles, automatic weapons, and grenades. The Viet Cong were driven off after about 30 minutes. Marine counter mortar fire was directed at the flashes from the Viet Cong mortars forcing them to evacuate or displace. Seventeen VC bodies were counted (and an estimated twenty more killed). Seven weapons were captured along with some ammunition.

Capt Jerry Ledin, C.O. of Co E, 2/4, received the Silver Star and Purple Heart as a result of the 5 December action. Capt Ledin's Silver Star citation sated in part: "On 5 December 1965, Captain Ledin's company was moved from Chu Lai, on short notice, to provide security for a downed helicopter at a government outpost fourteen miles south of Quang Ngai. Arriving at the objective just before dusk, Capt Ledin immediately established a three-sided perimeter, ingeniously positioning one platoon in a unique manner which was to prove of decisive value in the night's bitter combat action. Fearlessly exposing himself to sporadic sniper fire, he personally checked each position and coordinated precise night defensive plans. His foresight and preparations were severely tested just before midnight, when a heavy barrage of mortar and recoilless rifle fire immediately preceded an attack by fifty to eighty Viet Cong. Although painfully wounded by mortar fragments in the initial barrage, Capt Ledin courageously moved to the second story of a building which already had received several direct hits and was in imminent danger of total destruction. From his hazardous but advantageous observation point, he continued to direct his men, constantly pointing out targets, ensuring evacuation of the wounded and shouting words of encouragement to the fighting Marines below. With exceptional skill, he directed illumination from his mortars, naval guns, and a flare ship. Selflessly refusing medical aid for himself, he stalwartly remained at his post throughout the night. As a direct result of his heroism and exemplary professional ability, the out post was held, the helicopter safely evacuated with no loss of life to the Marines, at least 17 Viet Cong killed and numerous weapons captured".

On 8 December, a Regimental Order was promulgated directing the establishment of a provisional company to be formed from the Headquarters Co and attached units. Whenever two companies or more of a battalion were committed to an operation for a duration that extended beyond the daylight hours, the battalion must be augmented by additional forces in order to continue to man assigned defensive positions. The provisional company was to be activated on order (by CO, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines) to augment either battalion or reconstitute the regimental reserve as required.

It was interesting to observe that two people, both present at the same incident or event, had different versions as to what had happened. For example, two members of Co B, one a

platoon commander, the other the company executive officer, recalled an incident that had occurred on 17 December.

- Raul Brown, the platoon commander: “My platoon was assigned to an outpost on a peninsula north of Chu Lai for a while. We would patrol out of there every night, crossing the river in water up to our chins holding on to a rope and then patrol north to several villages. Several times we engaged in small firefights. Once, the VC snuck across and hit my outlying squad outpost and killed 3-4 men. I seem to remember the village just at the base of the peninsula was only called “No Name.” We were well dug in, had ammo bunkers, mines, wire, interlocking bands of fire, and fougasse. Unfortunately we had no protection from above. On 17 December, four helicopters operating in Operation Harvest Moon attacked my platoon position [Co B, 1 /4] with .50 cal. Machine guns and 2.5” rockets that killed two of my men. John Albrecht was up there that day paying us and there was an amtrac and his Mite [Jeep] sitting in full view on a bright, sunny Sunday afternoon. We sure had a helluva lot of MPC scattered around after the attack though! Subsequent Article 32 investigation exonerated pilots due to fatigue and combat stress.”
- John Albrecht, the company executive officer: “On the incident on 17 December. I was the pay officer and had a jeep and driver; I don’t know how the jeep got onto the island. Anyway, I was in the process of paying with good old green backs- not MPC. Two Army Hueys came by and we looked at them and they circled and opened up with 2.5 rockets on the first run. We dove into the holes that had been prepared as they passed over low and circled. I had my driver drive the jeep on to the beach and write ‘US Marines’ in the sand. We waved at them and hollered. On their second pass, one of the NCOS jumped up on top of one of the bunkers and tried to flag them off and was blown up in the air. I believe he received a bronze star. In the process I lost several thousand dollars in green backs. I did not have to reimburse the service. I can’t remember if we fired back on the second pass but I do remember around thirty rounds of rockets coming in. On the first pass I thought we were being attacked with mortars. After that, I respected those skinny rockets. I don’t know what happen to the Army crews; it was their first day in-country.”
- And yet a third version: according to the battalion's command chronology, “At 171345H [December 1965], Company B's patrol base 'Kahuku' (BT 476142) [on Hill 12 on the western end of Ky Hoa Island and within several hundred meters of where the Truong Giang River flowed into the South China Sea] reported receiving incoming mortar fire initially thought to be from the island at (BT 4712). Two KIAs were sustained. Further reports indicated that the suspected mortar rounds were in actuality 40mm rocket fire from friendly HU-1E aircraft. The HU-1E aircraft returning to MAG-36 [on the Ky Ha Peninsula] had seen the Marines at (BT 476142) and mistaken them for Viet Cong.”

As directed by CG, 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv, the unit boundary between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Marines was adjusted on 16 December.

On 24 December, CG, 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv directed that offensive operations would be suspended during the period 1800H on the 24<sup>th</sup> until 2400H on the 25<sup>th</sup>. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, the CG then suspended offensive actions until hostilities were clearly initiated by VC/PAVN units. On 26 December, the CG directed that all offensive operations were to be resumed without restrictions at 0750H on the 26<sup>th</sup>. This would be the Marines first experience with holiday cease fires (which in my experience were always busier, incident wise, than the non-cease fire periods). For example, a Viet Cong attempt during the Christmas cease fire the An Tan Bridge northwest of Chu Lai while unsuccessful was noteworthy in that the VC employed swimmers with satchel charges in the abortive company size attack.

At 0245H on the 25<sup>th</sup>, the An Tan Bridge (BT 497067) Marine security detachment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, Co H, 2/4, reported hearing one round of small arms fire. A sampan was sighted moving south towards the bridge. Illumination was fired and the sampan taken under fire. It then reversed its course and beached on the south west shore. A man emerged and swam across the river. He was taken under fire with unknown results. This incident was probably related to what happened the following night. The An Tan Bridge was a 3-span structure which spanned the An Tan River where the river intersects Rte. 1. The bridge's strategic location was such that its destruction would benefit the Viet Cong as it would hinder all military vehicular traffic movement on Rte. 1 and be detrimental to the local economy. There was no by-pass available. The bridge had always been a very lucrative sabotage target. The bridge was located in the midst of the An Tan Hamlet and was surrounded by houses on three sides. In some case, these houses were within 10 meters of the Marine defensive positions surrounding the bridge. Because the bridge is located in the middle of the hamlet, reconnaissance of the Marine defensive positions would not have been difficult for the Viet Cong. A rehearsal of the attack would have been possible in daylight hours by rehearsing the movement of each attacking element at different times without attracting attention.

Intelligence sources reported that the attacking force was composed of a local force company from the Ky Khuong village area (BT 4309) seven kms to the northwest of the bridge and two demolition squads, one from Ky Xuan Island (BT 4809) two kms to the north and the other from the Ky Sanh village (BT 4504) five kms to the southwest, with the collective nom de guerre, the "Gallantry Company." The attacking force had infiltrated the area surrounding the bridge and at 0240H on the 26<sup>th</sup>, launched the assault from three different sides with another unit on the fourth side positioned to ambush a relief column. A second demolition squad was southeast of the bridge but their mission was not known. The VC attacked from all three positions within seconds of each other, spraying the area with automatic weapons fire, and saturating the area with had grenades, rifle grenades and satchel charges. The VC used the house near the defensive positions for concealment. The actual attack on the defensive positions lasted approximately ten minutes before the attacking Viet Cong could be repelled. The Viet Cong withdrew under the cover of small arms fire and exfiltrated utilizing the same routes as they infiltrated by. It appeared as if the attack on the defensive positions was just a diversion for the demolition squad which was swimming up the river towards the bridge.

A few moments before the attack was launched, a Marine patrolling the bridge (Position #11) heard a noise in the water that sounded like splashing about 300 meters northeast of the bridge near the northernmost riverbank. The area was kept under surveillance without any sighting. 81mm mortar illumination was fired over the bridge at 0250H. As the illumination was fired, the Marines manning position (bunker) #8 spotted 6-8 VC swimming towards the bridge from the northeast approximately 200 feet from the bridge in the center of the river. All the swimmers were hit and seen to submerge, never to be seen again, with the exception of one managed to make it to the bank near position (bunker) #7, which unknown to bunker #8 had been vacated. Bunker #8 withheld their fire on the VC for fear of shooting into bunker #7. The VC fled into the houses on the northern side of Bunker #7 and escaped.

At 0250H, the first elements of the relief force arrived at the bridge and were greeted with sporadic small arms fire from the withdrawing VC. This fire was believed to have originated from the VC force which was to ambush the relief column (but never executed). The area surrounding the bridge was immediately searched and the area secured. Marine casualties during the attack had been 2 KIA and 9 WIA. At first light, the area was thoroughly searched producing one VC KIA, wearing black shorts, who washed ashore from the river. The Marine defenders would claim 20 VC KIA-probable. The following equipment and ordnance was found: 1-ChiCom submachine gun (K-50) found around the neck of the dead VC; 2- satchel charges (one found floating in the river north of the bridge); 5- VC homemade-type grenades; several rounds of Soviet carbine ammunition; and 2- tail fin assemblies from an unknown type of rifle grenade.

Two battalion (-) size operations were conducted during December 1965. The First Battalion 1/4 on 27 December conducted an operation on Ky Xuan Island and on 30 December, the Second Battalion conducted an operation in the northern portion of their TAOR. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines reported 31 VC KIA confirmed and eleven weapons captured during December 1965.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines conducted no regimental size operations during the month and only one battalion size operation of note. There were four operations in excess of one company, but none had established any significant contact with VC forces. The Second Battalion, 2/7, participated in Operation Harvest Moon between 8-19 December under the operational control of Task Force Delta.

Three battalion (-) operations were run under the operational control of the Third Battalion, 3/7, in December. On 13 December, elements of the Provisional Battalion manning the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion's positions during Harvest Moon joined with Cos I (-) and K (-) to conduct a sweep of the Long Phu village complex well to the west of Rte. 1. On 15 December, a Co I patrol had established contact with the VC in four separate incidents:

- (1) At 1020H, one squad from the patrol received a heavy volume of automatic weapons fire from an estimated 30 VC vicinity of Thanh Tra (1) coordinate (BS 525938), wounding one Marine. The patrol returned fire wounding three VC and possibly wounding five others before the VC broke contact.

- (2) At 1130H in the same general location, the same squad was again hit by heavy small arms fire, wounding two more Marines. The Marines deployed and returned fire which silenced the enemy fires and caused the VC to withdraw.
- (3) At 1230H, a Marine from another squad was wounded by a "bouncing Betty" type anti-personnel mine located near Thanh Tra (2) at (BS 537946).
- (4) In the day's final encounter, at 1415H, one more unit of the patrol was taken under fire by an estimated VC squad, including at least four armed women. The patrol returned fire and killed two of those women, who were found along with two carbines near Thanh Tra (3) vicinity of coordinate (BS 524948).

At 0615H on 21 December, a Co M, 3/7, patrol operating in the reconnaissance area of responsibility (RAOR) at (BS 505958), made contact with an estimated four to six VC. The VC used small arms and hand grenades, and in the Marines' return fire, two VC were killed. In a similar encounter by the same patrol on the 22<sup>nd</sup> at 1200H, three VC were engaged in a fire fight and one of these VC was killed in Tay Phuoc (1) vicinity of coordinate (BS 482949). The patrol continued their operations in the TAOR, and on the 25<sup>th</sup>, at 1030H, in an open rice paddy to the east of Phuoc Lam (3), vicinity of (BS 498918), it was taken under fire by three VC automatic weapons and at least five other small arms. The initial burst of fire wounded eight Marines and killed one. The squad took advantage of what cover was available and returned fire while another unit was rushed to their assistance. This additional squad swept through the VC position causing the VC to break contact and flee to the south. An aerial observer spotted one VC body at 1100H about 1,200 meters to the southeast of Phuoc Lam (3), near coordinate (BS 505914). The body was recovered by the patrol along with several documents.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion command group went to the field again on 27 December and had joined with Cos K and M to sweep an area adjacent to the north bank of the Song Tra Bong west of Rte. 1 in Operation Humbug. The operation resulted in seven VC killed, one VC wounded, and 31 VCS captured, all without any Marine casualties.

The Regiment's assumption of responsibility for the defense of the Chu Lai airfield, and subsequent re-adjustments of unit TAORs required modification of the Regiment's basic defense order. In conjunction with III MAF's instructions relative to freeing infantry units from static defensive positions for more active offensive roles, the Commanding Officer, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, was granted operational control of certain non-infantry units for use in airfield defense when other commitments necessitated employment of infantry elements normally used in this role. Regimental instructions were published to constitute the Airfield Defense Group with two provisional rifle companies from MAG-12, the Navy's Mobile Construction Battalion, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> LAAM Battalion resources.

A cooperative hog farm was under construction in the Chu Lai New Life Hamlet. The materials were provided by USOM, and Capt Theer, Co E, 2/7, an experienced hog raiser from Iowa, offered

technical advice and assistance to the members of the cooperative. Garbage from the Chu Lai enclave was to be used to feed the pigs.

During December, 7<sup>th</sup> Marine units reported 48 enemy KIA, 19 WIA, 138 VCS, 12 VCC, and 8 weapons captured.

The year ended on a tragic note for the First Battalion, Fourth Marines, when recently promoted Major Robert Sweeney (temporarily appointed to major and assigned to H&S Co, on 18 November), died on 31 December by drowning (non-battle casualty) while making a reconnaissance of the Chu Lai beach area. Major Sweeney was swept off the rock he was standing on by a wave while briefing his relief as Assistant Peninsula Defense Commander concerning defensive positions in the area and washed out to sea. The Battalion S-3 radio log for that day simply reported that Major Sweeney had fallen off a cliff/rock along the east coast of the Ky Ha Peninsula in the vicinity of grid square (BT 5310) at 1230H. A 1550H message directed battalion units to "be on lookout for [his] body on the beach."

### **The Enemy**

The enemy being confronted up to this point was primarily Viet Cong main and local force units and hamlet and village guerrillas. For the most part, they were content to ineffectively snipe at us with small arms fire, inaccurately pump a few mortar or RPG rounds upon us, but very effectively harass us with booby traps. Marines were much more inclined to stomp around and use blunt force (employing as much artillery and close air support as we could get our hands upon) to make our point, e.g., responding to ineffective sniping from several VC carbines with overwhelming artillery and air.

The village guerilla, frequently an older man, not military trained, poorly armed, not highly indoctrinated, was generally assigned the mission of static defense of the village. Some might also undertake sabotage and assassination missions or become demolitions experts. At the hamlet level, the village guerrillas were organized into either a cell of 3 men (their basic unit), a half squad (6 men), or infrequently, a full squad (12 men). At the village level, they might be organized into a platoon of three or four squads (36 to 48 men). They satisfied their guerilla responsibilities on a part-time basis and were more of a psychological value to the NLF as they were not expected to stand and fight if the ARVN conducted a military sweep through the village. Guerrillas were equipped with the usual mixture of ChiCom, U.S., and French weapons and homemade grenades. A second functional element was the combat guerrilla who was much less static (i.e., village or hamlet-bound) and more likely to be used in combat missions away from the home village. Frequent assignments for combat guerillas included serving as aids to mobile elements or other full military (or main force) elements on military operations, often serving as runners or on propaganda and psychological warfare missions. They also served as a manpower pool for the main forces.

In general, the full military elements were full time, younger, better trained and equipped, more thoroughly indoctrinated politically and employed guerrilla tactics, rather than orthodox or

conventional military tactics. They looked like guerrillas (not like regular soldiers; no high and tight haircuts or uniforms). Their units broke up between operations which allowed them to live and work among their families. There were two basic entities within the full military elements: the regionals or territorials and the main force (or “hard hats”) which in turn consisted of two types, the independent or the concentrated. The regionals or territorials consisted of independent companies, each of 3 or 4 platoons, at the district level and took their orders from the district (occasionally provincial) central committee. These regional elements became known as local force units. The two types of main force units were both battalion-sized entities consisting of a headquarters element and 2 to 4 subordinate companies, each of about 85 to 120 men. These battalions were either independent (Doc Lap) or concentrated (also referred to as mobile battalions). Both took their directions from the provincial central committee. In some instances, the main force battalions were part of the structure of regiments, or entities that would make up regiments to be created in the future.

The Marines at Chu Lai had first come in contact with VC main force units during Operation Starlite: the 40<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Bns, and elements of the 90<sup>th</sup> (MF) Bn, all known subordinates of the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment, as well as elements of the 450<sup>th</sup> VC Bn, the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regt’s heavy weapons unit. These were the same VC units which had been reported in contacts with the ARVNs in late May and again during July. The VC resisted the Marines using small arms (most VC were found to be armed with French MAS-36 rifles), automatic weapons, 60mm and 81/82mm mortars, 12.7 mm AA guns, and 57mm RR fires from strong and organized positions. Many of the VC encountered were wearing the traditional black PJs. However some had mixed uniforms, camouflaged with foliage, and U.S. steel helmets with helmet liners. Among the weapons captured were M-1s, M-14s, U.S., ChiCom, and Russian carbines, French MAS-36s, BARs ChiCom SMGs, ChiCom RPG-2s (rocket propelled grenade launchers), grenades, and explosive charges. A U.S. AN/PRC-10 tactical radio with antennas was captured which had permitted the VC to enter Marine tactical nets.

The 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment had been among the first units of its size formed in South Vietnam, reportedly activated during February 1962. In July 1963, the regiment was reinforced by the 502<sup>nd</sup> Infiltration Battalion which infiltrated from NVN. The major maneuver elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment were the 60<sup>th</sup>, 80<sup>th</sup>, and 90<sup>th</sup> Battalions (with the 70<sup>th</sup> VC Main Force Battalion attached when the regiment was operating in Quang Tin Province. Earlier, there had been a 400<sup>th</sup> Artillery Battalion (in actuality, the heavy weapons battalion in the 1<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment which had been disbanded in September of 1965. Its companies were directly subordinated to the regimental headquarters. There were nine support companies, such as medical, anti-aircraft, engineer, signal, reconnaissance, transportation, antitank, mortar, and training, directly subordinate to the 1<sup>st</sup> VC’s regimental headquarters. The regiment was thoroughly familiar with the people and terrain of Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces and to the ARVN units operating in those areas.

A tabulation of enemy capability in the two southern enclaves at the end of the year indicated that increases in enemy strength in the Chu Lai enclave had given the Viet Cong a capability to

attack in the TAOR with two regiments (the 2<sup>nd</sup> VC and the 18<sup>th</sup> PAVN) reinforced with two main force battalions, local force and guerrilla elements. The most significant enemy activity had occurred during daylight hours on 27 December, during the Christmas cease fire period, when a Marine patrol was engaged by an estimated 60-75 VC armed with 15-20 automatic weapons. Viet Cong casualties were 41 KIA. Of particular significance were the 90 VC-initiated contacts during the Christmas truce period (24-27 December), when U.S. forces were not initiating contact. Increases in enemy strength gave the VC the capability to attack the Da Nang TAOR with one regiment (the 1<sup>st</sup> VC) and possibly a second (the 36<sup>th</sup> PAVN) reinforced by two main force battalions and local forces and guerrilla elements.

## **Chapter 6 - The Pineapple Marines**

On 25 December 1965, 3/4 had rotated out of the Hue-Phu Bai enclave to Okinawa. They reorganized and re-outfitted. The battalion would reenter South Vietnam at Hue on 18 March 1966. The remainder of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein) would stay in Vietnam until 1969 and thereafter would be permanently stationed for many years at Marine bases, Okinawa, Japan. Units of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein) participated in the war in Vietnam from April 1965 – November 1969 while operating from Chu Lai, Da Nang, Phu Bai, Quang Ngai City, Dong Ha, Con Thien, Cua Viet, Cam Lo, USS Iwo Jima, Vandegrift Combat Base, and Quang Tri.

By mid-1966, most if not all of the Marines who had departed Hawaii as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade in March 1965, (even those “Pineapple Marines” transferred to other battalions in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDivs), had completed their tours in Vietnam and had rotated out of the country. There were undoubtedly some who had extended their tours. A significant percentage of the officers (33%) who had served together in the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines in the early and mid-1960s remained on active duty for full military careers. All would invariably return to Vietnam for second and even third tours. Some would be awarded very high personal decorations for heroism (e.g., Marty Brandtner, two Navy Crosses within a period of 10 days; Al Slater a Navy Cross for commanding two rifle companies both under fire at the same time; and numerous Silver and Bronze Stars).

Among the 33% who remained in the Marine Corps, there were two who made lieutenant general (Marty Brandtner and Bob Johnston), three major generals (Mike Myatt, OK Steele, and Dennis Murphy), one brigadier general (Garry Brown), and a number of colonels, lieutenant colonels, and majors.

Of the 67% of the Pineapple Marine officers who had left Chu Lai and active duty in the Marine Corps, a good number went on to very successful civilian careers, if you consider becoming a millionaire (or billionaire in at least one instance) as being successful. Others, while not quite that financially successful, nevertheless served their country and communities honorably and successfully as educators, ranchers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, ministers (including a Jesuit priest), commercial pilots, businessmen, and a Deputy Director for Operations (DDO) at the Central Intelligence Agency.

Without exception, the officers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein), when leaving active duty took their Marine training and experiences with them into civilian life, just like all Marine veterans that preceded them. As a Marine they had learned to lead, and they had learned to follow. They had learned problem solving by intelligence and analysis, and they had learned to work with teams. And above all they had learned to shoot straight and take care of their Marines. General James F. Amos, (35th Commandant) said: *“A Marine is a Marine. I set the policy two weeks ago – there’s no such thing as a former Marine. You’re a Marine, just in a different uniform and you’re in a different phase of your life. But you’ll always be a Marine because you went to Parris Island, San Diego or the hills of Quantico. There’s no such thing as a former Marine.”*

As long as any Pineapple Marines stay standing and reasonably alert it is our intent to continue updating this document with the individual recollections of wartime experiences. We will add photos and maps in future revisions. And, we intend to add individual biographies to our website [www.kbaymarine.com](http://www.kbaymarine.com). Marines, please continue to contribute your stories and updates.

Pineapple Marines can look back and be proud that when they were called, they served, they did their duty and won their battles. Our Commander in Chief, President Ronald Reagan once said: ***“Some people spend an entire lifetime wondering if they made a difference in the world. But, the Marines don’t have that problem.”***

## Epilogue

The commitment of unit ground forces into Vietnam, and subsequent repeated escalation of the war was a political and military mistake. The cost in terms of American treasure (\$111 billion for military operations, 1965-1972), and American blood (58,220 fatal casualties) was enormous and unnecessary. 14,844 Marines were fatal casualties in Vietnam.

The post WWII foreign policy of the United States began to be framed by the fall of China in 1949. The Korean war and the French Indochina war, both begun in 1950, and both were supported by the U.S. efforts to: 1) contain the expansion of communism in Asia – Korea; and, 2) to continue French colonialism - Vietnam. American military advisors began to assist Vietnamese forces in 1950. Following the defeat of France in 1954 U.S. involvement in Vietnam by 1959 amounted to just under 1,000 advisors. By 1963 under President Kennedy the troop level had escalated to 16,000, and by 1964 under President Johnson the troop level was 23,000.

It was a fact, during the post WWII years that Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson all proclaimed adherence to the “Domino Theory”; that if one Asian country fell to communism more countries would follow until all of Asia was lost to the influence of China and Russia. It was a popular theory in congress and with the American public. It was the subject of articles of support in the Stars and Stripes, a publication supported by the DOD (Department of Defense) and distributed to U.S. forces worldwide including the troops assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein), 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade, MCAS Kaneohe, during 1961-1965.

Kennedy appointed Robert McNamara Secretary of Defense, and many academics to key positions in his administration. His brother Robert was appointed Attorney General. Both Kennedys and McNamara experienced a serious lack of confidence in the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a result of the failure of the “Bay of Pigs” invasion to overthrow the Cuban government in April 1961. The Kennedy staff was labeled “The Best and The Brightest”. But, the animosity between the “old school” advisors and the new administration was well known in Washington.

No one knows what Kennedy would have done about Vietnam if he had lived. And, no one knew what Johnson would do about Vietnam when he became president in November 1963. What Johnson did do was to retain most of the Kennedy appointees in their jobs. Johnson was very impressed with the intelligence and energy of the Best and the Brightest. In fact, Johnson was an insecure man of weak character. He needed to hide his intentions about what to do about Vietnam until after the 1964 election. So, he lied to his staff and he lied to the congress, and he lied to the press and the American people. He was afraid of losing an Asian country to communism. And, he was afraid that his domestic policy legislation, (the Great Society), would not get through congress if he escalated the military involvement in Vietnam.

In the first week of August Johnson was handed a possible way out of his decision making predicament--the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Whatever really happened on 3 August in the South China Sea made no difference because Johnson secured the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution from congress. That gave him broad powers to increase U.S. military presence in Vietnam, including

ground forces. Between August, 1964 and March, 1965 Johnson was elected president by a landslide, and he fell deeply under the influence of McNamara by holding meeting after meeting regarding Vietnam at the White House without input from his key military advisors, the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (The Chiefs were Army General Earle Wheeler, Chairman, Air Force General Curtis LeMay, Navy Admiral David McDonald, Army General Harold Johnson, and Marine Corps Commandant General Wallace Greene).

McNamara continued to meet with the Joint Chiefs to discuss military tactics, strategy on troop deployment and the need for consensus. The Chiefs were all protective of their own services role. The Chiefs each wanted a bigger role. McNamara wanted limited use of force in the North. He was pushing a limited war theory called "Graduated Pressure" designed to force the North Vietnamese to negotiate a truce. The CIA was sure that limited war with slowly increasing military pressure would only cause the North to increase their military effort in kind.

On February 9, 1965 Johnson approved limited air strikes against the North, and on February 26 he agreed to commit U.S. ground forces. In late March Johnson gave the ground forces the mission of "Killing Viet Cong." Army General William Westmoreland, who was appointed to lead the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) in June 1964 requested more troops to support the strategy he developed to kill the Viet Cong.

The next question was who goes and when? General Victor Krulak, who was responsible for all FMFPac Marines, was consulted. Two reinforced battalions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division landed in Vietnam in March to provide security for the airfield at Da Nang. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein) set sail for Okinawa arriving 26 March. BLT 3/4 was designated the alert battalion landed at Phu Bai/Hue on 15 April to provide security for the airfield there. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines landed at Chu Lai on 7 May 1965 to provide security for the construction and defense of an airfield.

The Marines had landed. Krulak's long-held strategy, to control three coastal enclaves, each with an airfield, won the argument at the Joint Chiefs. But it was the approval of McNamara and his influence with President Johnson that set the course of the early conduct of the war. War was never declared, congress was never consulted. The war just happened.

Westmoreland kept asking for more troops. Secretary of State Dean Rusk did not influence policy. The Joint Chiefs were convinced that a consensus was necessary to support the president even though they knew the McNamara strategy would not lead to a victory. CIA Director John McCone would not agree to support the military strategy and resigned effective 28 April 1965. The American forces in country by 1968 exceeded 500,000 troops.

The American people lost faith in our government. Students and others opposed to the war rioted. Lyndon Johnson's presidency failed. He did not run for re-election.

H.R. McMaster, in his book "Dereliction of Duty" said: "The war in Vietnam was not lost in the field, nor was it lost on the front pages of the New York Times or on the college campuses. It was lost in Washington D.C., even before Americans assumed sole responsibility for the fighting

in 1965 and before they realized the country was at war, indeed, even before the first American units were deployed. The disaster in Vietnam was not the result of impersonal forces but a uniquely human failure, the responsibility for which was shared by President Johnson and his principal military and civilian advisers. The failings were many and reinforcing: arrogance, weakness, lying in the pursuit of self-interest, and, above all, the abdication of responsibility to the American people.”

Every person when becoming an American citizen, serving in government, being elected to a public office, or serving in the military takes an oath of allegiance. When appointed Marine officers are bound by the following Oath of Office:

“I \_\_\_\_\_ , having been appointed an officer in the Marine Corps of the United States, as indicated above in the grade of \_\_\_\_\_ do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign or domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same, that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservations or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter; So help me God.”

The Pineapple Marines served.

### **Acknowledgements – Roger Staley**

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Semper Fi

Col. Roger Staley, USMC (Ret.)

### **Acknowledgements – Robert Peters**

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Several authors have published books that have provided me with their personal insight and/or invaluable research into national policy, and the decision making process that led to commitment of the United States to the Vietnam war, and the military tactics employed. Two of those books are David Halberstam's The Best and the Brightest, and H. R. McMaster's Dereliction of Duty. Also, Philip Caputo's A Rumor of War is a powerful first person recollection into the minds and hearts of men in combat.

The anecdotal reports of experiences and opinions from many Pineapple Marines has given the story, (during peacetime and war), a personal touch that would not be possible from military records alone. Thank you Marine contributors all.

I am deeply indebted to my friend and author Phillip Jennings. Phil is a former helicopter pilot in the United States Marine Corps and Air America, serving in Vietnam and Laos 1965-1970, and is a founding member of Vietnam Veterans for Factual History [vvfh.org](http://vvfh.org).

May 7, 2015, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pineapple Marines amphibious landing at Chu Lai, South Vietnam was marked by a reunion of 4<sup>th</sup> Marines (Rein) officers at the Silverton Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Pineapple Marines are grateful for the generosity of Ed Roski, and his wife Gayle, owners of the Silverton for hosting this, as well as prior reunions. (Ed is also a Pineapple Marine decorated company commander).

Semper Fi,

Bob Peters, Pineapple Marine Veteran

