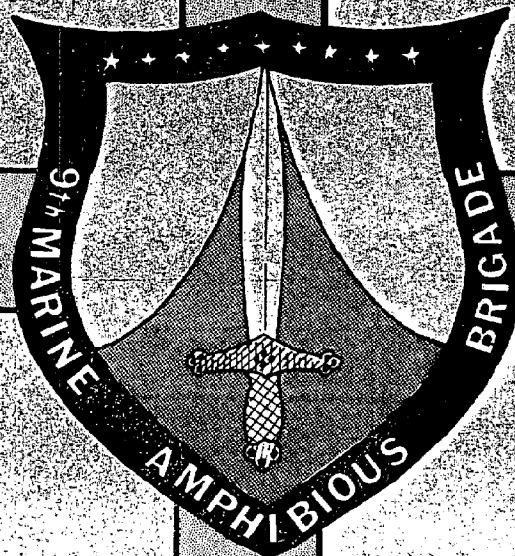


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OPERATION FREQUENT WIND



1975

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TAB B

5 August 1975


Foreword

The purpose of this report is to provide a supplement to Command Chronologies submitted for the non combatant emergency evacuation of Saigon, here after referred to as operation "Frequent Wind".

Many thousands of words have been written about the "Frequent Wind" operation, principally due to its unprecedented nature. No attempt is made in this report to address articles, statements or opinions of outside sources, military or civilian, on actions taken. This report is intended to provide a factual account, in broad context, of the operation as seen thru the eyes of the commanders and staff within the Ninth Marine Amphibious Brigade.

If one major point can be made on why this operation was a success it is that by the meticulous planning of an integrated Marine air ground team "Any Challenge Can Be Met".

I would like to take this final opportunity to acknowledge the countless hours of hard work of the staffs of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade, 4th Regimental Landing Team, Provisional Marine Aircraft Group 39, and the Brigade Logistic Support Group. I am especially indebted to Colonel Wylie Taylor, Al Gray, Frank McLenon and Colonel Hans Edebohls for their encouragement and professional advice. A particular note of thanks and recognition must go to my G-3 Lieutenant Colonel Robert White for his patience with me and for the many arduous hours spent in assembling this report. It is my fervent hope that this report will contribute to future successes in NEMVAC operations.



RICHARD E. CAREY
Brigadier General
U. S. Marine Corps

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CHAPTER I

THE 1974-75 NVA/VC DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE

Little did contingency planners throughout Pacific commands realize how important their carefully prepared and voluminous evacuation plans for Southeast Asia were until after the North Vietnamese boldly moved on the South commencing with the 1974-75 Dry Season Offensive. The plan for evacuation of Military Region I, called FORTRESS JOURNEY, was put into effect by late March 1975. TALON VISE, later renamed FREQUENT WIND, and which provided for the evacuation of Saigon, was right on its heels.

In light of the importance of one of the most unprecedented combat operations in history, the evacuation by helicopter of nearly 7,000 persons from the jaws of the enemy, it is important that the stage be set properly so that the very reason for the execution of FREQUENT WIND is not lost in the aftermath of its success. The enemy situation leading up to the 29-30 April operation, as prepared by the 9th MAB G-2, chronicles clearly the NVA/VC maneuvers.

Setting the Stage

With the surrender of Saigon on 30 April 1975 the 34 year war in South Vietnam ended. The final scene of the drama started in December 1974, on a stage set since 28 February 1973. Working feverishly after the cease fire, the NVA massed their greatest military strength ever in the south. Tanks and heavy artillery accompanied by thousands of troops thundered across South Vietnamese borders. Cessation of Amer-

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ican bombing had allowed the NVA to develop good LOC's south and a sophisticated logistical apparatus to support their aggression.

In spite of these advantages, the NVA were unsure of their ability to completely conquer the south. Although COSVN's resolution for the 1975 campaign was total victory, it was not really expected until 1976. The possibility of a resumption of American bombing could not be discounted by Hanoi and was a major factor in moderating NVA objectives at the start.

The Offensive Begins

The attack on Phuoc Long Province in MR-3 was geared to test American reaction to a major enemy offensive. The NVA saw American inaction to this assault as the green light for initiation of an all out offensive. Even at this point the NVA did not expect the successes which were to follow.

Following the capture of Phuoc Long Province, the NVA were content with a status quo while making final preparations for large-scale assaults. The ARVN, on the other hand, began to prepare defensive plans in earnest, especially in MR-1 where the heaviest attacks were expected. In MR-2 attacks were expected around Kontum and Pleiku and movement of the NVA 968th Division to this area from Laos tended to confirm this. There were some indications also that the 10th and 320th Divisions had possibly moved south into Quang Duc Province during February of 1975. However, based on contradictory reporting provided by SIGNINT and HUMINT sources, U. S. and ARVN intelligence was unable to resolve exactly from where the attack would come.

When combat did erupt in MR-2 on 4 March it was along the major LOC's (Routes 19 and 21) to the highlands. The roads

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were quickly interdicted and by 10 March, Ban Me Thout was attacked suddenly by two NVA divisions, one of which, the 316th, had infiltrated undetected from North Vietnam. With major roads into the area closed, the ARVN began the piecemeal commitment of reinforcements. This tactical error resulted in the loss not only of Ban Me Thout but the destruction of the ARVN 23rd Division as well.

Withdrawal from the Central Highlands

On 16 March, after determining their indefensibility, President THIEU ordered what was supposed to be an orderly withdrawal of the highlands to more defensible terrain. A lack of planning and organization turned the withdrawal into a rout. Within two hours, the road south was clogged with South Vietnamese military and civilians in vehicles and on foot. The NVA pursued the fleeing columns which moved slowly along Route 7A. By this time the South Vietnamese military units were completely disorganized and incapable of defending the retreating columns. The NVA pursued to the coast, capturing tens of thousands of refugees and tons of equipment on the way. The precipitous abandonment of the highlands set a tone of panic and defeatism which was to spread infectiously in coming days. The NVA forces moved quickly to capitalize on this situation. A few ARVN units, notably the 22nd Division in Binh Dinh Province and the 3rd Airborne Brigade in Khanh Hoa Province, resisted the Communists, but otherwise the Communist drive to the coast met little resistance.

Abandonment of the North

In MR-1 the GVN defense network broke before it was even

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really subjected to heavy combat. Although the Communists enjoyed many successes during early March, the heaviest blow against MR-1 defense was the movement of the ARVN Airborne Division from the area to Saigon on 12 March. The ABN Div was one of the keystones essential for a strong defense. Its loss had a severe psychological impact upon the remaining defenders. The snowball had begun to roll. After the withdrawal of the airborne troops, evacuation of the central highlands, and a series of limited but sharp enemy attacks, military morale dropped and civilian panic rose. But, while strong threats had developed in Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces, the first area to break was Quang Tri Province on 19 March 1975. The Province Chief ordered Quang Tri abandoned, adding even more to the feeling of panic in the region. Nevertheless, the MR-1 commander planned to fight. These plans, however, were disrupted by the vacillation of President THIEU, who gave a series of conflicting orders first to abandon Hue in the face of heavy attacks, then to defend it. Commanders found it impossible to reverse the movement of their troops so quickly. Troops and equipment were stranded on roads already clogged by refugees, and command and control became extremely difficult. When the Communists did launch their attacks near the city panic had really set in. Efforts were made for the orderly withdrawal of some units but with only marginal success. Route QL1 was soon cut between Hue and Danang and Communists forces quickly surrounded the city. By 24 March, Quang Ngai and Quang Tin Provinces were lost and hundreds of thousands of refugees fled to what was hoped to be the Danang enclave. The snowball continued to roll. Fear stricken troops presented only token resistance to NVA forces by this time. Massive desertions were reported as GVN troops fled to Danang

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with their families, leaving equipment, weapons, and gear strewn along the roads. It became clear that by now even Danang was clearly indefensible. Although already too late, evacuation of Danang commenced, first by air then by sea. The air evacuation ended on 28 March when uncontrolled mobs of people crowded onto runways making air operations impossible. The last plane out, a World Airlines passenger plane, had to run over people and motorcycles to take off. By 29 March Danang was the scene of chaos and pandemonium, with no law and order or organized defense. The second largest city in South Vietnam fell to the Communists without a struggle. The northern aggressors walked into the city to find airplanes, tanks, guns and other equipment in perfect condition left abandoned.

Preparing for the Final Blow

Meanwhile, the snowball continued to gather mass and momentum. By 3 April the NVA held all of MR-2 except Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan Provinces. The major cities of Qui Nhon, Nha Trang and Dalat had been abandoned.

Combat was light for the next few days as the NVA hastily prepared for attacks in MR-3. The stunning successes in MR-1 and MR-2 were not expected by the NVA and a few days were needed to consolidate their gains and formulate new offenses. Improved command and control, which in past offenses was sadly lacking, proved to measure up to the task this time. The improved command and control enabled the NVA to move their force swiftly to capitalize on the GVN's withdrawal. Divisions from North Vietnam, MR-1 and MR-2 moved south to MR-3 while divisions from MR-4 were moved north and east to MR-3. Newly captured equipment and an improved road network aided this

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movement, which was accompanied by forward deployment of AAA and portable SAM (SA-7) cover.

Their morale suffering badly now, the RVNAF nevertheless made half-hearted efforts to regroup and organize its defense. Some units were formed from the rag-tag 18,000 ARVN soldiers evacuated from MR's 1 and 2, but they proved to be only marginally effective when later committed to combat. Of 15 ARVN divisions, six were rendered combat ineffective in MR-1 and MR-2. They were the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 22nd, 23rd, and the Marine Divisions. Having been routed once, it was unlikely they would perform well when remnants were reconstituted.

Unleashing the Death Blow

Military activity in MR-3 began in Tay Ninh Province. A major combined arms attack here eliminated all ARVN presence west of the Van Co Dong River. This resulted in the loss of Tri Dam District in Binh Duong Province. This victory was quickly followed by launching heavy attacks in the eastern part to the region against ARVN positions along Routes 1 and 20. In the process two district towns, Dinh Quan in Long Khanh Province and Hoa Duc in Binh Tuy Province, were overrun. Heavy fighting subsequently shifted to Xuan Loc, the capital of Long Khanh Province. Here, four NVA Divisions commenced attacks on 9 April in order to defeat the 18th ARVN Division defending there and gain control of the main highway (Route 1) approach through Xuan Loc into the Bien Hoa/Saigon area. The South Vietnamese quickly reinforced Xuan Loc with an Airborne Brigade, an Armored Brigade, and an Infantry Regiment. Despite meeting a stubborn defense, as well as taking heavy casualties, the NVA were able on 20 April to take Xuan Loc and move on west towards Bien Hoa. Although it had taken the brunt of the NVA attack at Xuan Loc, the 18th ARVN Division was forced

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THE FINAL DRIVE ON
BIEN HOA AND SAIGON

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to take up the defense of Bien Hoa within just a few days, for the two Vietnamese Marine Brigades deployed just east of Bien Hoa along Route 1 were considered unreliable. Their Marine Division Commander, despite orders to be with the two Brigades at Bien Hoa, remained at Vung Tau, thereby failing to consolidate command of the Marines. In all the task of defending Bien Hoa fell to the 18th ARVN Division, two Airborne Battalions, and the two Marine Brigades. A badly battered Armored Brigade moved to Long Binh in reserve. Ultimately, the Vietnamese Marines were ordered to secure the main Bein Hoa-Vung Tau highway (Route 15), but they were effectively blocked north of Long Thanh. The loss of Xuan Loc and the effective interdiction of Routes 1 and 15 signalled the end of ARVN resistance in eastern MR-3 and had opened the way for attacks against the main prizes - - Bien Hoa and Saigon.

On 21 April President THIEU finally bowed to increasing pressure and resigned. He was succeeded by Vice President Tran Van HUONG, who initially assumed a militant policy of continued resistance. However, after only seven days in office, HUONG turned over the presidency to former General Dung Van "Big" MINH, who immediately began implementing plans for negotiations with the Communists. The Communists added a new prerequisite for negotiation by demanding the elimination of the war machine in addition to the previous demands for departure of "all U. S. agents and of the THIEU clique" by 26 April 1975.

The Final Days

True to their word, when their demands went unanswered, the NVA launched the final assault on 26 April which they named the "Ho Chi Minh Campaign". Strikes were made against

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ARVN elements in the Long Thanh/Long Binh area. Phouc Le near Vung Tau came under simultaneous attack and fell quickly, thereby isolating the Vung Tau Peninsula. The Bear Cat Armor School and Long Thanh District were also overrun, thereby effectively sealing off any escape from Saigon to the sea over Route 15. On 28 April direct attacks on Long Binh began and panic caused breakdown of the defenses around Bien Hoa. VNAF aircraft, which had flown out of Bien Hoa for most of the war, were now forced to move to Can Tho. Saigon and Tan Son Nhut Air Base came under heavy rocket and artillery attacks for the first time. Also, turncoat VNAF pilots and AAA gunners began bombing and strafing Tan Son Nhut, and aircraft attempting to depart were fired on by AAA gunners. The AAA and SAM envelope began to tighten around Saigon. Especially menacing was the shoulder-fired SA-7 SAM. Simultaneously, ground attacks were conducted against the ARVN in Cu Chi, Lai Khe, and virtually all friendly positions around Saigon City. The NVA strategy apparently was to destroy the remaining ARVN units outside the city and avoid a prolonged fight in Saigon itself. On 29 April Vung Tau and Bien Hoa fell. Saigon was defenseless.

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CHAPTER II

THE NINTH MARINE AMPHIBIOUS BRIGADE

On 26 March 1975, the Ninth Marine Amphibious Brigade was activated by III Marine Amphibious Force for planning contingency operations. Brigadier General Richard E. CAREY, currently the Assistant Wing Commander, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, was named as Commanding General. General CAREY proceeded to Okinawa on 3 April to assemble part of the staff which, in conjunction with the 9th MAB staff nucleus already at sea, would become the Brigade headquarters.

The MAB staff nucleus had been dispatched with Commander Task Force 76 on 30 March to act as a control headquarters for Marine Security Platoons destined for employment aboard Navy and Military Sealift Command (MSC) ships involved in the evacuation of South Vietnamese Military Regions I and II. First Battalion, Fourth Marines was embarked as the troop element of this unit, which was entitled the Amphibious Evacuation RVN Support Group and was commanded by Colonel D. C. ALEXANDER.

On 4 April General CAREY moved to Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines by air, taking with him not only the assembled staff augmentation but also Colonel A. M. GRAY, Commanding Officer, 4th Marines as his Deputy Commander. Colonel GRAY was assigned concurrently as Commanding Officer designate, 33rd Marine Amphibious Unit.

Activation of 33rd MAU

There was much to do at Subic Bay in preparation for sailing to join up with Commander Task Force 76, Rear Admiral Don-

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ald B. WHITMIRE, at sea off the coast of South Vietnam. On 7 April the 33rd MAU was activated, with Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 1/9, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel R. L. BOND, and Logistic Support Unit (LSU) 1/9, commanded by Major D. O. COUGHLIN, as the ground elements. HMM-165(-), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel J. P. KIZER and HMH-463, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel H. M. FIX, were placed under the operational control of 33rd MAU on 9 April. HMH-463 had transitted from Hawaii aboard the carrier HANCOCK which was now configured for helicopter operations. On 10 April HMH-463 chopped to 31st MAU, with Amphibious Ready Group "A" off the coast of Cambodia, in preparation for conducting the EAGLE PULL evacuation of Phnom Penh.

On 9 April the 33rd MAU and the MAB staff element sailed for Vung Tau, spread-loaded as best as possible in order to retain flexibility, and on the 11th rendezvoused with CTF-76 aboard his flagship, the BLUE RIDGE. Now joined with the 9th MAB staff nucleus, the MAB headquarters was manned for planning and operations, and reported the same day to CTF-76 for planning in connection with Noncombatant Emergency Evacuation Operations (NEMVAC) in South Vietnam.

13 April saw 33rd MAU officially report to the MAB for planning, although Colonel GRAY and his staff had been working closely with the MAB headquarters from the start.

The Fourth Marines had commenced initial planning for activation of the 33rd MAU at Camp Hansen, Okinawa on 27 March. This was essentially an administrative effort, with the primary objective the preparation for anticipated formal activation of the 33rd MAU. On 5 April this staff was directed to displace from Camp Hansen via MCAF, Futema for transit to Subic Bay with elements later to be designated as Headquarters,

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9th MAB. On arrival of the two staffs at Subic, groundwork was laid so that BLT 1/9, which was to be air transported from Okinawa, could move to the upper MAU camp for initial billeting.

Extensive plans were being formulated at the RLT level to support taskings that had been outlined in the mission assigned 33rd MAU by 9th MAB. The principal areas of concentration were Vung Tau, Newport Pier and the DAO/Air America Complex. The MAU plans were essentially ready to be promulgated when CG, III MAF directed the deactivation of 33rd MAU effective on 13 April 1975, with concurrent activation of RLT-4 under the command of Colonel GRAY. During the period 7 to 18 April 33rd MAU was the principal on-station component of the 9th MAB.

The Other MAU's

That same day, the 13th, the 31st MAU, commanded by Colonel J. F. ROCHE, also reported for planning. This MAU had just completed EAGLE PULL at Phnom Penh, and was experienced in NEMVAC operations.

The 35th MAU, commanded by Colonel H. G. EDEBOHLS, was in the process of forming up on Okinawa. BLT 3/9, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel R. E. LOEHE, had been flown back to Okinawa from the Camp Fuji maneuver area, and proceeded to board amphibious shipping for the transit to join 9th MAB. LSU 3/9, commanded by Major F. W. JONES, accompanied the BLT.

For all practical purposes the MAB was formed up for planning and, with the exception of the 35th MAU which was to arrive within a few days, was ready for operations. The MAB looked as follows:

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9th Marine Amphibious Brigade
 31st Marine Amphibious Unit
 BLT 2/4
 LSU 2/4
 HMH-462
 33rd Marine Amphibious Unit
 BLT 1/9
 LSU 1/9
 HMM-165 (-)
 HMH-463
 35th Marine Amphibious Unit
 BLT 3/9
 LSU 3/9
 Amphibious Evacuation RVN
 Support Group (BLT 1/4)

BGen R. E. CAREY
 Colonel J. F. ROCHE
 LtCol G. P. SLADE
 Maj J. A. GALLAGHER
 LtCol J. L. BOLTON
 Colonel A. M. GRAY
 LtCol R. L. BOND
 Maj D. O. COUGHLIN
 LtCol J. P. KIZER
 LtCol H. M. FIX
 Col H. G. EDEBOHLS
 LtCol R. E. LOEHE
 Maj F. W. JONES
 LtCol C. E. HESTER

Return to Subic

It was at this time, the 15th of April, that the determination was made by higher authority to return the Task Force to Subic Bay. Evacuation of refugees on Navy ships had been terminated and activity had lulled on MSC shipping. Accordingly, the return to Subic was completed at midday on the 17th. This was a short-lived upkeep period at Subic Bay though, for overnight the tensions in South Vietnam had heightened and the Task Force was directed to sail the very next afternoon for Vung Tau. First Battalion, Fourth Marines debarked at Subic, and remained at the MAU Camp for reconstitution as a BLT in anticipation of relieving BLT 2/4 as ARG Alpha's Marine Landing Force.

The return to Subic Bay had been a frustrating one for the

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9th MAB to say the least. Planning had been initiated, and all recognized the necessity for remaining on station to execute if the call came to do so.

The Doctrinal War

While the MAB was enroute back to Vung Tau, the decision was made by higher headquarters to reconfigure the existing MAB/MAU organization into a doctrinal MAB. On 19 April this was effected, and the three MAU's were deactivated. 9th MAB now consisted of Regimental Landing Team 4, Provisional Marine Aircraft Group 39 and a Brigade Logistic Support Group. In addition, a unique organization, the Amphibious Evacuation Security Force (AESF), was added. This latter unit replaced the First Battalion, Fourth Marines as the security forces aboard MSC ships. Initially, the AESF consisted of ten 72-man detachments task-organized from various Third Marine Division units. Operations of the AESF are covered in Chapter III of this report.

The reconfigured MAB was organized as shown below:

9th Marine Amphibious Brigade	BGen R. E. CAREY
Comm Co (-) (Rein)	Major R. L. TURLEY
Regimental Landing Team 4	Colonel A. M. GRAY
BLT 1/9	LtCol R. L. BOND
BLT 2/4	LtCol G. P. SLADE
BLT 3/9	LtCol R. E. LOEHE
Provisional Marine Air Group 39	Colonel F. G. MCLENON
HMH-462	LtCol J. L. BOLTON
HMH-463	LtCol H. M. FIX
HMM-165	LtCol J. P. KIZER
* HML-367	LtCol J. R. GENTRY
Brigade Logistic Support Group	Colonel H. G. EDEBOHLS

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LSU 1/9

Major D. O. COUGHLIN

LSU 2/4

Major J. A. GALLAGHER

LSU 3/9

Major F. W. JONES

Amphibious Evacuation Security Force Major D. A. QUINLAN

* Remained at NAS, Cubi Point, R. P., less detachments aboard USS HANCOCK (CVA-19), USS OKINAWA (LPH-3) and USS BLUE RIDGE (LCC-19).

On 19 April the reconfigured MAB arrived back at Vung Tau and, on 20 April, reported to Commander Task Force 76 for operations. Planning had been moving at a rapid rate through all of the manipulations leading up to the MAB's return to the Evacuation Objective Area (EOA). The next ten days were to be even more hectic as the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong concentrated their efforts on Saigon and the surrounding vicinity.

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CHAPTER III

PLANNING FOR NEMVAC OPERATIONS

Ninth MAB had commenced concentrated planning for Noncombatant Emergency Evacuation operations back on 11 April, and had issued an operation plan which tasked the MAU's accordingly. Now, with a doctrinal MAB, a second OPLAN was issued as quickly as possible.

Higher Headquarters Plans

Throughout the planning stages it had been necessary to review near-volumes of the basic contingency plans (CONPLANS) issued by CINCPAC's coordinating authority for NEMVAC operations in South Vietnam, the U. S. Support Advisory Group (USSAG). This organization, a double hat of Commander 7th Air Force, was headquartered at Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand. The basic USSAG contingency plan (CONPLAN) 5060-V used initially was issued in July 1974, with a revised plan promulgated by message in late February.

USSAG's CONPLAN 5060-V listed several options, ranging from one involving evacuation by commercial airlift or sealift to others introducing military airlift and sealift as well as Ground Security Force (GSF) and helicopter evacuation. The options were as follows:

OPTION I : Evacuation utilizing all available transportation assets. Controlled by the American Embassy to include commercial airlines and steamship lines. Limited military assistance provided in the form of airlift and/or sealift.

OPTION II : Primarily fixed wing aircraft evacuation to include rotary wing aircraft, a Ground Security Force, and an Amphibious Force, if required.

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OPTION III : Primarily sealift evacuation from Vung Tau and/or Saigon to include rotary wing aircraft, a Ground Security Force, and an Amphibious Task Force, if required.

On 5 April, again by message, USSAG/7thAF submitted proposed OPTION IV to the new CONPLAN 5060-V-1-75. This option addressed helicopter evacuation from the vicinity of Saigon, and included basically the same provisions for a Ground Security Force and Amphibious Task Force as Options II and III. Subsequently, operations plans (OPLANS) proposed in support of each option of the basic CONPLAN were issued by message. The most pertinent was one in support of Option IV, issued on 9 April. This OPLAN provided for a Marine Amphibious Brigade, one CVA configured for helicopter operations, and two MIDWAY class CVA's (one of which may be configured for Air Force helicopters).

The other two OPLANS promulgated by USSAG/7thAF by message during April were in support of Options II and III. Interspersed with the constant arrival of new plans from USSAG/7thAF was the receipt of plans issued by CINCPACFLT, COMSEVENTHFLT, and CTF-76. Suffice it to say that FREQUENT WIND was a planning nightmare, for with receipt of each new plan a total review of MAB planning to-date was absolutely necessary in order to ensure proper tasking within the capability of the force available. Every aspect of the envisioned operation had to be examined minutely. Additionally, the necessity for issuing the basic MAB OPLAN upon reorganization of the MAB on 19 April added to the hurried planning.

The Mission

It was obvious from the first reading of the USSAG/7thAF CONPLAN and the subsequent supporting OPLANS that a number of variables faced the MAB. To tackle only one, despite the

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size and disposition of the force, would only serve to ignore the others. The only choice was to plan for all options as best they could be interpreted. It was important that this be captured in a comprehensive mission statement.

The mission of Ninth MAB, as deduced and published in MAB Operation Plan 2-75 was as follows:

"To provide a Ground Security Force (GSF) to Newport Pier, to the DAO/Air America Complex, to other LZ's as designated by DAO, to Can Tho, to Vung Tau to establish an emergency evacuation/marshalling area, and to provide Marine Security Forces for employment aboard MSC shipping."

An illustration of potential evacuation sites is at page 19.

Initial Liaison with Saigon

Upon arrival in the waters off Vung Tau on 10 April, one of the first orders of business was to make contact with officials of the U. S. Embassy and the Defense Attache Office (DAO) in Saigon. In addition, a III Marine Amphibious Force liaison team had been sent to Saigon via USSAG/7thAF headquarters in order to assist in the advance planning for a Ground Security Force and air evacuation itself.

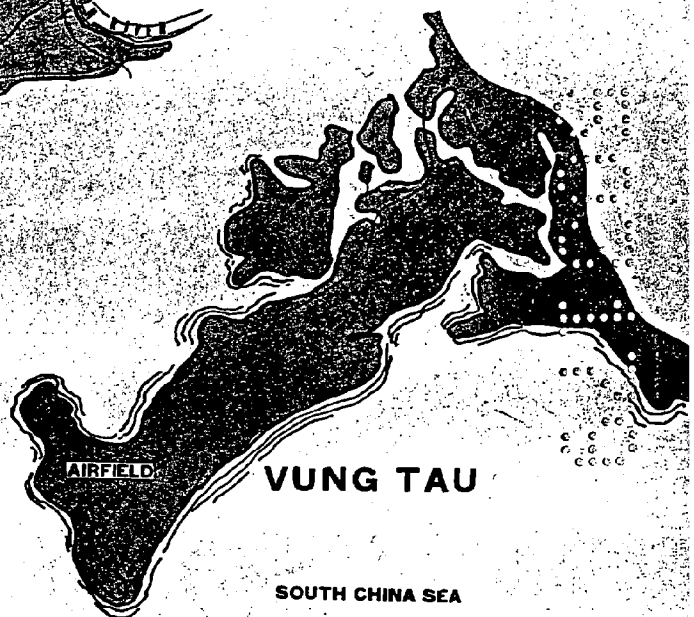
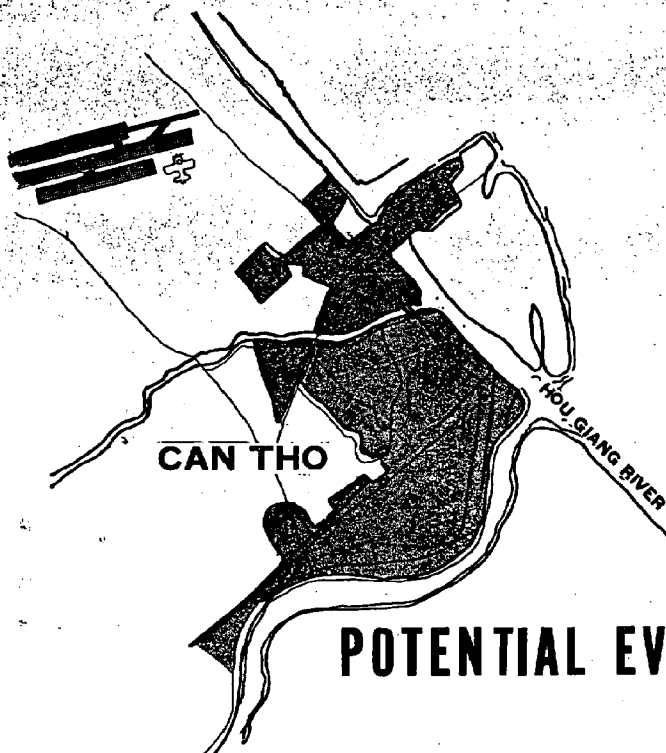
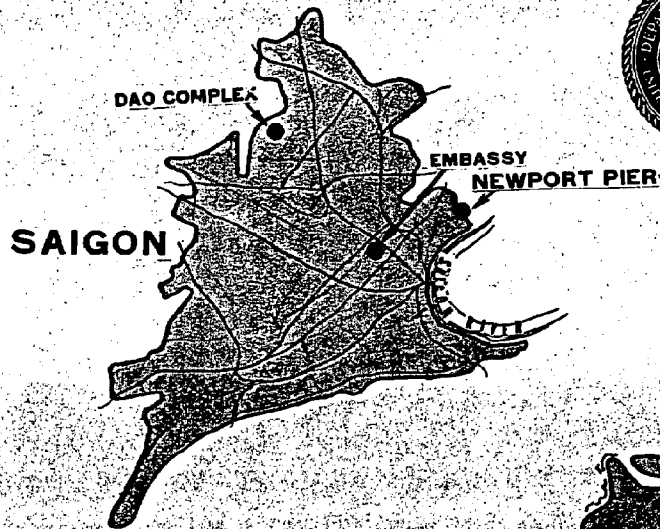
11 April saw the III MAF team from Saigon visit BLUE RIDGE and brief the MAB staff on current planning in Saigon. This visit was of vital importance, for it opened the door to future liaison using more-than-willing Air America helicopter support. When the MAF team left the ship that day they were asked to inquire into the possibility of 9th MAB commanders and key staff officers visiting Saigon the next day in order to conduct a reconnaissance of potential evacuation sites there. This was approved, and the next day a delegation of mixed air and ground officers spent the day in Saigon.

On their return to BLUE RIDGE, they reported to the Commanding General that it was apparent that the two prime

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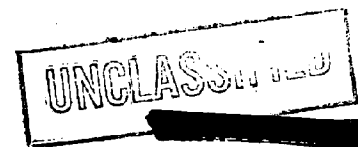
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POTENTIAL EVACUATION SITES

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evacuation sites appeared to be the DAO/Air America Complex and the Newport Pier, and they brought back schematics and photographs of these facilities. Further, they advised of a general lack of concern on the part of responsible officials in Saigon as to any sort of evacuation. The first impression of "Business as Usual" was gained during this visit.

Armed with the report of his team, the Commanding General requested, and was granted, permission to conduct a personal reconnaissance and courtesy visit to the area. Accordingly, the next day, 13 April, he flew to Saigon with Colonel GRAY aboard an Air America helicopter. During his visit, the Commanding General had an opportunity to talk with the Defense Attache and the CINCPAC and CINCPACFLT representatives in Saigon as well as make personal reconnaissance of Newport Pier, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, various LZ's throughout Saigon, the DAO/Air America Complex, and, while enroute to and from Saigon, the Vung Tau Peninsula.

The next day Colonel GRAY was dispatched back to Saigon in order to further develop the contacts there and, in particular, make as good a terrain evaluation as possible of Vung Tau without violating the international boundary restriction. He barely made it back to BLUE RIDGE late that afternoon, as this was the day the Task Force was directed to return to Subic Bay. Now that the visits had been made and the MAB's feet were on the ground, the understanding of the frustration felt on departing the area can be understood more than ever.

Possible Evacuation Sites

As mentioned before, there were several evacuation sites

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identified by USSAG/7thAF and other headquarters in their plans:

Newport Pier - This facility, situated adjacent to the Long Binh Bridge along the Saigon riverfront, featured four deep-water berths and a number of other ramps and landings for LST's and assorted tugs and smaller craft. Parking lots provided for up to nine CH-53 landing spots. Newport was envisioned as a large scale evacuation facility accommodating up to 100,000 evacuees by waterborne means. The MAB considered USSAG/7thAF Option III as applicable to Newport Pier and planned accordingly. One battalion was considered for the Ground Security Force at Newport Pier, with platoon-size Ship's Security Forces provided as necessary. Insertion of the GSF could be by helo or up the Saigon River on ships. Extraction was equally flexible. It should be noted that this possible evacuation site was considered as a viable one right up to 29 April. See the illustration on page 22.

DAO/Air America Complex - Situated adjacent to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, this complex was the primary evacuation site considered by the DAO and the Marines in Saigon. Numerous Landing Zones were available, with some preparation, in the DAO Compound, the Annex, and across the highway on the Air America apron. Up to two battalions could be employed as a Ground Security Force in this complex. The DAO Complex itself was divided roughly into two separate areas, one called the Alamo and the other the Annex, with the Alamo housing the main headquarters building and the Emergency Command Center. The Annex consisted primarily of the Exchange and a gymnasium. See the illustration on page 23.

Can Tho - CTF 76 had developed a plan for moving up the Bassac River to Can Tho, about 50 miles southwest of Saigon, for evacuation of up to 2,000 persons. In support of this plan MAB elements were prepared to insert and extract a

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**GOOD OBSERVATION POINT
FROM BRIDGE INTO PIER AREA**



DEFENSIVE WIRE THAT REQUIRED REPAIR IN THIS AREA

MAIN ENTRANCE

FOOD COMMISSARY
LZ
3 CH-53'S

GEAR

LZ
3 CH-53'S

PROCESSING SITES
INTERTRANSIT SHED
S-6418

SHIP DOCKING AREA
4 SHIPS TO BE DOCKED ALONG PIER
6 IF NESTING EMPLOYED

SAIGON RIVER

LST AREA
LZ
S-6403

2 CH-53'S
LZ
S-6405
S-6406
S-6407
S-6408
S-6409
S-6410
S-6411
S-6412
S-6413
S-6414
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T-6500

N
E

TO SAIGON
NEWPORT

REFERENCE LOCATION

REFERENCE LOCATION

NEWPORT PIER

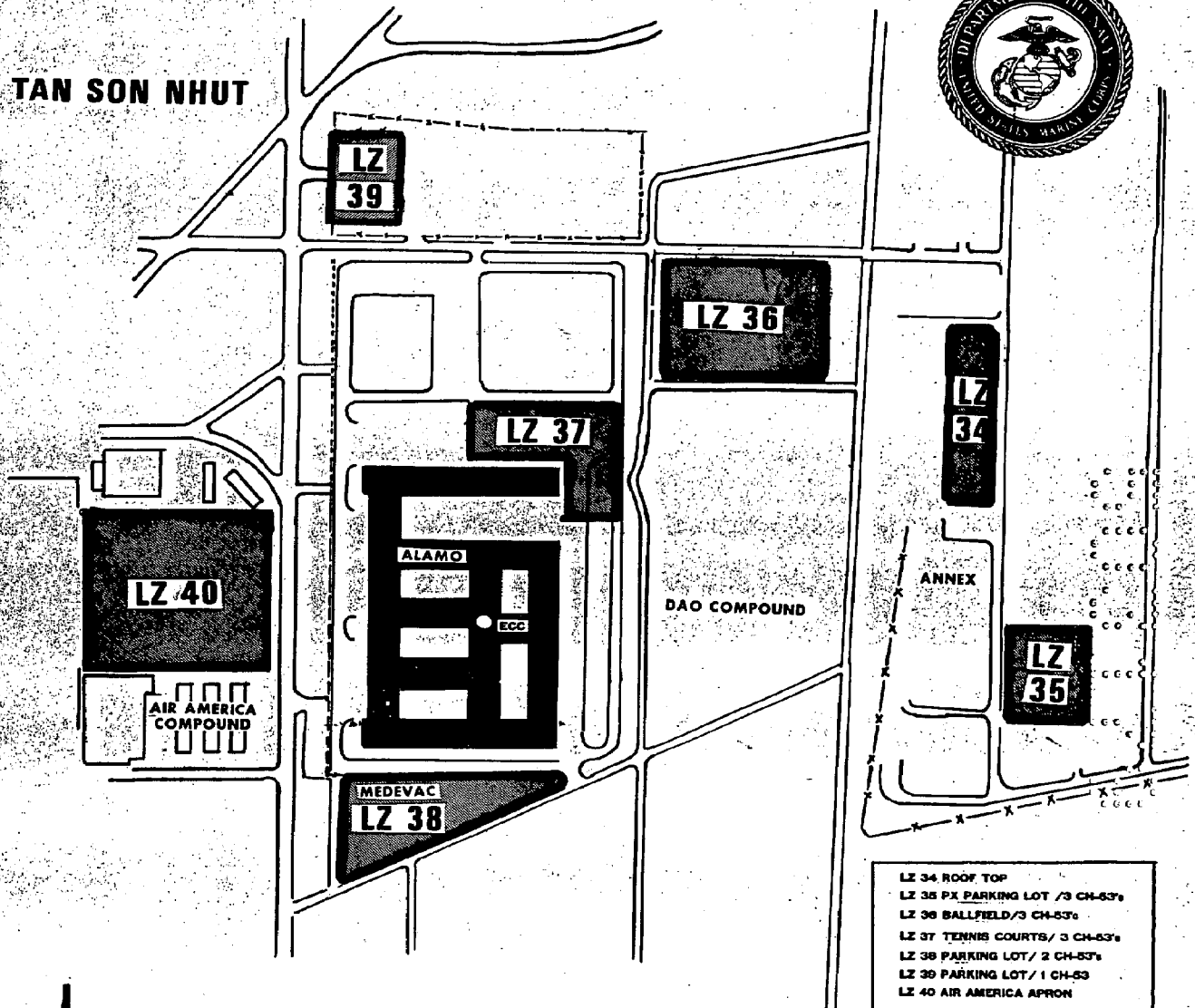
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DAO / AIR AMERICA COMPLEX

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Ground Security Force by helicopter or waterborne means.

Saigon Rooftops - One of DAO's plans for assembling evacuees was to collect them at about a dozen billets throughout Saigon and then transport them by Air America helos to the DAO Compound Annex for further processing and marshalling. Four-man Marine Security elements were envisioned as rooftop security and LZ control in support of Air America.

U. S. Embassy - With only one rooftop LZ, and that was restricted to CH-46's and smaller, the Embassy was never seriously considered as a mass evacuation site. The number of evacuees from there could reach as high as 100, to include the Ambassador, his staff and the Embassy Guard. An additional LZ was considered available in the courtyard parking lot, but only with removal of a large tree and other lesser obstacles.

Vung Tau - The largest evacuation site, and the one that plagued planners from beginning to end, was Vung Tau. Hundreds of thousands of refugees, as well as remnants of the RVN Army and Marine units, had fled to the Vung Tau Peninsula by mid-April in hopes of being sealifted from there to safe havens. It was conceivable that the MAB would be committed to an amphibious landing to secure the airfield and port facilities in order to develop a marshalling/evacuation center. An estimate of the size force ranged from one Battalion Landing Team to the entire Brigade, depending on the RVN permissiveness involved. An agreement with the military remnants there was considered absolutely essential. Again, USSAG's original Option III had surfaced with Vung Tau.

Advanced Command Element

During the initial on-station time off Vung Tau commencing on the 11th of April, the importance of a full-time direct

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representative of the Ground Security Force Commander at the DAO Compound was realized. With this in mind the Commanding General requested, and was granted by JCS, permission to insert an Advance Command Element consisting of his Deputy Commander, a Communications Officer, an Air Officer and Explosive Ordnance Disposal personnel. The element was added to gradually, as necessary, to include additional Naval Aviators, HLZ control teams and communicators. This facilitated liaison with the Embassy, DAO, the Emergency Command Center, marshalling coordinators and Air America. It significantly enhanced the probabilities for a successful operation. Detailed activities of the Advance Command Element are contained in Chapter IV of this report.

33rd MAU/RLT-4 Planning

Planning actually was commenced by the 4th Marines well prior to the activation of the 33rd MAU or RLT-4. A small part of the RLT-4 staff that would participate in the planning and execution of NEMVAC operation FREQUENT WIND was also assigned to the earlier RVN evacuation. Essentially, the requirements to plan for the evacuation had been identified and the staff had begun formulating the basic framework for the subsequent FREQUENT WIND plans. On 11 April the 33rd MAU planning staff collocated with the 9th MAB planning staff aboard BLUE RIDGE in order to expedite the planning efforts.

Based on the mission which had been announced in MAB OPLAN 2-75, RLT-4 promulgated its OPLAN 1-75 on 20 April 1975, with specific tasking to subordinate units. In some cases MAB Annexes sufficed for the RLT; where appropriate, these annexes were utilized by the RLT. Employing these procedures assisted in relieving some of the communications backlog that

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was occurring aboard BLUE RIDGE, and eliminated duplication of effort. As additional information became available, planning became more refined and two minor changes to the RLT plan were issued. Essentially, the same requirements remained and the changes will not be addressed. On 28 April the situation around Vung Tau began to show signs as being one of the most viable planning requirements. To ensure proper readiness, BLT 3/9, supported by BLT 1/9, was directed to accelerate its planning.

On the evening of 28 April the situation changed totally in Saigon as to the potential tasking of the RLT. Since the primary means of evacuation at this point was via C-130 aircraft from Tan Son Nhut the RLT was tasked to provide security for Tan Son Nhut airfield. As a result of this tasking appropriate Frag Orders were issued; however, the next morning, 29 April, the complexion of the operation again changed and at 1215 the Deputy Commander in Saigon received a message which was relayed to BLUE RIDGE to execute USSAG/7thAF 5060-V Plan (Option IV). RLT units were placed on alert in accordance with previously issued RLT-4 OPLAN 1-75. BLT 2/4 was tasked to provide security for the DAO Compound and BLT 1/9 was directed to be prepared to provide security for the Air America Compound.

Air Planning

As planning progressed there were many details involving Air Operations which had to be resolved. First, the MAB had submitted, in conjunction with CTF-76, its recommended helicopter flow to USSAG, but, when examined, USSAG's Air Fragmentary Order revealed that the MAB's recommendations had either not been received or had been overlooked. It was absolutely essential that the MAB Helo Flow Plan be coordinated with that of USSAG, for the Air Force Battlefield Com-

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mand and Control Center (ABCCC) would be controlling helos into and out of the evacuation zones once they were feet dry over land. Ultimately, some rather frenzied communications with USSAG via message resolved this situation, but not without much concern. It should be mentioned also that the flow originally directed by USSAG would have resulted in the first evacuation helos exhausting their fuel prior to their return to the ships. Here was a perfect example of different services using different equipment and different language, not to mention methods of operation. Once brought to USSAG's attention, the appropriate adjustments were made and the helo flow was correct.

It had been necessary for PROVMAF-39 to develop a helicopter flow schedule that would support the Ground Security Force Commander's (GSFC) scheme of maneuver ashore for insertion of the Ground Security Force, evacuation operations and the extraction of the Ground Security Force. The flow schedule had to include inherent flexibility to allow for insertion, evacuation, and extraction from the multi-sites, and to allow for multi-deck operations on launch and recovery platforms at sea. Finally, the helicopter flow schedule had to be one that could be controlled by the ABCCC Feet Dry and the Helicopter Direction Center (HDC) Feet Wet.

Second among the major air problems was the clarification of L-Hour. To Marines it meant the time that a helo would touch down in a zone. To the Air Force it meant the time that a helo would launch, a definition used as recently as during EAGLE PULL. But, once clarification was asked for, L-Hour was defined for all forces as the time that helos would touch down in an evacuation zone.

Not as perturbing but definitely as thought provoking were the related subjects of night and restricted visibility flying. Heretofore, the evacuation had been considered

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a daytime fair-weather operation. But, late on 26 April, poor weather threatened, and concentrated planning was conducted for both Instrument Flight Rules (IPR) and night flying operations.

With the enemy threat to air ranging from SA-7's to AAA fire which, from all indications and reports was building daily, the safety of helos was of paramount importance. The best protection and deterrent was Tactical Air (TACAIR) cover and helo escort. TACAIR assignments provided by USSAG were analyzed, with the resultant determination that the type of cover and the ordnance loads required adjustment. Initial ordnance loads assigned for close air support missions were not appropriate for the mission foreseen. Two-thousand pound laser guided bombs were excellent for knocking out long range artillery, such as 130 MM Guns reported in the area, and 500 pound bombs were appropriate for use against built up areas. But, it was felt that 5" ZUNI and 2.75" rockets for close-in point target work that would more closely adhere to the rules of engagement were needed. This was recommended to USSAG, in addition to asking for helo escorts. The ordnance loads were adjusted to form a better load than originally scheduled; however, time ran out before this could be fine-tuned.

Fixed-wing aircraft were never provided for helo escort. What was needed was two three-plane divisions of A-7's for the purpose of covering the overland helo route. AH-1J Cobras were used in place of the A-7's to accompany the transport helos feet dry all the way to Saigon. They would then turn around to pick up other inbound flights. These Cobras, with their 20 MM cannons, could suppress hostile fire along the route and use 2.75 MM white phosphorous rockets to mark targets for the fixed wing A-7's to roll in on and destroy. Further, as a bonus, the Cobra pilots were all Forward Air Controller (Airborne) (FAC(A)) qualified and could have con-

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trolled airstrikes. Again, time ran out before this facet could be firmed up. Yet, it was discussed with Task Force 77 and arrangements were made for Navy aircraft with proper ordnance loads to carry out the mission. These aircraft were not necessarily dedicated to helo escort but, as in the case of the Air Force close air support aircraft, could have been on target within ten minutes.

Fighter cover provided by both Air Force and Navy was outfitted with the latest air-to-air weaponry.

Other aircraft were outfitted to destroy radar installations that posed a SAM threat. And, an Air Force AC-130 (SPECTER), dedicated as a flare ship, was available to provide suppressive pinpoint fire at night. The TACAIR situation was acceptable, but it could have been better had the MAB had the time to refine it.

Also of great concern were the control measures to be employed for helos and TACAIR. It was believed that what was planned as an Air Force controlled show Feet Dry could very easily develop into a full scale Amphibious Operation; thus, it was necessary to provide for this contingency. In concert with COMSEVENTHFLT an Airborne Direct Air Support Center (DASC) was requested as backup for the ABCCC. In response, First Marine Aircraft Wing positioned a KC-130 configured as an airborne DASC at Cubi Point. Although not employed in a primary role, the airborne DASC was launched as a backup if needed.

Air planning considerations were based on aircraft availability, aircraft inventory cycles rate, GSF insertion and extraction, and deck availability, as follows:

(1) Aircraft Availability:

- 90% availability first lift
- 85% availability second lift
- 75% availability sustained

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(2) Aircraft inventory:

44 CH-53 (includes 10 USAF HH-53 in MIDWAY)
 27 CH-46 (three detached to DUBUQUE for special operations)
 6 UH-1E
 8 AH-1J

(3) Cycle rate: ninety minutes, based on a round trip to furthestmost site (DAO) from the average MODLOC station.(4) GSF insertion/extraction: helicopter flow was developed to accommodate insertion and/or extraction of two battalions (1680 personnel). Helicopter Employment and Assault Tables (HEALT) were developed by the RLT and PROV MAG accordingly.(5) Deck availability:

10 spots on MIDWAY (USAF helos were limited to CVA operations but did operate from Amphibious Shipping)
 7 spots on HANCOCK
 5 spots on OKINAWA
 8 spots on ancillary shipping

Helicopter Flow

The helicopter time schedule as shown below was developed by the RLT and PROV MAG for movement of the GSF from ships to the evacuation site, and is, in fact, a recap of the Helicopter Employment and Assault Landing Table (HEALT) developed jointly by the RLT and PROV MAG:

<u>Time</u>	<u>Ship</u>	<u>Event</u>
L-2:00	HANCOCK (CVA-19)	Launch 6 CH-53 for troop pick up (3 to VANCOUVER (LPD-2), 3 to PEORIA (LST-1183))

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L-1:50	VANCOUVER (LPD-2)	Land 2 CH-53 from HANCOCK for troop pick up
L-1:45	VANCOUVER (LPD-2)	Launch 2 CH-53 w/troops to HANCOCK for refuel
L-1:45	VANCOUVER (LPD-2)	Land 1 CH-53 from HANCOCK for troop pick up
L-1:40	VANCOUVER (LPD-2)	Launch 1 CH-53 w/troops to HANCOCK for refuel
L-1:40	HANCOCK (CVA-19)	Launch 3 CH-53 to VANCOUVER for troop pick up
L-1:40	PEORIA (LST-1183)	Land 1 CH-53 for troop pick up
L-1:35	PEORIA (LST-1183)	Launch 1 CH-53 w/troops to HANCOCK for refuel
L-1:35	PEORIA (LST-1183)	Land 1 CH-53 for troop pick up
L-1:30	PEORIA (LST-1183)	Launch 1 CH-53 w/troops to HANCOCK for refuel
L-1:30	OKINAWA (LPH-3)	Load 2 CH-53 w/troops
L-1:30	VANCOUVER (LPD-2)	Land 1 CH-53 for troop pick up
L-1:30	PEORIA (LST-1183)	Land 1 CH-53 for troop pick up
L-1:25	VANCOUVER (LPD-2)	Launch 1 CH-53 w/troops to MT VERNON for refuel

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L-1:25	PEORIA (LST-1183)	Launch 1 CH-53 w/troops to HANCOCK for refuel
L-1:25	VANCOUVER (LPD-2)	Land 2 CH-53 for troop pick up and refuel
L-1:20	OKINAWA (LPH-3)	Launch 4 CH-53 (2 w/troops to DUBUQUE for refuel, 2 to PEORIA for troop pick up)
L-1:15	HANCOCK (CVA-19)	Land 3 CH-53 w/troops from PEORIA for refuel
L-1:15	MT VERNON (LSD-39)	Land 1 CH-53 w/troops from VANCOUVER for refuel
L-1:10	OKINAWA (LPH-3)	Load 4 CH-53 w/troops
L-1:10	OKINAWA (LPH-3)	Launch 4 CH-53 w/troops (2 to DENVER for refuel, 2 to DULUTH for refuel)
L-1:00	HANCOCK (CVA-19)	Launch 2 CH-53 to OKINAWA for troop pick up and refuel
L-1:00	DUBUQUE (LPD-8)	Land 2 CH-53 w/troops from OKINAWA for refuel
L-1:00	PEORIA (LST-1183)	Land 1 CH-53 for troop pick up
L-0:50	DENVER (LPD-9)	Land 1 CH-53 w/troops from OKINAWA for refuel

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L-0:50	DULUTH (LPD-6)	Land 1 CH-53 w/troops from OKINAWA for refuel
L-0:50	HANCOCK (CVA-19)	Land 3 CH-53 w/troops from VANCOUVER for refuel
L-0:50	PEORIA (LST-1183)	Launch 1 CH-53 w/troops to MOBILE for refuel
L-0:50	PEORIA (LST-1183)	Land 1 CH-53 for troop pick up and refuel
L-0:45	DENVER (LPD-9)	Land 1 CH-53 w/troops from OKINAWA for refuel
L-0:45	DULUTH (LPD-6)	Land 1 CH-53 w/troops from OKINAWA for refuel
L-0:40	MOBILE (LKA-115)	Land 1 CH-53 w/troops from PEORIA for refuel
L-0:40	OKINAWA (LPH-3)	Load 4 CH-53 w/troops
L-0:30		Launch 1st wave of 12 CH-53 (4 from OKINAWA, 2 each from DUBUQUE, DENVER and DULUTH, and 1 each from MOBILE and PEORIA)
L-0:30	OKINAWA (LPH-3)	Land 3 CH-53 for troop pick up and refuel
L-0:15		Launch 2nd wave of 11 CH-53 (5 from HANCOCK, 3 from OKINAWA, 2 from VANCOUVER and 1 from MT VERNON)

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Planning Considerations for the DAO/Air America Complex

With the DAO/Air America Complex identified as the most logical evacuation site and the situation in Saigon worsening, it was readily apparent by 26 April that final determination must be made as to providing the Commanding General with the requisite flexibility with which to selectively tailor the Ground Security Force to existing conditions it might meet in and around the DAO/Air America Complex. He announced four planning options, varying in force application, as follows:

(1) First, the hostile threat, requirements for crowd control and security, and the number of evacuees could be such that a one battalion-sized unit could be inserted into the DAO Compound and Annex. Insertion and extraction would be by helicopter into and out of the Landing Zones at the PX parking lot, the softball field, the tennis court, and the north and south parking lots. The other options were developed from this basic option.

(2) Second, with similar security conditions envisioned as the primary option, a battalion command group and one company would be inserted into the Air America Complex, with the capability of building to a full battalion there if necessary. This would provide for an additional Landing Zone, enhance security of the DAO Compound, and would allow for faster evacuee and Ground Security Force extraction by helicopter should the necessity arise.

(3) Third, should the situation allow, only two companies and a battalion command group would be inserted into the DAO Compound, just using Landing Zones in the Alamo itself. This option envisioned minimal hostile threat and a relatively small number of evacuees.

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(4) Lastly, the Commanding General could elect to conduct the evacuation with no Ground Security Force at all. Naturally, this option would be dictated only if a totally permissive atmosphere prevailed.

Liaison with USSAG/7thAF Headquarters

On 18 April 1975 the G-3 Plans Officer, Major Keith YOUNG, was dispatched to USSAG Headquarters to act as the MAB Liaison Officer for Operation FREQUENT WIND. He remained at NKP until the operation was terminated.

Direct communication with Ninth MAB was not possible from NKP although a secure voice phone and an autovon circuit was available to the Deputy Ground Security Force Commander in Saigon. These circuits were used daily to clear up questions relative to the operation. As mentioned, the Liaison Officer carried with him a flow chart for communications procedures so as to coordinate with the USSAG Communications Officer and clear up possible procedural problems.

Identification of Landing Zones became a problem when it appeared that as many as three different names were being used to identify the zones. After coordinating with representatives from USSAG this problem was solved and all Landing Zones were to be called/identified by numbers rather than by colors or names of birds.

The prime point of contact for Major YOUNG at USSAG was the Director of Operations. Daily dialogue was established and it offered a good chance for the Liaison Officer to explain the capabilities of Ninth MAB. As questions came up concerning the operation, and were answered, a good rapport was developed which proved helpful throughout.

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The Liaison Officer is a requirement for interface in basic procedures and terminology for a joint operation. The MAB Liaison Officer remained in BLUE CHIP (USSAG Operation Center) during the conduct of the operation. Throughout, numerous questions were asked concerning size of units, equipment carried, and capabilities. This type of face-to-face contact is of critical importance when developing and maintaining cross-tell between key commanders.

Communications Planning

In January 1975 a periodic update of the 9th MAB TALON VISE contingency plan had been undertaken to reflect changes and updates published by senior commands and to ensure currency of all material.

At that time, plans published by senior commands tasked 9th MAB with providing forces ranging from a reinforced company up to a MAU, with BLT Bravo and two air Contingency Battalions. Rather than prepare separate communication-electronics plans for each geographical area and each different force structure, it was decided to write one plan which, when modified by a fragmentary order, would support CTF-79, CTF-76 and/or USSAG/7thAF NEMVAC operations in Southeast Asia. The largest potential organization was planned for, ensuring that it contained within it each of the smaller organizations. Doctrinal command and control, supporting arms, administrative and logistics communications were planned, including radio, wire, multi-channel radio and teletype. The most complex requirement would be for an amphibious operation, so this was chosen as the basis for planning. Minor changes would then be required for execution under the operational control of USSAG/7thAF.

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Liaison was made with the communications personnel from CTF-79, CTF-76 and Seventh Fleet, and a set of frequencies obtained. A large number of spares was included because political considerations and lack of an exact evacuation objective area precluded working with local frequency coordinators. Call signs obtained from CGFMFPac were allocated in the CTF-79 NEMVAC OPLAN.

The planned nets and assigned frequencies and call signs were combined with frequency and circuit designators and the chosen organizational structure was entered into a master radio plan. This plan was placed in a computer in order to allow for flexibility in making changes and incorporating last minute details. Upon receipt of a Warning Order specifying force composition, the entire radio plan could be issued in appropriate format directly from the computer. A fragmentary order telling what nets/circuits to activate and promulgating any unforeseen changes would allow the plan to support any of the potential organizations for operations of any specified duration. As examples of this flexibility, portions of the plan were activated to support 33rd MAU upon its activation.

At the time the two MAU's reported to 9th MAB for planning on 13 April, the communications plan was easily modified by using spare frequencies to expand the BLT Bravo system into a second MAU system. Upon receipt of plans to form a third MAU, the plan was again expanded, this time by adding an entire extra MAU communications system. The plan could now support up to three MAU's, two air contingency battalions and a PROVMAH Headquarters (The PROVMAH Headquarters had always been in the plan to allow for fixed wing air defense and air support). At this time a communications support element similar to that provided a MAU was requested to support 9th MAB Headquarters.

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During a liaison visit to Saigon on 10 April, a copy of the USSAG/7thAF 5060-V Option IV OPLAN was obtained. The communications listed therein caused some consternation and a few changes. These changes were incorporated, and a joint 33rd MAU/9th MAB Communication-Electronics plan in annex form was issued. Other forces were not yet assigned, so additional portions of the plan were not activated.

Upon return to Subic Bay on 14 April 1975, and subsequent restructuring of the 9th MAB into a MAB Headquarters, an RLT, a PROVMAg and a BLSG, communications planning took a new direction. The original communication-electronics plan computerized input had provided for this doctrinal structure, and concurrent planning by all units of the 9th MAB resulted in finalization of this plan. The nature of the operations 9th MAB was directed to plan for dictated that a Communication Company (-) (Rein) be requested. This was accomplished by secure telephone on 14 April 1975.

Consternation and confusion existed over the elaborate system required by USSAG/7thAF to obtain TACAIR. A flow chart and proposal were sent to USSAG Headquarters with the 9th MAB Liaison Officer to help clarify this area. That proposal was discussed and accepted.

Upon return to RVN waters on 19 April, several liaison visits were made to and from Saigon by communications personnel from the Advance Command Element, the RLT, PROVMAg and the MAB to ensure continuity of plans. Secure telephone was used between the CEO of the Advance Command Element and USSAG/7thAF to coordinate requested changes to communications plans and clarify areas of uncertainty.

The final version of the Communication-Electronics Plan allowed for operations under OPCON of USSAG/7thAF in Saigon and/or Can Tho and an amphibious operation at Vung Tau employing forces up to an RLT composed of three BLT's, with two air contingency BLT's in reserve.

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On 22, 23 and 24 April 1975, eighteen enlisted communicators from the RLT-4 Communications Platoon were inserted into the DAO Compound. They carried enough backpack equipment to support an austere RLT Headquarters ashore. A large amount of equipment was available in the DAO Compound though, and after a communications exercise with ABCCC and BLUE RIDGE, as well as intra-DAO communications checks, most backpack equipment was returned to amphibious shipping.

Booklets were printed on 5x8" cards which depicted each net, medevac procedures and TACAIR procedures. They listed call signs and frequencies. These were distributed throughout the MAB Headquarters, the RLT, the PROV MAG and the BLSG. The Communications Plan was thoroughly briefed to all Commanders.

Upon receipt of the word to execute Option IV, communications personnel afloat and in the DAO Compound were at their stations with equipment activated and ready to perform their assigned mission.

Logistics Planning

When the Brigade Logistic Support Group was activated on 19 April 1975 it was composed of a headquarters element and three Logistic Support Units (LSU's). Because of the limited operations ashore as visualized in the CONPLAN it was determined that a small, highly specialized command and control headquarters element imposed over the existing LSU's would provide the most effective logistical support organization within the space limitations and time constraints.

The three LSU's had previously been under the operational control (OPCON) of the BLT's or MAU's which they were supporting. Upon change of OPCON to the BLSG, they became part of a larger logistical operation.

Under the MAU concept, the material assets of the LSU's were for the sole support of the designated BLT. Under the

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BLSG concept, the assets, while primarily for the support of the designated BLT, were also available for the support of the entire Landing Force.

Due to the short time frame between the activation and the departure of the BLSG from Okinawa there was not time to obtain a computer record of the assets of the LSU's. While it became apparent early in the planning cycle that there were generally sufficient levels of supply within the LSU's and Landing Force Operational Readiness Material (LFORM) to support the operation, the problem would be location and availability within the Task Force.

Therefore, as soon as the Task Force was assembled in the Evacuation Operation Area (EOA) a meeting of the LSU commanders and the BLSG staff was held aboard the flagship. Records of the material assets of the LSU's were obtained and key extracts were inducted into the Amphibious Support Information System (ASIS) so that a computerized centralized inventory was available. LFORM held on all ships of the Task Force was also inducted into ASIS. Technical skills within the LSU's were readily available from Manpower Management System (MMS) listings provided by the LSU commanders.

Based upon the centralized inventory of all supplies available within the Task Force and identification of the maintenance skills, the BLSG through the Logistic Control Center (LCC) assigned specific responsibilities to the LSU's and controlled all movement of all resupply actions as well as maintenance support requirements. This was designed to eliminate duplication and make maximum use of supplies and skills at hand.

Due to the nature of the NEMVAC operation, it was decided

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that the prescribed loads would suffice for the duration of the operation. The prescribed loads were established to cover the maximum period of time required to complete the evacuation; and, in the case of the ship's security detachmen, to cover the period from loading refugees to the time the ship reached a safe haven. If for any reason the operation extended beyond the projected period of time, safety stocks were assembled and staged to provide an immediate resupply capability.

The three LSU's were assigned primary, secondary and tertiary responsibilities in support of the Landing Force. The assignments were made based on the physical and personnel assets of the LSU's and any contingency plans which they were to support. As a result, the following assignments were made:

LSU 1/9

Primary	Supply Support
Secondary	Beach Support Area Operations
Tertiary	Maintenance Support

LSU 3/9

Primary	Maintenance Support
Secondary	Supply Support
Tertiary	Beach Support Area Operations

LSU 2/4

Primary	Beach Support Area Operations
Secondary	Maintenance Support
Tertiary	Supply Support

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The rationale behind the primary assignments were that each LSU had different characteristics by virtue of its prior operations and lengths of time to form and outfit for this operation. LSU 2/4 had been on station in the Gulf of Siam for approximately 45 days involved in support of EAGLE PULL and had also been involved in refugee operations at Danang. The supplies had been used and resupply had been difficult due to time and transportation constraints. LSU 3/9 had been flown from Camp Fuji to Okinawa and then loaded on the MOBILE. Its maintenance capability was complete but it was short some of its supplies due to operations at Fuji. It had, however, restocked its supply of batteries during its time on Okinawa. LSU 1/9 had been formed and flown from Okinawa to Subic in less than 48 hours. As a result it took only its operating deployment stocks leaving Mount Out and its maintenance vans behind. What supplies it had were complete and it was generally well staffed with supply personnel. It was embarked on DURHAM, an LKA which had a large quantity of LFORM. LSU 2/4 was aboard an LSD, the THOMASTON, which would facilitate movement to the beach in support of the Vung Tau operation, if required. As it happened, LSU 2/4 provided the Helicopter Support Teams (HST) in the DAO Compound.

To be ready to support the various options of the operation, safety stocks were assembled by LSU 1/9 and prepositioned on the DURHAM. They consisted of two notional company-size and one notional battalion-size blocks of rations, water, batteries, fuel, medical supplies and ammunition. In addition, two special field fortification packages consisting of concertina and posts were also staged on the DURHAM.

Supply and maintenance support for the operation was envisioned as being minimal once execution was directed. The

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policy was to support the Ground Security Force from mobile dumps at sea so as to have as few support personnel ashore as possible.

It was also necessary to equip and support the Amphibious Evacuation Security Force (AESF) detachments which were sent to the various Military Sealift Command (MSC) ships supporting the evacuation of Vietnamese evacuees. Rations, medical supplies, ammunition and other equipment were assembled and distributed to the detachments.

Explosive Ordnance technicians were inserted into the DAO Compound in Saigon prior to the operation to ensure that the various Landing Zones were prepared for accepting helicopters and also to ensure that sensitive equipment did not fall into hostile hands when the withdrawal/evacuation was executed. Millions of dollars of equipment and structures were to be destroyed just prior to the last helicopter leaving the DAO Compound.

Rules of Engagement

The Rules of Engagement established for a noncombat emergency evacuation must be restrictive in nature to insure that only the force required to successfully complete the mission is exerted; however, these rules must provide the commander with enough flexibility to prudently and rapidly increase the degree of force exerted when the situation warrants an escalation. The Rules of Engagement developed for the evacuation of Saigon by USSAG/7thAF and which later were incorporated into the 9th MAB OPLAN, provided the operating forces with just such an environment.

Both air and ground commanders, though they may be exposed to heavy hostile activity, were directed to comply

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with the basic principles of the Rules of Engagement by using only that amount of force required to conduct the mission.

The use of riot control agents proved to be the only problem encountered with the Rules of Engagement. Initially, this most humane method of crowd control was denied; however, just prior to the execution of the operation, riot control agents were authorized and were employed during the final Embassy extraction. The Rules of Engagement as finally adopted provided 9th MAB with the guidelines and flexibility required for such operations, and should be a valuable source for planning future NEMVAC operations.

Ship's Reaction Platoons

On the 28th, when it became apparent that large numbers of South Vietnamese would attempt to fly their families out of country on helicopters, CTF-76 alerted the Task Force to the likelihood of their helicopters landing on available decks. With a CH-47 Chinook landing aboard BLUE RIDGE after dark on the 28th, the necessity for handling this eventuality was brought close to home.

The Commanding General tried to assist CTF-76 in all ways possible with the Vietnamese helos and the refugees. He issued instructions to Commanding Officers of troops aboard all Task Force 76 ships to form and be prepared to provide armed reaction platoons on request of ship's captains in order to assist ship's forces in the handling and security of refugees. In addition, MAB reaction units were directed to be prepared to assist in sanitizing, maintaining, or manning aircraft that might unexpectedly land aboard TF-76 ships.

On the morning of the 29th, CTF-76 advised the Task Force

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that RVNAF helos must be cleared from flight decks immediately in order to keep the decks operational. In fact, a number of RVNAF helos, as well as Air America helos, did seek refuge on TF-76 ships. In some cases the helos were jettisoned over the side. In others, the helos were allowed to offload on a deck and then ditched at sea. The pilots were recovered by small boats off U. S. ships. To add to the confusion, two helos collided aboard BLUE RIDGE and another flew into her side while attempting a landing.

Option V

On 24 April USSAG/7thAF promulgated its fifth and final option for NEMVAC operations in Vietnam. Although it was submitted to CINCPAC as a proposed concept, the Commanding General determined that there was sufficient credibility to the plan so as to warrant the MAB's consideration at the time. Therefore, Operation Plan 3-75 was written in support of the new Option V.

Encompassed in Option V was an evacuation from Tan Son Nhut Air Base by fixed wing aircraft or helo, a sealift, a helo lift from Newport Pier, and the seizure of the Vung Tau Peninsula. The plan called for evacuation ranging in numbers of 1,500, 3,000, 6,000 and up to 200,000 persons. An Amphibious Task Force (ATF) was included in the plan, as was a Marine Amphibious Brigade, two fixed-wing airlifted battalions (U. S. Army or Marine Corps), and a specially configured Marine Security Force for employment aboard MSC shipping. On receipt of Option V it was apparent to MAB planners that the probable evacuation and the assigned forces were becoming more clearly aligned.

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MAB OPLAN 3-75 offered a concept of operations as follows:

- (1) A one battalion-sized Ground Security Force (USA or USMC) from the ATF or by fixed-wing aircraft would secure a perimeter in the vicinity of Tan Son Nhut Air Base/DAO Compound to allow evacuee assembly and control for fixed wing evacuation. If/when fixed wing evacuation was no longer feasible, the GSF would withdraw to the DAO Compound and continue the evacuation by helicopter. Upon completion, the GSF would extract by fixed wing aircraft or helicopter.
- (2) A one battalion-sized GSF (USA or USMC) from the ATF and/or from Tan Son Nhut by helicopter would secure an evacuation assembly area at Newport Pier to permit evacuation by helicopter or MSC shipping. Upon completion the GSF would extract by either ship or helicopter.
- (3) Up to a one Brigade-size GSF would secure the Vung Tau Peninsula and provide protection and control of port facilities, the airfield, and refugee marshalling areas within the Force beachhead. Vung Tau would be used as an interim processing area for subsequent movement to designated safe havens. The GSF would be extracted by helicopter and/or across the beach or at piers.

Obviously, Option V covered all the bases, and was a viable plan depending on the circumstances. It combined all of the aspects of the previous Options II, III and IV, with some minor variations and adjustments. The alternatives considered by the Commanding General in planning for Option V were as follows:

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CHAPTER IV

THE ADVANCE COMMAND ELEMENT

As introduced in Chapter III, insertion into Saigon of an Advance Ground Security Force Command Element had been approved by JCS and, on 18 April, this element, consisting of the following personnel, departed for the Naval Air Station, Cubi Point:

Colonel, USMC	- Deputy Commander, 9th MAB
LtCol, USMC	- Communications-Electronics Officer
Maj, USMC (NA)	- Air Liaison Officer
Capt, USMC	- Explosive Ordnance Disposal Officer
MSgt, USMC	- Explosive Ordnance Disposal Specialist

Prior to departure from Okinawa the group, minus EOD Technicians, was briefed by the Chief of Staff, III MAF and the G-4, 3rd Marine Division, the latter of whom had only recently returned from Saigon. During the evening of the 18th the entire group was briefed by the G-3, III MAF, who had also recently returned from Saigon. The substance of these briefings covered efforts made to prepare for evacuation of Saigon if required, together with the names of key individuals in the Embassy and Defense Attache Office who had been involved in evacuation planning.

Briefings at USSAG/7thAF

The Advance Element departed on 19 April 1975, ostensibly for Saigon. Upon arrival at Tan Son Nhut, however, the group was directed by COMUSSAG to proceed to Nakon Phanom, Thailand.

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This was intended as a USSAG/7thAF briefing prior to final entry into Saigon. On the evening of the 19th and the morning of the 20th the group received comprehensive briefings, primarily concerned with intelligence, from the USSAG Staff, and a complete briefing from the Marine officer who had served as GSF Commander in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Early on the afternoon of 20 April, the five-man advance element returned to Saigon and established a command post at the DAO Compound, adjacent to Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

The Atmosphere in Saigon

Command arrangements in Saigon for evacuation were nebulous, and initial efforts of the Advance Command Group were hampered somewhat by a lack of real credentials. Much of what was accomplished was done with unofficial sanction. A "Tightrope Walk" was essential, in that the Embassy was totally responsible for evacuation planning. At the stage, GSF members were relied upon to perform their functions on order. In the interim, a "Business as Usual" posture was to be maintained, lest the South Vietnamese gain the impression that an American evacuation was being overtly planned. The net result of this evolution was stalemates regarding dismantling of tennis courts, barbedwiring of designated areas, and a multiple of other impediments to preparation for evacuation. Eventually, meaningful liaison between the GSF Commander aboard BLUE RIDGE, the Deputy GSF Commander in Saigon, the Defense Attache, and the Ambassador overcame these difficulties. But, an all-out, last minute effort was still required to ensure the success of NEMVAC operations.

The Embassy itself was organized with the Special Assistant

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for Field Operations and Defense Attache reporting directly to the Ambassador. The Security Director reported to the Special Assistant for Field Operations and the Officer in Charge of the Emergency Command Center reported to the DAO.

Defense Attache Office (DAO)

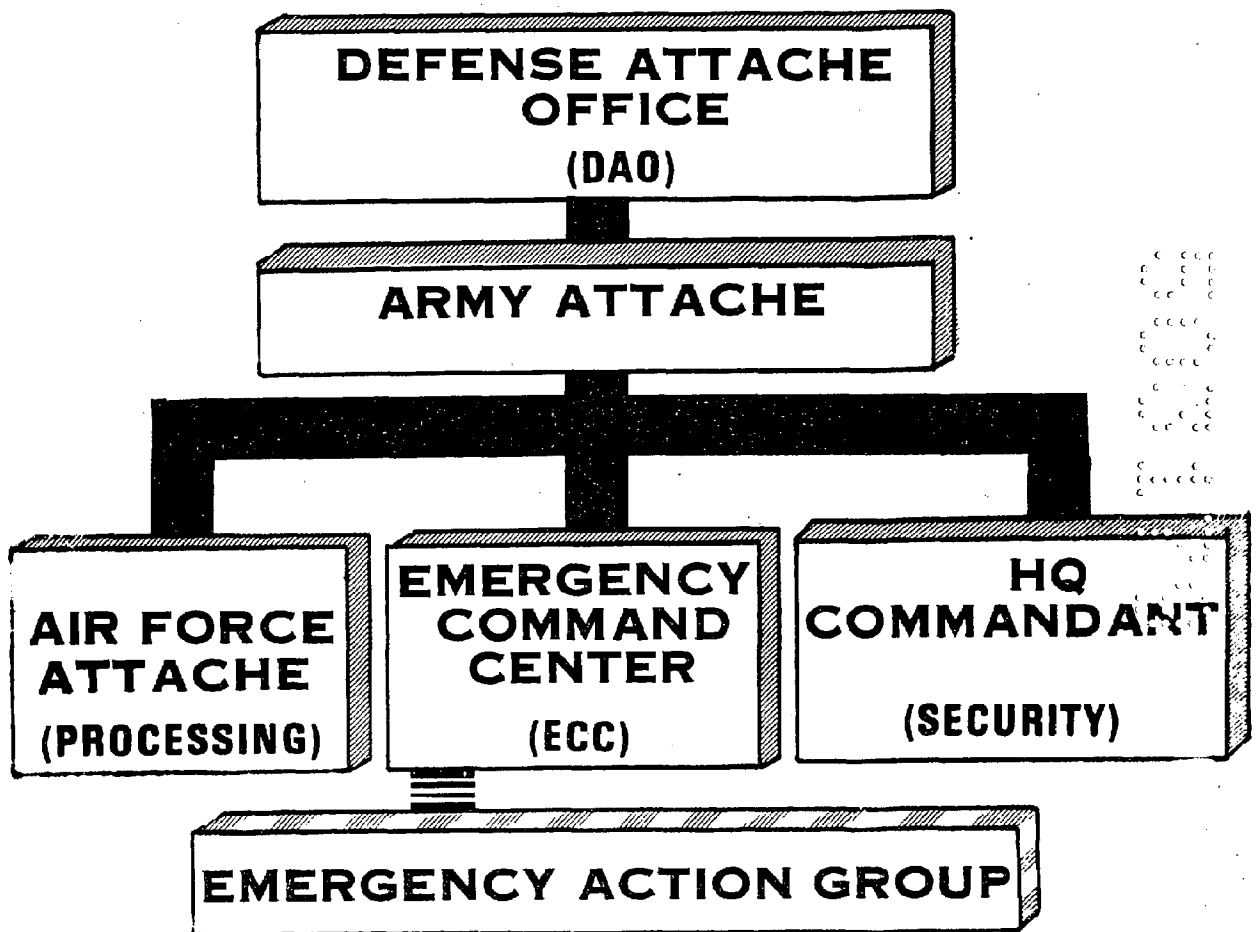
As the Advance Command Element was headquartered with DAO, and that organization had been assigned nominal responsibility for NEMVAC, the vast preponderance of efforts took place within that organization. The DAO was, on 20 April 1975, engaged in limited planning for evacuation of Americans and designated Vietnamese under Options II and IV of the USSAG plan. No real consideration was ever afforded Option III and the later-issued Option V, for reasons which will become obvious later in this report. Although a plan for evacuation did exist within DAO, it was outdated and, in view of the severity of the situation, totally inadequate. DAO evolved a structure of its own, without written or oral direction, for handling the impending emergency. Simply, it provided for an Emergency Action Group organized on a part-time basis, under the Emergency Command Center. See illustration on page 51.

While the DAO functioned on almost a routine daily basis, the "Emergency Action Group", for lack of a more adequate title, functioning with the blessing of the ECC, actively engaged in planning for NEMVAC operations. Their actions included but were not limited to:

- (1) Procurement, staging, and equipping buses for evacuation of personnel from the Embassy and downtown Saigon

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DAO ORGANIZATION

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to the DAO.

(2) Coordination with Air America to effect rooftop lifts of evacuees from downtown to DAO.

(3) Rehearsal of evacuation plans.

(4) Obtaining volunteers as bus drivers, marshals for rooftops, and other tasks.

It must be reemphasized here that this group was comprised of three officers who had other duties within DAO, had never obtained "Official" sanction for their activities, and who performed their functions almost exclusively after hours.

On or about the 22nd of April, the massive fixed wing evacuation of "Americans" was ordered. The DAO was promptly tasked with this evolution, an assignment which eventually all but paralyzed the organization for other responsibilities. The immediate effect was the arrival of literally thousands of Vietnamese at DAO. The number of evacuees was running 13 to 15 Vietnamese to each American. DAO employees quickly found themselves performing the following tasks:

(1) Working in the Annex attempting to ascertain who did and did not meet standards as evacuees.

(2) Establishing and attempting to enforce quotas for

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all categories of "Favored" Vietnamese.

(3) Attempting to maintain some degree of security within DAO and the Annex.

(4) Attempting to maintain minimum sanitation standards in the Annex.

(5) Processing and moving evacuees to Tan Son Nhut.

Of the many deleterious effects this operation had at DAO, perhaps the most serious from the American evacuation standpoint was a cessation of preparations by the "Emergency Action Group" and the ECC. Both their personnel and assets became completely absorbed in the fixed wing effort, which reached a peak of 7,500 per day, with as many as 5,000 refugees remaining overnight sleeping in every available space in the DAO Compound and Annex. Security became virtually non-existent due to paucity of personnel and overwhelming numbers of people. Still, only a handful of Americans were leaving Saigon, some with as many as 60 Vietnamese dependents.

On the 25th of April the security problem in the Annex area was solved when JCS authorized the introduction of one Marine Rifle Platoon. This organization, consisting of a Lieutenant Platoon Commander, a SSgt Platoon Sergeant, 36 Marines, and 2 Corpsmen from 1/9 assumed responsibility for Annex security and, though taxed to the utmost and later under fire, they performed superbly. Annex security and, as a direct consequence, DAO Compound security, was no longer a problem. Their performance will be discussed in more detail.

The major problem encountered by the Advance Command Group during this period was a total abandonment of planning for

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American evacuation. While some sense of urgency was apparent at DAO, the sheer volume of outgoing evacuation virtually crippled any other effort. Refinement of preparations underway by the Advance Command Element continued, but it could best be described as a lonely, unnoticed matter.

Business as Usual Comes to a Halt

"Business as Usual" came to an abrupt halt on the evening of 28 April when three A-37 aircraft bombed Tan Son Nhut Airfield between 1815 and 1830. Concurrent attacks by fire on adjacent ammunition dumps led even the most dubious observer to realize the noose on Saigon had tightened. At that time some 800 - 2,000 evacuees remained in the Annex awaiting fixed wing evacuation. No plan for their movement by other means existed, thus routine evacuation by fixed wing aircraft was planned for the morning of 29 April. At 0400 on that date the NVA/VC interdicted both Tan Son Nhut Airfield and the DAO Compound with high velocity artillery. The result at DAO was two Embassy Marines killed at the roadblock adjacent to gate # 4 and one round in the gymnasium where evacuation processing was conducted. Fortunately, the gymnasium was empty at the time and no casualties occurred. Other rounds fell in the DAO Compound adjacent to the home of the Defense Attache and in Landing Zone 38. A tour of the area assured calm and absolutely no panic. Security had been increased and only one gate to each compound and the Annex remained open. Tan Son Nhut had numerous fires, and rounds continued to fall in that area. At first light VNAF aircraft launched from Tan Son Nhut but were quickly downed by SA-7 missiles. Security at the main gate of Tan Son Nhut, a main access to the DAO Compound, remained reliable and no large numbers of Vietnamese

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were accumulating around DAO.

At approximately 0900 it was announced that the Ambassador had authorized implementation of Option II. C-141 flights had been suspended, so C-130's were scheduled to conduct the lift. Evacuees began to arrive shortly thereafter by private vehicle, bus, and Air America helicopters. The first lift for C-130's was staged and departed for Tan Son Nhut. The reports concerning this flight and one more C-130 flight are contradictory, but no more than two flights departed before Tan Son Nhut was closed by RVNAF aircraft and automobiles abandoned on runways, the SA-7 missile threat, and the continuing incoming artillery. Evacuees continued to arrive at DAO while approximately 2,000 remained in the Annex. At about 1000 the Ambassador arrived at DAO and conferred with the Defense Attache. No immediate decision apparently resulted, although some 45 minutes later those in the ECC were told that Option IV, the helicopter evacuation, was to take place.

The Advance Command Element had conducted liaison with the Special Assistant for Field Operations who was responsible for NEMVAC planning and operations, and with Major KEAN USMC, who was assisting in security coordination and NEMVAC planning as well as inspection and evaluation of communications and planned HLZ's. Unfortunately, the Embassy plan for evacuation was also outdated and no valid information was available regarding numbers of evacuees, either American or Vietnamese. It literally seemed that the Vietnamese "pipeline" was wide open and no one knew how many Americans were in Saigon outside the Embassy, DAO and other government agencies. On the morning of 29 April it was anticipated that a maximum of three Air America rooftop lifts by UH-1E's and one CH-53 lift from the courtyard would remove all remaining Embassy evacuees.

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Others, including the Ambassador, were to proceed to DAO by bus for evacuation from that site.

As mentioned earlier, at approximately 0900 FREQUENT WIND Option II was ordered. The Emergency Action Group began rounding up evacuees in downtown Saigon, but not at the Embassy, where the gates were locked. The three buses in the Embassy compound, prestaged with required equipment, were never utilized. At the DAO Compound, the Emergency Action Group also had organized the processing of evacuees, and it went smoothly; however, only one C-130 load made it out of Tan Son Nhut before the airfield was shut down. At approximately 1030, Option IV was ordered, evacuee processing continued in an orderly manner, and the first evacuation helicopters arrived at 1506. No security problems were encountered at either the DAO Compound or the Annex. This can be attributed to three primary factors:

(1) Continuation of processing of the 2,000 Vietnamese evacuees in the Annex in a normal orderly manner.

(2) The presence of the 1/9 Platoon and Embassy Marines who assured security at the two gates and lent a calm presence despite the proliferation of incoming artillery and rocket fire.

(3) The evacuation of Vietnamese nationals from the Annex by helicopter despite the fact that it had not been programmed.

The following functions were performed without significant problems during execution:

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- (a) HLZ control
- (b) Internal and external communications
- (c) Evacuee processing
- (d) LZ marshals and control parties
- (e) Destruction in the DAO Compound once evacuation was completed

These functions were closely coordinated with and, in some instances, performed by the Emergency Action Group at DAO.

Preparation of Helicopter Landing Zones

Upon arrival on 20 April, it was apparent to the Advance Command Element that a great deal of preliminary helicopter planning had already been accomplished. The plan briefed was essentially the plan that was followed on 29 April. But although much preliminary planning had been completed, preparations to make the DAO Compound suitable for helicopter operations had begun on only the smallest scale. Further, preparations for helicopter operations would apparently remain at a standstill except for GSF insertion and extraction until the Defense Attache and/or the American Ambassador came up with a collection plan for potential evacuees. Operational planners were adjusting the size of the helicopter operation without notification as to the potential evacuee population because neither the DAO nor the American Embassy had any plan

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to collect and stage evacuees, nor did they presume to estimate the numbers of evacuees with any accuracy.

The immediate and obvious problem was LZ preparedness, as others of the group were working on essential classified destruction, evacuee collection and staging, crowd control, and perimeter security. By late evening on the 20th, the proposed Landing Zones had been inspected, the obvious obstacles and needed improvements noted and the first engineering efforts for Landing Zone 35 soil stabilization was effected. The entire proposed helicopter ingress and egress routes between the Air America ramp and HANCOCK off Vung Tau Peninsula were flown with an Air America helo to ensure their security.

The initial engineering efforts mentioned above were to clear and mark for day and night operation selected rooftop Landing Zones throughout the city of Saigon. Initially, permission was asked of the DAO and the Embassy for these activities. Instructions received were not to make any LZ preparations whatsoever. Recognizing a sense of urgency was not shared universally, these activities were pressed under cover of darkness. Obstacles were removed and wind socks and luminescent markings on 13 pre-selected building rooftops designated as American Evacuee Assembly Points were installed. These efforts were in direct support of a proposal to use Air America helicopters to finish the downtown collection of evacuees and move them to the DAO Compound for military evacuation once FREQUENT WIND was ordered executed.

Landing Zone improvements were necessary in each of the several locations in order to provide the GSF Commander with a wave capacity of 12 CH-53's. The pre-selected Landing Zones, once fully prepared, would have the following capacities (see illustration on page 23):

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LZ 35 (PX Parking Lot)	3
LZ 36 (Softball Field)	3
LZ 37 (Tennis Court Area)	3
LZ 38 (Parking Lot)	2
LZ 39 (Parking Lot)	1
LZ 40 (Air America Ramp Area) Contingency	

The DAO Facility Engineer was provided with a verbal list of improvements to be made to each Landing Zone area. These actions were deemed urgent as D-Day was uncertain. Specific Landing Zone improvements listed as essential were:

(1) LZ 35 (PX Parking Lot)

(a) Completely enclose by wire to preclude evacuees from abandoning cars in this area, the former PX Parking Lot.

(b) Empty and then destroy the structure housing the PX bookstore and gift shop.

(c) Remove the power line poles from the western edge of the landing area.

(2) LZ 36 (Softball Field)

(a) Remove twelve 50 foot light standards which completely circled the playing field.

(b) Remove trees in the approach and departure corridors (Magnetic heading 150 degrees)

(c) Remove backstop apparatus.

(d) Grade and then spray and roll soil so as to stabilize it to reduce or eliminate IFR conditions for landing helicopters due to visibility-restricting dust.

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(e) Enclose the field, which was outside the DAO fence, in multi-strings of concertina wire.

(3) LZ 37 (Tennis Court)

(a) Remove the tennis court fence which was 15 feet in height and completely encircled the two court area.

(b) Remove all light standards (8 in all), fire hydrants, lesser fences and signposts.

(c) Clear all shrubs and trees in the area in front of the DAO theater in order to accommodate a third CH-53 in the LZ.

(4) LZ 38 (South Parking Lot)

(a) Remove bus stop sunshade structure.

(b) Remove all civilian and military vehicles.

(5) LZ 39 (North Parking Lot)

(a) Remove guard shack

(b) Reposition the DAO Motor Pool Dispatcher Radio antennae.

(c) Remove 14 concrete flower pots used as traffic islands in the motor pool area.

All Landing Zones were scheduled, upon completion of the above work, to be marked with either luminescent panels or paint, or both.

Major modifications proceeded slowly for various reasons. The labor force available to the DAO engineering staff was limited, prone to strike (which they did on 23 April) and the

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force was decreasing in size daily as various laborers opted to exercise their privilege, gained through U. S. employment, of evacuation eligibility. Major among the obstacles to Landing Zone improvement was the reluctance of the Defense Attache (DATF) to approve modifications in the DAO Compound.

Throughout this period, the plan was discussed and refined. Visual aids were provided for the briefing of USMC and Air America air crews. Personal liaison was made with the Air America Chief Pilot to determine his needs and desires and to ensure that all potential operational conflicts were covered. Air America pilots and their management were very concerned about the security of their equipment, aircraft and employees. They were concerned in particular as a result of their experiences during the fall of Danang and Nha Trang. They desired to assist the American evacuation of Saigon in every way possible. Liaison with Air America, its management and pilots, was continuous throughout D-Day.

Concurrent with the development of the Landing Zone improvement program, a briefing was presented on the proposed interface between evacuee processing and staging and the evacuation helicopter lift.

Actual Landing Zone improvements were accomplished very slowly, and only as a result of continuous pressure and insistence. In chronological order, the Landing Zones were developed as follows:

(1) LZ 35 (PX Parking Lot)

(a) 20 April - On this date, capacity was two CH-53's. This capacity assumed that automobiles in the parking lot and track in and around the parking lot could be removed

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before L-hour.

(b) 22 April - The PX manager stated that the bookstore and gift shop merchandise would be removed that afternoon and that the building could be demolished on the 23rd.

(c) 25 April - The building was only partially emptied and not ready to be torn down. The PX manager complained about "high-handed Marines". He further complained that the erecting of concertina around the parking lot was "hurting business".

(2) LZ 36 (Softball Field)

(a) 20 April - On this date the field was absolutely unusable for helicopter operations due to numerous obstructions (trees, wires, and poles) and a loose, sandy soil surface on the field.

(b) 21 April - Inquiries revealed that this field, outside the DAO wire, was the property of the VNAF. Permission to grade and oil the field was withdrawn by the DATT.

(c) 22 April - DATT stated that the softball field was a "VNAF matter". A civilian contractor agreed to do the work in exchange for "consideration for his laborers". Work began at 1400 this date.

(d) 23-24 April - Trees were felled and removed, light standards cut down, debris removed, concertina installed and field was graded and oiled. Oil set-up time was about 40

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hours.

(e) 25 April - LZ was ready, with a capacity of three CH-53's

(3) LZ 37 (Tennis Court Area)

(a) 20 April - On this date, the parking lot adjacent to the tennis court would accommodate one CH-53, but only during daylight hours and only after a very steep and difficult approach.

(b) 21-22 April - Requests to commence Landing Zone improvements were disapproved by DATT.

(c) 24 April - Finally, approval was granted and work with cutting torches began. 90% of the obstacles were removed.

(d) 25 April - The Landing Zone could now accommodate two CH-53's as well as parking space for two command and control helos.

(e) 26 April - Directed the removal of all trees and shrubs from in front of the DAO theater. The DATT reprimanded those concerned for this decision because of its "high visibility". By 1700 this LZ had a three CH-53 capacity.

(4) LZ 38 (South Parking Lot)

(a) 20 April - On this date, the Landing Zone

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egress route between the Task Force and Saigon. This slide presentation was viewed by CG, 9th MAB, his principal staff and the staffs of both RLT-4 and PROVMAAG-39. In return, a briefing was presented on the plan for employment of the GSF in DAO/Air America Complex. Upon return to Saigon, a brief was presented on the GSF plan as it related to helicopter operations, Landing Zone organization and evacuee processing.

Since all Landing Zones were now ready for use, all were marked with CH-53 "footprints" in luminescent paint. Measurements were taken from the CH-53 NATOPS Flight Manual and the "footprints" were placed so as to provide maximum rotor-to-rotor to obstacle clearance. When the Landing Zone surface could not be painted, iron rods were installed to which standard USMC helicopter LZ marking panels could be attached prior to L-hour.

Discussions were held with personnel who were organizing the evacuee collection from building rooftops, to include control of helicopters. A rather slow buildup of evacuees at DAO was anticipated based upon transportation for collecting Americans around the city being mobbed by those local nationals who wanted to leave Saigon and couldn't. A system was designed whereby the people controlling the helicopters would request them at a flow rate consistent with the evacuee population reported by the Landing Zone marshal.

On 27 April, after the final cleanup of LZ 39, each Landing Zone was toured and inspected for final necessary modifications to ensure aircrew/aircraft safety. These final engineering tasks included not only last-minute "nice to have" improvements but also several specific requests from Squadron and PROVMAAG personnel who had seen the zones on preceeding days. This L-hour checklist included the powerline removal

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in LZ 35; removal of all cars and trash from LZ's; linkup of the wire around LZ 36 with the main DAO fence across the street; removal of the two flag poles south of LZ 37; removal of the overhead wires in LZ 38; and installation of the air marking panels in LZ's 36 and 37. These projects were left until last because there was either no alternative or the DATT absolutely refused to allow the work to be done at that time.

On the morning of 28 April, the routine morning walk-around revealed numerous automobiles abandoned by fixed wing evacuees in LZ's 35 and 37. Additionally, hundreds of processing evacuees who had subsisted in the compound overnight had erected metal and cardboard structures in LZ 35. More cleanup was done. The Security Platoon Commander was briefed on the absolute necessity of keeping the LZ's clear at all times because both D-Day and L-hour could come at any time.

Concurrently with LZ preparation, the communication system to be used was finalized. A full and complete check of all internal and external nets for evacuee and helicopter communications was conducted with each piece of equipment and its operator(s) in the positions they would occupy on D-Day. Of the five Landing Zones organized, three were manned by DAO personnel. Two volunteers were trained to man the remaining LZ's.

LZ marshals assumed the responsibility of meeting, searching and organizing evacuees as they arrived at DAO by either bus, car, Air America helo or on foot. After processing, the evacuees were to be held in staging areas adjacent to Landing Zones 35, 36, 37 and 38. Landing Zone 39 was later discarded as an evacuee staging area at approximately 1530 on 29 April as the civilian marshal assigned there evacuated himself. Further, noise levels in that LZ produced by adjacent gen-

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