

Chronology of Vietnam War, 1962-1975

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY MARINE CORPS EVENTS IN VIETNAM WAR, 1962 – 1975

April 9, 1962 - The leading elements of Marine Task Unit 79.3.5, a helicopter task unit codenamed Shufly commanded by Col John F. Carey arrived at Soc Trang, Republic of Vietnam.

Significance: *This was the first Marine squadron-sized unit together with a small security force to deploy to Vietnam as a result of the establishment of the U.S. Military Assistance Command on February 8, 1962. They were to provide helicopter support to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in its campaign against Communist Vietnamese forces called Viet Cong (VC).*

March 8, 1965 - The 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) commanded by BGen Frederick J. Karch landed at Da Nang, Vietnam, consisting of two Marine battalions, one arriving by air and over the beach. The following day, the MEB assumed control of the Marine Task Unit 79.3.5 at Da Nang which became Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 16.

Significance: *This was the first deployment of U.S. battalion-sized U.S. combat units to Vietnam. Although the mission of the 9th MEB was limited solely to the defense of the airbase at Da Nang, it was, nevertheless, indicative that the U.S. advisory phase in the Vietnam War was to be transformed into more direct U.S. participation.*

May-June 1965 - On May 6, the 9th MEB was transformed into the III Marine Expeditionary Brigade which the next day became the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF). III MAF consisted of the forward elements of the 3rd Marine Division and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. MajGen William R. Collins was commanding general of both III MAF and the 3rd Marine Division and was relieved on June 4, 1965 in both capacities by MajGen Lewis W. Walt. MajGen Paul J. Fontana established the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing headquarters on May 11, 1965 and was relieved on May 24, by Brigadier General Keith B. McCutcheon. By this time, III MAF had established three bases at Da Nang, Chu Lai, and Phu Bai. The Commanding General, III MAF was responsible for all U.S. military activity in South Vietnam's I Corps consisting of the five northern provinces. The total strength of III MAF at the end of June was over 18,000 personnel.

Significance: *This was the formation of the Marine Corps command structure in Vietnam that was to remain in place to the departure of the Marine units from Vietnam in 1971.*

Aug 1, 1965 - The Joint Action Company was officially formed at Phu Bai Consisting of four South Vietnamese Popular Force platoons, each reinforced by a U.S. Marine infantry squad, which platoons eventually became known as Combined Action Platoons.

Significance: *This event initiated what eventually became the Combined Action Program which assigned these combined South Vietnamese and American platoons into various villages in the III MAF area of operations. This was a unique Marine and largely successful contribution to the U.S. /South Vietnamese pacification program in the countryside.*

Aug 3, 1965 - Company D, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines conducted a one day operation in the vicinity of Cam Ne, south of Da Nang. A CBS television crew, accompanying the company, filmed a Marine setting fire to a Vietnamese thatched house. This film, which was shown on the evening news, led to a debate in the press about U.S. tactics in Vietnamese Villages.

Significance: *The relationship of the media, especially the TV media, and the military was to be an acrimonious one during much of the Vietnam War. The so-called "Cam Ne incident" set much of the tone of this relationship.*

August 18-24 1965 - The 7th Marines conducted an amphibious and helicopter assault and defeated a large Communist force, the 1st VC Regiment, in Operation Starlite, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy in heavy fighting on the Van Tuong Peninsula south of Chu Lai.

Significance: *This was the first battle of American troops against a large Main Force VC unit.*

March 1, 1966 - The 26th Marines was activated at Camp Pendleton, California initiating the formation of the 5th Marine Division.

Significance: *For the first time since World War II, the Marine Corps was to have four infantry*

divisions on active duty. By the end of June, the Marines were authorized over 278,000 personnel, a Marine Corps larger than that of the Korean War.

March 4-7, 1966 - The 3rd Marine Division Task Force Delta defeated the 21st North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Regiment inflicting heavy casualties upon the enemy in heavy combat in Operation Utah south of Chu Lai.

Significance: *This was the first engagement by Marine units against North Vietnamese Army units.*

March 10, 1966 - South Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky removed LtGen Nguyen Chanh Thi from his position as ARVN I Corps commander. As a result this led to a series of strikes and political unrest especially in I Corps that saw a succession of I Corps commanders into June 1966. Much of the heaviest unrest was in the Da Nang sector which often placed III MAF in the middle between troops loyal to the central government and those who supported Thi and the Buddhist dominated "Struggle Group". General Walt often served as a mediator between the two.

Significance: *This unrest undermined the authority of the Vietnamese government which had grave implications about American participation in the war.*

March 29, 1966 - MajGen Lewis J. Fields established the 1st Marine Division Headquarters at Chu Lai.

Significance: *III MAF now officially consisted of two Marine infantry divisions and a reinforced Marine Aircraft Wing.*

July 7- August 2, 1966 - The 3rd Marine Division Task Force Delta conducted Operation Hastings just south of the so-called Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) dividing the two Vietnams. The Marine task force successfully repulsed the 324B NVA Division in its attempt to move into northern Quang Tri Province.

Significance: *This marked the beginning of the North Vietnamese effort to move in strength directly through the DMZ. It resulted eventually in the move of the entire 3rd Marine Division northwards and establishing a forward headquarters at Dong Ha in northern Quang Tri Province.*

November 29, 1966 - The Marines establish a one battalion base area near the U.S. Special Forces Camp at Khe Sanh in northwestern Quang Tri Province.

Significance: *This was the first establishment of a permanent Marine base at Khe Sanh.*

February 21, 1967 - Dr. Bernard Fall, noted historian of the French combat experience in Indochina, died in an explosion of an enemy mine. Dr. Fall was accompanying the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines in Operation Chinook.

Significance: *Dr. Fall was a recognized expert on Vietnam and ironically died in an area near the so called "Street Without Joy," which he had so carefully portrayed in his writing. He was one of the South Vietnamese regime.*

February 27, 1967 - NVA rocket troops launched 140 mm rockets against the Da Nang Air Base. More than 50 rockets hit the base in less than a minute. The rockets had a range of 9,000 meters.

Significance: *This was the first known use of large tactical rockets in South Vietnam. The use of these weapons forced III MAF to extend its protective patrolling at Da Nang out to 9,000 meters, which added to the drain on Marine infantry manpower.*

March 18, 1967 - The first woman Marine to serve in Vietnam, M/Sgt Barbara J. Dulinsky, arrived in Saigon, for assignment to the MACV combat operations center.

March 26, 1967 - ComUSMACV ordered III MAF to prepare a plan for locating, constructing, and occupying a strongpoint obstacle system south of the DMZ to prevent the North Vietnamese from infiltrating through that zone into South Vietnam.

Significance: *III MAF eventually began building this strongpoint system later in the year while under fire by North Vietnamese artillery. This anti-infiltration effort, also known as Dye Marker and Project Nine was labeled by the Media as "McNamara's Wall," after the name of the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara.*

April 20, 1967 - U.S. Army Task Force Oregon under Major General William B. Rosson (USA) established its headquarters at Chu Lai and came under the operational control of III MAF to reinforce the Marines in I Corps. Eventually on September 20, Task Force Oregon became the U.S. Army Americal Division under Major General Samuel W. Koster (USA).

Significance: *III MAF became truly a U.S. joint command with a sizable Army contingent under its operational control.*

April 24 - May 11, 1967 - The "First Battle of Khe Sanh" or "Hill Fights" took place. In extremely bitter fighting with North Vietnamese troops, units of the 3rd Marine Division cleared Hills 8881S, 881N, and 861 overlooking the Khe Sanh Combat base.

Significance: *Khe Sanh began to take on more importance as a Marine outpost. The American command insisted that it be held and the North Vietnamese continued to probe and try to isolate the garrison.*

May 31, 1967 - LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr. succeeded LtGen Lewis W. Walt as Commanding General III MAF.

Significance: *General Walt who had become identified with the Marine Corps pacification campaign including the Combined Action Program was relieved after two years in command of III MAF. Walt's successors as III MAF would continue to emphasize pacification as a central component of the Marine effort in South Vietnam especially in the heavily populated area around Da Nang.*

July 2-14, 1967 - The 9th Marines conducted Operation Buffalo to counter a North Vietnamese offensive near the Marine base at Con Thien just south of the DMZ. In very intensive fighting with heavy casualties on both sides, the Marines repulsed the North Vietnamese.

Significance: *The North Vietnamese in the eastern DMZ begin to escalate the war in the north and would continue to mount attacks against Con Thien.*

September 19-27, 1967 - In a massive attack by fire on Con Thien, the North Vietnamese fired more than 3,000 heavy artillery, mortar, and rocket rounds against the Marine battalion at Con Thien. In response, U.S. artillery returned 12,577 rounds, Navy gun ships fired 6,148 rounds, and U.S. fighter/attack aircraft flew 5,200 missions against the enemy firing positions.

Significance: *This was one of the heaviest North Vietnamese artillery bombardments against American troops during the war and was the first phase of the Communist 1967-1968 Winter Spring Campaign that would culminate in the 1968 Tet offensive.*

January 21, 1968 - General William C. Westmoreland, Commander USMACV, ordered a temporary halt to work on the "McNamara Line", the barrier and anti-infiltration system south of the DMZ.

Significance: *This for all practical matters ended the work on the McNamara Line which officially terminated on October 22, 1968.*

January 21 - April 15, 1968 - NVA troops began shelling the base at Khe Sanh and the strongholds in the surrounding hills. This rocket, mortar, and artillery barrage initiated the siege of Khe Sanh.

Significance: *The siege of Khe Sanh would be one of the defining battles of the Vietnam War. Supplied by air and supported by massive artillery and air bombardments including B-52 strikes, the 6,000 man Khe Sanh garrison would hold out against elements of an estimated two North Vietnamese Divisions until relieved by U.S. forces on April 14.*

January 30 - February 28, 1968 - Communist forces launched a country-wide offensive during the Vietnamese Tet holidays. On January 30, their Main Force units launched an aborted attack upon Da Nang. Units from the U.S. Army Americal Division would reinforce the 1st Marine Infantry Division at

Da Nang. Fighting in the Da Nang sector would continue sporadically until the end of February. Communist offensives would also occur in Hue, Quang Tri City, Hoi An, and Quang Ngai City in I Corps

Significance: *While providing the Communists with the some political and propaganda successes, especially in the United States, the defeat of their nation-wide offensive would cost the Communist forces dearly in manpower in both their regular forces and especially among their Viet Cong infrastructure and local forces.*

January 31 - March 2, 1968 - In the Battle for Hue City, the North Vietnamese in Division strength on January 31 captured most of the city except for small pockets of resistance. Elements of the 1st Marine Division Task Force X-ray, the South Vietnamese 1st ARVN Division, and the U.S. 1st Air Cavalry Division in month-long house to house fighting retook the city with significant losses suffered by both sides.

Significance: *The capture of Hue, the ancient Imperial capital of Vietnam had significant symbolic reverberations throughout the country and was the one partially successful element of the enemy Tet offensive. The defeat of the Communist forces at Hue prevented them from possibly taking over the two northern provinces of South Vietnam.*

February 9, 1968 - MACV Forward, under General Creighton B. Abrams, Deputy Commander USMACV, is established in I CTZ at Phu Bai. It is a forward headquarters to monitor operations in the two northern provinces. The two divisions in the sector, the U.S. Army 1st Cavalry Division (Air Mobile) and the 3rd Marine Division, remain, however, under the operational control of III MAF.

Significance: *There is some concern among Marine commanders that MACV plans to assume direct command of all forces in the north and reduce the role of the senior Marine command.*

February 12, 1968 - The 27th Marines receive orders to deploy to Da Nang from the U.S. as part of the reinforcements requested by General William C. Westmoreland and the JCS. President Johnson made extensive reductions to original recommendations of MACV and the JCS.

Significance: President Johnson limited the number of U.S. reinforcements to Vietnam as a result of the Tet offensive and disapproved the JCS recommendation for a call up of major U.S. Reserve units for the war. In effect, he placed an upper limitation upon the U.S. combat involvement in Vietnam.

February 13, 1968 - The headquarters and combat elements of the 101st Airborne Division arrive in I CTZ.

Significance: *III MAF now has three U.S. Army Divisions under its operational control as well as two reinforced Marine Divisions and a reinforced Marine Aircraft Wing in I Corps.*

March 7, 1968 - General Westmoreland issued a "Single Mananger" for air directive officially placing with the Seventh Air Force the "responsibility for coordinating and directing the air effort throughout Vietnam, to include I CTZ and the extended battle area." III MAF was to make available to the Seventh Air Force commander all strike and reconnaissance aircraft and that part of the Marine air command and control system that related to the employment of these aircraft. Marine fixed-wing transports, observation aircraft, and helicopters were exempted from the directive.

Significance: The Marine Command protested this decision claiming that the directive placed undue restrictions upon Marine fixed-air in mission of support form Marine ground forces. While never withdrawn during the war, the directive was amended several times, and by the end of the war, III MAF in effect basically regained its control over its fixed-wing aviation.

March 10, 1968 - U.S. Provisional Corps, Vietnam was created under the command of Lieutenant General William B. Rosson, USA, to replace the MACV (Fwd) Headquarters. The new command has under its operational control the 3rd Marine Division, the 1st Cavalry Division (Air Mobile), and the

101st Airborne Division and is a subordinate headquarters to III MAF. The U.S. Provisional Corps becomes XXIV Corps on August 15, 1968.

Significance: *III MAF became one of the largest commands in Marine history. It had assumed in effect the role of a Field Army with a Marine Aircraft Wing attached to it.*

April 30 - May 2, 1968 - Marine BLT 2/4 engaged and defeated elements of two enemy regiments from the 320th NVA Division in the small hamlet of Dai Do in the 3rd Marine Division Cua Viet sector near Dong Ha. Both the Marine battalion and the enemy sustained heavy casualties in the intensive three-day battle. Two of the Marine company commanders were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions during the battle.

Significance: The battle of Dai Do forestalled a larger NVA offensive aimed at taking the large Marine headquarters and logistic base at Dong Ha. This was part of the renewed Communist offensive labeled "Mini-Tet" that occurred throughout much of South Vietnam at this time.

June - October 1968 - The 3rd Marine Division, now under MajGen Raymond G. Davis, undertook an aggressive counteroffensive against North Vietnamese forces in the northern border section below the DMZ.

Significance: Employing new helicopter mobile and firebase tactics, and no longer confined to securing defensive outposts, the 3rd Marine Division swept the 320th NVA Division out of its forward positions in South Vietnam.

July 5, 1968 - The last Marine forces officially closed out and departed the Khe Sanh Base.

Significance: *With U.S. forces employing more mobile tactics in the north, Khe Sanh was no longer required as a major base. The close out of the base was more of symbolic significance than of any military strategic one.*

September 12-16, 1968 - The 27th Marines redeployed from Vietnam to the United States.

Significance: *This was the first withdrawal of U.S. forces sent to reinforce the U.S. command in Vietnam during TET. While not considered a reduction of U.S. forces, it was harbinger that the U.S. was looking to reduce its combat forces in Vietnam.*

December 7, 1968 - March 9, 1969 - The 1st Marine Division Task Force Yankee conducted Operation Taylor Common in Base Area 112 southwest of Da Nang, accounting for extensive North Vietnamese casualties.

Significance: *Incorporating mobile helicopter and firebase tactics used by the 3rd Marine Division, the 1st Marine Division entered the North Vietnamese base areas, destroying much of the enemy main force logistics buildup and clearing the 2nd NVA Division elements which had taken refuge there.*

February 22 - March 18, 1969 - The 9th Marines under the 3rd Marine Division conducted Operation Dewey Canyon, a mobile helicopter and fire base operation, in the Da Krong Valley in western Quang Tri Province. During the course of the operation, Marine units crossed the border into Laos.

Significance: Not only was this was the first acknowledged and deliberate entry into Laos by a large American unit, it resulted in the uncovering of extensive enemy supplies, arms, and ammunition, spring offensive in northern Quang Tri Province.

July 4 - November 7, 1969 - In accordance with Presidential order in the reduction of U.S. troop strength in Vietnam, the 3rd Marine Division redeployed from Vietnam to Okinawa.

Significance: *The 3rd Marine Division was the first U.S. division to depart Vietnam in accordance with U.S. plans for the eventual withdrawal of American combat units from Vietnam.*

November 1969 - With new command arrangements, the Special Landing Force (SLF) Battalions of the Seventh Fleet could not be committed to South Vietnam without specific authorization of the JCS. **Significance:** *Up to this point, from 1965 to 1969, MACV could request the Seventh Fleet for deployment to South Vietnam of its SLF battalions as a matter of course. Many SLF battalions remained ashore for months on end, and in effect, were part of the total MACV strength. This was no longer the case and meant a further reduction of forces immediately available to the MACV commander.*

January 28 - March 19, 1970 - Redeployment of Marine units from Vietnam, now codenamed Keystone Robin, continued to include the 26th Marines, MAG 12, and several aviation squadrons. **Significance:** *U.S. redeployment plans call for III MAF units to be among the first U.S. units to depart Vietnam.*

March 9, 1970 - III MAF turned over command of U.S. units in I Corps over to XXIV Corps, thus becoming a subordinate command of XXIV Corps. **Significance:** *This again is indicative of the future reduced role for Marines in Vietnam and their pending departure.*

April 30 - June 29, 1970 - U.S. and South Vietnamese units entered the Cambodian fishhook area to attack the Viet Cong command headquarters and logistics base maintained across the border. Two Vietnamese Marine Brigades together with their U.S. Marine advisors participated in the action. Marine advisors were restricted to 25 miles inside Cambodia. No U.S. Marine ground units participated in this incursion. **Significance:** *While the operation was successful militarily, it led to wide-spread student and anti-war demonstrations and unrest in the United States. For the Marine Corps, it was indicative that Marine advisors to South Vietnamese units were beginning to have a more active role than the Marine units in Vietnam.*

October 1, 1970 - The 7th Marines departed Vietnam. **Significance:** *The continuing redeployment of Marine units from Vietnam in accordance with the keystone Robin plans.*

January 30 - April 6, 1971 - On January 30 the South Vietnamese begin Lam Son 719. In phase 1 which lasted to February 8, the South Vietnamese supported by allied forces opened up the Khe Sanh base. In Phase II, the South Vietnamese forces which included the Vietnamese Marine Corps Division. U.S. advisors, including U.S. Marine advisors, were not permitted to accompany their units into Laos, they were allowed, however, to coordinate supporting fires (ARG)/Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) remained off the Vietnamese coast, but was not committed. **Significance:** *Militarily, this operation was much less successful than the Cambodian incursion and called into question the capability of the South Vietnamese command to coordinate division-size forces. Again U.S. Marine units in Vietnam played almost no role in Lam Son 719 as they redeployed or planned to redeploy from Vietnam.*

March 25, 1971 - The 5th Marines departed Vietnam. **Significance:** *The continuing redeployment of Marine units from Vietnam in accordance with the Keystone Robin plans.*

April 14, 1971 - The III MAF headquarters, the 1st Marine Division headquarters, and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing headquarters departed Vietnam. The 3rd Marine Amphibious Brigade replaced III MAF at Da Nang and totaled 1,322 Marine and 124 Navy officers and 13,359 and 711 Navy enlisted men. It consisted of the 1st Marines, MAG-11 and MAG-16, and the 2nd Combined Action Group Headquarters.

Significance: *This was to be the last command adjustment before the final departure of Marine units in Vietnam.*

May 11, 1971 - The Combined Action Group headquarters was deactivated.

Significance: *This ended the Marine Corps pacification and civic action campaigns in Vietnam.*

June 27, 1971 - The 3rd MAB was deactivated.

Significance: *This ended the major Marine participation in the Vietnam war with a few exceptions. Marine advisors continued to be assigned to the Vietnamese Marine Corps and Marines of Subunit 1, 1st Air/Naval gunfire liaison company continued to coordinate ship gunfire and naval air support for U.S. Army and ARVN units in Vietnam.*

March 30 - June 27, 1972 - On March 30, the North Vietnamese launch their Nguyen-Hue (known in the U.S. as the Easter) Offensive and after extensive losses in I Corps, South Vietnamese forces stabilize their lines at the My Chanh River north of Hue. In the retreat of the Vietnamese Marine Division, U.S. Marine advisors played a major role in helping to rally the Vietnamese Marines after the initial setbacks. On April 6, the Marine Corps deployed MAG-15 to Da Nang and on May 16, MAG-12 deployed Bien Hoa in III Corps. Both Marine aircraft groups operated under the Seventh Air Force in support South Vietnamese Forces. On June 16, MAG 15 redeployed from Da Nang to Nam Phong, Thailand where the group continued to support operations of the Seventh Air Force against the Communist forces both in Vietnam and Cambodia. MAG-12 would remain in Bien Hoa until February 1993. The 9th MAB was embarked on board Seventh Fleet amphibious shipping and arrived in the Gulf of Tonkin on April. The MAB remained embarked and Marine infantry units were not committed.

Significance: *Although Marine ground units remained ready for redeployment to Vietnam, the Marine Corps participation was limited in its participation in the renewed fighting to aviation support and in an advisory effort.*

14 March 1973 - With the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973 between North Vietnam and the United States, Sub-unit 1, 1st ANGLICO redeploy.

Significance: *This was the last Marine tactical unit to leave Vietnam.*

29 March 1973 - U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam was deactivated.

Significance: *This ended the U.S. military advisory effort at the unit level with the South Vietnamese military, and included the deactivation two days earlier of the U.S. Marine Advisory Unit to the South Vietnamese Marine Corps.*

14 August 1973 - U.S. Congress ceased the funding of all U.S. military action in Southeast Asia and halted combat air operations from Thailand.

Significance: *This concluded all U.S. air action in Cambodia flown by U.S. aircraft based in Thailand*

including that of the Marines. The last elements of Marine task Force Delta at Nam Phong departed Thailand on 21 September.

12 April 1975 - Marines on the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade (9th MAB) executed Operation Eagle Pull, the evacuation of American and other foreign nationals from Phnom Penh, Cambodia just before the fall of the city to the Communist Cambodian Khymer Rouge.

Significance: *This ended U.S. involvement and support of the Cambodian regime of Lon No1, the general who had overthrown Prince Nordom Sihanouk in 1970. The Khymer Rouge assumed control of the Cambodian and its government.*

29 April 1975 - Marines on the 9th MAB executed Operation Frequent Wind, the evacuation of Americans, foreign nationals, and various Vietnamese official and citizens associated with Americans from Saigon to ships of the U.S. Seventh Fleet.

Significance: *This ended U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. The 9th MAB, in effect, conducted the last U.S. troop operation of the Vietnam War. The following day, Saigon fell to North Vietnamese troops and organized South Vietnamese resistance to the Communist forces of North Vietnam ended. The Communists unified Vietnam under their regime.*

12-15 May 1975 - On 12 May, a Khymer Rouge gunboat seized an American ship, the SS Mayaguez in the Gulf of Thailand and detained its crew. Two days later, USAF helicopters landed Marines of BLT 2/9 on Koh Tang Island off the Cambodian coast where the crew is believed to be held. Marines from Company D, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines boarded the Mayaguez only to find deserted. The Khymer Rouge released the mayaguez crew who were picked up by a U.S. destroyer at sea. On 15 May, with the recovery of the ship and its crew, the Marines withdrew from Koh Tang Island. The American forces sustained total casualties of 15 killed, 3 missing in action (later declared dead), 49 wounded, and 23 other personnel killed in a related helicopter crash. Khymer Rouge casualties were unknown.

Significance: *This concluded the entire combat involvement of the United States military forces in the former French Indochina.*