U.S. MARINES IN VIETNAM

VIETNAMIZATION AND REDEPLOYMENT

1970-1971

COVER: *Marines from Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines emerge from a heavy-lift CH-53 helicopter in a search-and-destroy mission in a long-time enemy base area known to the Marines as Charlie Ridge, 12 miles southwest of the Da Nang Airbase.*
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373245

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USMC MARINES IN VIETNAM

VIETNAMIZATION AND REDEPLOYMENT (SFT)

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VIETNAMIZATION AND REDEPLOYMENT

1970-1971

by
Graham A. Cosmas
and
Lieutenant Colonel Terrence P. Murray, USMC

Edited by
Major William R. Melton, USMC
and
Jack Shulimson

HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION
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Foreword

This is the eighth volume in a planned 10-volume operational and chronological series covering the Marine Corps' participation in the Vietnam War. A separate topical series will complement the operational histories. This particular volume details the gradual withdrawal in 1970-1971 of Marine combat forces from South Vietnam's northernmost corps area, I Corps, as part of an overall American strategy of turning the ground war against the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong over to the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam.

Marines in this period accomplished a number of difficult tasks. The III Marine Amphibious Force transferred most of its responsibilities in I Corps to the Army XXIV Corps, which became the senior U.S. command in that military region. III MAF continued a full range of military and pacification activities within Quang Nam Province, its remaining area of responsibility. Developing its combat and counterinsurgency techniques to their fullest extent, the force continued to protect the city of Da Nang, root out the enemy guerrillas and infrastructure from the country, and prevent enemy main forces from disrupting pacification. At the same time, its strength steadily diminished as Marines redeployed in a series of increments until, in April 1971, the III Marine Amphibious Force Headquarters itself departed and was replaced for the last month of Marine ground combat by the 3d Marine Amphibious Brigade. During the redeployments, Marine logisticians successfully withdrew huge quantities of equipment and dismantled installations or turned them over to the South Vietnamese. Yet this was also a time of troubles for Marines. The strains on the Armed Services of a lengthy, inconclusive war and the social and racial conflicts tormenting American society adversely affected Marine discipline and cohesion, posing complex, intractable problems of leadership and command. Marines departed Vietnam with a sense that they had done their duty, but also that they were leaving behind many problems unsolved and tasks not completed.

Although written from the perspective of III MAF and the ground war in I Corps, the volume treats the activities of Marine advisors to the South Vietnamese Armed Forces, the Seventh Fleet Special Landing Force, and Marines on the staff of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, in Saigon. There are separate chapters on Marine air, artillery, and logistics. An attempt has been made to place the Marine role in relation to the overall effort.

Dr. Graham A. Cosmas was with the History and Museums Division from December 1973 through April 1979 and is now on the staff of the U.S. Army's Center of Military History. Previously, he had taught at the University of Texas and the University of Guam. He is a graduate of Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, and received his doctorate in history from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1969. Dr. Cosmas has published several articles on military history and *An Army for Empire: The United States Army in the Spanish-American War* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1971) and is co-author of *Marines in the Dominican Republic, 1916-1924* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1975).

The co-author, Lieutenant Colonel Terrence P. Murray, served with the History and Museums Division from August 1983 until July 1984. He is a graduate of the U.S. Naval

Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, and of the Armed Forces Staff College. Lieutenant Colonel Murray served a combat tour in Vietnam as an infantry officer during 1969 and 1970. He is now assigned to the Navy-Marine Corps Senate Liaison Office in Washington, D.C.

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

Preface

U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Vietnamization and Redeployment, 1970-1971, is largely based on the holdings of the Marine Corps Historical Center. These include the official unit monthly command chronologies, Marine Corps messages and journal files, the Oral History and Personal Papers Collections of the History and Museums Division, and the reference files of the division.

The authors have supplemented the above sources with research in the records of the other Services and pertinent published primary and secondary sources. Although none of the information in this history is classified, some of the documentation on which it is based still has a classified designation. More than 250 reviewers, most of whom participated in the events depicted in the history, read a comment edition of the manuscript. Their comments, where applicable, have been incorporated into the text. A list of those who commented is included in the appendices. All ranks used in the body of the text are those held by the individual in 1970-1971.

The production of this volume, like its predecessors, has been a cooperative effort. Dr. Graham A. Cosmas researched and wrote the first draft of the history with the exception of the last chapter. Lieutenant Colonel Terrence P. Murray completed the revision of the manuscript and incorporated the comments, assisted by Major William R. Melton. Mr. Jack Shulimson, Head, Histories Section and Senior Vietnam Historian, edited the final version and prepared the volume for publication. All of the Vietnam historians, past and present, in the Histories Section, History and Museums Division, especially Mr. Shulimson and Mr. Charles R. Smith, and former members Lieutenant Colonel Lane Rogers, Lieutenant Colonel Gary Parker, and Lieutenant Colonel David Buckner, reviewed the draft manuscript and provided invaluable comments and criticism.

Access to Marine Corps documents was facilitated by Mrs. Joyce Bonnett of the division's Archives Section. Miss Evelyn Englander, head librarian, and her assistant, Mrs. Pat Morgan, were most helpful in obtaining needed references. The Reference Section, headed by Danny J. Crawford, made its files available and answered numerous queries cheerfully and professionally. Mrs. Regina Strother of the Reference Section assisted in photographic research. The Head, Oral Histories Section, Mr. Benis M. Frank, was equally supportive in making his collection available.

Mr. Frank prepared the index with the assistance of Mr. Smith and Major Arthur F. Elzy, both of the Histories Section.

Mr. Robert E. Struder, head of Publications Production Section, adeptly guided the manuscript through the various production phases. Maps were produced by Mr. W. Stephen Hill, who also contributed the design and makeup of the book. The manuscript was typeset first for the comment edition by Corporals Paul W. Gibson, Joseph J. Hynes, and Mark J. Zigante. Corporals Stanley W. Crowl and James W. Rodriguez II, with the guidance and substantial additional contribution of Mrs. Catherine A. Kerns, accomplished the final typesetting.

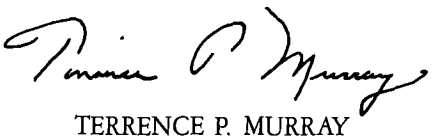
Special thanks are due Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, Director of Marine Corps History and Museums, who established the guidelines for the Vietnam series and made available to the author his personal notebooks for 1970-1971, when he was assistant division commander of the 1st Marine Division and assistant brigade commander of the 3d Marine Amphibious Brigade; Colonels John E. Greenwood, Jr., Oliver M. Whipple, Jr.,

and John G. Miller, successively the History and Museum Division's Deputy Directors for History, who provided continuing support; and Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., Chief Historian, who provided the benefit of long experience in writing Marine Corps history, as well as encouragement, wise counsel, and general editorial direction.

The authors also are indebted to their colleagues in the historical offices of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, who freely exchanged information and made documents available for their examination.

They must express their gratitude also to all those who reviewed the comment edition and provided corrections, personal photographs, and insight available only to those who took part in the events. In the end, however, the authors alone are responsible for the contents of the text, including opinions expressed and any errors in fact.

GRAHAM A. COSMAS



TERRENCE P. MURRAY

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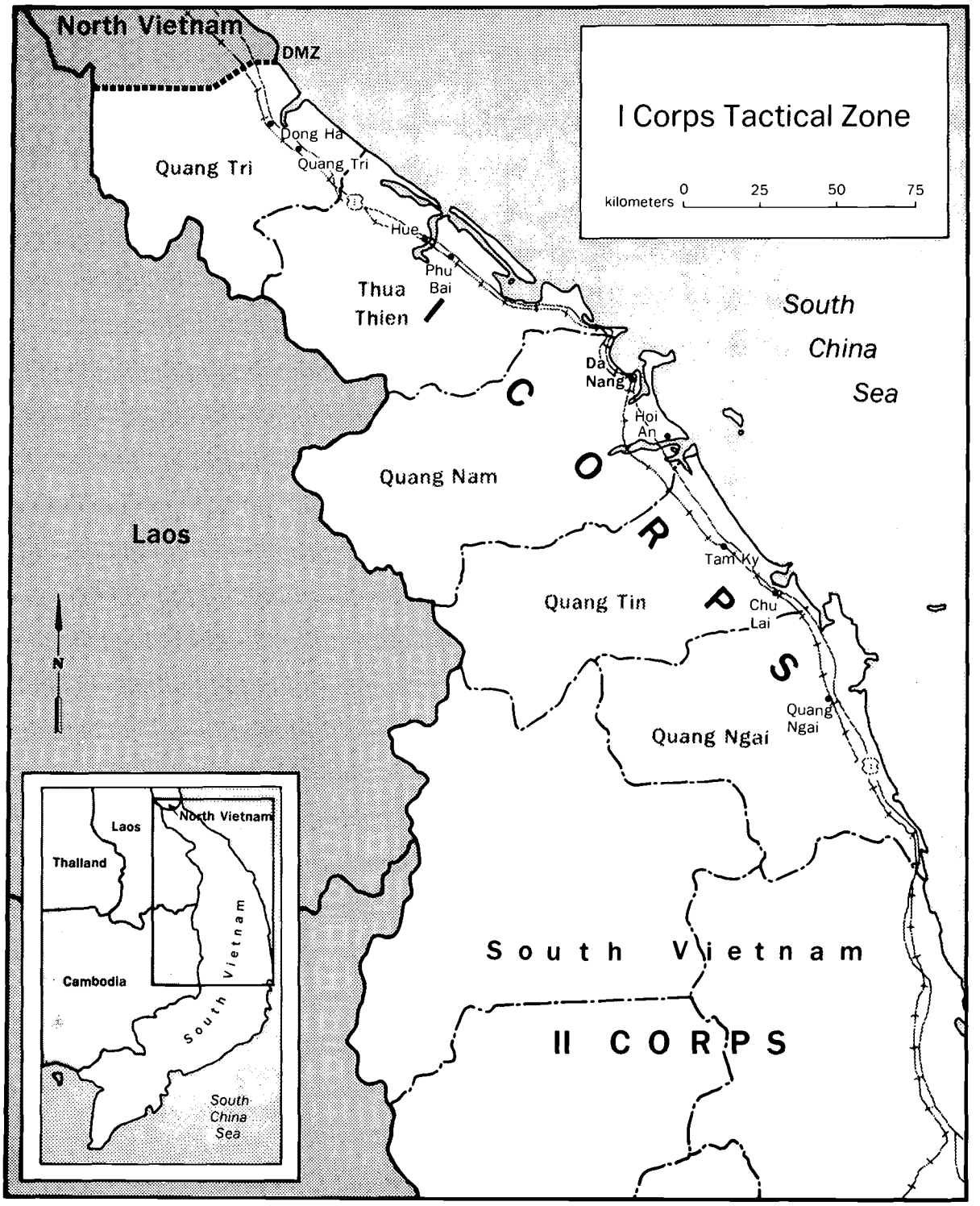
North Vietnam
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Phu Bai
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CORPS
South Vietnam
II CORPS
Laos
North Vietnam
Thailand
Cambodia
South Vietnam
South China Sea

PART I
A CONTRACTING WAR

CHAPTER 1

The War in I Corps, Early 1970

III MAF in January 1970—Allied and Enemy Strategy, 1969-1970
The III MAF/ICTZ Combined Plan for 1970—Troop Redeployment: Keystone Bluejay
The Change of Command in I Corps

III MAF in January 1970

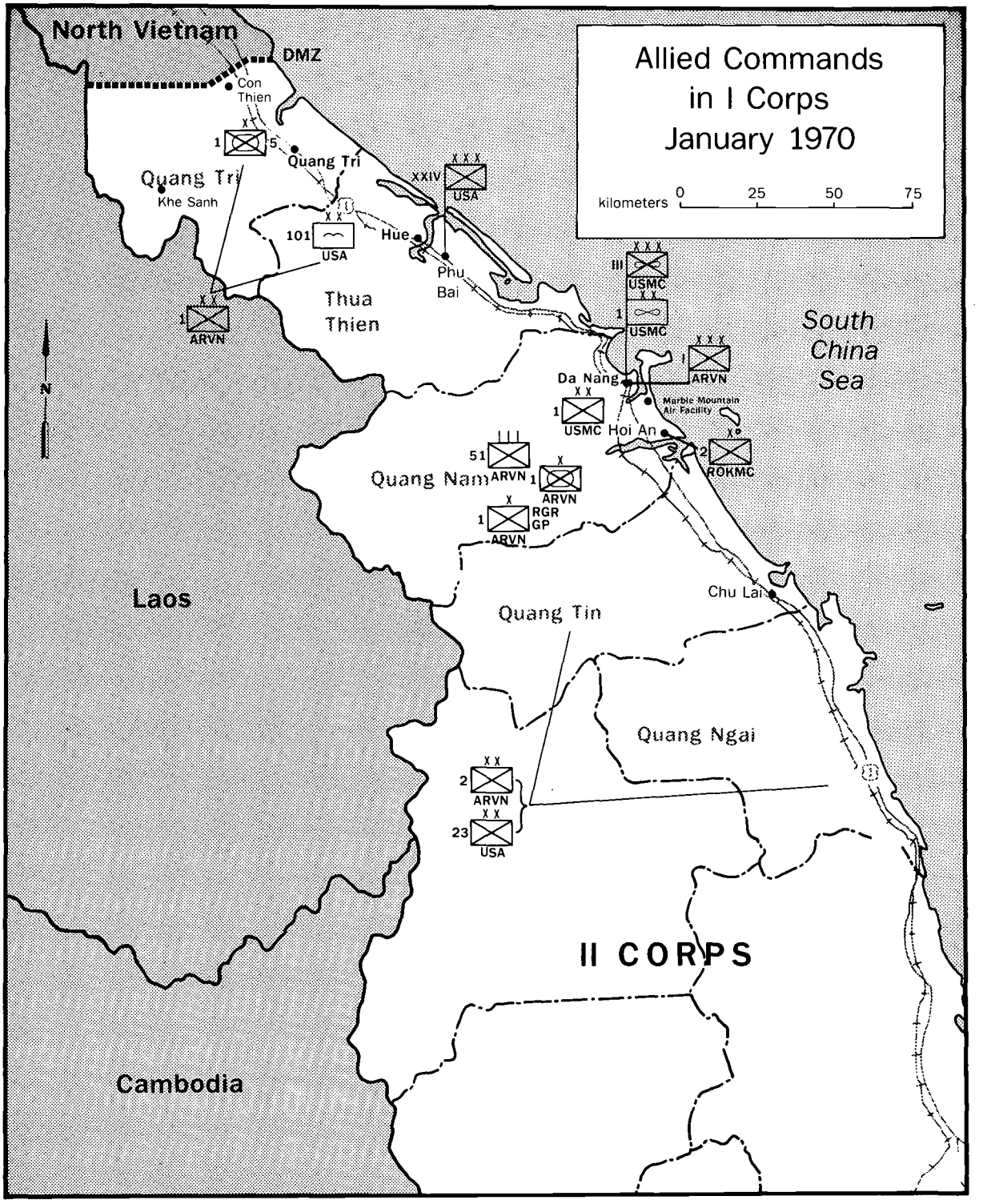
In January 1970, the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) was responsible for defense of the five northernmost provinces of South Vietnam. Constituting I Corps Tactical Zone (I CTZ), these provinces were from north to south Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai. Marines had operated in these provinces since 1965 and had taken a valiant and costly part in some of the war's heaviest fighting, including the sieges of Con Thien and Khe Sanh and the house-to-house battle of Hue City. By early 1970, Marine operations were focused on the Da Nang tactical area of responsibility (TAOR) where large-scale combat had become infrequent, although the enemy constantly engaged the troops of III MAF in an unspectacular but deadly war of ambushes, small skirmishes, rocket and mortar attacks and boobytraps. These latter devices inflicted the most ravaging toll upon Marines in terms of casualties.

At the beginning of 1970, Lieutenant General Herman Nickerson, Jr., commanded III MAF, which included about 55,000 Marines. The previous January, before redeployment began, III MAF numbered over 79,000. Major General Edwin B. Wheeler's reinforced 1st Marine Division, 28,000 strong, had its headquarters just outside Da Nang and operated in Quang Nam Province. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW)—12,000 men with over 400 aircraft under Major General William G. Thrash—had fixed-wing squadrons flying from fields at Da Nang, Chu Lai, and Phu Bai and helicopter squadrons stationed at Marble Mountain east of Da Nang and at Phu Bai. At Da Nang, the 7,600 officers and men of Brigadier General Mauro J. Padalino's Force Logistic Command (FLC) supplied the division and wing and kept their equipment operating. Scattered in platoon-size detachments throughout the villages of I CTZ, the 2,000 officers and men of the Combined Action Force (CAF) under Colonel Theodore E. Metzger continued the Marines' most ambitious experiment in pacification.[1]

Besides the Marines, III MAF included about 50,000 United States Army troops. In Quang Tri Province, the 6,000 officers and men of Army Brigadier General William A. Burke's 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) helped guard the invasion and infiltration routes across the Demilitarized Zone. In Thua Thien just to the south, the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), commanded by Major General John M. Wright, USA, deployed 20,800 men in three brigades to protect Hue. These two Army formations, which had moved into I Corps early in 1968 to counter the enemy's Tet offensive, constituted the XXIV Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General Melvin Zais, USA. Located at Phu Bai, Zais' headquarters was under the operational control of III MAF. In Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces in southern I Corps, the 23,800 troops of the 23d (Americal) Division, commanded by Major General Lloyd B. Ramsey, USA, operated under III MAF's direct control from their headquarters in Chu Lai. General Nickerson, in his capacity as senior U.S. advisor to I Corps, also commanded the 222 officers and 305 enlisted men of the U. S. Army Advisory Group (USAAG) in I Corps.[2]

A civilian deputy for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) was also a member of the III MAF staff and was charged with coordinating through his province and district representatives U.S. civilian and military resources which directly supported the pacification program in I Corps. Formed under the single manager concept and directly controlled by MACV, CORDS was created in an effort to integrate totally country-wide pacification.

I Corps also had operating within it important allied contingents which were neither attached to nor controlled by III MAF. About 28,000 U. S. Army, Navy, and Air Force personnel were stationed in I Corps with the Naval Support Activity (NSA), Da Nang; the U. S. Army Support Command, Da Nang; the 45th Army Engineering Group; and the Air Force's 366th Tactical Fighter Wing. While these organizations cooperated closely with III MAF for many purposes, they were directed by their service component commanders. III MAF did not control but did supervise the operations of the 6,000-man 2d Republic of Korea Marine Brigade, which protected an enclave


Allied Commands
in I Corps
January 1970
kilometers 0 25 50 75
North Vietnam
DMZ
Con Thien
Quang Tri
Khe Sanh
Quang Tri
Hue
Phu Bai
Thua Thien
South China Sea
Da Nang
Marble Mountain Air Facility
Hoi An
Quang Nam
Chu Lai
Quang Tin
Quang Ngai
Laos
Cambodia
II CORPS
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III USMC
1 USMC
1 ARVN
1 USMC
2 ROKMC
51 ARVN
1 ARVN
1 RGR GP ARVN
2 ARVN
23 USA

south of Da Nang carved out of the 1st Marine Division's territory.[3]

In I CTZ, as elsewhere in South Vietnam, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and its local and regional militia were gradually assuming a larger share of the fighting. The Vietnamese commander of I Corps,* Lieutenant General Hoan Xuan Lam, controlled a force which included about 41,000 ARVN regulars. His corps included two divisions—the 1st stationed in Quang Tri and Thua Thien and the 2d in Quang Tin and Quang Ngai. An independent regiment, the 51st, and the 1st Armored Brigade operated in Quang Nam to protect Da Nang while the 1st Ranger Group, normally located near Da Nang, acted as corps reserve.

Reinforcing the regulars, 65,000 troops of the Regional Forces and Popular Forces (RFs and PFs) and about 80,000 members of the newly organized part-time People's Self-Defense Force (PSDF) were available to combat small guerrilla bands and root out the Viet Cong political underground.** Some 5,300 men of the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDGs), recruited and trained by the South Vietnamese Special Forces and advised and assisted by the U. S. Army's Company C, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), occupied camps deep in the mountains. The CIDGs collected information about enemy activities and tried to block infiltration into the lowlands.[4]

From III MAF Headquarters at Da Nang, General Nickerson had to coordinate the activities of these diverse forces. Like his predecessors who headed III MAF, he functioned within a complex chain of command. His force was under the operational control of General Creighton W. Abrams, USA, Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (ComUSMACV), but on administrative matters affecting the Marines under his command, Nickerson took orders from and reported to Lieutenant General Henry W. Buse, Jr., Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific (CGFMFPac). As commanding general of III MAF, Nickerson directed the operations of all United States combat units in I Corps. As senior U. S. advisor for I Corps, he was responsible for coordinating plans and activities with Lieutenant General Lam's ARVN forces but had no authority over them. Nickerson also provided "operational guidance" to the commander of the Korean Marine Brigade, which was under the authority of the commanding general of Korean Forces in Vietnam, headquartered in Saigon. With both the South Vietnamese and Koreans, Nickerson had to rely on negotiations and persuasion to secure concerted action.[5]

Nickerson's previous Marine Corps experience had helped to prepare him for his complex assignments. Born in Massachusetts in 1913, he took pride in his part-Indian ancestry and claimed descent from the tribe of Massasoit, the chief who helped the Pilgrims through their first hard winter at Plymouth. Nickerson joined the Marine Corps in 1935 as a second lieutenant after graduating from Boston University. He spent two and one-half years in China with the 4th Marines before World War II. After the war, in which he commanded a defense battalion, an antiaircraft group, and was executive officer of the 25th Marines, he returned to China as a staff officer of the III Marine Amphibious Corps and later of the 1st Marine Division during the occupation of Tientsin. With the United Nations peacekeeping mission to Palestine in 1949, he witnessed another area of international and cultural conflict. Combat command of the 7th Marines in Korea followed, where Nickerson, now a colonel, won both the Army Distinguished Service Cross and the Silver Star Medal.

Having briefly visited Da Nang in 1964, Nickerson began his first tour in Vietnam in October 1966. As a major general, he commanded the 1st Marine Division and then spent five months as deputy commanding general of III MAF. After a tour at Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington during which he received his third star, he returned to Vietnam in

*The Republic of Vietnam was divided into four corps tactical zones, each of which was a political as well as military jurisdiction. Each corps commander thus acted as political and military chief of his region. Under him province chiefs conducted both civil and military administration, and under the province chiefs in turn were district chiefs. Villages and hamlets were beginning to elect their own local governments. Autonomous cities, including Hue and Da Nang in I Corps and Saigon and Cam Ranh elsewhere in the country, were administered by mayors who reported directly to the government in Saigon. MACV ComdHist 70, I, ch. V, p. 1.

**The RFs and PFs were full-time soldiers. They usually operated in company-sized or smaller units charged with the close-in defense of important government and military installations, bridges, villages, and hamlets. At this time they had a separate administration from the regular army, being under the Ministry of the Interior while the regulars were under the Ministry of Defense. In mid-1970, the RFs and PFs would be incorporated into the regular armed forces. The PSDF, established in 1969, had both the military purpose of organizing the people to protect themselves and the political mission of strengthening grass-roots support of the South Vietnamese Government. See Chapters 7 and 8 for more details on these forces.

March 1969 to succeed Lieutenant General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., in command of III MAF.[6]

Nickerson was responsible for the defense of the 10,000 square miles of I CTZ. The location and terrain of this region made it both strategically important and hard to protect. In the north, I Corps bordered the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) which separated South Vietnam from its northern enemy and in fact was far from demilitarized. On the west, I Corps abutted Laos and the enemy bases supplied by the Ho Chi Minh Trail. North Vietnamese troops could easily invade the region from either direction, and their long-range artillery could shell northern Quang Tri from the relative safety of North Vietnam and Laos.

The terrain within I Corps favored the enemy. The rugged, jungle-blanketed mountains that cover the western part of the region hid Communist supply bases and the camps of main force units and facilitated the infiltration of North Vietnamese replacements and reinforcements. East of the mountains, a narrow rolling piedmont quickly gives way to a flat, wet coastal plain much of which is covered by rice paddies and beyond which lie beaches of the South China Sea. Most of the Vietnamese inhabitants of I Corps live in the flatlands, either in the thousands of villages and hamlets interspersed among the rice fields or in the large cities of Hue and Da Nang. Concealed among the civilians were the enemy's political agents and guerrillas, and from the populated areas the enemy drew recruits and supplies.[7]

An estimated 78,000 enemy troops operated in I Corps. According to allied intelligence, the Communist order of battle included about 49,000 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars, perhaps 6,000 main force Viet Cong (VC), over 12,000 VC guerrillas, and about 11,000 supply and administrative personnel. Almost half of these troops, some 42 infantry and 11 support battalions, were believed to be massed along or near the DMZ, while the second largest concentration—16 combat and 4 support battalions—threatened Da Nang in Quang Nam Province.

Three different headquarters directed enemy operations in ICTZ. The *B5 Front* controlled the troops along the DMZ; *Military Region (MR) Tri Thien Hue* had charge of Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces; and *MR 5* oversaw the campaign in the rest of I Corps, assisted by a separate headquarters subordinated to it, *Front 4*, which was responsible for Quang Nam. American and South Vietnamese intelligence officers believed that all three of these commands received orders directly from Hanoi, rather than through the *Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN),*[8] which commanded the enemy troops in the other three corps areas.

A year of heavy and constant allied pressure, guided by improved intelligence and by an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the enemy's methods and weaknesses, had left the NVA and VC in I Corps battered and exhausted at the end of 1969. Here, as elsewhere in South Vietnam, the allied war effort at last seemed to be moving forward steadily and systematically. Throughout the year, American, ARVN, and Korean troops had driven deep into well-established enemy base areas. They had inflicted heavy losses on main force units, seized or destroyed tons of supplies, and wrecked carefully constructed fortifications, bunkers, and tunnel complexes. At the same time, an intensified pacification campaign had reduced enemy guerrilla strength. By the end of the year, according to the statistical hamlet evaluation system then being used, about 90 percent of the civilians in I Corps lived in secure localities.

Especially impressive to American commanders in I Corps was the improvement of the South Vietnamese regular and militia forces. The ARVN, benefiting from intensive American efforts to improve its equipment, training, and leadership, had displayed increasing willingness and ability to seek out and engage the enemy. While still short of heavy artillery, aircraft, and good small-unit commanders, the ARVN divisions were steadily moving closer to assuming the burden of combat. The RFs and PFs, in the words of Major General Ormond R. Simpson, who finished a tour in command of the 1st Marine Division late in 1969, "are coming on strong. They have a long way to go, but they're coming . . ."[9] Rearmed with M16 rifles and often reinforced by combined action Marines,* these once unreliable troops were fighting with increasing effectiveness against the small enemy units that prowled the populated lowlands.

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were still able to mount heavy attacks, especially in northern I Corps, but supply shortages and growing allied combat effectiveness were increasingly forcing them to revert to harassing tactics. During late 1969, the number of engagements with major enemy units steadily declined while the number of rocket and mortar attacks and sapper raids on allied installations and civilian targets

*For details on the Combined Action Program, see Chapter 8.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

MajGen Edwin B. Wheeler, left, and MajGen Ormond R. Simpson take the salute from a Marine honor guard at Da Nang Airbase on 15 December 1969. Gen Wheeler relieved Gen Simpson as commanding general of the 1st Marine Division on this date.

increased. In many parts of I CTZ, intelligence reports indicated severe shortages of food and medicine among the enemy. General Simpson declared in December 1969 that in Quang Nam "The enemy . . . is in very bad shape at the moment. He is very hungry; he is ridden with malaria. Hunger is an over-riding thing with him; he is trying to find rice almost to the exclusion of anything else. He is moving to avoid contact rather than seek it."[10] While the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong in I Corps and throughout South Vietnam remained determined to carry on the fight, their capacity to do so effectively showed every sign of declining.

Allied and Enemy Strategy, 1969-1970

Since the first large United States commitment of infantry units to the war in 1965, American civilian and military leaders had realized that they faced two different but interrelated enemy threats. The first was that posed by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong main forces—units of battalion or larger size that could engage and destory allied troops in conventional battle. The second threat came from guerrillas who operated in small groups within the populated areas and sought to maintain and extend Communist control of the villagers. The guerrillas furnished the main forces with recruits, supplies, and intelligence while the main forces protected the guerrillas by overrunning minor government garrisons and forcing larger government units to concentrate against them rather than against the guerrillas.

The Americans realized that to win the war they would have to defeat both enemy components at the same time—the main forces by large-scale attacks on the units and their bases and the guerrillas by a pacification campaign to root out the enemy's political and military underground while providing security and economic and social improvement for the people. Throughout the war, however, American commanders differed in the degree of emphasis they placed on each element of the strategy. Many, including General William C. Westmoreland, General Abram's predecessor as ComUSMACV, gave priority to the big-unit war and were willing to divert troops from pacification to mount multi-battalion sweeps into remote enemy base areas. Others, including most of the senior Marine commanders in Vietnam, preferred to concentrate on protecting population centers against attack, defeating the local guerrillas, and eradicating the VC political cadre. They urged that large-scale operations be undertaken only when they clearly supported pacification, for example, by driving enemy main forces away

from major cities or heavily populated areas. They contended that if the guerrillas were defeated, the main forces—deprived of information, replacements, and supplies—would be reduced to a minor and easily countered threat.[11] Still others, like Major General Lloyd B. Ramsey, commander of the Americal Division, saw no reason to draw the line between pacification and big-unit war, arguing that "the enemy situation and the terrain dictated the priorities."[12]

In practice, the choice between these approaches involved variations in emphasis rather than an absolute rejection of one element in favor of the other. During 1967, especially, when military support of pacification had been largely turned over to the Vietnamese, the "big-unit war" had received priority in the American effort. Then the savage enemy Tet offensive of January-February 1968 dramatized the fact that pacification and population security could be neglected only at the risk of political and military disaster. At the same time, increasing opposition to the war in the United States, the opening of peace talks in Paris, and the commitment of the new Nixon administration to reduce the American combat role without abandoning the objective of a secure non-Communist South Vietnam created further pressure for a change in priorities.

In General Westmoreland's view, the decisive victory in January-February 1968, which destroyed the enemy's main force Tet offensive, "enabled MACV to concentrate a lot more on the guerrillas and local forces as opposed to the main force."[13] General Abrams, who took over as ComUSMACV after the Tet offensive in 1968, at once began moving toward a more evenly balanced strategy. Late in 1968 he promulgated what he called the "One War" concept as the guiding principle for Allied operations. The "One War" slogan expressed Abrams' belief that the big-unit and pacification wars had to be waged as interdependent and mutually supporting parts of the same struggle. Large-unit attacks on enemy main forces and bases, improved hamlet and village defense, political and economic development, and improvement of the Vietnamese Armed Forces were to be combined into a balanced effort. This effort was aimed at protecting the civilian population, eliminating VC political and military influence, and expanding the authority of the South Vietnamese Government.[14]

Guided by the "One War" principle, the allies in 1969 pressed the war simultaneously on several fronts. United States troops continued their assaults on enemy main forces, but their operations were based on more precise intelligence and were usually aimed at forestalling enemy attacks on populated areas. Instead of being relegated to static territorial defense as they had been in previous years, the ARVN regulars were assigned the same missions as the allied troops and increasingly joined with American units in major offensives. Accelerated efforts to improve their weapons, supply, training, and leadership helped equip them for this role. To replace the regular troops guarding cities, military installations, lines of communication, and villages and hamlets, the South Vietnamese Government, aided by MACV, added 72,000 more men to the RF and PF and rearmed these troops with the M16. Providing still another line of local defense, the government began organizing and arming the People's Self-Defense Force. The Saigon Government also launched a more vigorous police action against the Viet Cong underground and introduced new programs of economic aid and social development. By the end of the year, in the words of the MACV command history, "In practically every phase of the 'One War' concept, the successes were on the allied side."[15]

As the allies increased their emphasis on pacification in 1969, the enemy all but abandoned large-scale combat against American and ARVN regulars and reverted to small-unit hit-and-run attacks, terrorism, and political subversion. The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese did this for several reasons. Repeated bloody defeats had evidently convinced them that they could not win a conventional war against American firepower and mobility. They feared and wanted to counter the allied pacification campaign, and they saw low-level warfare as the most economical way to maintain their military and political position until the United States withdrew her forces from Vietnam or the Paris talks produced an agreement.

The *Central Office for South Vietnam*, which directed enemy operations in most of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), formally proclaimed the new strategy in its Resolutions 9 and 14, adopted respectively in July and October 1969. Both resolutions stressed the same themes: that major conventional attacks had proven costly and unsuccessful and the VC and NVA must intensify guerrilla warfare in order to defeat pacification and weaken allied forces in preparation for a possible later resumption of the main force war. The resolutions ordered enemy main forces to avoid combat except under the most favorable conditions. Guerrilla and sapper units, reinforced when necessary by soldiers from regular battalions, were to increase

their attacks on Regional and Popular Force troops, the PSDF, and Vietnamese Government installations and personnel. By late 1969, enemy troops throughout South Vietnam were following these orders. Allied commanders reported a steady reduction in the number of large-unit contacts. The incidence of company and platoon or smaller-size engagements declined also, but more slowly, while acts of terrorism, sabotage, and assassination increased in frequency.[16]

The allies' Combined Campaign Plan for 1970, prepared by representatives of MACV and the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) late in October 1969, was designed to counter the enemy's tactics and to build upon the previous year's progress. The plan again emphasized pacification and protection of populated areas. It also declared that during the next year American forces in Vietnam would be reduced at a rate "consistent with progress of RVNAF [Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces] improvement and modernization, pacification and development, and the level of enemy activity."

Typical of the counterinsurgency war, a Marine patrol from the 1st Marine Division searches a carefully concealed enemy position after a firefight in June 1970.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A372848

Under the plan United States and ARVN troops were to continue their mobile operations against enemy forces and bases, while screening the population against attack and infiltration. They were to push the enemy away from food-producing regions and deny them use of base areas closest to major cities, important roads and railroads, and centers of government and economic activity. The regulars were to maneuver outside the inhabited regions while the Regional and Popular Forces, the People's Self-Defense Force, and the national police combated guerrillas and eradicated the underground in villages and hamlets.

Two other plans supplemented the Combined Campaign Plan. MACV and the JCS in March 1970 adopted the Consolidated RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Plan (CRIMP). The latest in a series of such plans, this one emphasized improvement in the quality rather than increases in the size of the Vietnamese Army, Navy and Air Force. The plan called for continued effort to create a military system able to defend the country after the Americans left and included provisions for further modernization of equipment, improvement of living conditions for military men and their families, and simplification of the chain of command.

At about the same time, President Nguyen Van Thieu's government proclaimed adoption of its second annual Pacification and Development Plan. This plan, the government's authoritative statement of pacification policy, set the goal of providing at least a measure of security for 100 percent of the South Vietnamese population by the end of 1970. It also contained renewed commitments to strengthen local governments and self-defense forces, assist refugees, veterans, and war victims, combat terrorism, and promote economic development. Thus, as the allies envisioned it, the "One War" was to continue on all fronts in 1970, with the American share of responsibility gradually diminishing and the Vietnamese share increasing.[17]*

The III MAF/ICTZ Combined Plan for 1970

On 13 December 1969, the American, Korean, and South Vietnamese commanders in I CTZ issued their Combined Campaign Plan for 1970, designed to implement the principles of MACV's nationwide plan. This document would guide the operations of the Ma-

*The P&D Plan and allied efforts to carry it out are discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

rines and other allied forces throughout the year.

The writers of the plan assumed that the NVA and VC in I Corps, while not directly commanded by *COSVN*, would continue to follow the strategy outlined in *COSVN* Resolutions 9 and 14. The planners declared that "The enemy no longer seeks a complete military victory. . . . The enemy's overall objective now is to repel or witness the withdrawal of friendly forces by waging limited warfare designed to demoralize friendly forces." In pursuit of this goal, the NVA and VC would try to "demoralize ARVN and FWMAF [Free World Military Assistance Forces] by attacks by fire, sapper attacks, and limited ground probes" to "inflict maximum casualties." The enemy would also increase political propaganda, subversion, and terrorism to discredit the Vietnamese government and disrupt pacification.

The planners defined the enemy threat in terms of the "One War" doctrine:

> In his efforts to achieve political control of RVN, the enemy attempts to demonstrate that the GVN [Government of Vietnam] is not capable of governing the country or of providing credible security to the people. His offensive operations and the resultant reaction operations by friendly forces produce adverse effects on security of the people. The most effective way of assuring security . . . is to keep enemy forces away from [the people] and by neutralizing the VC infrastructure. Without the VCI, enemy main forces cannot obtain intelligence, manpower, or food, prepare the battlefield or move. . . . Providing security to the Vietnamese people is the major objective of RVNAF/FWMAF."[18]*

The campaign plan divided the opposing forces into two categories: the VC/NVA main forces, "often located in remote areas, or entering RVN from safe havens across the border," and the VC guerrilla units, terrorist groups, and underground, "located closer to and often intermingled with the people." American, Korean, and ARVN regulars were to engage and destroy the main forces, neutralize their bases, and keep them away from populated areas. The Regional and Popular Forces, People's Self-Defense Force, and national police would concentrate on the guerrillas. They would "prevent enemy infiltration, attacks, and harassment of villages, hamlets, cities, province and district capitals, industrial centers, military bases, populated areas and vital LOC [lines of communication]."

For the regular forces, a major task under the plan would be destruction ("neutralization") of the enemy's base areas—complexes of tunnels, caves, and bunkers, usually located deep in the mountain regions, which housed headquarters, communications centers, supply dumps, training and rest camps, and hospitals. Allied troops were to attack these areas on a priority system worked out by province chiefs and military commanders, concentrating most of their effort on "those bases which directly affect the areas undergoing pacification and consolidation, key population and economic centers, and vital communications arteries. More remote bases would receive continued unpatterned air strikes and harassment fire," while small allied units blocked the routes between them and the populated districts. The writers of the plan believed that:

> Locating and isolating the enemy's command, control and logistics facilities will contribute to his eventual defeat. Restricting and constraining VC/NVA units in base areas will force a separation between the VCI and the enemy's main military forces. As this separation becomes more complete, and our air and artillery harassment continues, the enemy will be forced to leave his base area sanctuaries and expose himself to our superior firepower and mobility. The enemy will come to fight on our terms, either in locations of our choosing or at least not in areas of his choosing. . . . As long as the enemy is restricted to remote, relatively uninhabitable areas, under constant surveillance and harassment, he is defensive and a less serious threat to the achievement of our objectives.[19]

The Combined Campaign Plan repeatedly stressed "territorial security"—the separation of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese from the civilian population—as the central objective of all allied activity. Every type of allied unit was assigned security functions. American, Korean, and ARVN regulars, for example, when not engaged in mobile operations against bases and main force units, were to patrol constantly to block infiltration "into the fringes of cities, towns and areas adjacent to population centers." They would also reinforce RF and PF units against large-scale attacks, furnish air and artillery support to the militia, and cooperate with them in antiguerrilla operations. RF and PF patrols within and on the outskirts of inhabited areas would keep pressure on local guerrillas and infiltrators while the national police and PSDF maintained order and eradicated the VC underground inside the urban areas.

In an effort to fix precisely the pacification responsibilities of the many and sometimes conflicting allied and Vietnamese political and military authorities in I Corps, the campaign plan required classifying every locality in one of four security categories. Secure

*Free World Military Armed Forces (FWMAF) consisted of all allied nations providing military forces to South Vietnam.

Areas, the first category, were regions, usually heavily populated, where regular civil government was functioning, where people could move freely by day and night, and where enemy activity had been reduced to occasional acts of terrorism or rocket and mortar attacks.

In Consolidation Zones, the second category, enemy main forces had been expelled and the government was in the process of destroying guerrillas and underground cadre. Here terrorism and fire attacks would occur frequently, and the government would impose strict curfews and other population control measures. In both Secure Areas and Consolidation Zones, the Vietnamese province chiefs and under them sector and village authorities, had responsibility for defense and public order, using RF and PF, the PSDF, and the national police as their principal armed forces.

Beyond the Secure Areas and Consolidation Zones lay the Clearing Zone, consisting of thinly populated and Viet Cong-controlled territory, often containing enemy main forces and their bases. In these areas, ARVN division and regimental commanders, in cooperation with their allied counterparts, controlled operations. Here allied regular forces would maneuver "to engage or drive the enemy therefrom and to prevent enemy forces from entering Consolidation Zones." As enemy bases in the Clearing Zone were isolated or abandoned and main force units pushed out, portions of the Clearing Zone could be incorporated into the Consolidation Zone, thus enlarging the range of government control.

Beyond the Clearing Zone, the Border Surveillance Zone encompassed the terrain just within the national frontiers. In this zone, regular units and CIDGs under the direction of tactical commanders sought to "detect, engage and deter" North Vietnamese forces trying to infiltrate South Vietnam.

Each province in I Corps contained a mixture of all four categories of territory in varying proportions. While the areas rarely grouped themselves into neat concentric belts, most of the Secure Areas and Consolidation Zones lay in the eastern piedmont and coastal plain while the Clearing and Border Surveillance Zones encompassed most of the mountainous

LtGen Herman Nickerson, Jr., left, Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force talks with 1stSgt James L. Langford, Company G, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines and with LtGen Hoang Xuan Lam, Commanding General, I Corps as the battalion leaves Vietnam.

Abel Papers, Marine Corps Historical Collection

hinterland. The purpose of this elaborate division, as indeed of the whole Combined Campaign Plan, was to unify all allied military operations for successful prosecution of the "One War."

Troop Redeployment: Keystone Bluejay

Withdrawal of Marines from I Corps had begun in mid-1969. The I Corps Combined Campaign Plan for 1970 assumed that American forces in Vietnam "will be reduced to a level consistent with progress of RVNAF improvement and modernization, pacification and development, and the level of enemy activity."[20] The first months of 1970 witnessed a further major reduction in Marine strength followed by a fundamental change in III MAF's command role.

President Richard M. Nixon, who took office early in January 1969, almost immediately committed himself and his administration to reduction of American troop strength in Vietnam at a rate determined by periodic assessment of three variables—the level of North Vietnamese infiltration and enemy battlefield activity, the ability of the South Vietnamese to fight their own war, and progress in the Paris negotiations. In support of this policy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared a plan during the first half of 1969 for removing United States combat forces from Vietnam in six separate redeployments. At the end of this gradual withdrawal, about 280,000 Americans, most of them in aviation and support units, would remain in-country. These troops would depart as the Vietnamese technical services improved until only a military advisory group was left. The timing, size, and composition of each redeployment would depend on the variables defined by the President. Under the plan, removal of combat troops could be completed as early as December 1970 or as late as December 1972.[21]

Beginning in June 1969, the first two redeployments, codenamed Keystone Eagle and Keystone Cardinal, took out of Vietnam about 65,000 American military personnel including over 26,800 Marines. The entire 3d Marine Division redeployed, as did one attack squadron, one observation squadron, and two medium and one heavy helicopter squadrons from the 1st MAW and proportional contingents of support and service troops.[22]

These first withdrawals brought with them changes in Marine organizations in the Western Pacific. On 7 November, a new headquarters, the I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF),* began operations on Okinawa under Major General William K. Jones, who also commanded the 3d Division which was now based there. This headquarters would control all air and ground units of the Fleet Marine Force in the Western Pacific not committed to Vietnam. On the same date, a subordinate command, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (Rear) under Brigadier General William G. Johnson, was activated at Iwakuni, Japan, with the mission of overseeing Marine aviation units in Japan and Okinawa.[23]

With Keystone Cardinal, the Special Landing Force (SLF) of the Seventh Fleet ended its long participation in the Vietnam War. Composed of one and later two Marine battalion landing teams (BLTs), each paired with a helicopter squadron, the SLFs had landed repeatedly up and down the coast of South Vietnam, sometimes in independent operations, at other times to reinforce heavily engaged ground forces. The last SLF operation in Vietnam, Operation Defiant Stand, took place south of Da Nang in September 1969. The SLF was then reconstituted from units of the 3d Marine Division and 1st MAW (Rear). While it often cruised offshore during the remaining years of the war, it could no longer land in Vietnam without special permission from the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[24]

In October and November 1969, planning began in Washington and Saigon for the third phase of the American withdrawal. It was expected that the size of this increment would be announced to the public after the scheduled completion of Keystone Cardinal on 15 December and that the actual troop movements would occur early in 1970. As in the other redeployment phases, determining how many troops would come out and how many of those would be Marines involved complex negotiations among the Joint Chiefs of Staff, MACV, III MAF, FMFPac, and Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC). Brigadier General Leo J. Dulacki, Chief of Staff of III MAF, later recalled the interweaving considerations:

> There were numerous factors which came into play in the development of plans for each redeployment phase. Initial overall numerical goals would be established by MACV for

*"Marine Expeditionary Force" was the proper name for an air-ground command formed of a division and wing. III MAF should have been called III MEF, but the title was changed in deference to Vietnamese association of the word "expeditionary" with French colonialism. During 1970, in Marine Corps Order 3120.3A dtd 18 August 1970, the title was changed permanently to Marine Amphibious Force for all MEFs.

III MAF; those raw numerical goals would then have to be translated into coherent troop lists by III MAF planners in consultation with MACV planners and finite numbers then determined on the basis of the troop lists.[25]

Many things were considered by III MAF in redeployment planning. Forces remaining in Vietnam had to maintain tactical integrity, especially when redisposition of forces expanded areas of responsibility. The possibility of the enemy exploiting an advantage caused by redeployment had to be anticipated. Ground combat forces remaining required proportionate combat support and logisitic support. Units deploying to Western Pacific bases needed to retain organizational and tactical integrity in the event that they might be reintroduced into Vietnam. Recognizing that the redeployment of major ground combat units had an immediate impact on ARVN forces, the negative impacts of III MAF redeployments had to be kept to a minimum. As General Dulacki noted, "there had to be . . . a lot of give and take between not only III MAF, but the other corps commanders as well as MACV."[26]

While redeployment deliberations were going on between MACV and the JCS and between MACV and III MAF, Colonel Floyd H. Waldrop, G-3 of the 1st Marine Division, was wrestling with the tactical questions of how to control the TAOR with fewer units and personnel while recognizing the need to have sufficient flexibility to respond to a serious enemy incursion. There were a host of considerations: what bridges will Marine units need to maintain security of and what bridges will need to be turned over to the ARVN? What fixed installations must be given up? What battalion and regimental boundaries will need to be realligned between Marine units and between Marines and the ARVN?[27]

Planning for the early 1970 withdrawal, codenamed Keystone Bluejay, developed into a two-level dialogue. On the first level General Abrams, working in conjunction with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, had to settle with the JCS and the White House the total number of men to be pulled out. In this process MACV's concern for maintaining adequate forces on the battlefield had to be balanced against the administration's desire to ease domestic political tension by getting the troops out quickly. Second, a tug-of-war occurred between MACV and the Army on one side and III MAF and the Marine Corps on the other over the size of the Marine portion of the withdrawal. Although original III MAF plans called for the early withdrawal of all Marine forces and III MAF proceeded accordingly, HQMC appeared to question the wisdom of the early withdrawal of all Marines from Vietnam.[28] This turned into an argument about how rapidly Marine participation in the war should come to an end.

During October and November, the JCS instructed MACV to consider the feasibility of withdrawing 100,000 men by the end of June 1970 or, as an alternative, 50,000 by late March or early April. General Abrams late in November advised against either of these withdrawals. He argued that both proposals would impose on the ARVN too sudden an increase of responsibility and that it would be militarily unwise in the face of many indications that the enemy planned another Tet offensive for early 1970. If more troops had to be withdrawn, he urged that no more than 35,000 be taken until after the period of maximum danger in late January and February.[29]

If 100,000 men did have to come out in the first half of 1970, MACV preferred that about half of them be Marines. During October MACV developed two alternative compositions for an immediate 100,000-man withdrawal, called the "Marine Heavy" and the "Marine Light." Under the first plan all 55,000 Marines of III MAF would leave Vietnam in Phase Three, while in the second only one regimental landing team (RLT) would go.* Unable to slow the withdrawals directed by Washington, General Abrams initially favored the "Marine Heavy" plan because it would allow MACV to substitute Marine aviation units in the next deployment for Army ground combat units which he felt were more urgently needed in South Vietnam. MACV wanted to apply the "Marine Heavy" plan proportionally whatever the size of the redeployment.

Headquarters Marine Corps authorities in Washington strongly objected to this proposal, which departed radically from earlier JCS plans for a more gradual Marine redeployment. HQMC pointed out that so rapid a withdrawal would overload the Marines' bases and supply facilities in the Pacific and cause severe problems of personnel administration. HQMC also recognized that such a quick withdrawal would leave the Marine Corps, as the only Service not involved in Vietnam, a very vulnerable target for budget reduc-

*A regimental landing team normally consists of a Marine regiment with the attached support forces needed to conduct an amphibious landing. It includes about 6,000 officers and men.

tions.* Elaborating further on Marine Corps opposition to a rapid withdrawal, General Dulacki observed years later that "although there were several reasons for the HQMC position, the most compelling was the fact that the Marine Corps deemed it incongruous that, after some five years of combat in Vietnam, with the war still continuing, the Marines would no longer be participants." In General Dulacki's view as Chief of Staff, III MAF, MACV more so than the JCS was responsible for determining the size force respective Services would send home with each redeployment.[30]

On 15 December, in an address to the nation, President Nixon resolved the question of the total size of the withdrawal. He announced that 50,000 more troops would leave Vietnam by 15 April 1970. However, to guard against a possible Communist Tet offensive, the troop movement would not begin until early February, and none of the combat units involved would cease active operations until mid-February.[31]

The composition of the 50,000-man reduction remained unresolved. MACV still wanted a large Marine contingent and ordered III MAF to plan to withdraw over 19,000 Marines. This would require the removal of two full RLTs under the Marine system of translating each increment into tactical units of the proper size. III MAF designated the 26th Marines (the only regiment of the war-activated 5th Marine Division still in Vietnam) and the 7th Marines for Keystone Bluejay, heading a long list of aviation and support units.

Plans were changing, however, even as III MAF finished this troop list. The Department of the Army discovered that it would lack the men to maintain the Army strength in Vietnam envisioned in the Marine-Heavy option. To assure what MACV considered adequate ground forces during the first half of 1970, more Marines would have to stay in Vietnam. This consideration and continuing Marine Corps opposition to a too-rapid pullout of III MAF led the Joint Chiefs of Staff late in December to reduce the Marine share of Keystone Bluejay to 12,900 men—one regimental landing team with aviation and support units.[32]

"The slowdown of the Marines' withdrawal created a serious complication in ICTZ," said General Dulacki. "The Naval Support Activity had drafted plans for withdrawal concurrent with the rapid and early redeployment of the Marines. Although the Marine withdrawal was slowed, the Navy continued with their original plans." Thus the remaining Marines were faced with the prospect of losing support of the Naval Construction Battalion, the closure of the Naval Hospital at Da Nang, and the end of logistic support provided by NSA. For Marines these were all imminent concerns, but the most critical was the impending loss of the hospital ship from northern ICTZ to the Da Nang area. Urgent pleas of III MAF and FMFPac were to no avail and the hospital closed. Ultimately, General Abrams promised to provide Army hospital support if necessary, and the Army Support Command assumed logistic support functions of NSA. Redeployment moved inexorably forward.[33]

III MAF selected Colonel James E. Harrell's 26th Marines as the regiment to redeploy. The regiment's supporting artillery, the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines, would go out with it. Other artillery units designated for Keystone Bluejay included the 5th 175mm Gun Battery, a platoon of 8-inch howitzers, and Battery K, 4th Battalion, 13th Marines. Since operations around Da Nang required few tracked vehicles, III MAF designated for withdrawal all but one company of the 1st Tank Battalion and the 3d Amphibian Tractor (AmTrac) Battalion. The 1st Anti-Tank Battalion would leave with the armor. The 1st Shore Party and the 7th Motor Transport Battalions headed the roster of support units, which included numerous engineer, military police, communications, reconnaissance, headquarters, and medical detachments.[34]

The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing would relinquish one of its group headquarters—Colonel James R. Weaver's Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 12, which would move from Chu Lai to the Marine air station at Iwakuni, Japan, with its housekeeping squadrons, Marine Air Base Squadron (MABS) 12 and Headquarters and Maintainance Squadron (H&MS) 12. Three jet squadrons—Marine Attack Squadrons (VMAs) 211 and 223 and Marine Fighter/Attack Squadron (VMFA) 542—and Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron (HMH) 361, with detachments from other units, rounded out the aviation component of Keystone Bluejay.

Late in January, these units began preparing to leave Vietnam. They did so under III MAF Operation Plan (OPlan) 183-69, issued in September 1969, which prescribed procedures for withdrawing units during

*Colonel Don H. Blanchard, who was Head, Joint and Special Plans, Joint Planning Group, HQMC was privy to much of the debate within HQMC and the Pentagon over this sensitive issue. He said he stressed this fear to the Commandant "in the initial go-around on this Inter-Service squabble really with a future roles and missions connotation!" Col Don H. Blanchard, Comments on draft ms, dtd 2Jun83 (Vietnam Comment File).

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A374146

Marines from Company I, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines brought into Elephant Valley by a CH-46 helicopter move out of the landing zone in one of the battalion's last operations. The battalion was scheduled to redeploy with the 26th Marines in Keystone Robin.

continuing hostilities. Under this plan, each redeploying organization ceased active operations or "stood down" well before its actual date of departure and moved to a designated base camp to prepare its men and equipment for sea or air transportation out of the country. Its mission and area of operations would immediately be assumed by other units according to prearranged plans. "There were tremendous logistic problems as well as the tactical ones in breaking contact with the enemy," recalled Major General William K. Jones, who had redeployed his 3d Marine Division to Okinawa the previous November.* The Marines not only had to prepare "equipment and vehicles for shipping" but sort out "equipment to be left or turned over to RVN or Korean forces," and also level bunkers, and clean up camp sites.[35]

While preparing for embarkation, the redeploying organization was to "retain sufficient combat ability for security and self-defense." Marine units were to leave Vietnam as fully organized and equipped formations, but in fact they rarely left with the same men who had served in them in combat. Instead, with each redeployment, a system of personnel transfers went into operation appropriately nicknamed the "Mixmaster." In this process, the departing unit would be filled with Marines from all elements of III MAF who had spent the most time in Vietnam in their current one-year tours while those members of the redeploying unit who had the most time left to serve in-country would transfer to organizations not designated to redeploy. For the 26th Marines, this meant that members of the regiment with most of their tours still to serve were reassigned to the three infantry regiments left in the 1st Division while the battalions of the 26th Marines were filled with men from other units whose tours were nearing an end. Upon return to the United States, the regiment would be deactivated.*[36]

*On redeployment of his division to Okinawa, Major General Jones also became Commanding General, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force and Commander, TF 79 of the Seventh Fleet.

*For details on the procedures and policies for redeploying men and equipment, see Chapter 19.

The troop movements of Keystone Bluejay started on 28 January and continued until late March. Most of the combat units, in accordance with the President's announcement, left Vietnam near the end of the period. Between 28 and 31 January, the 3d AmTrac Battalion (-), the cadre of the 1st Anti-Tank Battalion, and numerous detachments of aviation, engineer, communications, headquarters, and Force Logistic Command personnel left Da Nang by ship and airplane. They were followed in middle and late February by the 7th Motor Transport Battalion and more headquarters and support detachments. Between 11 and 19 March units redeployed included: the 26th Marines; the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines; the 1st Shore Party Battalion (-); the 5th 175mm Gun Battery; a platoon of 8-inch howitzers; and the 1st Tank Battalion (-).[37]

The aviation redeployments of Keystone Bluejay included what the FMFPac historian called "the largest tactical trans-Pacific . . . air movement yet recorded by Marine aviation units." In this operation, codenamed Key Wallop, the 20 A-4E Skyhawks of VMA-223 and the 15 F-4B Phantoms of VMFA-542 took off late in January from their respective bases at Chu Lai and Da Nang and flew to the Naval Air Station (NAS), Cubi Point in the Philippines. From there the two squadrons headed out across the Pacific to their new base at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS), El Toro, California. They stopped over on the way at Guam, Wake Island, and Hawaii and refuelled in the air several times. By 11 February, they had completed their movement. Meanwhile, late in January, HMH-361 embarked its 14 CH-53 Sikorsky Sea Stallions for shipment to MCAS Santa Ana, California. In February, the 12 A-4Es of VMA-211 and MAG-12 with its headquarters and service squadrons moved to Iwakuni.[38]

By the end of March, all the units of III MAF scheduled for Keystone Bluejay had left Vietnam. III MAF now consisted of 42,672 Marine officers and men, including the 23,186-man 1st Marine Division. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing now had 174 fixed-wing aircraft and 212 helicopters flown and maintained by 1,267 officers and 8,976 enlisted men. The strength of Force Logistic Command had fallen to 348 officers and 5,512 men. The Combined Action Force, which underwent no major reductions in Keystone Bluejay, contained 52 Marine officers and 1,885 enlisted men.[39]

The Change of Command in I Corps

Since 1965, the Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force had commanded all United States forces in I Corps Tactical Zone. Constituting a "separate command directly subordinate to ComUSMACV," III MAF directed all American military operations in I Corps and coordinated combined United States-South Vietnamese activities. The commanding general of III MAF represented ComUSMACV as United States area coordinator for I CTZ, and as Senior U.S. Advisor, he had operational control over the U.S. Army Advisory Group (USAAG) and U.S. Army Special Forces in the northern five provinces. He thus exercised the same authority as the Army field force commanders in the other three corps areas, and in addition he directed the operations of his own air wing.[40]

With the entry of Army units into I CTZ, III MAF had grown into an Inter-Service headquarters. In January 1970, the III MAF staff included 219 Marines, 5 Navy, and 39 Army officers. The headquarters had attached to it the 1st Marine Radio Battalion and two Army units—the 29th Civil Affairs Company and the 7th Psychological Operations Company.[41]

Since the NVA/VC Tet offensive of 1968, a second major U.S. headquarters had existed in I Corps. This was the Army's XXIV Corps, which occupied the former 3d Marine Division Headquarters compound at Phu Bai, just south of Hue. Subordinate to III MAF and controlling American troops in Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces, XXIV Corps had evolved from the MACV Forward command post set up in January 1968 just after the start of the Tet offensive. At its peak strength in March 1968, XXIV Corps (then known as Provisional Corps, Vietnam) had consisted of the 3d Marine Division, the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), and the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). At the end of 1969, the corps, then commanded by Lieutenant General Melvin Zais, USA, contained the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) and the 101st Airborne Division. Its headquarters staff numbered over 500 Army and Marine personnel.[42]

As troop withdrawals began, General Abrams on 3 August 1969 directed his commanders throughout South Vietnam to suggest ways to reduce manpower without redeploying more combat units. Elimination of superfluous headquarters, Abrams suggested, was a logical starting point in this process.[43] His words seemed to apply especially to I Corps with its two corps-level American headquarters. With Marine strength in the northern provinces dwindling more rapidly than Army strength and with Marine operations increasingly limited to Quang Nam Province, the

trend of events pointed toward amalgamation of III MAF and XXIV Corps with the Army gradually dominating the new headquarters.

Marines approached such a merger with caution. From their point of view, more was at stake than administrative efficiency; the proposed change of command could threaten the existence in Vietnam of an operating Marine air-ground team. III MAF, controlling both the 1st Marine Division and the 1st MAW under a single Marine headquarters, constituted such a team, although for some purposes III MAF had had to surrender a measure of command over the wing to the Seventh Air Force. Elimination of III MAF Headquarters or its absorption by XXIV Corps could result in the division passing under Army command while the wing would be taken over by the Air Force—an eventuality which Marines believed would reduce operational efficiency and set undesirable precedents. Thus throughout the discussions of command reorganization in I Corps, both Headquarters Marine Corps and III MAF insisted that as long as the Marine division and wing remained in Vietnam they must have a Marine headquarters over them.

In mid-August, General Nickerson proposed to General Abrams that the XXIV Corps Headquarters be eliminated and that additional Army officers and enlisted men be incorporated into the III MAF Headquarters. At the same time, the number of Marines on the III MAF staff would be reduced so that the new joint headquarters would contain 518 fewer people than the total of the old III MAF and XXIV Corps staffs. The Army-Marine headquarters thus formed would command all United States forces in I Corps and would take over all the duties now performed by III MAF and XXIV Corps. As Marine units redeployed, Nickerson pointed out, Marine strength in the new headquarters could be reduced and the Army representation increased. General Nickerson argued that this reorganization would achieve three goals at once: it would reduce headquarters manpower in I Corps; it would retain the Marine air-ground team as long as Marines remained in Vietnam; and it would provide the framework for a smooth Army takeover of I CTZ as the Marines left. On 25 August, General Abrams accepted this proposal in principle and instructed III MAF to submit detailed plans for its implementation.[44]

By 30 October, III MAF had developed a plan for reducing the total headquarters personnel of III MAF and XXIV Corps by 518 officers and enlisted men, closing down XXIV Corps Headquarters, and establishing a new joint Army-Marine headquarters under the suggested title of "Joint Field Force Vietnam." The proposed new staff would consist of 126 Marine and 99 Army officers and 465 Marine and 251 Army enlisted men. All general and most special staff sections would contain both Marine and Army personnel. The commanding general of the joint force would remain a Marine lieutenant general until most of the 1st Marine Division and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing had redeployed, at which time an Army lieutenant general would replace him. A Marine major general would act as deputy commanding general until all Marines had left I CTZ. After 15 December, when the tour of duty of the current III MAF chief of staff ended, an Army brigadier general would assume that post in the new headquarters. Lieutenant General Zais, the XXIV Corps commander, expressed general approval of this plan but wanted an Army general put in command of the new headquarters on 15 December on grounds the Army already outnumbered the Marines in I Corps.[45]

During November and December, the prospective acceleration of Marine redeployments, by shortening the time Marines would remain in Vietnam, eliminated the need for the planned joint headquarters. Instead, both MACV and III MAF began thinking in terms of a simple exchange of roles between III MAF and XXIV Corps. Under this arrangement, the Army headquarters would take over command of all United States forces in I Corps while a reduced III MAF under operational control of XXIV Corps commanded the Marine division and wing.

Early in February, Colonel George C. Fox, Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3 for Plans/Operations of III MAF, drafted a set of proposed "Terms of Reference" defining the powers of a force headquarters subordinate to XXIV Corps. Approved by Lieutenant General Nickerson and by Lieutenant General Buse (Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific), the Terms of Reference declared that III MAF Headquarters was the command and control element of a solely Marine Corps force composed of ground, air, and service elements. Its mission was to "exercise command of Marine Corps forces assigned by higher authority to perform missions and tasks as directed by Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam." III MAF would continue to direct the operations of the 1st Division and the 1st Wing. It would remain in charge of Marine supply and administration, and it would

plan and conduct Marine redeployments. It would stay under the administrative control of FMFPac.[46]

Meanwhile, independent of the III MAF planners, members of the MACV staff in Saigon had been working along parallel lines. In mid-February, General Abrams' headquarters sent to III MAF for comment a set of proposed changes in MACV's Directive 10-11, which defined the command relationships among American forces in Vietnam. The revised directive placed XXIV Corps in command of all United States troops in I Corps and appointed Commanding General, XXIV Corps as the Senior U.S. Advisor for the region. It defined III MAF as "a separate command subordinate to and under the operational control of CG, XXIV Corps," exercising control of all Marine units, both ground and air in I Corps, and conducting military operations within its area of responsibility.[47]

Marines greeted MACV's proposed directive with approval and relief. Colonel Fox recalled that "I was dreading that when they brought up a draft copy [of the revised directive], I thought well, here we go for a real fight. . . . I couldn't believe my eyes when I found out that theirs was . . . completely acceptable to us."[48]

On 19 February, General Abrams came to Da Nang for a final briefing on the plans for the change of command. The briefing produced a heated confrontation between General Nickerson and General Zais. It began when General Zais objected to having to pass orders to the Marine division and wing through III MAF Headquarters. General Nickerson replied with a vigorous defense of the Marine air-ground team. Then, as General Dulacki, the III MAF Chief of Staff recalled:

> . . . You had two three-star generals going at it in the presence of General Abrams . . . rather vociferously. I mean both of them. I wouldn't say that each lost his temper, but you knew how they felt and it was emotional and vocal. . . . I remember General Abrams sitting back and smoking a cigar and listening to all of this. . . . I guess in time . . . he decided he'd heard enough of it. And his comments were to this effect: "I am not about to become involved in trying to disrupt or change Marine Corps doctrine. Marine Corps doctrine is that they have an air-ground team. The wing and the division are integral parts of a MAF headquarters. This is their concept of operations. This is the way they've operated. And as far as I'm concerned I'm not going to do anything to change it at this point in time. . . ."[49]

Viewing the confrontation years later, Dulacki added that "General Zais' position [objecting to the interposition of III MAF Headquarters between XXIV Corps and the 1st Marine Division] was somewhat ironic. At that point in time, he commanded the XXIV Corps which consisted of an Army division and a brigade; and his was a large headquarters interposed between III MAF and those two Army units, an arrangement quite comparable to what III MAF proposed upon transfer of command."[50]

With the new command arrangement thus confirmed by ComUSMACV, Marine and Army staffs set 9 March 1970 as the date for the formal exchange of roles between III MAF and XXIV Corps. On 6 March, General Nickerson instructed all United States units in ICTZ except the Marines to submit operation reports to XXIV Corps Headquarters after 9 March. Marine units would continue to report to the commanding general of III MAF. At the same time, III MAF transferred operational control of the Americal Division and its attached aviation and support units to XXIV Corps. The Army headquarters also received operational control of the U.S. Army Advisory Group in ICTZ and of Company G, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), and took over the direction of naval gunfire support for units in I Corps.*[51]

Control of the Combined Action Force constituted a special problem. Entirely composed of Marines with attached Navy personnel, the force operated under III MAF Headquarters and had platoons in hamlets scattered throughout I Corps. These units had to cooperate closely both with Vietnamese forces and with Army elements that soon would cease to be controlled by III MAF. On 26 March, III MAF resolved the problem by placing the CAF under the operational control of XXIV Corps while retaining administrative control. Later in the year, as the CAF's field of activity was reduced to Quang Nam Province, it would return to III MAF operational control.[52]

Within III MAF itself, the change of command

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*This change meant that Sub-Unit One, 1st Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (ANGLICO), now coordinated naval gunfire support throughout the Republic of Vietnam. ANGLICO units rarely operate under Marine commands; their mission is to coordinate naval gunfire support for non-Marine forces. Hence until 9 March naval gunfire support in I Corps was controlled by the Fire Support Coordination Center (FSCC) at III MAF Headquarters while the ANGLICO subunit, under operational control of MACV Headquarters, provided naval gunfire liaison teams for the other three corps areas. After 9 March, the ANGLICO team at XXIV Corps Headquarters took responsibility for calling in naval gunfire missions for both U.S. and ARVN forces in I Corps. Sub-Unit 1, 1st ANGLICO, ComdC, Mar 70. For further details of ANGLICO operations, see Chapter 21.

brought a few organizational rearrangements. The most important of these was the transfer early in March of the 1st and 3d Force Reconnaissance Companies from the direct operational control of III MAF to that of the 1st Marine Division. Like the platoons of the CAF, these units had ranged throughout I CTZ, and the change of their command relations reflected the reduction of their sphere of operations to Quang Nam and to support of the 1st Marine Division.[53]

Besides reassigning control of many units, the change of command involved the movement of III MAF and XXIV Corps Headquarters, with their hundreds of personnel and tons of equipment, to new locations. Both Marine and Army planners agreed that XXIV Corps should take over the III MAF compound at Camp Horn just east of Da Nang City. There the Army headquarters would have the communications and other facilities needed to direct operations throughout I Corps, and there it would be able to maintain closer contact with Lieutenant General Lam, the ARVN I Corps commander, who had his headquarters in Da Nang. Thus the change of American command would require transfer of the XXIV Corps Headquarters from Phu Bai to Camp Horn and the simultaneous movement of III MAF Headquarters to a new site, in each case without interrupting for any length of time the continuing direction of operations.

Preparations for this movement, codenamed Operation Cavalier Beach, began on 30 January. On that date, III MAF and XXIV Corps organized a joint planning group representing the G-1, G-2, G-3, G-4, and G-6 sections of each staff.* The group, under the overall supervision of Brigadier General Dulacki, the III MAF Chief of Staff, was to plan, coordinate, and supervise the move. Throughout the complex preparations, which involved the interchange of facilities, equipment, and personnel along with the concurrent requirement for both Army and Marine headquarters to maintain operational continuity, the Services worked harmoniously. As General Dulacki noted, "there were many opportunities for parochial bickering on the part of the various staff sections but, instead, like true professionals they worked together to make the transfer as efficient as possible." General Zais' guidance to the III MAF Chief of Staff was direct: "You've got a functioning headquarters here. You know what has to be done. You work it out as you see best, and we'll move down when you say you are ready to take us." General Zais gave similar guidance to his staff, and the shift of headquarters was begun.[54]

III MAF first had to find a new headquarters location. Consideration was given to having III MAF and XXIV Corps remain in their present locations with a transfer of functions, but the idea was shelved because of the difficulties created for XXIV Corps in their new role as senior command in ICTZ. General Dulacki remembered commenting to General Abrams after both headquarters had been relocated that "it would have been so much simpler if we had stayed where we were and merely transferred the command functions." He was stunned by Abrams reply, ". . . I was somewhat surprised that was not what you recommended." The option of satelliting III MAF Headquarters on the 1st Marine Division or 1st Marine Aircraft Wing was considered but discounted in part because of Dulacki's recollection of the undesirable aspects of a similar arrangement he experienced on the III MAF staff in 1965, when that staff was satellited on the wing. The impracticality of constructing a new headquarters site was recognized from the outset.[55]

Once again the Seabees came to the rescue, as they had so often in the past. "Since they were phasing down operations due to redeployment of their units, the Seabees volunteered to vacate their headquarters site at Camp Haskins," which was on Red Beach northwest of the city of Da Nang about five miles from Camp Horn. The Seabees moved to a smaller site in the same vicinity. Dulacki observed that it was somewhat ironic that Red Beach is where the Marines first landed in Vietnam in March 1965. Camp Haskins contained barracks and office buildings which could be adapted readily to III MAF's requirements, and it was close to the Force Logistic Command with its existing communications facilities. On 6 February, Marine engineers and Seabees of the 3d Naval Construction Battalion moved into Camp Haskins and began preparing for its new tenant.[56]

Throughout February, at Phu Bai, Camp Horn, and

*In February 1968 at the urging of Colonel Sanford B. Hunt, Communications-Electronics Officer (CEO), III MAF, Lieutenant General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., Commanding General, III MAF redesignated the CEO Section, the G-6 Section. This was done in recognition of the increased coordination and technical control demanded of an expanded corps-level tactical situation brought on by the Tet offensive. This was the first time in Marine Corps history that communications-electronics was elevated to "G" section status, and it continued for the remainder of the war. Col Sanford B. Hunt and Maj James Connell, Comments on draft MS, 12Dec83 (Vietnam Comment File). See also III MAF Directories, Jan-Feb68 in III MAF ComdCs, Jan-Feb68.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A193462

Marine Commandant Gen Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., obscured by another officer, greets LtGen Melvin Zais, USA, Commanding General, XXIV Corps, while medal-bedecked LtGen Hoang Xuan Lam, Commanding General, I Corps Tactical Zone, looks on.

Camp Haskins, the preparations continued. III MAF prepared tables of organization for a much reduced headquarters establishment and drew up lists of functions to be transferred to XXIV Corps. Recognizing that III MAF's staff could aid XXIV Corps with their expanded staff responsibilties, III MAF also selected Marine officers and men for assignment to the XXIV Corps staff. According to General Dulacki, "when we were phasing down, we just let them go through the list of the people and decide what key billets or what key functions they wanted to fill with Marines, and that's exactly how we left the people there."[57] This assisted XXIV Corps greatly and enabled selected Marines to remain in their billets until end of tour, when they were replaced by Army officers. Advance parties of Army officers and men moved into Camp Horn to prepare for movement of the main body of XXIV Corps Headquarters from Phu Bai.[58]

For the headquarters staff of III MAF, it was a time of hard work and some confusion. Colonel Herbert L. Wilkerson, Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, who joined the staff at this time summed up the situation:

> The way I like to describe this is you cut your force into one-fourth, you reassign practically every person—enlisted and officer—to a new billet within that force, not necessarily doing what he was doing before, and displace the CP, all simultaneously . . . . Every officer in the 3 shop, practically, changed some responsibility one way or the other and assumed other people's responsibilities, and then displacement of the CP alone is a traumatic experience for a corps level function, and you try to do all this . . . while everybody changes jobs . . . . [59]

In spite of the inevitable difficulties, Operation Cavalier Beach progressed more or less on schedule. On 5 March, III MAF began moving into Camp

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A700390

LtGen Keith B. McCutcheon is seen in a formal pose. Gen McCutcheon relieved LtGen Nickerson as Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force.

Haskins. The next day, XXIV Corps Headquarters with its aviation, artillery, military police, and other support detachments, started its journey to Camp Horn. By 9 March, the day set for the change of command, both headquarters were installed and operating in their new compounds.

The ceremony at Camp Horn on 9 March formally acknowledged two simultaneous transfers of command. Lieutenant General Nickerson turned over operational control of all United States forces in I Corps to Lieutenant General Zais. At the same time, Nickerson passed command of III MAF to his own successor, Lieutenant General Keith B. McCutcheon.[60]

The new commanding general of III MAF was born in Ohio in 1915. An honor graduate of the Army ROTC course at Carnegie Institute of Technology, McCutcheon in 1937 resigned his Army Reserve commission to accept a second lieutenancy in the Marine Corps. His reason for doing so forecast the focus of his Marine career: frustrated in efforts to enter Army aviation, he knew the Marines had airplanes, and he wanted to fly. McCutcheon received his naval aviator's wings in 1940. Thereafter his assignments and activities paralleled and contributed much to the growth of Marine aviation. In 1944, as operations officer of MAG-24 during the invasion of the Philippines, McCutcheon perfected a basic system for command and control of close air support. He also was awarded the Silver Star Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross, and six Air Medals for gallantry in action. During the 1950s, he played a leading part in Marine helicopter development, commanding HMR-161 in Korean combat. Later, as commander of MAG-26, he continued to improve helicopter tactics and organization.

McCutcheon's involvement with Vietnam began in 1963 where, as a brigadier general and assistant chief of staff for operations on the staff of the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CinCPac), he spent two years helping to plan and direct the introduction of American forces into the war. From June 1965 to June 1966, he commanded the 1st MAW in Vietnam, receiving his promotion to major general in January 1966. Then, as deputy chief of staff for air at Headquarters Marine Corps, McCutcheon directed further expansion of the Marine aviation effort in Vietnam and supervised the introduction to combat of new and improved helicopters. He was promoted to lieutenant general in February 1970.[61]

A slightly-built, soft-spoken officer, General McCutcheon approached his new task with the same confidence and determination he had expressed long ago as a young man writing to a prospective employer:

> I particularly pride myself in the fact that I can carefully and meticulously plan and organize my work in a most efficient manner; and not only plan the work, but to execute it with rapidity and accuracy.
>
> The ability to do these things lies in my will-power and conscience. Anything I have been made responsible for, or anything I have undertaken, I have always endeavored to complete.
>
> It also seems that my capacity increases with the pressure; that is, the more work there is for me to do, the more efficiently I perform it.[62]

General McCutcheon took over a III MAF whose headquarters was about half the size of the one Nickerson had commanded at the beginning of the year. In contrast to 219 Marine, 5 Navy, and 39 Army officers and 509 Marine, 12 Navy, 19 Army, and 2 Air Force enlisted men in January, the force staff in April consisted of 105 Marine and 6 Navy officers and 204 Marine and 6 Navy enlisted men.[63] The total size of III MAF following initial redeployments was approaching 40,000 Marines, down close to 15,000 from the start of 1970.

During and after the move to Camp Haskins, III MAF Headquarters was plagued with communications difficulties. Just before 9 March, the automated teletype machines at Camp Horn stopped working, creating a pileup of paper and tape. The staff hauled bags of this material with them to Camp Haskins. On 9 and 10 March, the teletypes at Force Logistic Command Headquarters, which were to serve III MAF at Camp Haskins, also broke down. Compounding the problem, the ditto machines which reproduced messages for distribution failed at the same time. Hurried repairs restored all the machines to operation by 12 March, and personnel from III MAF, FLC, and the 5th Communictions Battalion cleared up the message backlog and established normal communications. Even then, the system proved cumbersome, with couriers running back and forth between FLC and Camp Haskins every 30 minutes or so. General Dulacki, recalling the experience, hoped that "next time we're a little bit closer to communications."[64]

The reduction in the size of the III MAF staff was a reflection of its reduced role. The difficult question was, how lean a staff could be organized to satisfactorily perform the mission? III MAF realized that the old "Marine Corps Schools concept," in which a skeleton III MAF staff would parasite off division and wing staffs, just wouldn't work. On the other hand, the argument made by some to keep the large existing III MAF staff intact was equally impactical.[65]

The decision was ultimately made to develop an austere T/O with no fat. "It was to be a lean organization, adequate to perform the new III MAF mission with no frills, and one which recognized the inexorably continuing redeployment. Although, at times, seemingly draconian measures were necessary to achieve that goal, in the end it was accomplished and accomplished successfully."[66] When General Chapman visited III MAF in early 1970, he was pleasantly surprised to see the realistic approach that III MAF had taken in sizing the staff.

The reduced III MAF staff had barely enough personnel to carry out its command functions. Colonel Wilkerson commented in July that III MAF Headquarters ". . .strictly maintains a command center for monitoring what's going on. . . . The command center . . . has a watch of one staff officer and one staff NCO and one general clerk, and that's the extent of our participation. . . . [CG, III MAF] can't really participate other than to advise people and try to keep up to date on what's going on. . . ."[67]

XXIV Corps Headquarters had its problems, also. From concentrating primarily on tactical control of troops, General Zais and his staff had to assume the many logistic, administrative, and political responsibilities formerly discharged by III MAF. They had to adjust their thinking to deal with all of I Corps rather than only the two northern provinces, and they had to establish a relationship of trust and cooperation with General Lam, who had worked closely with III MAF. XXIV Corps Headquarers, like III MAF, discovered that it had underestimated the number of men required for its job. The Army staff expanded to meet its new responsibilities and by June was overflowing the old Marine compound at Camp Horn.[68]

By mid-1970, both XXIV Corps and III MAF had recovered from the confusion of their alteration of roles. The small-unit war being waged required no large transfers of troops between division TAORs, and XXIV Corps usually left direction of day-to-day operations in Quang Nam Province to the 1st Marine Division. In June, General Dulacki said:

> In general I think the relationship between III MAF and XXIV Corps is very good. There are no serious problems. . . . I think a lot of the staff sections in XXIV Corps couldn't quite understand that III MAF was the senior headquarters insofar as the division and wing was concerned. It took them a little while to understand that if they have any orders and directions for the wing or the division they had to come through us, and in general there are no problems in this regard.[69]

Although he initially had objected to III MAF's continued control of the division and wing, Lieutenant General Zais proved "very understanding, very considerate" in his dealings with the Marines. "At the lower staff levels, occasionally, Service parochialism or jealousy (on both sides) would rear its ugly head, due to a failure to understand the other Services' normal modus operandi. But the longer the two headquarters worked together, the trust, confidence and respect between the two grew and solidified." As General Dulacki observed more than a decade later, "Neither General Zais nor General McCutcheon would have had it otherwise."[70]

CHAPTER 2

The War Continues

Overview and the Defense of Da Nang
The Inner Defenses: Northern Sector Defense Command and Southern Sector Defense Command
The 1st and 26th Marines: The Rocket Belt—The 5th Marines: Thuong Duc, An Hoa, and Arizona Territory
The 7th Marines: The Que Son Mountains—Results

Overview and the Defense of Da Nang

For the American, ARVN, and Korean infantrymen patrolling the hamlets, rice paddies, and mountains, and for the aviators, artillerymen, and others who supported them, command changes brought little variation to the daily routine of war. Throughout the first half of 1970, both sides in I Corps adhered to the patterns of operation established during the previous year. The NVA and VC continued their small-unit attacks, terrorism, and infiltration. Seeming to threaten a resumption of large-unit warfare, they massed troops and supplies along the DMZ in the first months of the year and opened new bases along the Laotian border in northwestern Quang Tri. They also appeared to be building new bases and reopening or enlarging old ones in Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai.[1]

Throughout I Corps, allied troops took the offensive to protect the population and disrupt the enemy buildup. In northern Quang Tri, the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized), in cooperation with regiments of the 1st ARVN Division, launched Operation Greene River on 19 January. Greene River covered a long series of large and small-scale operations which lasted until 22 July, accounting for almost 400 enemy dead at a cost to the allies of 68 killed and 967 wounded.

To the south, in Thua Thien, the 101st Airborne Division began the year with Operation Randolph Glen. Like Greene River, and like most named operations in this period, Randolph Glen was the title for a mixture of pacification and search and clear activities. In Randolph Glen, pacification predominated. The 101st Airborne Division committed all three of its brigades to protection of the coastal lowlands. On 1 April, the division began Operation Texas Star, in which one of its brigades continued to patrol the populated areas while the other two kept in constant motion in the piedmont, pursuing enemy main force units and seeking out and destroying base areas. Continued until 5 September, Operation Texas Star resulted in over 1,700 NVA and VC killed while costing the 101st Airborne and the ARVN units working with it over 350 killed in action (KIA), many from boobytraps and small ambushes.[2]

In southern I Corps, the Americal Division was engaged in Operations Pennsylvania Square, Iron Mountain, Geneva Park, Frederick Hill, and Nantucket Beach. As was true elsewhere, these operations were, in reality, an unbroken series of patrols on the fringes of populated areas and forays into back-country sanctuaries. Month after month, the Americal troops whittled away at the enemy in unspectacular but deadly contacts.[3]

In the first months of 1970, the ARVN regulars of I Corps concentrated on forestalling enemy incursions into towns and villages. Both in conjunction with American units and on their own, the ARVN troops supplemented constant small-unit patrolling with larger sweeps against major Communist formations. One of the most successful independent ARVN operations, Operation Duong Son 3/70, began on 11 February when elements of the 1st Armored Brigade and the 37th and 39th Ranger Battalions attacked into an area near the coast south of the Korean enclave at Hoi An. On the fourth day of this operation, they engaged two VC main force units, the *V-25th Infantry Battalion* and the *T-89th Sapper Battalion*. The ARVN troops, assisted by artillery and helicopter gunships, killed over 140 of the enemy, including a battalion commander, and drove the survivors into blocking positions established by two Regional Force companies, which took a further toll of the fleeing Communists.[4]

While the regular units sought out enemy main force formations, the Regional and Popular Forces intensified their patrolling around villages, hamlets, and government installations. Displaying increased confidence and aggressiveness as a result of improved training and weapons, the RFs and PFs set increasingly more night ambushes. In the first two months of 1970, the territorial troops claimed to have killed over 1,300 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong while taking 77 prisoners and capturing over 600 weapons.[5]

Both regulars and militia paid for their successes. In the first three months of 1970, the ARVN in I Corps lost 303 men KIA and 984 wounded, while the RFs and PFs lost 195 killed and over 700 wounded. In

return, they accounted for over 4,400 enemy killed, took over 1,100 prisoners, and captured almost 2,000 weapons.[6]

The remaining Marines in I Corps contributed their share to the ongoing effort. The jets and helicopters of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing flew missions throughout the five northern provinces, and the fixed-wing attack and reconnaissance aircraft ranged into Laos and Cambodia. On the ground in Quang Nam Province, the 1st Marine Division continued to aggressively seek out the VC and NVA.

After the redeployment of the 3d Marine Division late in 1969, Marine ground operations were limited largely to Quang Nam Province, where the 1st Marine Division conducted continuous small-scale combat in defense of Da Nang. During the first half of 1970, the 1st Marine Division, unlike the U.S. Army divisions operating in I Corps, did not name its operations, but its complex activities were typical of the way the war was being waged there.

Major General Edwin B. Wheeler commanded the 1st Marine Division at the beginning of the year. Born in New York State in 1918, Wheeler entered the Marine Corps in 1941 and served in the Pacific with the 1st Marine Raider Battalion. In 1943, while commanding a rifle company, he won the Silver Star Medal during the New Georgia campaign. Wheeler again led Marines in combat in Korea. Commanding the 3d Marines in 1965, he spent his first Vietnam tour in the Da Nang area. After duty as commanding officer of the Basic School and Assistant Division Commander, 2d Marine Division, Wheeler, who had been promoted to brigadier general in 1966 and major general two years later, returned to Vietnam in June 1969 as deputy commanding general of XXIV Corps. He took over the 1st Marine Division from Major General Ormond R. Simpson on 15 December 1969.[7]

An accident cut short General Wheeler's tenure as division commander. On 18 April, the helicopter carrying Wheeler, members of his staff, and Colonel Edward A. Wilcox of the 1st Marines on an inspection of a search and destroy operation crashed on approach to a jungle landing zone southwest of Da Nang. Wheeler suffered a broken leg and had to relinquish command.[8]

Wheeler's replacement, Major General Charles F. Widdecke, arrived on 27 April. A year younger than Wheeler, Widdecke had entered the Marine Corps after graduating from the University of Texas at Austin. He fought in the Pacific with the 22d Marines, winning the Silver Star Medal at Eniwetok and the Navy Cross at Guam, where he was severely wounded. Like Wheeler, Widdecke had served in Vietnam before. He entered the country early in 1966 as commanding officer of the 5th Marines. Later, while still commanding his regiment, he also served as chief of staff of Task Force X-Ray at Chu Lai. Promoted to brigadier general while in Vietnam, he went from there to a tour as Chief of Staff, FMFPac. He came to the 1st Division from a two-year assignment in Washington as Director, Marine Corps Reserve, during which he had received his second star. He would command the division until its redeployment in April 1971.*[9]

Under both Wheeler and Widdecke, the division performed the missions specified in its operation order during late 1969. Under this order, the division, in coordination with South Vietnamese and other allied forces, "locates, interdicts, and destroys enemy forces, bases, logistical installations, infiltration routes and LOC [lines of communication] within the assigned TAOR/RZ."** The division was to provide security for the city of Da Nang and assist Vietnamese forces "as requested" in support of pacification, while continuing surveillance, reconnaissance, and psychological warfare within its TAOR "and such other areas as may be assigned." The order also required the division to

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*After his return from Vietnam, Major General Widdecke commanded the I MAF at Camp Pendleton until his retirement on 1 July 1971. He died on 13 May 1973.

**The various terms used in delineating the territorial responsibility of units were defined at this time as follows:

Division TAOR: "The area assigned to the 1st Marine Division in which the responsibility and authority for the development and maintenance of installations, control of movement and the control of tactical operations involving troops under division control is vested in the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division. All fire and maneuver conducted within the TAOR, or the effects of which impinge upon the TAOR, must be coordinated with the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division."

Reconnaissance Zone (RZ): "The land area adjacent to the 1st Marine Division TAOR, over which the Division Commander has the responsibility for surveillance and reconnaissance operations. All fire and maneuver within this area must be coordinated with the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division . . . ."

Area of Operation (AO): "An area where forces conduct operations during a specific period of time. These operations are coordinated with, and advance agreement obtained from, appropriate GVN/FWMAF representatives. An AO is normally assigned for a specific operation which may be within or outside of a TAOR." 1st MarDiv OpO 301A-YR, Anx C, dtd 10 Dec69.

furnish relief and support for combined action platoons (CAPs), Special Forces camps, and GVN district headquarters within its area of responsibility. Finally, the division was to be ready to send up to three reinforced battalions with a command group to assist allied forces anywhere in South Vietnam.[10]

In conformity with countrywide allied strategy, the division concentrated its efforts on keeping the enemy away from the city of Da Nang and its heavily populated environs. Division infantry units and supporting arms were "disposed to provide maximum security for the Da Nang vital area, installations and LOCs of greatest political, economic, and military importance in the division TAOR."[11] The division directed its offensives against enemy forces and base areas which posed the most immediate threat to the centers of government, population, and economic activity or to allied military installations.

A collection of Vietnamese forces was loosely formed into a roughly division-level organization also tasked to defend the Da Nang TAOR. Known as Quang Da Special Zone (QDSZ), this headquarters, while not staffed sufficiently to perform division-level command and control, did exercise command by the summer of 1970 over 12 infantry battalions with attendant artillery and armor support.* Originally formed to coordinate security of the city of Da Nang, QDSZ in the spring of 1970 established a field command post southwest of Da Nang on Hill 34. Weekly conferences were held between commanders of QDSZ, 1st Marine Division, and the 2d Republic of Korea Marine Brigade from which combined staff action originated. While QDSZ never matured to the level desired by the Marines, under the guidance of the 1st Marine Division the South Vietnamese headquarters was able to provide a measurable contribution to the defense of the Da Nang TAOR.[12]

The 1st Marine Division's TAOR encompassed about 1,050 square miles of territory. Beginning above the vital Hai Van Pass in the north, it extended into the Que Son Valley in the south and included all of Quang Nam Province and portions of Thua Thien and Quang Tin. Almost 1,000,000 Vietnamese lived in this region, over 400,000 of them in Da Nang and most of the rest in the coastal lowlands and river valleys south and southwest of the city.[13]

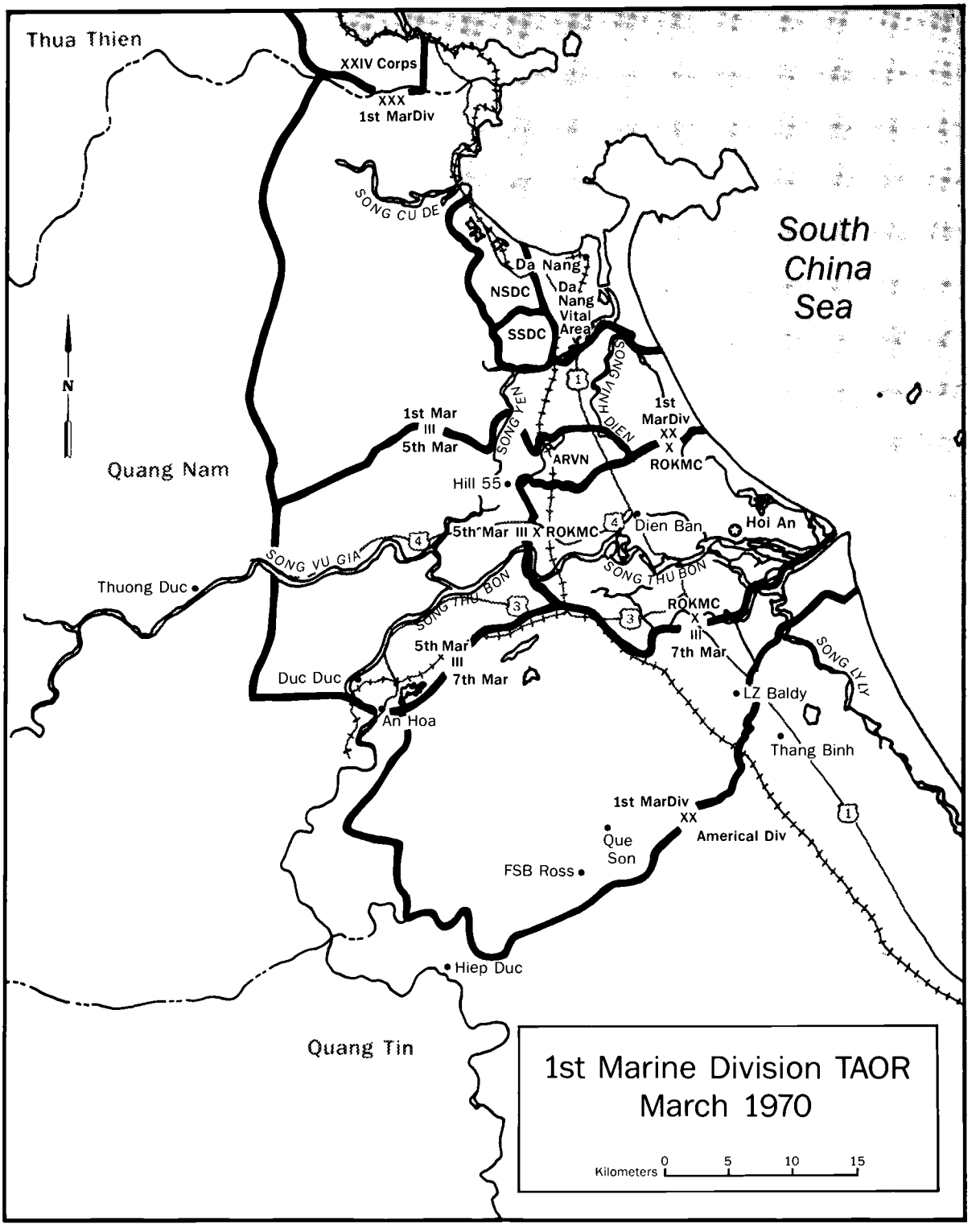
During five years of bitter warfare, Marines had become familiar with the terrain of Quang Nam. In the northern portion of the TAOR, rugged mountains of the Annamite Chain thrust down into the South China Sea to form the Hai Van Peninsula, restricting overland movement northward from Da Nang through the Hai Van Pass to the old imperial city of Hue. Extending westward and southward, these mountains form an arc around the rolling hills and lowlands of Da Nang. The eastern boundary of the Da Nang TAOR is the South China Sea.

Just south of Da Nang's wide bay in the heart of Da Nang was the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing's facility from which military installations sprawled westward about four miles to the hill mass of Division Ridge. To the immediate south and southwest of Da Nang, rice paddies dominate the landscape, broken only by intermittent hills with thick treelines and patches of brush dotted with hamlets and villages. Throughout the lowlands thousands of grave mounds furnished the enemy cover and concealment, and numerous low hills provided sites for cantonments, outposts, and defensive positions.

Innumerable streams and waterways intersect the coastal lowlands. They include several major rivers which flow out of the mountains to the west and run into the South China Sea. The Cu De River empties into the bay of Da Nang north of the city. The Cau Do River and the Han River encircle the city on the south and east and separate it from Tien Sha Peninsula (called Da Nang East by Marines) and the helicopter base at Marble Mountain which is actually located on the flat seashore just north of the rock outcroppings that gave it its name. Still farther south the Vu Gia and Thu Bon Rivers run through broad valleys which cut deep into the mountains.

On the western edge of the TAOR, the heights of the Annamite Chain wall in the coastal plain, extending the entire length of the western boundary from north to south. Steep, jungle-covered, their peaks hanging with mist and fog during the monsoon season, these mountains are penetrable on foot or by helicopter. In the far southern part of the 1st Marine Division's TAOR, a spur of the Annamites projects northeastward toward the coast. Known as the Que Son Mountains, the range overlooks the Que Son Valley to the south of it, and its hills, ravines, jungles,

*At the end of July 1970, QDSZ had operational control of the 257th Vietnamese Marine Corps Brigade (2d, 5th, and 6th Battalions and a battalion of light artillery), the 1st Ranger Group (21st, 37th, and 39th Battalions), the 5th Mobile Strike Group, and the 44th and 64th Artillery Battalions. FMFPac, MarOps, Jul70, p.22; *The Marines in Vietnam, 1954-1973, An Anthology and Annotated Bibliography* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1974), p. 141.


Thua Thien
XXIV Corps
XXX
1st MarDiv
SONG CU DE
Da Nang
NSDC
Da Nang Vital Area
SSDC
South China Sea
N
Quang Nam
1st Mar
III
5th Mar
SONG VEN
SONG VINH DIEN
1st MarDiv
XX
X
ROKMC
ARVN
Hill 55
5th Mar III X ROKMC
Dien Ban
Hoi An
SONG VU GIA
Thuong Duc
SONG THU BON
ROKMC
X
III
7th Mar
5th Mar
III
7th Mar
Duc Duc
An Hoa
LZ Baldy
SONG LY LY
Thang Binh
1st MarDiv
XX
Americal Div
Que Son
FSB Ross
Hiep Duc
Quang Tin
1st Marine Division TAOR
March 1970
Kilometers 0 5 10 15

and many caves offered the enemy a ready-made stronghold close to the populated regions.

From the outskirts of Da Nang to the remote mountain valleys, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops infested the 1st Marine Division's TAOR. According to allied intelligence, a North Vietnamese general, Major General Nguyen Chanh Binh, commanded these enemy forces. His headquarters, the identity of which was obscured by the enemy's use of multiple names, was known to allied intelligence as *Front 4, Group 44,* and *Quang Da Special Zone Unit.* As senior military commander, General Binh apparently controlled *Front 4*'s NVA regulars and VC main force and local force units. The hamlet and village guerrillas took their orders from the local VCI, who in turn were directed by the provincial party committee which worked closely with General Binh. Under *Front 4,* three tactical wings directed field operations—a *Northern Wing* in the Hai Van area, a *Central Wing* west of Da Nang, and a *Southern Wing* believed headquartered in the Que Sons.

In early 1970, allied intelligence estimated that *Front 4* had 12,000-13,000 troops under its command, including a possible 16 NVA and VC infantry battalions, two NVA rocket artillery battalions, and an indeterminate number of VC local force and guerrilla units. The enemy in Quang Nam, as elsewhere in South Vietnam, was using North Vietnamese replacements to rebuild VC main force and even local force units which had suffered heavy losses in the fighting of the last two years. Thus the enemy's *Southern Wing,* according to allied intelligence reports, had disbanded one of its NVA infantry regiments, the *36th,* to reinforce hard-hit VC elements in the lowlands.

In accordance with their nationwide strategy, the enemy in Quang Nam had reverted to low-intensity guerrilla warfare. *Front 4*'s NVA regiments rarely engaged in combat. They spent most of their time training and refitting in their mountain base camps while VC main and local forces and guerrillas, assisted by small NVA detachments, kept limited but constant pressure on the allies. Against allied regular troops, the enemy usually relied on ambushes, rocket and mortar attacks, and occasional sapper assaults on bases to inflict as much damage as possible with minimal forces. During the year, these small-scale attacks were made against Regional and Popular Force units in an effort to disrupt the pacification program. To the same end, the VC and NVA kept up a continuing campaign of terrorism against civilians, ranging from kidnappings and assassinations of individual anti-Communists to full-scale mortar and ground assaults on pro-government hamlets. To further terrorize the population, the enemy fired rockets into built-up areas, concentrating on Da Nang where their inaccurate missiles could inflict the most casualties and damage.

Against both civilian and military targets, most rocket, mortar, and sapper attacks came during periodic offensive surges or "high points," interspersed with weeks of relative inactivity during which the enemy repositioned troops and replenished supplies. High points in 1970 occurred in January, April-May, and August-October. At all times throughout the division's TAOR, the enemy's mines and boobytraps took their daily toll of Marine, ARVN, and civilian lives and limbs.[14]

Small detachments of NVA and VC regulars moved continually throughout the 1st Marine Division's TAOR, enemy rocket and mortar teams positioned themselves for attacks, and local VC planted mines and boobytraps. While these combat actions were carried on, replacements, medical units, and supply parties upon whom depended the enemy's elaborate and flexible logistics system, operated continuously. According to allied estimates, about 90 percent of the enemy's arms and ammunition in Quang Nam Province, 30 percent of his food, and about 25 percent of his other supplies in early 1970 were trucked down the Ho Chi Minh Trail from North Vietnam and then moved by porters into mountain base areas 20-30 miles south and southwest of Da Nang. These base areas also harbored camps, training installations, and headquarters. The rest of the enemy's supplies, including most of the food and the material for boobytraps, came from the populated lowlands, where it was procured by the VCI through purchase, contribution, or forced requisition and then cached for movement to the base areas.

Within Quang Nam Province, most enemy supplies travelled on the backs of porters. These porters were members of transport battalions and sometimes regular frontline troops, reinforced when necessary with civilians conscripted in VC-controlled hamlets. They customarily operated in teams of three to 10 persons each carrying a 30- to 70-pound pack. Usually protected by armed escorts and moving by night or through covering terrain, the supply parties often followed rivers or streams in and out of the mountains. The waterways also allowed them to move rockets and other heavy equipment by sampan. The porter, mov-

ing ahead of attacking units instead of behind them as do the supply troops of conventional armies, prepositioned ammunition and weapons for assaults and collected cached rice and other stores for movement back to their mountain bases. By the beginning of 1970, American and Vietnamese intelligence agencies had traced most of the enemy's principal infiltration routes, located the major base areas, and developed a detailed picture of the Communist supply system. Many of the 1st Division's operations during the year were aimed at the disruption of that system.[15]

The 1st Marine Division had to coordinate its operations continuously with South Vietnamese and Korean forces. The four battalions of the Republic of Korea 2d Marine Brigade, containing about 6,000 officers and men, were based at Hoi An, about 15 miles south-southeast of Da Nang. They defended a roughly semi-circular TAOR which extended from the South China Sea inland to a point just northeast of the coastward end of the Que Son Range. Under their special command relationship with MACV, the Koreans were supposed to receive "operational guidance" but not orders from III MAF and in fact possessed almost complete autonomy within their TAOR.[16]

Quang Nam contained substantial South Vietnamese regular and territorial forces. The ARVN contingent consisted of the four-battalion 51st Regiment, a veteran unit highly regarded by American advisors; the 1st Ranger Group of three battalions; the 1st Armored Brigade; the 17th Armored Cavalry Squadron; and units of artillery and support troops. Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) based at Thuong Duc deep in the mountains along the Song Thu Bon blocked important enemy infiltration routes. Protecting the populated areas were 52 Regional Force companies (now being organized into RF groups of four to seven companies), 177 Popular Force platoons, and 3,000 men of the national police force.

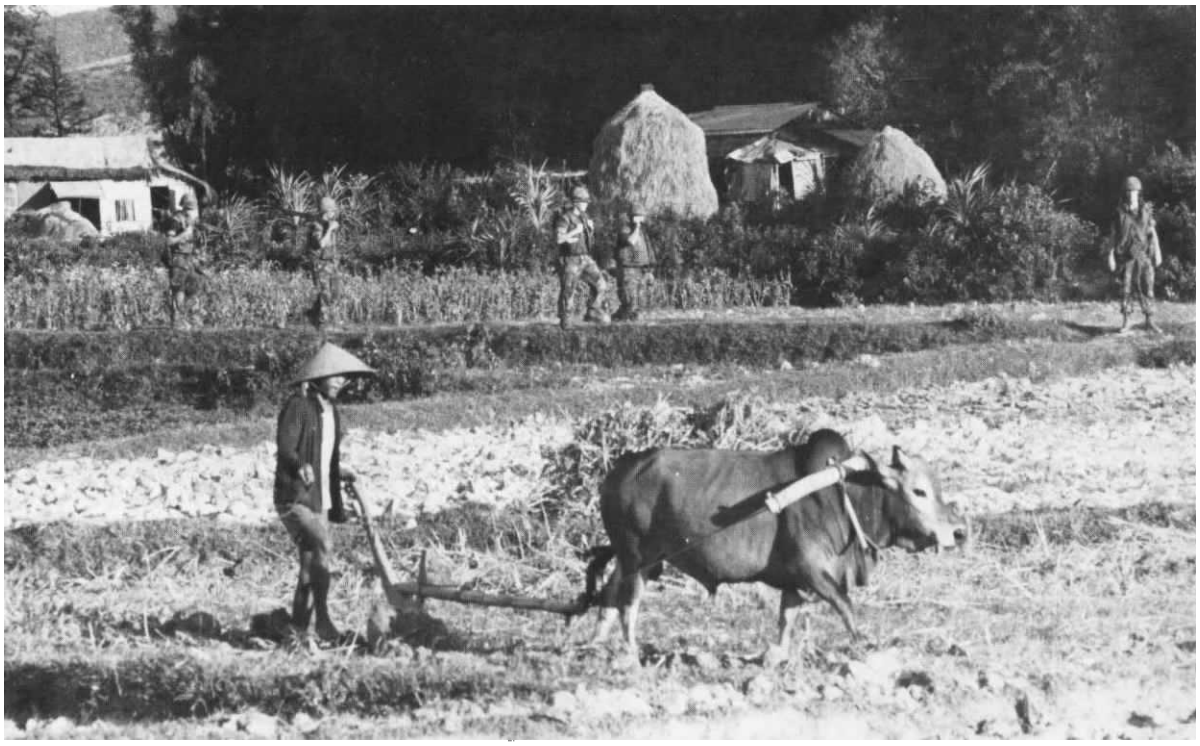
At the beginning of 1970, the effectiveness of these forces continued to be reduced by a complicated chain of command. The 51st Regiment operated under Quang Da Special Zone while the other ARVN regular formations in Quang Nam remained under direct control of General Lam, the I Corps commander. Lam occasionally placed one or more of them under QDSZ for a particular operation. General Lam also commanded the CIDGs and through the province chief controlled the RFs and PFs. Since the creation of QDSZ, the commanders and staffs of III MAF and the 1st Marine Division had worked to build it into a full-fledged tactical headquarters with a balanced combat force of all arms under its permanent control, capable of directing the defense of the province. Progress had been slow, retarded by the labyrinthine complexities of ARVN internal politics and by the Vietnamese shortage of qualified divisional staff officers.[17]

In conformity with overall allied strategy, the ARVN regulars in Quang Nam Province had as their primary mission attacks on enemy main forces, base camps, and lines of communication while the RF/PF and police units concentrated on local defense and the eradication of the VC infrastructure. At the beginning of 1970, Marine commanders were discussing with General Lam the deployment of the province's ARVN units. The Marines, anticipating the redeployment of one of their own regiments, wanted the Vietnamese troops to take charge of their own area of operations within the 1st Marine Division's TAOR, while General Lam preferred to have each of his units share an area of operations with one of the Marine regiments. Early in March, the 51st Regiment established such a joint TAOR with the 5th Marines, but the other ARVN units continued to operate throughout the 1st Marine Division area.[18]

The 1st Marine Division deployed its own four infantry regiments—the 1st, 5th, 7th, and 26th Marines—in a series of concentric belts centering on Da Nang. A reinforced artillery regiment, the 11th Marines, provided fire support for the infantry. The 1st Reconnaissance Battalion and the 1st Tank Battalion supplemented and reinforced the efforts of the infantry regiments, as did strong contingents of engineers, transportation, and service troops.

With the division as its defensive shield, the city of Da Nang, the airfield to the west of it, and Tien Sha Peninsula and Marble Mountain Air Facility to the east of it constituted the Da Nang Vital Area. This area was not included in the 1st Marine Division's TAOR. Instead, III MAF in conjunction with South Vietnamese authorities supervised its defense. The division's responsibility began just outside the Da Nang Vital Area with the Northern and Southern Sector Defense Commands (NSDC and SSDC). These commands consisted of various headquarters and support units organized for mutual defense. Between them they guarded Division Ridge, the high ground west of the Da Nang Airbase.

Beyond the defense commands lay the Rocket Belt, its main defensive purpose implicit in its name, guarded by the 26th Marines with its battalions spread out



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373930

Marines from Headquarters Battalion, 1st Marine Division patrol valley just three miles west of Da Nang. The incongruity of war and peace is vividly demonstrated as the seemingly unconcerned farmer employs both a crude plow and a water buffalo to work his plot.

north and west of Da Nang and the 1st Marines deployed to the southwest, south, and southeast. Southwest of the 1st Marines, the 5th Marines operated in a TAOR which encompassed the An Hoa Combat Base and industrial area and the infiltration routes along the Song Thu Bon and Song Vu Gia. Still further south, the 7th Marines' TAOR stretched from the coastal plain westward to include the Que Son Mountains and about half of the Que Son Valley. The southern boundary of the 7th Marines' TAOR also constituted the boundary between the TAORs of the 1st Marine Division and the Army's Americal Division.[19]

As part of the Keystone Bluejay redeployment, the 26th Marines stood down for deactivation during late February and early March, and the division realigned its regimental TAORs to fill the resulting gap. Early in March, the 1st Marines extended its TAOR to the northward and took over most of the 26th Marines' portion of the Rocket Belt. At the same time, it turned over the southwestern portion of its TAOR, including Hills 37 and 55, to the 51st ARVN Regiment. The 5th Marines redeployed its 1st Battalion to the SSDC to assume the function of division reserve while continuing to cover its TAOR with its remaining battalions. The 7th Marines slightly enlarged the boundaries of its existing TAOR. This deployment remained in effect throughout the first half of 1970.[20]

With the 3d Marine Division withdrawn from Vietnam, Marines no longer stood guard along the DMZ, but the 1st Marine Division retained responsibility for reinforcing northern I Corps with a regiment if a new escalation of the war there required it. To meet this responsibility with the reduced forces left by Keystone Bluejay, the division staff during March and April drafted Operation Plan 2-70. Under this plan, a reinforced regiment was to deploy to northern I CTZ within 36 hours of the order being given. The 7th Marines was to provide two infantry battalions and the command group, leaving one battalion to protect a reduced TAOR. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, in division reserve, less one company, would constitute the third battalion of the regiment, which would have attached to it an artillery battalion and companies of engineers and other support troops. The plan charged the responsible commands with being ready to move one battalion northward within eight hours' notice, the second battalion with the command group within

18 hours, and the third battalion and the balance of the force within 36 hours.[21]

Operation Plan 2-70 never had to be executed, as the war continued at low intensity throughout I CTZ during the first six months of 1970. Month after month, III MAF summed up the 1st Division's activities in the same words: "In Quang Nam Province, the 1st Marine Division emphasized security and pacification operations. . . ."[22]

To deal with the varied and pervasive enemy activities, Marine operations were divided into three categories. Category I focused on populated areas where the VC and NVA had direct contact with the populace, often on a daily basis. Here cordon and search operations were executed to seal the enemy in the hamlets and villages where he conducted his business, then to root him out and kill or capture him. The activities of the Combined Action Program and Combined Unit Pacification Program (CUPP)* were also included in this category.

Category II covered small-unit day patrols and night ambushes on the edges of the villages and hamlets. In these operations, the Marines tried to engage and destroy NVA/VC main force detachments maneuvering in the lowlands or at least to sever the contact between these enemy forces and the guerrillas and political cadres among the people. Category II included reconnaissance in force operations of generally company scale designed to disrupt enemy supply movement and prevent the launching of sustained rocket and mortar attacks. The largest percentage of 1st Marine Division activities fell into Category II.

Category III applied to multi-company and occasionally multi-battalion operations against NVA and VC main force units and their headquarters and bases. These were not aimed at permanent occupation or pacification, but instead sought to inflict casualties, destroy or capture stores and equipment, and prevent the enemy from reinforcing units operating in inhabited areas. Category III operations usually took place in thinly populated mountain and jungle regions.[23]

In each regiment's TAOR, the size of combat activities varied, with mostly fireteam and squad operations in the Rocket Belt and platoon-, company-, or battalion-size maneuvers in the 5th and 7th Marines' areas, which were closer to enemy bases. The daily routine of Category I and II activities was altered occasionally by regiments and battalions to execute a Category III operation. Periodically, in response to intelligence forecasts of intensified enemy pressure, the division would direct increased day and night activities, inspection and improvement of fortifications, and often temporary reassignments or redeployments of platoons, companies, or battalions to reinforce vital areas. While the broad tactical features of the war were similar throughout the division's TAOR, each regiment conducted combat operations with relative independence, tailoring small-unit and larger scale maneuvers to meet the varying threat of local guerrillas, NVA, or VC main force units.

The Inner Defenses: Northern Sector Defense Command and Southern Sector Defense Command

The Da Nang Vital Area extended south from the city to the Cau Do River and to a point on the seashore just below MAG-16's base at the Marble Mountain Air Facility. On the west, the Vital Area's border lay just beyond the edge of the Da Nang airfield complex.* To the south, the Vital Area bordered the TAOR of the 1st Marines, and on the west it adjoined the NSDC and the SSDC.

Each of these sector defense commands coordinated the security activities of the American units and installations and Vietnamese local forces within its boundaries. Each was under the command of the senior officer of a tenant American unit, who carried out this assignment in addition to his regular duties.

Colonel Don D. Ezell, commanding officer of the 1st Marine Division's artillery regiment, the 11th Marines, also commanded the NSDC, until 25 March, when he was relieved by Colonel Ernest R. Reid, Jr. The TAOR of the NSDC, a 35,000 grid square** stretch of hills, scrub, and rice paddies, extended north almost to the Cu De River and included the sand flats of Red Beach where elements of the 9th MEB had come ashore in 1965. In April 1970, NSDC included 17 Marine, Army, and Navy units and facilities, among them the 1st Marine Division Command Post, the Northern Artillery Cantonment, and Force Logistic Command, along with 31 Vietnamese villages and hamlets. Also among the tenant units responsible for providing personnel to man the lines of NSDC was Headquarters Battalion, 1st Marine Division. Colonel

*For details on the CAP and CUPP programs, see Chapter 8.

*For details of the defense of the Da Nang Vital Area, see Chapter 14.

**A grid square is 1,000 meters square on a standard tactical map.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A194077
Two Marines, part of a provisional rifle company from the Force Logistic Command, search a stream eight miles west of Da Nang for Viet Cong hiding places.

William C. Patton, who commanded the battalion during the first few months of 1970, recalled the security role of his command which numbered over 3,200 men:

> The personnel of HQBN accomplished their normal workday requirements and then manned almost two miles of division perimeter at night. The band members, for example, toured the division on a daily basis playing for troop ceremonies and morale, and at night did an exceptional job of perimeter security. Several were wounded during the period. The security for division headquarters was maintained with no breaches of the lines during the period August 1969 to March 1970.[24]

The commander of NSDC supervised the maintenance and improvement of the fixed defenses of NSDC units. Using personnel from the tenant organizations, he sent out daily and nightly patrols and ambushes to find and eliminate enemy infiltrators who worked their way past the 1st and 26th Marines. Troops of each sector defense command regularly cooperated with local Vietnamese forces in pacification activities and in cordon and search operations which targeted specific hamlets and villages. During March, a moderately active month, NSDC units conducted 526 patrols and ambushes, 361 of them at night. NSDC forces reported nine enemy sightings, engaging the enemy four times, while killing one and taking three detainees*, and capturing two AK-47s.[25]

*A person suspected of being a Viet Cong soldier or agent but not yet positively identified as such.

From its border with NSDC, the TAOR of the SSDC extended south to the Cau Do River and lapped around the western side of NSDC's TAOR. Containing the Hill 34 complex and two important highway bridges, the Cobb Bridge and the Cau Do Bridge, the SSDC covered the southern and southwestern approaches to Da Nang. In January 1970, the commanding officer of the 1st Tank Battalion, Major Joseph J. Louder, commanded SSDC, using troops from his battalion and from the 26th Marines as his principal patrol and reaction forces.

Louder's units conducted daily and nightly patrols and ambushes, averaging between 1,300 and 1,400 per month during early 1970. SSDC patrols had sporadic contact with small groups of enemy, and occasional larger clashes occurred. On the night of 3-4 January, for example, Outpost Piranha, some one and one-half miles south-southwest of the 1st Marine Division CP, repelled an attack by seven grenade-throwing VC who rushed the defenses under cover of mortar and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fire. The Marines on the outpost killed one of the attackers but had four of their own men seriously wounded. To better meet such attacks, in February Major Louder constituted a mobile reaction force of 2 officers and 75 enlisted Marines drawn from the 1st Tank Battalion and the 26th Marines.[26]

When both the 1st Tank Battalion and the 26th Marines redeployed in Keystone Bluejay, the new division reserve, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, assumed primary responsibility for the security of SSDC. To assure a smooth turnover, Major Louder worked closely with the 1st Battalion's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Cornelius F. ("Doc") Savage, Jr. On 28 February, Company C of Savage's battalion, under operational control of the tank battalion, took over perimeter defense of Hill 34. Company B joined Company C in sector defense during the first days of March, and, after 3 March these two companies took over patrolling responsibilities from the tank battalion. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Savage and his S-3 visited all SSDC units with Major Louder. On 5 March, as all but one company of the 1st Tank Battalion stood down for redeployment, Savage's battalion assumed full responsibility for the SSDC. From that time through the end of June, the battalion, with its CP at Hill 34, kept two companies in rotation in the northern and central sectors of the SSDC to block infiltration while two more platoons guarded the Cobb and Cau Do Bridges.[27]

The 1st and 26th Marines: The Rocket Belt

Beyond the NSDC and the SSDC lay the Rocket Belt, a block of territory roughly delimited by a semicircle with a 12,000 meter radius centered on the Da Nang airfield. This area, its radius determined by the range of the enemy's 122mm and 140mm rockets, contained most of the sites from which the NVA/VC could launch rockets to harass American military forces and further terrorize Vietnamese civilians in American occupied areas.

Since June 1968, the 1st Marine Division, at the direction of III MAF, had been building a physical barrier along the outer edges of the Rocket Belt. Called the Da Nang Barrier and later the Da Nang Anti-Infiltration System (DAIS), the project would, when completed, consist of a cleared belt of land 500 meters wide running the entire length of the Rocket Belt. Within the cleared strip, two parallel barbed wire fences, wire entanglements, and minefields were designed to halt or at least delay infiltrators. An elaborate array of sensors and observation devices (many of them leftovers from the ill-fated "McNamara Line" along the DMZ), installed in or just behind the barrier, would alert allied troops and artillery to counter enemy probes. Under a plan prepared by General Simpson in March 1969, the barrier would be guarded by fire of Marine rifle companies and a supporting artillery group of two 105mm howitzer batteries, the entire force under direct operational control of the 1st Marine Division. According to General Simpson's estimate, the system would ultimately require no more than 1,800 Marines to keep the enemy out of the Rocket Belt, freeing about 5,000 Marines for offensive operations.[28]

In January 1970, the DAIS existed largely on paper. Marine, ARVN, and Korean engineers had cleared most of the land, erected the barbed wire fences and 23 wooden watchtowers, and laid a few minefields. Unfortunately, divided responsibility, adverse weather and terrain (much of the barrier ran at right angles to the natural drainage system of the Da Nang area, causing washouts during the monsoon season), and lack of manpower and materials had prevented completion of the system. Most of the sensors had never been emplaced, and the forces to monitor them and guard the barrier had not been assembled or positioned. Those portions of the system that had been built were now deteriorating. Brush, in places up to 18 feet high, had covered parts of the cleared strip, and both VC infiltrators and civilian farmers bound for their rice paddies had cut passages through the unguarded wire. At the end of his tour in command of the 26th Marines in mid-December 1969, Colonel Ralph A. Heywood said: "The wire that was constructed on both sides of the barrier . . . [has] been breached in a thousand places. This is going to take—a conservative estimate would take—about 200 people one month given the necessary equipment to get that wire back in shape."[29]

The worth of the DAIS was the subject of much debate within the 1st Marine Division in 1970. Lieutenant Colonel Pieter L. Hogaboom, then operations officer of the 26th Marines, said that the officers and men of the 26th Marines from the regimental commander (Colonel James E. Harrell) on down lacked any enthusiasm for the efficacy of the system. Nevertheless, they tried to make it work. Their efforts fell into two areas, said Hogaboom, "an attempt to evaluate the reliability of the sensor readings as indicators of enemy activity, and an attempt to improve tactical response to the readings, assuming that they actually indicated movement across or along the trace of the DAIS."

To test and improve the system, Hogaboom said that the regiment "even went to the extent of having fire teams, squads and entire platoons from Captain George [V.] Best's [Jr.] Company G crawl, walk, and run across and along the line of sensors, only to get readings that were inconsistent with the size and relative stealth or activity of the the crossing unit . . . ." At other times units got readings "from points on the trace that were under observation in good visibility conditions," where monitoring units were pretty certain there wasn't any activity. 26th Marines concluded that at best the sensors were right only part of the time.

"To improve response time," explained Hogaboom, "26th Marines saturated both sides of the trace of the DAIS with patrols and ambushes and covered as much of the trace as possible with direct fire weapons. Crews prepared range cards for their segments of the trace, using sensor locations as targets." To increase the possibility of making contact with the enemy "patrols, primarily of fire team and squad size, were routed to cover points on the trace of sensors with a history of frequent activations. The patrols were in contact with readout stations in the company CPs . . . and were tasked to respond to activations."

Direct fire weapons, including M60 and .50 caliber machine guns, 106mm recoilless rifles, and tank main guns, were brought to bear on targeted sections of the

DAIS when readout stations radioed sensor numbers to gun crews. "For the 106s and main guns, fleshette rounds with fuses cut in advance for each target on a specific range card . . . were used. Claymores were employed to augment direct fire weapons." Incorporating live fire training into these elaborate procedures, the response time between sensor activation and getting well-aimed fire on target was compressed to a few seconds, but as the 26th Marines' operations officer observed, "Rarely was the enemy, his remains, or his equipment found."[30]

Because of the inadequacies of the DAIS, protection of the Rocket Belt continued to require the constant efforts of large numbers of Marine infantrymen, and in January 1970 the 1st and 26th Marines shared this task. The 26th Marines, under Colonel Harrell, Heywood's replacement, already designated for Keystone Bluejay redeployment, held the northern half of the Rocket Belt and guarded Hai Van Pass, through which Route 1, South Vietnam's only north-south highway, and the railroad parallelling it run to connect Da Nang with Hue. The regiment's 2d Battalion, in the northernmost TAOR of the Division, had companies positioned at the Lien Chieu Esso Depot, Hai Van Pass, and Lang Co Bridge and Hill 88 north of the pass. The Marines of this battalion operated mostly in the steep, jungled mountains and left close-in protection of the road and railroad largely to the Vietnamese RFs.

Next in line to the south and southwest of the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines, the companies of the 3d Battalion protected Nam O Bridge, where Route 1 crosses the Cu De River, and held positions on Hills 190 and 124 and Outpost Reno. From these points, they could observe and block enemy infiltration routes along the Cu De, through the villages and rice paddies just south of it, and in the rolling, brush-covered country still further south. The 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, with its CP on Hill 10 southwest of Da Nang, patrolled a TAOR of rice paddies, hamlets, and patches of woods that lay directly below Charlie Ridge, a hill mass that projected from the Annamite Mountains and constituted a much-used enemy harboring place close to Da Nang.[31]

Throughout January and February, each battalion conducted patrols and ambushes around-the-clock. Marines of the battalions also manned observation posts and sensor readout stations and launched occasional company-size reconnaissance in force operations along known infiltration routes or cooperated with Regional and Popular Forces to cordon and search villages. In January, for example, the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, conducted 2 company operations, 26 platoon combat patrols, and 180 squad combat patrols. Marines of the battalion set up 61 listening and observation posts and 338 night ambushes.[32]

South and east of the 26th Marines, the battalions of Colonel Herbert L. Wilkerson's 1st Marines, which

Enemy 122mm rockets uncovered by the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines after an attack on the Da Nang Airbase are lined up for display. Members of a Marine engineer demolition team seen in the background were assigned the dangerous task of disarming the rockets.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373105

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A374149

Men of the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines rush to board a waiting CH-46 from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364. Responsible for the protection of the northern half of the Da Nang Rocket Belt, the Marines are responding to a possible enemy sighting.

had its headquarters at Hill 55, controlled the portion of the Rocket Belt extending from the foot of Charlie Ridge to the coastal flats south of Marble Mountain. This area of operations contained a larger civilian population than did that of the 26th Marines, and in its villages and hamlets the Marines had learned some of their first hard lessons about the difficulties of pacification. The countryside was infested with local guerrillas, as well as with small groups of main force VC/NVA.

Adjacent to the TAOR of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, operated from Hills 22 and 37 in an area of flooded paddies and scattered treelines to cover its portion of the Rocket Belt, defend several important bridges, and halt infiltration eastward from Charlie Ridge and northward from enemy refuges in the heavily populated country south of the Cau Do River. The battalion had one company on CUPP duty and during January had temporary operational control of Company G from the 2d Battalion to cover the base of Charlie Ridge. Further to the east, the 1st Battalion protected another segment of the Rocket Belt, helped guard the railroad and highway bridges over the Cau Do, and acted as regimental mobile reserve. Guarding from the Rocket Belt to the beaches of the South China Sea, the 2d Battalion contested the coastal infiltration routes to Marble Mountain. During January and most of February, the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines took over the southern portion of the battalion's TAOR to reinforce the area against an expected enemy Tet offensive.

The 1st Marines saturated its TAOR with fire team and squad-size patrols and ambushes just like 26th Marines did. With Vietnamese RFs and PFs and police, they cordoned and searched villages for guerrillas and conducted occasional company-size sweeps. During January, the 2d Battalion cooperated with the Korean Marines to the south to support a land-clearing operation. In this heavily populated region, with its many VC and VC sympathizers, mines and boobytraps constantly plagued the Marines, causing casualties almost daily. During two months of operations around Hills

22 and 37, for instance, Marines of the 3d Battalion found 99 boobytraps and detonated 22. In contrast, after they moved north into the former 26th Marines TAOR in March, in four months they found only eight boobytraps and set off none.[33]

In January, to supplement the usual ground patrols and ambushes, both the 1st and 26th Marines participated in a new system of heliborne combat patrols codenamed Kingfisher.* This was the latest variant in a long series of quick-reaction heliborne assaults which the Marines had experimented with since 1965. Kingfisher differed from earlier efforts since it was an offensive patrol, intended to seek out the enemy and initiate contact rather than exploit engagements begun by ground units. As Colonel Wilkerson put it, "This is an offensive weapon that goes out and hunt[s] them . . . . They actually invite trouble."[34]

The ground component of the Kingfisher patrol was a reinforced rifle platoon embarked on board three Boeing CH-46D Sea Knight helicopters. Accompanied by four Bell UH-1G Huey Cobra gunships, a North American OV-10 Bronco carrying an aerial observer, and with fixed-wing air support on call, the Marines would patrol the regimental TAOR by air. Usually airborne at first light, when night activities were ending and daytime patrols were preparing to depart, the Kingfisher patrol would search the area of operation for signs of the enemy. The platoon would be landed if the enemy were sighted or if an area bore some signs of enemy presence. When contact was made, the Cobras would provide close air support and the aerial observer would call in fixed-wing air strikes and artillery fire if necessary. While one platoon flew the day's mission, the rest of the Kingfisher company was equipped and ready to move by air to reinforce it, often with extra ammunition placed on the landing pad for quick loading. When the Kingfisher platoon was inserted, the CH-46s would immediately return to the company area, pick up a second platoon, and take off to assist the first platoon or exploit a new contact.[35]

Kingfisher operations required careful coordination. In the 1st Marines, for example, the company assigned to Kingfisher came under direct operational control of the regiment. Each patrol flight included a UH-1E Huey command helicopter. This aircraft carried the company commander, a regimental staff officer in radio contact with the 1st Marines' CP, and the air commander. These officers together would decide when and where to land the troops. Once the platoon was on the ground, the company commander, who remained aloft, directed its movements. Each time a Kingfisher patrol went out, regimental headquarters informed the battalions of the areas within their TAORs that were likely to be investigated, so that the battalions' own patrols could avoid them. The regiment also informed the artillery, which would then suspend all fire at those coordinates unless called upon to support the Kingfisher platoon.[36]

While both the 1st and 26th Marines flew Kingfisher patrols, the first and most spectacularly successful use of the tactic was made by the 1st Marines. Late in December 1969, First Lieutenant William R. Purdy received orders to prepare his Company A of Lieutenant Colonel Godfrey S. Delcuze's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, for "a special mission . . . doing something entirely different from the normal day-to-day walking through rice paddies, seeing no enemy," and hitting boobytraps, an activity to which they had grown too accustomed. The new mission was Kingfisher. Lieutenant Purdy carefully prepared his Marines. He refreshed their training in squad and platoon assault tactics, including squad and fire team rushes, which few of the men had employed since coming to Vietnam. He also drilled them in quick loading and unloading from helicopters, first with chalk outlines of the CH-46D on the company's landing pad and then at Marble Mountain with actual CH-46Ds of Lieutenant Colonel Walter R. Ledbetter, Jr.'s HMM-263, which would furnish the air transport.[37]

Company A ran its first Kingfisher on 2 January. Its assault platoon landed twice, encountering no enemy while experiencing problems with communications and coordination which it and the helicopter crews quickly solved. Lieutenant Purdy also learned anew that terrain seen from the air often was not what it appeared to be. "On our first landing," he recalled, "we landed in what we thought was a large green field; it turned out to be a large green rice paddy with water up to waist deep."[38]

The company launched its second Kingfisher on 6 January. About 0730, five miles or so south of Marble Mountain in a flat, sandy portion of the 2d Battalion's TAOR, the airborne patrol saw some men sitting next to a hut. The smoke that was also observed turned out

*On 26 December 1969, the 1st Marines conducted its first Kingfisher patrol of the regimental TAOR. The platoon was landed on a target in the Ngan Cau area but no contact was made. A debrief was conducted and notes were taken on lessons learned in preparation for future patrols which began in January 1970.

to be from cooking fires. The men reacted with apprehension when the Huey in which Lieutenant Purdy was riding came down for a closer look. After talking the situation over, Purdy and the air commander, Lieutenant Colonel Kermit W. Andrus, S-3 of MAG-16, decided to land the platoon and check the suspects' identities.

As the three CH-46Ds came into the hastily marked landing zone, a heavy volume of small arms fire from the ground removed all questions about who the men were. In fact, the Marines were landing almost in the middle of a sizeable group of armed VC. As Corporal James D. Dalton, a squad leader, put it, "We dropped right down in on 'em—actually we dropped right down on their breakfast table."[39] The VC seemed to be completely surprised, the platoon commander observed:

> . . . We landed right directly on top of people, and . . . they were running right beside the windows of the choppers, and we got a couple of kills right out of the choppers. We were almost within distance to bayonet them as they were running along the windows of the choppers.[40]

Under fire which damaged the hydraulic system of the CH-46D piloted by Lieutenant Colonel Ledbetter, the Marines, benefiting from their many rehearsals, deplaned, quickly organized, and attacked by fire team and squad rushes. Caught completely off balance, the VC began running in all directions. They had strong defenses against a conventional ground attack, but in the words of one Marine "we had dropped inside their perimeter, and they were having to sky [flee] and we were fighting from their positions, every berm we came to all we had to do was drop our rifles on it and start firing."[41] As they scattered across the flats to escape the infantry's grenade and rifle assault, the VC came under fire from the Cobra gunships which, as Corporal Dalton put it, "were tearing them up."[42] When the fight ended about 0855, Company A had counted 15 enemy killed by its own and the Cobras' fire, and the Cobra crews claimed nine more in an area that the infantry did not sweep because of enemy mine and boobytrap markers. The Marines, who had suffered no casualties, also took one prisoner and captured 2 weapons, 17 grenades, and assorted documents and equipment.[43]

By mid-February, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, had

Infantrymen of Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines are seen waiting for a helicopter to pick them up. The Marines are taking part in the Kingfisher operations, which began in January 1970 as heliborne combat patrols to seek out dispersed enemy units.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A372554

launched 18 Kingfisher patrols, 13 by Company A and 5 by Company D. The first three or four Kingfishers produced contacts comparable to that of 6 January, but as time went on the patrols found fewer and fewer targets. The same proved true of the 26th Marines' Kingfishers. Evidently the enemy, after suffering heavily a few times, had reduced his early morning movement and learned to take cover at the sight of helicopters aloft at that time of day. Kingfishers, other than at first light, proved ineffective because the number of civilians in the fields prevented ready identification of and rapid attack upon enemy groups. Nevertheless, Lieutenant Colonel Delcuze, Lieutenant Purdy, and most other officers and men involved in Kingfisher believed it a valuable tactic, especially against the small enemy detachments that operated in the Rocket Belt. Kingfisher had demonstrated that it could inflict significant enemy losses, and even patrols that found no contact reduced the VC's freedom of movement and produced useful intelligence.[44]

While the Kingfisher concept enjoyed much success in the early months of 1970, Lieutenant Colonel William V. H. White, commanding officer of 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, said that too much emphasis was placed on the Kingfisher operation. He felt that since it tied up a dedicated rifle company, which could have been used more constructively, Kingfisher "should have been dropped much sooner than it was or conducted periodically from within one of the battalion combat bases." He said it was an excellent tactical innovation, but the enemy quickly diagnosed the concept of employment and adjusted his activities accordingly.[45]

In mid-February the 1st Marines began the complex process of relieving the 26th Marines so that the latter could stand down from combat for redeployment and deactivation. The operation began on 15 February when the companies of the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines, stationed at Hill 88 and Lang Co Bridge, returned to the battalion rear area on Division Ridge. Elements of the Army's 101st Airborne Division assumed control of that part of the Marines' area of operations. On 1 March, the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, temporarily under the operational control of the 26th Marines, relieved the 3d Battalion and elements of the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines in their arc of positions ranging from Outpost Reno in the south to the Esso Depot and Hai Van Pass in the north. On 6 March, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, extended itself to cover the TAOR of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, including Hills 10 and 41 and the outpost on Hill 270. Meanwhile, the 1st Marines gave up much of the far southwestern portion of its old TAOR, turning over security of the Cau Do Bridge to the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, and its former headquarters cantonment on Hill 55 to the 51st ARVN Regiment.[46]

The replacement of elements of one regiment with elements of another without major interruption of the continuous combat operations needed to protect the Rocket Belt required careful planning and coordination at both regimental and battalion levels. An example of this process was the relief of the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines, by the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines. Planning began on 10 February with an orientation visit by Lieutenant Colonel Frank M. Boyd, commanding officer of the 1st Marines battalion, to Lieutenant Colonel John J. Unterkofler of the 26th Marines unit. The visit included a tour of the departing battalion's fixed positions. Three days later, the executive officers of the two battalions together surveyed the positions and began detailed planning of the relief. On 21 February, the S-3 of Boyd's battalion arrived with an advance party of 46 Marines, some of whom began familiarizing themselves with defenses and terrain while others went for an orientation to the sensor readout sites on Nam O Bridge, Hill 190, and OP Reno. Key staff officers of the relieving battalion established themselves during the same period at Unterkofler's CP and began a round of visits to the Vietnamese district headquarters in the TAOR. Beginning on 24 February, staff officers of the two battalions held daily meetings to hammer out final arangements, while the Headquarters and Service Company of the 26th Marines battalion prepared to move that unit's CP and redeploying personnel to the 1st Shore Party Battalion camp. That movement took place during the last two days of February. On 1 March, riflemen of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines occupied their new forward positions without incident and quickly resumed the routine of patrols and ambushes.[47]

As the 26th Marines stood down, its battalions transferred most of their men to other units of the 1st Marine Division. Many Marines of the 3d battalion, for example, went by truck or helicopter to units of the 1st Marines the day the battalion was relieved. The 26th Marines conducted its last combat patrol in Vietnam on 6 March. On 18 March, after almost two weeks spent tying up administrative and logistic loose ends, representatives of the regiment, which had arrived in

Vietnam in 1967 and received a Presidential Unit Citation for its defense of Khe Sanh in 1968, participated in a farewell ceremony at Da Nang airfield. The following day, 350 remaining personnel, including Colonel Harrell with the regimental colors, boarded aircraft for the flight to El Toro, where they were welcomed home by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Leonard F. Chapman, Jr.[48]

The departure of the 26th Marines left the 1st Marines in charge of the entire Rocket Belt, an area of about 534 square kilometers. The 1st Marines moved its headquarters from Hill 55 to Camp Perdue behind Division Ridge near the center of its enlarged TAOR. The regiment had undergone a change of command in February, when Colonel Edward A. Wilcox, who had served in Korea with the 7th Marines and had just completed a tour as G-2 on the staff of the 1st Marine Division, replaced Colonel Wilkerson. Wilkerson joined the staff of III MAF as Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3.

After the redeployment, the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines held the northern portion of the arc around Da Nang, with one company on CUPP duty and the others on Hill 190, at the Esso Depot, and at Nam O Bridge. The battalion stationed a reinforced platoon at the top of Hai Van Pass. The 1st Battalion held the central sector from Outpost Reno—taken over from the 3d Battalion on 28 March—to a boundary line southeast of Hill 41. The eastern TAOR, now nearly doubled in area, remained the responsibility of the 2d Battalion. These dispositions would continue unchanged for the rest of the year.

The 1st Marines kept tight security of the Rocket Belt, conducting patrols and ambushes and manning lines 24 hours a day. Companies protected command posts, firebases, cantonments, bridges, and observation posts; patrols probed infiltration routes and potential rocket launching sites; and ambushes were set in during the hours of darkness. Battalions occasionally rotated company positions within their TAORs, conducted company-size sweeps, or cordoned off hamlets for searches by PFs and police. High threat periods brought shifts of companies between battalions to strengthen key positions and increased numbers of night patrols and ambushes.[49]

At times, battalions varied their tactics. In June, for instance, the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, operating in heavily boobytrapped country, reduced the number of its daytime patrols and instead began setting up observation posts at strategic points manned by rifle squads and sniper teams. According to the battalion's report, "This change not only increased cognizance of many densely vegetated areas but also decreased the number of Marine boobytrap casualties."*[50]

In brief fire fights, the Marines inflicted losses on small enemy units infiltrating the populated areas and the VC's political and administrative cadre. On 10 February, for example, a patrol from Company E, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, on its way to a night ambush site about three miles south of Marble Mountain, collided unexpectedly with a "large . . . VC/NVA force." The point man, Corporal Ronald J. Schiattone, immediately opened fire and the rest of the unit deployed and attacked. A short fire fight followed, with the enemy trying to break contact while another patrol from Company E moved into blocking positions. The firing died down, and a sweep of the area disclosed four VC/NVA bodies, three AK-47 assault rifles, three M16s, and assorted other weapons and equipment. Drag marks and blood trails indicated that the enemy had suffered more casualties than they had left behind.[51]

A few weeks later, a squad from Company K, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, while patrolling in brushwood country west of Da Nang, "heard movement in thick vegetation and assaulted with grenades and small arms fire." Searching the area, they found a dead enemy with a pistol, grenades, medical gear, rice, and documents. When translated, the documents identified the dead man as a VC district paymaster.[52]

Not all patrol encounters were with the enemy, as a squad of Company B of the 1st Battalion found out. Returning from a patrol west of Hill 10 on the morning of 23 March, the Marines came upon three bull water buffaloes attended by a Vietnamese child. Something about the Marines irritated the animals and, in the words of the battalion spot report:

> All 3 bulls started to charge the point man at a slow pace. VN child was able to retain 2 of the bulls and the 3rd bull kept charging the squad. Sqd leader gave orders to back up

*The tactics that were employed to best control activity in areas of operation often varied based on the judgments of commanders. Colonel William V. H. White, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines from January to May 1970, challenged the view that increased cognizance could be maintained over the battalion's TAOR from strategically placed observation posts. In his opinion the size and nature of the terrain and the thousands of people in it—civilians, VC, RFs, PFs, ARVNs—made it necessary to get out among them to know what was going on." Col William V. H. White, Comments on draft ms, 6Jul83 (Vietnam Comment File).

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373245

Marines from Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines emerge from a heavy-lift CH-53 helicopter in a search and destroy mission in a long-time enemy base area known to the Marines as Charlie Ridge, located 12 miles southwest of the Da Nang Airbase.

and not shoot unless necessary. Bull kept charging and was shot 4 times by a member of the squad. Checked bull out and [it] was found dead. Brought VN child in charge of bull in. S-5 [civic action officer] will fill out reports on the incident and file VN request for payment.[53]

In the many small, violent clashes with the enemy, the young Marines often demonstrated exceptional valor. On 11 April, for instance, a squad of Company E, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, was returning from a night ambush about four miles south of Da Nang when it spotted two enemy soldiers carrying an RPG rocket launcher. The Marines fired at them, killing one who fell into a flooded rice paddy. His companion dived into the water and hid in the reeds and brush while the Marines threw grenades into the paddy to flush him out. Lance Corporal Emilio A. De la Garza, Jr., a 20-year-old machine gunner from East Chicago, Indiana, who had enlisted in 1969 and transferred into the battalion from Marine Corps Exchange duty in Da Nang only the previous December, spotted the fugitive. With the aid of his platoon commander and another Marine, De la Garza started to drag the struggling soldier from the paddy. The enemy soldier reached for a grenade and pulled the pin. De la Garza saw the movement and shouted a warning. He pushed the platoon leader and the other Marine aside and himself took the full force of the explosion, suffering mortal wounds. The second VC/NVA was killed and the RPG launcher with two rounds was captured. Lance Corporal De la Garza, the only Marine casualty, received a posthumous Medal of Honor.[54]

The 1st Marines launched an occasional Category III operation. Typical of these and relatively successful was the reconnaissance in force on Charlie Ridge conducted by the 1st Battalion, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Charles G. Little, from 15 to 27 April. The operation took place in conjunction with the 51st ARVN's Operation Hung Quang 1/32, a two-battalion sweep in an adjacent area, and was based on intelligence reports which located the headquarters of the *Q-84th Main Force Battalion* and other significant enemy units in the jungled hills and ravines of the Charlie Ridge area.

Charlie Ridge was the name given by allied forces to a complex of brush-covered foothills and jungle-blanketed mountains which overlooked the coastal plain some 12-15 miles southwest of Da Nang. Its large area, rough and broken terrain, and thick vegetation made Charlie Ridge an ideal enemy base camp location, and from it infiltrators could easily enter populated areas to the northeast, east, and south or move to convenient rocket launching sites. Since Operation

Oklahoma Hills in early 1969, major allied units had left Charlie Ridge alone except for air strikes, artillery harrassment and interdiction, and the insertion of reconnaissance teams which confirmed continued heavy enemy use of the area. The NVA and VC had honeycombed the hills with headquarters, supply caches, and base camps protected by bunkers, tunnels, and natural caves. In fact, they had developed a surplus of camps so that if Marine or ARVN units invaded one base complex, the enemy easily could move his men and materiel to another. In the words of a defector:

> The people in the base camp do not worry about allied operations. Forewarning of an attack is obvious at the base camp when FWMAF [Free World Military Armed Forces] conduct air strikes, artillery fire, aerial reconnaissance, and when helicopters fly in the area. When an operation takes place in the vicinity of the base camp, the people simply go further back into the mountains and return when the operation is over.[55]

The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, which normally operated along the Vu Gia River just south of Charlie Ridge, had conducted a multi-company reconnaissance in force there in February with meager results. Now Little's battalion, aided by a Hoi Chanh* who promised to lead them to the base camp of the *Q-84th*, would test the enemy's defenses again.

The operation began on 14 April when Company C accompanied by the Hoi Chanh left Hill 41 and marched westward into the hills along a known VC trail. Two days later, a provisional battery of four 4.2-inch mortars drawn from the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 11th Marines, with a security detachment from Company C, landed by helicopter on Hill 502, about 14 miles southwest of Da Nang and established Fire Support Base Crawford. On 17 April, three companies—A and B of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines and L of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines (temporarily attached to the 1st Battalion for this operation)—were lifted by helicopters into three separate landing zones south and west of the firebase. The Marines began a careful meter-by-meter search of previously assigned areas for base camps and supply caches.**

As the Marines had expected, the enemy chose not to fight for the area. Although they took several casualties from booby traps, the patrols met only light opposition from snipers and two- or three-man groups of enemy soldiers. The enemy mortared Company B's CP on the night of the 18th with no effect and four days later made a ground probe of Company A's night position. This ended after an exchange of grenades with no casualties on either side. Company C joined the main body around noon on the 22d, after a march during which it caught and killed several individual VC/NVA.

Soon after landing, the Marine patrols began uncovering the bunkers, huts, tunnels, and weapon caches of several extensive base camps, including one which the Hoi Chanh claimed was the headquarters of the *Q-84th Battalion.* On 24 April, a patrol of Company B, following an enemy communications wire unearthed the previous day, walked into the largest camp yet uncovered in the operation and came under fire from about 30 NVA, evidently the rear guard of a sizeable force trying to evade the Marines. The rest of the company reinforced the patrol and assaulted the camp. One Marine was killed as were two NVA, one of whom was identified from papers on his body as the executive officer of the *102d Battalion, 31st NVA Regiment.*

After the fight on the 24th, the operation continued without major incident. On 27 April, the infantry companies left the area by helicopter, and the following day the mortar detachment razed and abandoned FSB Crawford. During the operation, the 1st Battalion had uncovered 10 base camp sites with large quantities of equipment, including 91 individual and 17 crew-served weapons. It had also found significant caches of documents, including a file from the enemy's *Hoa Vang District Headquarters* which contained lists of members of the VC infrastructure in that district. In 11 contacts with an estimated total of 48 VC and NVA, the Marines had killed 13 while losing two of their own men killed and five wounded, mostly by boobytraps. They had been unable to exploit fully their potentially most significant discovery, the base camp entered by Company B on the 24th, because it lay within the AO of the 51st ARVN Regiment. This frustration was experienced all too often in this complex war with its delicate problems of command and control of allied but independent forces.[56]

Each battalion of the 1st Marines regularly called on the fixed-wing and helicopter squadrons of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing for the full range of support

*A VC who voluntarily surrendered and agreed to aid the GVN, actively or passively. The enemy were encouraged to surrender under the "Chieu Hoi" program. English translation is "Open Arms." The program guaranteed enemy soldiers fair treatment and a place in South Vietnamese society.

**On the 18th, while observing the opening phases of this operation, General Wheeler was injured in the crash of his helicopter in one of the 1st Battalion's LZs.

available to a Marine unit. During April 1970, for example, Marine fixed-wing squadrons flew 71 missions at request of the 3d Battalion, including 16 close air support strikes. Attack aircraft supporting the battalion expended 197 tons of bombs and napalm during the month. Helicopters of MAG-16 flew 26 medical evacuations for the battalion and 21 visual reconnaissance missions, besides transporting a total of 526 passengers.[57] The other battalions called for comparable quantities of air support, although the 2d Battalion, operating in a densely populated TAOR, requested few fixed-wing strikes. Instead, during April, it began using a night helicopter patrol, codenamed Night Hawk, which performed a function similar to the daytime Kingfisher. Consisting of a CH-46D equipped with a night observation device and two .50-caliber machine guns and accompanied by two Cobras, the Night Hawk patrolled the TAOR during the hours of darkness hunting targets of opportunity. Unlike Kingfisher the Night Hawk did not include air assault infantry.[58]

The 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, provided direct artillery support for the 1st Marines, with one or more batteries usually assigned in direct support of each battalion. When necessary, other Marine batteries could add their fire, as could warships stationed off the coast. Since the enemy in the 1st Marines' TAOR rarely massed in large groups or maintained contact with the Marines for any length of time, the batteries supporting the regiment delivered mostly harassing and interdiction fire or shelled pre-selected and pre-cleared grids in response to sensor activations or sighting reports from observation posts. The 3d Battalion, 1st Marines whose TAOR consisted mostly of unpopulated mountains and foothills, made the most use of artillery. In April, for instance, artillery supporting this battalion fired 15,914 rounds at harassing and interdiction targets. In addition, naval gunfire provided 2,440 supporting rounds. The 2d Battalion, on the other hand, could use artillery in only a few portions of its heavily populated TAOR.[59]

For the artillery batteries supporting the 1st Marines, and indeed for the regiment itself, a primary mission was the prevention of or quick reaction to VC/NVA rocket attacks on Da Nang. Since 1967, when the rocket attacks began, the Marines had gradually developed a system of prevention and response in which infantry and artillery worked in close coordination and mutual support. To prevent launchings, the regiments guarding the Rocket Belt saturated it with patrols and ambushes; most of the day and night small-unit activities of the 1st and 26th Marines had this as a major objective. The infantry manned or furnished security for observation posts which tried to spot infiltrators coming into the area or, failing that, the flashes of rockets being fired. By carefully plotting the sites of past firings, the Marines had pinpointed many of the enemy's most likely launching positions. They interdicted these each night, either by infantry patrols or by artillery bombardment, sometimes using both against the same area at different times. In the words of Colonel Ralph A. Heywood, Colonel Harrell's predecessor in command of the 26th Marines:

> We protected the Rocket Belt with artillery. We fired . . . some 1100 to 2100 rounds a night, at known . . . rocket launching sites, and every time we'd get a piece of intelligence that would tell us that 100 people are carrying rockets over the hill, why we'd shoot at that also . . . . When we get a sensor reading, we shoot it.[60]

In spite of patrols and artillery fire, the enemy still managed to slip in from the mountains, set up their rockets, and fire, but they did so at their increasing peril. As soon as installations reported impacts or patrols or outposts reported rocket flashes, fire direction centers would order counterbattery fire against previously designated launch sites. The batteries kept their guns aimed at these coordinates when not assigned other targets. Observation posts would then plot from the flashes the estimated firing position, clearance would be requested for the area from Vietnamese authorities, and usually within two to four minutes of the first launching, rounds would begin falling on the launch site and likely enemy escape routes from it. If infantry patrols or ambushes were too close to the plotted position for safe artillery engagement, the nearest patrol would attack at once toward the site.

As soon as possible after the attack, infantry would secure the launching site while a rocket investigating team from the 11th Marines examined it and reported on every aspect of the incident—rocket positions and lauching devices, evidence of advance preparation of the site, estimated number of missiles fired, equipment left on the scene, enemy casualties found, and any other information which might help the Marines prevent future attacks. By mid-1970, this program substantially had reduced both the number of rocket incidents and the number of missiles discharged. At times, quick reaction forced the enemy to leave unfired rockets behind as they fled a site under infantry

or artillery counterattack. Nevertheless, in the first six months of 1970, the VC/NVA still managed to fire 85 rockets into the Da Nang area in 12 separate attacks. These missiles caused allied civilian and military casualties of 28 killed and 60 wounded.[61]

The 5th Marines: Thuong Duc, An Hoa, and Arizona Territory

South of the 1st Marines' TAOR and west of that of the Korean Marines, the 5th Marines defended a TAOR dominated by the confluence of two major rivers. The first of these, the Vu Gia, flows out of the mountains in a generally west-to-east direction through a valley dotted with villages and rice paddies, and overlooked to the north by Charlie Ridge. The major east-west highway, Route 4 (also known as Route 14), runs from Route 1 in the east to the western extremity of the Thuong Duc corridor, which was named after the town and Vietnamese Special Forces camp which guarded its western approaches.

In the flatlands about 10 miles east of Thuong Duc, the Vu Gia River flows into the second major river, the Thu Bon. This river is formed in the western Que Son Valley by the convergence of several smaller streams and bends northwestward and then northeastward to meet the Vu Gia. East of their confluence, the two rivers take on a new name, the Ky Lam. Continuing eastward, the name of the river changes a few more times until it finally meanders past Hoi An through a maze of channels and islets into the South China Sea.

Weary Marines from Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines patrol boobytrap-infested Go Noi Island. The Marine wearing the cross carries an M60 machine gun.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A374037

The Vu Gia and Thu Bon come together in the midst of a broad plain bounded on the northwest by the foothills of Charlie Ridge, on the west by the mountains of the enemy's Base Area 112, and on the southeast by hills rising into the Que Son Range. Marines called the portion of the plain between the Vu Gia and the Thu Bon the Arizona Territory. South and east of the Thu Bon lies the An Hoa Basin, site of a once-promising industrial project and in 1970 of the 5th Marines' combat base. Northeast of the An Hoa Basin and just south of the Ky Lam River, Go Noi Island, a fertile but enemy infested stretch of hamlets and paddies girdled and cut up by streams, extended from the 5th Marines' TAOR into that of the Korean Marines. From late May to early November 1969, in Operation Pipestone Canyon, the Koreans, along with elements of the 1st Marines and the 51st ARVN Regiment, had scoured Go Noi Island. They rooted the VC and NVA out of tunnels, caves, and trenches from which they had operated for years, killing some 800. Marine engineers and an Army land-clearing platoon then bulldozed the vegetation and crushed bunkers and fortifications. In spite of this and other allied pacification efforts, the VC guerrillas and political infrastructure remained strong in villages throughout the 5th Marines' TAOR, and parties of infiltrators crossed and recrossed it constantly.

The 5th Marines, commanded by Colonel Noble L. Beck until 11 February, then by Colonel Ralph F. Estey, began the year with the 1st Battalion covering the Thuong Duc corridor, the 2d Battalion protecting Liberty Road and Bridge* and conducting reconnaissance in force operations of western Go Noi Island, and the 3d Battalion operating in the Arizona Territory. Late in January, the 3d Battalion exchanged areas

*Liberty Road and Liberty Bridge had been worked on for several years by Marines and Seabees. They provided a direct road link between An Hoa and Hill 55 and Da Nang, vital both for military purposes and for the eventual and still hoped for development of the An Hoa industrial complex. Liberty Bridge, an 825-foot monsoon-proof span across the Thu Bon had been built by the Seabees to replace an earlier bridge washed away by a flood in 1967. It had been open to traffic since 30 March 1969. Simmons, "Marine Operations in Vietnam, 1969-72," p. 129.

of operation with the 1st Battalion, taking over the defense of the Thuong Duc corridor, while the 1st Battalion moved to the Arizona.

The pattern of battalion activities varied in the different areas of operation. In the Thuong Duc corridor, the 1st and then the 3d Battalion guarded the valley and Route 4 from strongpoints on Hills 65, 25, and 52. They saturated the countryside with patrols and ambushes, supported the CUPPs and CAPs working in the hamlets along the highway, and occasionally conducted a Category III operation on Charlie Ridge. The companies of the 2d Battalion manned an outpost at Liberty Bridge and cooperated with Vietnamese RFs, to guard the highway, while launching company-size sweeps into western Go Noi Island. In the Arizona Territory, the battalions defended no fixed positions, since this was and long had been hard-core enemy country. Instead, companies moved continually from place to place, patrolling, setting up night ambushes, and searching for food and supply caches. They conducted frequent multi-company sweeps and set up blocking forces for sweeps by battalions of the 51st ARVN.[62]

In January, the 5th Marines began using Kingfisher patrols, and, as was the case with the 1st Marines, the first few of these operations caught the enemy off balance and produced significant contact. On 13 January, for example, an OV-10 and a ground outpost on the hills west of the Arizona Territory sighted armed enemy near the south bank of the Vu Gia River. An airborne platoon from Captain William M. Kay's Company I, 3d Battalion, landed under fire and engaged them. Captain Kay decided to reinforce the platoon, which seemed to have encountered a large force. Helicopters of Lieutenant Colonel Charles R. Dunbaugh's HMM-364 picked up a second platoon of the Kingfisher company and landed it about two kilometers west of the engaged element. The two platoons then swept toward each other while the OV-10 directed fixed-wing air strikes and the Cobras hunted targets of opportunity. A CH-46D pilot reported that "the enemy on the ground had been caught completely off guard and completely unprepared, and they were . . . just running in every direction."[63] The two-platoon action lasted over two hours. At the end of it, at a cost of two wounded, the Marines had killed 10 enemy and taken one prisoner. They had captured two AK-47s and assorted equipment.[64]

In March, the regiment realigned its battalions in response to the Keysone Bluejay withdrawals. Lieutenant Colonel Johan S. Gestson's 3d Battalion extended its TAOR to the northeast to a point east of Route 1. It defended this enlarged TAOR, which included the strongpoints at Hills 37 and 55, as a combined area of operations with the 51st ARVN Regiment which placed its command post on Hill 55 and occupied Hill 37 with its 3d Battalion. On 6 March, Gestson's battalion also took command of the 1st Marines' CUPP company, Company M, the platoons of which operated in hamlets around Hills 37 and 55. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Savage's 1st Battalion, moved its companies by helicopter to positions in the SSDC where the battalion, now directly responsible to 1st Marine Division Headquarters, assumed the function of division reserve. To compensate for its departure, the 2d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Frederick D. Leder, enlarged its area of operations to cover the Arizona Territory as well as western Go Noi Island, Liberty Bridge, and the An Hoa Basin. These deployments continued in effect until the next troop withdrawal in late August and September.[65]

From its new positions at Hill 34 and Dai La Pass, the 1st Battalion for the next several months protected the SSDC while providing one or two of its companies in rotation for the division's Pacifier operation. Officially defined as "a swift striking, highly mobile heliborne task force which is able to react to any situation on very short notice," Pacifier consisted of an infantry company and four flights of aircraft each capable of lifting a platoon and almost identical in composition to the Kingfisher package.*[66] Instituted in March, the Pacifier infantry force could go into action on 10 minutes' notice at any time. Its aircraft were kept on standby for takeoff within 15 minutes of the order being given.

While it used a similar aircraft package, the Pacifier differed from Kingfisher in several important respects. The Pacifier functioned more as a reaction force than as a patrol, either striking predetermined targets or responding to ground contacts. Usually a longer time elapsed between the selection of the objective and the actual launching of the mission. Most important, in contrast to Kingfisher, which almost always went into unprepared landing zones, Pacifier missions generally started with air and artillery preparation

*Each Pacifier flight was composed of one UH1E command and control ship, two OV-10s carrying forward air controllers (airborne), three CH-46s for troop transport, two F-4Hs for LZ preparation, two F-4Hs for combat air patrol, and four Cobra gunships.

of the landing site a minimum of 5-10 minutes before the troop carriers arrived. This reduced the danger of ambushes in the landing zone, but, in the opinion of some Marine participants, sacrificed the element of surprise that Kingfisher often gained.*[67]

Between 15 March and 21 June, the 1st Battalion conducted 51 Pacifier operations, usually against preplanned objectives but sometimes to reinforce ground units in contact with the enemy. For example, on 31 May, elements of Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, operating northeast of An Hoa, sighted 18 enemy moving southward. The company at once established a blocking position and called for a Pacifier. Company A of the 1st Battalion, on Pacifier duty that day, responded. With Cobra gunfire and a ground assault, the Pacifier company and Company H killed five VC/NVA, took one prisoner, and captured an AK-47.[68]

On 12 June, the division enlarged Pacifier by adding to it a second rifle company from the reserve battalion with the same aviation support as the first. Later in the month, the battalion began experimenting with multi-company operations in which Pacifier companies and companies from other battalions worked together, directed by a skeleton battalion command post. The first of these took place on 20-21 June in the northern Arizona Territory. Companies B and C of the 1st Battalion cooperated with Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, in a foray which killed several enemy and uncovered caches of corn and weapons. From 23-26 June, the same units launched a second sweep northeast of Liberty Bridge along the Thu Bon River in an area where intelligence indicated the enemy might be massing to attack Hill 55. Although hampered by heat casualties and boobytraps, the companies, supported by four tanks, saturated the area with night ambushes and daylight helicopter operations. Their efforts netted only one NVA/VC killed and one detainee.[69]

While Pacifiers never matched the dramatic surprise contacts of the early Kingfishers, they did reduce the enemy's ability to mass forces within the division TAOR and inflicted substantial casualties. In the period from March to June, Pacifier operations killed 156 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong and captured 18 prisoners and 39 weapons, as well as large quantities of food, ordnance, and documents. Marine casualties in these operations totaled two killed and 21 wounded.[70]

While the 5th Marines' 1st Battalion ran its Pacifiers, Lieutenant Colonel Leder's 2d Battalion pursued the enemy from the Arizona Territory to Go Noi Island. The battalion rotated its companies between relatively static security operations at Liberty Bridge and reconnaissance in force and search and destroy missions. In April, for instance, Company E began the month guarding Liberty Bridge while Company H protected Liberty Road; Company F conducted a reconnaissance in force in the Arizona Territory and Company G acted as regimental reserve with one of its squads positioned at the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion's observation post on Hill 119 northeast of An Hoa. On 8 April, Company G took over protection of Liberty Bridge while Company E switched to guarding Liberty Road. Four days later, Company H began a reconnaissance in force in the Arizona Territory. From 16-20 April, Companies F and H and a battalion command group, supported by an RF platoon from Duc Duc District and four Marine tanks, conducted a search and clear operation in the Arizona area. After the end of this operation, Company F continued patrolling the Arizona until the 27th, when it moved to An Hoa to act as regimental reserve. During the month, some of the companies in turn were helicoptered to Da Nang for 48 hours of rest and recreation.[71]

On 8 May at 0145, Company G while guarding Liberty Bridge came under fire from 60mm and 80mm mortars, B-40 rockets, and small arms, followed by a ground assault by an enemy force of undetermined size. The company drove off the attackers, who wounded 21 Marines and RFs. Anticipating that the enemy would retreat southward from the bridge toward the foothills of the Que Sons, the battalion moved a platoon from Company E to block the route and called in a Pacifier platoon. The Marine units located the withdrawing enemy, engaged them, and killed 10.[72]

During the weeks following the fight at Liberty

*Lieutenant General Bernard E. Trainor, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines in the late summer and fall of 1970, observed, however, that the "Pacifier operations were sufficiently successful in keeping the VC/NVA off balance . . . ." Based on the best available intelligence, a Pacifier element would swoop down upon a selected target: "If a target turned out to be unproductive (a 'dry-hole' in the parlance of the time), little time was wasted beating the bush. The troops would be picked up and a strike would be made on a pre-briefed lower priority alternate target from the list of such targets maintained by the Pacifier." General Trainor concluded that "Over time, the air/ground Pacifier team operated like a well-oiled machine. Detailed orders were never necessary. All hands knew what they were to do—even with the sketchiest intelligence. Common sense proved more useful than the five-paragraph combat order." LtGen Bernard E. Trainor, Comments on draft ms, 22Nov85 (Vietnam Comment File).

Bridge, the 2d Battalion conducted a series of multi-company cordon and search operations. In cooperation with RF/PF elements and units of the National Police Field Force, the battalion tried to move suddenly on hamlets or villages known to be occupied by VC/NVA or enemy sympathizers. On 13 May at first light, the battalion command post with Companies H and F, a RF reconnaissance platoon, and four Marine tanks (often used by the 2d Battalion in these operations to break down vegetation and explode enemy mines in heavily boobytrapped hamlets) cordoned Le Nam (1), a hamlet about two miles southeast of Liberty Bridge. After the Marines surrounded the hamlet, a Marine platoon and the RF platoon together conducted a systematic search. In the words of the battalion report, "The VC/NVA were routed from numerous well concealed spider holes which laced the village." In sporadic fighting, the Marines and RFs killed two enemy and captured 24, three of them NVA doctors, while detaining 65 suspects. They also captured weapons, documents, and large amounts of hospital equipment. As the VC/NVA fled the hamlet, a Pacifier platoon called in by the battalion killed eight more of them.

Four days later, acting on information gained from interrogation of prisoners taken at Le Nam (1), the battalion cordoned and searched the neighboring hamlet of Le Nam (2), again using two of its own companies and this time a PF platoon. Again, they achieved surprise, routing the enemy from his holes and tunnels, killing six and capturing 18 along with rifles, grenades, a radio, documents, and medical gear.[73]

In June, the battalion shifted its cordon and search activities to the Arizona Territory. In an operation lasting from 14-16 June, the battalion command post, with Companies E and G and a National Police Field Force unit, cordoned and searched My Hiep (1) in the northwestern Arizona while a company of the 3d Battalion blocked enemy escape routes north across the Vu Gia River. Lifting into their cordon positions by helicopter just after dawn, the Marines started a careful search of the hedgerows and dense bamboo thickets. In 48 hours, they flushed out and killed three VC/NVA and captured 22, along with a haul of rifles, grenades, and documents. The prisoners taken included four soldiers of the *Q-83d Main Force Battalion* and a number of ranking members of the VC.

On 30 June, the same two companies with an Armed Propaganda Team from Duc Duc District moved in by helicopter to search Football Island, a favorite enemy harboring and food storage area on the west bank of the Thu Bon River about three miles north of An Hoa. After air strikes to prepare the landing area, the command helicopter and the gunships supporting the operation sighted about 20 enemy troops trying to escape across the Thu Bon, some swimming and the rest in a boat. According to the battalion report, "The command and control helicopter immediately took them under fire and then directed the gunships to the target area. In echelons the Cobras directed devastating fire from miniguns and automatic grenade launchers on the helpless and floundering enemy," killing an estimated 15.[74]

In the Thuong Duc corridor and south of Hill 55, Lieutenant Colonel Gestson's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines carried on an unspectacular but steady campaign to keep enemy infiltrators out of the villages and protect Route 4. From fortified positions on Hills 52, 25, 65, and 37, the companies of the battalion saturated the valley daily with squad- and platoon-size ambushes and patrols. They supported daily minesweeps by the engineers along Route 540 (Liberty Road) where it ran southward through the battalion's TAOR past Hill 37, and periodically covered engineer road sweeps westward along Route 4, opening the highway for ARVN truck convoys resupplying the Thuong Duc CIDG camp. In cooperation with CUPP units of both the 1st and 5th Marines, the battalion conducted frequent company-size cordon and search operations of targeted hamlets and villages.

The battalion's contact with the enemy consisted largely of brief, inconclusive exchanges of fire and the discovery or detonation of boobytraps. The boobytrap plague reached such proportions that on 19 April battalion headquarters designated four areas within the TAOR, all of them located east of Hill 65, as too heavily mined for penetration by routine small-unit activities. Operations in these areas were to be conducted only in daylight and with specific authorization from the battalion or a higher headquarters.[75]

The steady routine of small operations inflicted cumulative losses, both friendly and enemy, which over time added up to signifuicant figures. During April, for example, a month typical of the first half of 1970, the battalion claimed a total of 15 VC and NVA killed by its own fire and five more killed by supporting arms. The battalion also captured five AK-47s, eight pounds of documents, and 720 pounds of rice, along with other enemy ordnance and equipment. Its patrols

found 11 boobytraps and detonated seven. During the same period, the battalion lost two Marines killed in action, one dead of wounds, and 37 wounded.[76]

The 3d Battalion shared its area of operations with the ARVN 51st Regiment. The battalions of this regiment were in the field constantly, conducting cordon and search operations, sweeping the hills around the Thuong Duc CIDG camp, and supporting American and ARVN engineer units in clearing and improving the highways. Elements of the 3d Battalion regularly worked in cooperation with the ARVN units. On 7 June, in an unusually successful example of such cooperation, a reinforced Company K took up blocking positions in the Chau Son area about a mile southwest of Hill 55 while three companies of the 51st, supported by armored personnel carriers, swept toward them. At about 1000, the South Vietnamese collided with an estimated platoon of VC. In the ensuing firefight, the ARVN claimed 15 enemy killed and 9 captured along with 5 weapons. Marines of Company K accounted for three more VC trying to escape the ARVN sweep.[77]

Aviation and artillery played important roles in the 5th Marines' operations. Maneuvering in the Arizona Territory in February, the 1st Battalion had attached to it forward air controllers from both fixed wing and helicopter squadrons so that they could "enlighten each other and more readily advise the Battalion about all phases of air support."[78] The battalions employed artillery fire, mostly from the batteries of the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, primarily for harassment and interdiction. In the Thuong Duc corridor, the 1st and later the 3d Battalion coordinated steady shelling of infiltration trails and rocket launching sites on Charlie Ridge, selecting targets from sensor readings and from daily analysis of intelligence reports. Patrols on Charlie Ridge often discovered fresh enemy graves along the trails—mute testimony to the effectiveness of this fire.[79]

Even in this period of low-intensity warfare, the Marines made extensive use of their supporting arms. In April 1970, for example, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, had 17 close air support missions flown for it, which dropped 76 tons of ordnance and called upon aerial observers and gunships on "numerous" occasions. In the same period, artillery expended 3,051 rounds in fire missions in support of the battalion and 8,927 rounds for harassment and interdiction. In the same month, the 3d Battalion employed 19 tactical air strikes, while the artillery fired over 2,800 rounds in its area of operations. Most artillery missions were fired in response to intelligence reports concerning enemy locations or to interdict movement on trails habitually used by the enemy.[80]

The 7th Marines: The Que Son Mountains

Southeast of the An Hoa Basin, the land rises into the Que Son Mountains. In 1970, this rugged, jungle-covered range began the southwestern portion of the 1st Marine Division TAOR and extended northeastward toward Hoi An. To the south it overlooks the villages and fertile farm land of the Que Son Valley, also known as the Nui Loc Son Basin. From its beginnings at Hiep Duc in the southwest, this valley opens northeastward into the coastal plain. Running through the valley in an easterly and then northeasterly direction, a small river, the Ly Ly, marked the boundary between Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces and also between the TAORs of the 1st Marine Division and the Americal Division.

This region had experienced much warfare. The ravines, gorges, and caves of the Que Son Mountains hid extensive enemy base camps and headquarters complexes within easy striking range of the coast. The Que Son Valley, with many of its villages and hamlets controlled by the VC, constituted a major enemy food source. Detachments of VC/NVA combat and supply troops infested the area, and, particularly in its far southwestern reaches, Communist main force elements were to be encountered in substantial strength and willing to fight.

Marines had fought their first battle in the Que Son Valley back in December 1965 in Operation Harvest Moon. They returned in 1966 in Operation Double Eagle and Colorado and again in 1967 in Operation Union, but the area was not part of the 1st Division's TAOR at this time. As North Vietnamese pressure along the DMZ pulled the Marines northward, the Army took over responsibility for it. In August 1969 the Army handed defense of the northern portion of the Que Son Valley back to the Marines, with the Ly Ly River as the new boundary between the 7th Marines and the Americal Division.

Before the boundary between the 7th Marines and Americal Division was moved south from the foothills of the Que Sons to the Ly Ly River, the Marines and Army units encountered many problems controlling enemy movement through the foothills. Major General Lloyd B. Ramsey, who commanded the Americal at the time, recalled why the change was made:

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A374051

Marine SSgt J. W. Sedberry from Company F, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines examines a primitive handcrafted enemy explosive device in a village in "Happy Valley," some 20 miles from Da Nang. Since 1965, Marines found the valley anything but happy.

> Because of the problems we were having due to the boundary being in the hills, I made a recommendation to General Nickerson that either I move north and control the mountains and the valley or the Marines move south. General Nickerson made the decision to move the Marines south. Based on what he told me I believe he was concerned about giving me any more area because I was already overextended—it was just a matter of degree.[81]

The 7th Marines moved into the valley. In January of the following year, the regiment's TAOR included the Que Son Mountains, the northern Que Son Valley, and a portion of the coastal plain sandwiched between the Korean Marines on the north and the Americal Division to the south.[82]

The 7th Marines had inherited three combat bases from the Army, all located on or near Route 535, a highway which runs westward from Route 1 to Que Son District Headquarters. There the road branches, with Route 535 continuing southward into the Americal sector while the northern fork, Route 536, actually little more than a foot path, climbs over a pass through the Que Son Mountains into Antenna Valley* which in turn opens out northwestward into the valley of the Thu Bon River. LZ Baldy, the easternmost of the three bases, located at the intersection of Route 535 with Route 1 about 20 miles south of Da Nang, could accommodate a brigade and was the 7th Marines' Headquarters. Firebase Ross, just west of Que Son District Town, commanded the Que Son Valley while beyond it, FSB Ryder, on its hilltop in the Que Sons, covered both the Que Son Valley and Antenna Valley.

The 7th Marines began the year under the command of Colonel Gildo S. Codispoti. A combat veteran of World War II and Korea who had taken over the regiment early in July 1969, Colonel Codispoti

*How the valley, an ordinary stretch of hamlets and paddies, received this name is not definitely known. According to one story, Marine units operating there had to extend the antennas of their radios in order to communicate with their bases across the high ridges.

continued in command until 1 March 1970. His replacement, Colonel Edmund G. Derning, Jr., a World War II Marine Raider, came to the regiment after tours as Assistant Chief of Staff, G-4, of III MAF and Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1, of the 1st Marine Division.

Throughout the first half of 1970, the regiment deployed its battalions to block the enemy's infiltration routes, deny access to the sources of food in the Que Son Valley, engage and destroy combat forces, and find and neutralize base camps. Unlike the 1st and 5th Marines, which assigned each of their battalions a permanent area of operations, each containing a number of fixed installations to be protected, the 7th Marines permanently garrisoned only its three main bases—LZ Baldy and FSBs Ross and Ryder. It divided its TAOR into three large areas of operation. The first of these consisted of the flatlands around LZ Baldy. The Que Son Valley with Firebases Ross and Ryder constituted the second while the third encompassed the Que Son Mountains and the Phu Loc Valley along their northern slope. Operations varied in the three areas of operations dependent upon the terrain and nature of the threat. The 7th Marines rotated battalions between areas, while periodically moving individual companies to the rear for 48 hours' rehabilitation before returning them to the field.

Thus the 2d Battalion protected LZ Baldy and the hamlets around it until the end of January when the 3d Battalion replaced it. In early April, the 1st Battalion took over the area, staying until the end of June. In the Que Son Valley, the 1st Battalion guarded Ross and Ryder until early March when the 2d Battalion came in to remain through June. The Que Son Mountains and the Phu Loc Valley received repeated attention from all three battalions, culminating in late May and early June in a major search and destroy operation by the 3d Battalion.

Under orders from the division, the 7th Marines twice sent units to reinforce the Rocket Belt against predicted enemy offensives. On 24 January, the 2d Battalion redeployed from the Phu Loc Valley to the southern part of the TAOR of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. It remained there until the end of February. On 27 April, two companies of the 3d Battalion went to the same area, staying for about a month.[83]

In the eastern flats around Baldy and in the Que Son Valley, the battalions concentrated on Category II operations, small-unit patrols and ambushes, to keep the enemy out of the villages and hamlets and to thwart mortar, rocket, and sapper attacks on allied bases. In the Que Son Mountains, the battalions conducted Category III searches for base camps and supply caches to prevent the VC and NVA from massing men and equipment for offensives. In each of these areas of operation, elements of the 7th Marines had frequent and sometimes costly contact with the enemy.

Significant actions occurred quite close to LZ Baldy. About noon on 14 January, for example, a squad from Company F, 2d Battalion, sighted 15 enemy soldiers in an area of rice paddies and treelines two and one-half miles northwest of the base. The Communists were about 100 meters away from the patrol, moving toward the northwest. They wore green uniforms and carried weapons. The Marines fired at them, killing three, and pursued the rest as they fled. Then other enemy opened up on the patrol from three sides with automatic weapons. The fight rapidly expanded. Two other Marine patrols maneuvered to join the action, and came under fire from automatic rifles, machine guns, and grenade launchers. They replied with their own weapons. Company F's commander, First Lieutenant Charles M. Lohman, brought the rest of his company into the fight and called in artillery and air support. Before the action ended, three OV-10s, four helicopter gunships, two F-4 jets, and a Shadow AC-119 gunship had blasted the enemy with machine guns, high explosive and white phosphorous rockets, and napalm. Late in the afternoon, the enemy broke contact and dispersed, leaving behind 10 dead and two AK-47s. Company F had two Marines killed and three wounded.[84]

Smaller contacts around Baldy also took their toll of Marines. In a single day, 26 June, the 1st Battalion had five men killed in supposedly routine patrols and ambushes. One died in a grenade explosion while wrestling with an enemy he was trying to capture; three more were lost in a grenade and machine gun attack on their squad's night position, and another was killed when enemy sappers made a grenade attack on a platoon command post.[85]

In the Que Son Valley, the enemy kept even heavier pressure on the 7th Marines. Here terrain and military/political boundaries favored the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. About three and one-half miles south of Firebase Ross, a range of hills marks the lower edge of the Que Son Valley. The range includes Nui Loc Son, the ridge that gives the valley its alternate name. Although the boundary between the 7th Marines and the Americal Division had been moved south

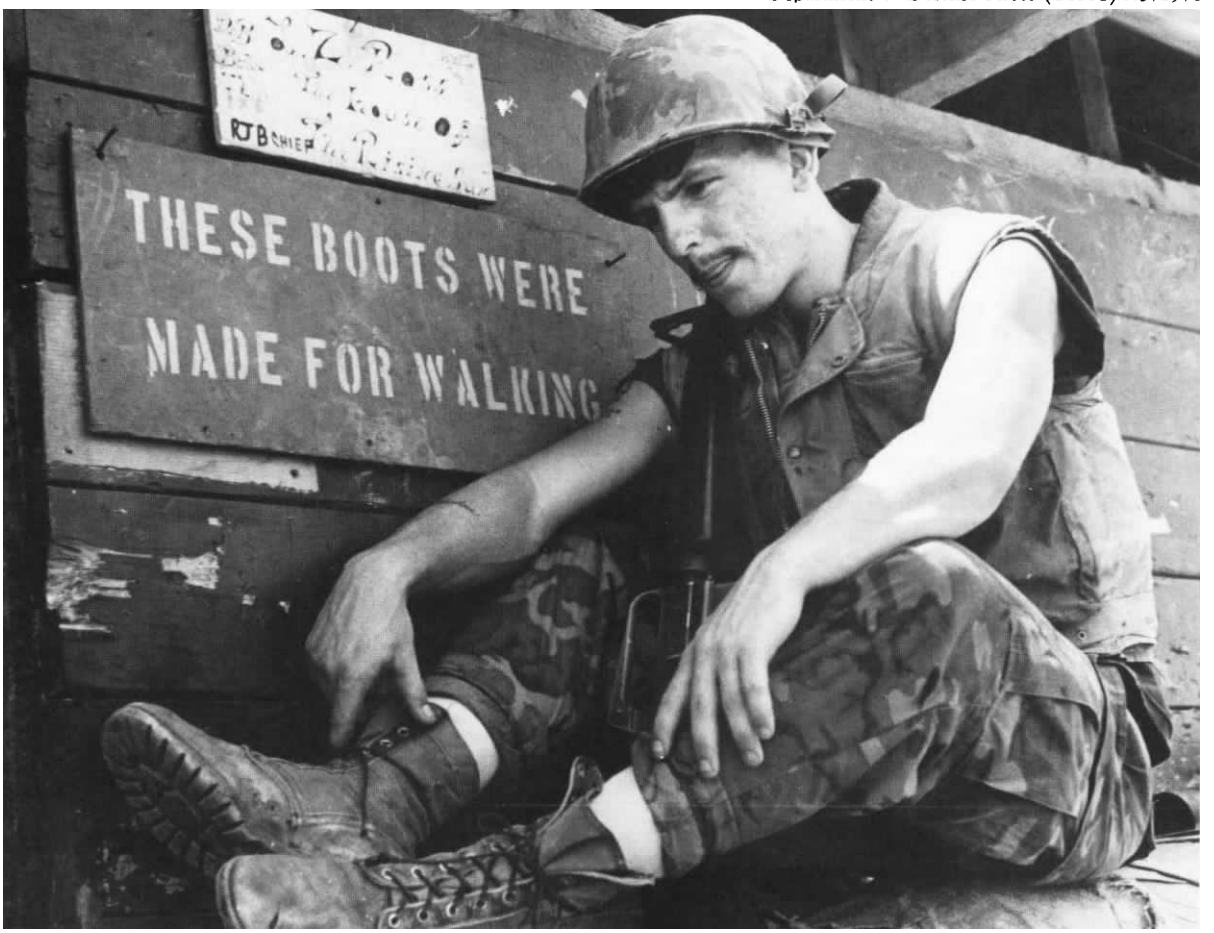
to the Ly Ly River, the enemy continued to use foothills along the boundary and areas between Marine and Army operating units to assemble men and supplies for attacks on Firebase Ross and Marines operating in the Que Son Valley.

On 6 January, sappers of the *409th Local Force VC Battalion*, supported by a mortar detachment from an unidentified VC or NVA unit, came out of the southern hills to attack Firebase Ross.[86] American and South Vietnamese intelligence agencies had tracked the sappers' movement northward from their usual area of operation in Quang Tin Province and had warned Ross that an attack might be imminent. On the night of 6 January, the defenders of the base numbered about 560 Marines: Headquarters and Service Company and Companies A and B of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines; Battery K, 4th Battalion, 13th Marines; elements of Battery G, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines; the 2d Platoon, 1st 8-Inch Howitzer Battery, and small detachments of support troops. Although rifle companies normally were not stationed at Ross, Company A had come in from the field to prepare for CUPP duty, and two platoons of Company B had been called in on 5 January in response to the reported enemy threat. The Marines of Company B were to attack southward with two platoons of PFs from Que Son District on the morning of the 6th in an effort to forestall the enemy's anticipated blow.[87]

The enemy struck first. During heavy monsoon rains which masked their approach, between 20 and 30 NVA and VC regulars in five-man teams crept up to the outer perimeter wire and quietly cut their way through at several points. Dressed in black or green shorts and bandannas, barefooted, and laden with grenades and

LCpl Ron J. Barrett rests his feet on a sandbag at Firebase Ross. Barrett, a member of a helicopter support team, is waiting for the resupply helicopter to appear. Marine humor is reflected on the signs above. One reads "LZ Ross, The House of the Rising Sun."

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A372976



satchel charges, they entered the perimeter without alerting the defenders. At 0130, the first rounds of a supporting mortar barrage* exploded on the base and sappers outside the perimeter opened fire with RPGs and small arms. The infiltrators went into action, hurling explosives into bunkers, Southeast Asia huts, offices, and vehicles. They concentrated on the countermortar radar, the battalion combat operations center, and the artillery positions.

The first mortar shells, grenades, and satchel charges caught many Marines asleep in their tents and huts. Some first learned of the attack when explosions hurled them from their bunks or brought roofs and walls down on top of them. Scrambling to collect weapons, helmets, and flak jackets, the Marines—officers, headquarters clerks, radar technicians, artillerymen, and riflemen alike—bolted for bunkers and fighting holes. They began trying to collect and care for their wounded while firing rifles and throwing grenades at sappers who seemed to be everywhere. In the initial confusion, the attackers put the countermortar radar out of action with a grenade in the generator. Perhaps five of them penetrated into the battalion headquarters area. One, spotted near the S-4 hut, shot a Marine sergeant and fled into the showers where other Marines cut him down. Two more walked in the front entrance of the Company A office as the company commander and his chief clerk went out the back door. Immediately thereafter, the office blew up taking the sappers with it, either hit by a mortar shell or destroyed by a charge planted by the sappers.

The defenders rallied rapidly. After clearing out infiltrators of their own living areas, the rifle companies deployed around the perimeter to block further penetrations. Captain Edward T. Clark III, commanding the 1st Battalion's Headquarters and Service Company, ordered his telephone operators and runners to check the perimeter positions and locate any breakthroughs. Then he requested authority from the battalion to send infantry to close the gaps. First Lieutenant Louis R. Ambort, commander of Company B which furnished most of the reaction forces, recalled: "We reacted by pulling squads off the more secure part of our sector of the perimeter and pushing them down head-on into the penetration area and getting it secured and then pursuing with small teams out into the wire to actually kill the enemy as he was running."[88] The quick reaction of the infantry and other units stopped the enemy short of the artillery positions.

Within minutes of the first mortar burst, Marine supporting arms had joined in the action. The gun and mortar batteries at Ross, assisted by batteries at FSB Ryder and LZ Baldy, opened fire on pre-cleared and pre-selected countermortar and other defensive targets, firing hundreds of high explosive, white phosphorous, and illumination rounds. Responding to a report from the PFs at Que Son District Headquarters that enemy reinforcements were massing about 150 meters north of the firebase, Captain Clark "requested a fire mission—81 fire mission—on this position and worked it up and down . . . adjusting it."[89] Preemptive fires of this sort kept the enemy from following up the sappers' initial penetration of the American lines. The low ceiling and the close proximity of friendly villages prevented the defenders from calling in air strikes, but a flareship circled overhead to supplement the artillery in illuminating the battlefield.

After 0330, the fighting diminished. By this time, most of the sappers who had infiltrated the base had been killed and the enemy had not reinforced them. Marines began combing the firebase for hidden survivors while helicopters landed to pick up the wounded. Throughout the rest of the night, Marines in bunkers on the perimeter continued to spot and fire at movement, but the attack was over. Shortly after dawn, around 0700, two platoons of Company B swept the outer defenses, finding a total of 38 enemy bodies and bringing in three prisoners. The enemy had left behind large amounts of weapons and ordnance, including 11 AK-47s, 5 RPG launchers and 6 rockets, 30 satchel charges, over 200 grenades (most of them homemade from soft drink and fruit juice cans), and 4 bangalore torpedoes. The Marines also counted their own losses—13 killed, 40 wounded and evacuated, and 23 slightly wounded. Material losses included the countermortar radar disabled, two trucks heavily damaged, a 106mm recoilless rifle put out of action, and a number of tents, huts, and other structures demolished. The poor quality of the enemy's ordnance, much of which had failed to explode, and confusion among the attackers after the initial penetration had prevented worse destruction.[90]

The day after the attack, the Marines at Ross began

*According to prisoners interrogated after the action, the sappers had not been told a mortar barrage was planned and were thrown into confusion when it began. Marines saw several enemy inside the perimeter killed by shells from their own mortars. Peters Intvw.

strengthening their defenses, their efforts spurred by intelligence reports that the enemy planned to attack again. They strung more wire, installed new sensors and radars, and set up a 40-foot tower equipped with a night observation device and a 106mm recoilless rifle. Although the enemy did not repeat the attack, it had left a vivid impression on many Marines at the base. A crewman on the countermortar radar summed up the lesson learned: "that no matter where you are and no matter how secure you may feel, . . . you have to retain the capability of actually fighting hand-to-hand right in front of you."[91]

This lesson was reemphasized a little over a month later, on 12 February, when one of the units that had repelled the attack on FSB Ross again encountered enemy troops in the southern Que Son Valley. On that day, Lieutenant Ambort's Company B, 1st Battalion, was conducting a sweep along the Ly Ly River south-southeast of Ross in a temporary extension of the Marine TAOR into the Americal area, searching for the sites from which enemy .50-caliber machine guns had been firing at allied aircraft. The Marines of Company B were also trying to verify intelligence reports that located the the *31st NVA Regiment* in the region.

At 0935 on the 12th, about five miles from the firebase, Company B's 2d Platoon was moving in column toward the east along a trail close to the south bank of the Ly Ly. The Marines came under fire from an enemy light machine gun to their front.[92] The gun crew fired a couple of bursts which hit no Marines but knocked out the lead squad's radio, then picked up their weapon and disappeared into the brush. Then the Marines began receiving automatic weapon fire from their right. Four or five men pushed through the bushes beside the trail in an effort to locate and silence the new attackers. Coming out into a small paddy no more than 25 meters square and bordered by treelines, these Marines met deadly accurate small arms fire which quickly killed two of them and wounded another. The survivors, flat on the ground, could not move and could not see where the fire was coming from. Other members of the platoon, including a staff sergeant and two Navy corpsmen, ran into the paddy to aid the first group and were themselves cut down. The rest of the Marines took cover at the edge of the trail and tried to bring rifle, M60 machine gun, and an M79 grenade launcher fire to bear on the attackers.

Company B had collided with an estimated platoon of 20-40 NVA regulars in carefully prepared and concealed positions. The NVA had caught the company in flat ground with the Ly Ly River to the Marines' left (north) and a brush-covered hill mass to their right (south). A light machine gun north of the river with perhaps a squad of riflemen blocked flanking maneuvers to that side while snipers on the slopes of the southern hill mass closed off another line of advance. The enemy's main fighting position consisted of a series of deep, well-hidden holes in the treelines bordering the small paddy, many of which were no more than 20 feet from the Marines. The holes were connected underground by tunnels through which the NVA could shift position or flee the area as they chose. They were arranged in the form of a "T" with the crossbar perpendicular to the company's line of march and with the vertical bar so placed that NVA could fire from it either into the small paddy where the Marines ini-

Marine Corps Historical Collection

A Marine resupply helicopter is about to land at Fire Support Base Ryder. A member of the helicopter support team is in communication with the aircraft.

tially were caught or into other paddies to the south between their position and the hills. The 2d Platoon had entered the "T" from the bottom. As Lieutenant Ambort later summed it up: "It was beautifully set up and very, very well executed. They held and fought and stayed there."[93]

Lieutenant Ambort formed his other available platoon in a north-south line along the western edge of the paddy where his forward elements were fighting with the intention of outflanking and driving off the NVA. The fire from the enemy's flanking positions blocked these efforts. The NVA in their fighting holes fired only when a Marine tried to move out into the paddy or otherwise broke cover, making it difficult for either platoon to find targets.

Reinforcements and supporting arms broke the deadlock. The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Charles G. Cooper, informed of the situation by Lieutenant Ambort, ordered First Lieutenant James D. Deare's Company C to land by helicopter west of Company B's position and attack eastward along the north bank of the Ly Ly while two companies of the Americal Division's 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry, 196th Brigade, would move in from the southeast and east to envelop the enemy. The 2d Platoon commander called for artillery, and within minutes of the start of the fight, the shells fell in the treelines to the front and flanks. A tactical observer arrived overhead soon afterward and directed Cobra gunships and flight after flight of jets against suspected NVA positions. The enemy in the treelines were too close to the Marines for bombing or napalming, so the jets concentrated on the hill mass to the south and silenced the snipers there while the Cobras strafed the treelines as near the Marines as safety would allow. The air strikes and gunships suppressed enemy fire enough for the 2d Platoon to pull its dead and wounded out of the paddy and recover their weapons and ammunition. The platoon then withdrew about 200 yards to the west to await helicopters which had been called in to evacuate the casualties.

Around 1300, helicopters, still under sporadic fire in the landing zone, began lifting out Company B's dead and wounded. A few minutes later, Company C arrived and started its attack north of the river. The enemy broke contact, slipping off the battlefield through their tunnels and then probably withdrawing eastward. They left behind four dead. Company B's 3d Platoon now advanced into the hill mass to follow up the air strikes. They found and killed two more NVA. The enemy then struck at the Marines one last time. Company C, after sweeping for a distance along the north side of the Ly Ly, turned and attempted to cross to the south bank, only to receive automatic weapons fire from the east. The fire killed two more Marines and wounded several. The company returned fire, called for air strikes on the suspected enemy positions, and pulled back to the north bank. At the day's end, the Marines counted 13 killed and 13 more wounded, nine of the dead and eight of the wounded in Company B.

The following day, 13 February, Companies B and C and two companies of the 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry, 196th Brigade swept the battle area along the Ly Ly. They shot two enemy stragglers, but the main NVA units clearly had made good their withdrawal. About a month later, from 9 to 16 March, the 1st Battalion returned to the banks of the Ly Ly. With three of its own companies, a company from the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, two Army companies, and a RF unit, the battalion conducted another search for elements of the *31st NVA Regiment.* The troops uncovered several bunkers and ordnance caches, had a few small firefights, and lost some men wounded by boobytraps but encountered no major enemy force.[94]

Firebase Ross and the valley and hills south of it continued to feel enemy pressure after the 7th Marines' 2d Battalion took over responsibility for the area early in March. Significant enemy units at times approached close to the base. On 24 April, for example, Company H of the 2d Battalion encountered an estimated company of NVA troops only two miles southwest of the firebase and between it and the Marines. In an engagement that lasted for about five hours, Company H, aided by artillery fire, airstrikes, and a Pacifier reinforcement, forced the NVA to flee in groups to the northeast and southeast, leaving six dead behind. The Marines had six wounded and an accompanying RF unit lost two more wounded.[95]

In an effort to reduce civilian support for the enemy in the Que Son Valley, the 2d Battalion in mid-April committed three of its rifle companies to an ambitious pacification program. Each company, supported by a RF platoon and a few National Policemen, was assigned one or more target hamlets, most of them VC-controlled, in the countryside north, west, and south of Firebase Ross. By day, the companies were to surround their target localities, allowing only permanent residents, who were identified by a special census and issued passes, to enter or leave. At night, the

companies would saturate the approaches with patrols and ambushes. While these measures were geared to prevent the enemy from moving in and out of the hamlets, the South Vietnamese Government, with American assistance, would try to win the people away from the VC through medical aid, propaganda, and the other well-tried methods of pacification. The battalion continued this program through the end of June with indications of progress but, as so often in the complex process of pacification, no dramatic or definitive results.*[96]

During April, May, and June, the enemy repeatedly hit Firebase Ross and the neighboring Que Son District Town with rocket and mortar fire. On 3 May, for instance, they fired five 122mm rockets and 28 82mm mortar rounds into the area, killing eight Vietnamese and wounding 12 Vietnamese and five Marines. The Marines replied with artillery cannon and mortar fire on suspected attack positions and withdrawal routes. Recalling the attack of 6 January, the 2d Battalion's commanders—Lieutenant Colonel Arthur E. Folsom until 9 April and then Lieutenant Colonel Vincent A. Albers, Jr.—carefully maintained and strengthened the fortifications of Ross. Beginning in March, they required all off-duty Marines at the firebase to sleep at their night defensive positions rather than in tents or huts. This measure at once increased readiness to repel ground assaults and reduced the number of casualties from rocket and mortar fire.[97]

Enemy sappers did not try a second attack on Firebase Ross, instead around 0300 on 6 May they struck Que Son District Headquarters. At the same time, they fired a diversionary mortar and rocket barrage and made a light ground probe at Ross. The diversion failed. While the RFs and headquarters personnel at Que Son battled the attackers, a reaction force of 20 Marines from the 2d Battalion's Headquarters and Service Company supported by two tanks left the firebase at 0345 to assist them. Later in the night, Company H also moved into Que Son. In about two hours of skirmishing, the Marine and Air Force fixed-wing strikes killed 20 VC and NVA at a cost of five Marines wounded. Que Son's South Vietnamese defenders claimed another seven enemy killed. The attack, however, had been costly. Besides the wounded Marines, U.S. Army personnel at Que Son had suffered one dead and nine injured while the Vietnamese had 14 soldiers and 74 civilians wounded and an "unknown" number of civilians killed.[98]

Besides mortar, rocket, and sapper attacks, the enemy in the hills south of Ross continually harassed the Marines with accurate sniper fire. The snipers' favorite positions were on the slopes of Hills 270 and 441 respectively, about two and one-half and four miles southwest of the firebase. Here, hidden by rocks, caves, and brush, they made operations on the valley floor hazardous for allied troops. The Marines used infantry sweeps, artillery fire, and air strikes to suppress the snipers, but they proved "very skillful and tenacious," and operations against them were hindered because Hill 441 was outside the Marine division's TAOR.

The 7th Marines established Outpost Lion on top of Hill 270, but even this did not end the sniper threat, as the events of 9 June demonstrated. Around 0910 on that day, a CH-53D from HMH-463, on a routine supply mission to the outpost, received four rounds of small arms fire from snipers on the southwestern slopes of Hill 270. The 3d Platoon of Company E, operating in the area, replied with machine guns and recoiless rifles. About an hour later, the platoon again exchanged shots with the snipers. In the afternoon, a squad from Company E on a sweep of the snipers' suspected morning location called for medical evacuation for two heat casualties. Reaching the Marines' position around 1330, the medevac helicopter, a CH-46D from HMM-161, came under heavy automatic weapons fire in the landing zone and took a number of hits, one of which severed a hydraulic line and forced the helicopter to land. Infantry from Company E set up security around the downed helicopter while gunships raked the suspected hiding places of four or five snipers still clinging to the slopes of Hill 270.

The gunships' fire kept the snipers' heads down long enough for another helicopter to come in and pick up the heat casualties, but later in the afternoon they surfaced again. At about 1600, a CH-46D, again from HMM-161, brought in a team to prepare the downed helicopter to be lifted out by a CH-53. As the team landed, their helicopter drew fire and lifted away with two hits. Two and one-half hours later, when the CH-53D from HMH-463 came in to complete the recovery, the snipers drove it off with fire, wounding the crew chief and the gunner. The day ended with Marine jets dropping napalm on the slopes of the hill and Company E planning to sweep the area at first light. They made the sweep early the next morning, but that afternoon, the snipers opened up again, this

*For further details on this effort in the general context of pacification, see Chapter 9.

time at an infantry platoon, and wounded one Marine. Thus the frustrating, deadly struggle went on.[99]

In the Que Son Mountains, the 7th Marines kept offensive pressure on the enemy, seeking to deny them use of this well established refuge. Typical of this kind of operation was the search and destroy mission conducted by Lieutenant Colonel Gerald C. Thomas, Jr.'s, 3d Battalion from 26 May through 12 June. The regiment ordered this movement in response to information from an enemy defector who pinpointed the locations of several hospitals and base camps. On D-Day, 26 May, Company I of the battalion flew by helicopter from Baldy to Landing Zone Crow on top of Hill 800 about five miles northwest of Firebase Ross. At the same time, the rest of the battalion with two platoons and a fire direction center from the mortar battery of the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, landed by helicopter upon Landing Zone Buzzard on Hill 845 about one mile northeast of LZ Crow. Both landing zones had been secured the day before by teams from the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion. While elements of one company and the mortar platoons set up a fire support base at LZ Buzzard, the other rifle companies began searching the hills for enemy troops and installations. If they needed it, they could request artillery support from the mortars at Buzzard and from Battery G, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, located at FSB Ryder. Besides providing fire to assist the infantry, this battery coordinated all artillery support for the operation. Tactical air observers were also on station to direct fixed-wing strikes if necessary.[100]

The rifle companies established patrol bases and from them dispatched platoons and squads to comb the area. Usually in single file, the Marines toiled through the rough terrain. They found movement up and down the sides of the steep ridges almost impossible and often had to follow the contours of the land along ridge tops or the bottoms of ravines. In many places, they had to use ropes to hoist their mortars and other heavy equipment up and down almost vertical slopes. Extreme heat aggravated conditions, causing most of the casualties during the first few days of the operation.[101]

As they struggled through the mountains, the Marines began to find what they were looking for. First Lieutenant Wallace L. Wilson Jr., commanding Company I's 1st Platoon, described the trials and successes of his men:

> After we landed on Hill 800 and walked down on the southeast side, we stayed down there for a couple of days checking out the area. We didn't find anything of significance—found a couple of bodies that had been buried approximately a month. Then we got word to move out in search of a comm center and having almost reached this comm center we found that the Chieu Hoi had decided that it wasn't in this place and he gave us another coordinate on the other side of the mountain. So my platoon was placed in the lead to go back and find our way over the mountain. As we started moving over the mountain we came to an enemy base camp, started seeing bunkers, well fortified, well positioned; moved on and up, found this cave complex, checked it out, found a considerable amount of ordnance, gear, no weapons—only documents, gear, chow . . . . Next day we moved on over Hill 845, started down on the northwest side. After staying there for a couple of days [we] started to move out. My platoon again found another complex. This time they found 12 SKS's, several light submachine guns, one light machine gun, approximately 1,000 pounds of corn, 750 pounds of potatoes, lots of documents . . . . There was also some graves in this area. We found some mortar rounds that were booby trapped in these caves. We . . . destroyed all this as we left.[102]

Another company found the communications center, and daily the Marines unearthed additional camps with caches of ordnance, food, and equipment. Most of these installations were so well camouflaged that the Marines were unaware of their existence until they walked into them. The enemy had usually built their camps at the bottoms of ravines or the bases of cliffs. In these locations, streams provided water; the jungle concealment; and caves and clusters of boulders protection against American artillery and airstrikes. Some of the camps "even had running water coming in from bamboo water devices to bring water down from the higher ground."[103] The camps were often protected by cleverly concealed and mutually supporting bunkers from which, a platoon leader reported, "12 men can chew a whole battalion up."[104]

Early in June, the battalion, which had had its companies working generally northwest of its initial landing zones, began shifting them southward through the hills by foot and helicopter. On 2 June, Company I was lifted out of the mountains altogether, moving to the Rocket Belt to reinforce the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, against a possible enemy offensive. A week later, the company returned to the Que Sons, landing from helicopters on Hill 848 just southeast of LZ Crow then working its way overland to Hill 953 a mile or so further south. The same day, the battalion command post and Company L were airlifted to another hilltop a mile or so south of LZ Buzzard while Company K continued to operate around Buzzard. On 9 June, the battalion dispatched Company M to Fire-

base Ross to reinforce its defenders against a threatened attack. The rest of the battalion, in the final phase of the operation, marched southeast down the ravines toward the valley floor northwest of Ross.[105]

Up to this point, the enemy had offered little resistance to the Marines other than to boobytrap campsites and trails. One of these early in the operation disabled the battalion's Hoi Chanh guide. As the companies moved down the slopes toward the valley floor, however, the enemy struck at them, concentrating on Captain John C. Williams's Company I. On 11 June, a patrol from the company ran into two NVA in bunkers near Hill 953. The enemy's opening bursts of automatic fire killed the point man and wounded the Marine behind him. Moving to assist the patrol, the company's reaction force also took fire. The Marines worked their way around the flanks of the bunkers, threw grenades, and managed to pull their casualties to safety. Then they called in air strikes and artillery which silenced the bunkers. After the fight, Marines searching the bunkers found one dead NVA with an AK-47.

The following day, as the company moved down the mountain with each of its platoons following a separate ridge line or stream bed, the 1st Platoon twice came under sniper and automatic weapon fire, losing three men wounded. In the second and more severe contact, the enemy poured in automatic and RPG fire from both front and flank of the Marines. In each encounter, the platoon's own fire plus shelling and bombing by the supporting arms forced the enemy to withdraw, but after the second action the platoon shifted to a less sharply contested line of march into the valley.[106] The commander of another platoon commented: "They're pretty weak at this time. If you move into an area with a battalion or a company intact, they won't fight, but anything less than a company and they feel pretty free and easy about continuing contact."[107]

As the companies reached the valley floor late in the day on 12 June, Company I's 2d Platoon set up its night perimeter within 50 meters of a company-size enemy base camp occupied at the time by about 50 VC or NVA. The Marines had moved in quietly, and the thick undergrowth prevented either side from immediately discovering the other. Within a few minutes, however, three of the enemy blundered into the Marine position and a fire-fight erupted. The enemy fled and the platoon pursued them while calling for air strikes. Three flights attacked the scattering enemy, but most of them had reached cover before the aircraft arrived, and some of the aircraft by accident almost hit the pursuing Marines.[108]

On 13 June, the battalion assembled in the Que Son Valley and the operation ended. It had netted nine VC/NVA killed, while capturing four prisoners, 44 weapons, and over two tons of food and medical supplies. The battalion moved back to LZ Baldy and began Category II activities in the region southeast of it. On 22 June, Company I, reinforced with an additional rifle platoon, an engineer team, and a forward air controller, returned to LZ Buzzard to resume search and destroy operations under a plan to keep one company in rotation continually in action in the Que Sons.[109]

Throughout the first half of 1970, the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, provided most of the artillery support for the 7th Marines. With its headquarters and usually one or two batteries at Baldy, the battalion kept one battery each at Ross and Ryder. Reinforcing the 3d Battalion, Battery K of the 4th Battalion, 13th Marines (redesignated in January Battery K, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines) operated from Firebase Ross, and the 1st 8 inch Howitzer Battery had a platoon stationed at Ross and a second at Baldy. Occasionally, the battalion displaced a unit to a temporary firebase, as it did in May in sending two mortar platoons from Baldy to LZ Buzzard. The battalion also regularly rotated its gun batteries between Baldy, Ross, and Ryder.[110]

Early in May, in order to support the infantry more effectively, the 3d Battalion altered its firing policy. When firing in aid of troops in contact with the enemy, the battalion's batteries, as standard procedure, had used a first volley of white phosporous (WP) shells to register on the target. This practice, 7th Marines infantrymen complained, warned the VC or NVA that shells were on the way and gave them time to escape. The 3d Battalion, therefore, instructed its gunners to begin firing first volleys of high explosive unless specifically asked to use WP by the forward observer. According to the artillery battalion, "the new procedure worked well in practice, and the change was enthusiastically received by the infantry units."[111]

Like the other regiments, the 7th Marines employed the full range of Marine air support, from jet air strikes to helicopter troop transport, medical evacuation, and resupply. The 2d Battalion, while defending Firebase Ross and the Que Son Valley, called for and received numerous close air support strikes. In June, for example, aircraft of the 1st MAW flew 31 attack missions for the 2d Battalion, dropping over 450,000 pounds

of ordnance.[112] During May and June, the period of its Que Son Mountains operation, the 3d Battalion requested and received 23 fixed-wing close air support missions. Helicopters of MAG-16 airlifted each member of the battalion an average of three times, carried out 95 medical evacuations, and delivered over 250,000 pounds of cargo.[113]

Throughout the first half of 1970, the 7th Marines regularly accounted for about half of the division's monthly totals of contacts with the enemy and of claimed VC and NVA killed. At the end of June, after six months of operations in the lowlands around Baldy, in the Que Son Valley, and in the enemy's mountain sanctuaries, the 7th Marines reported a total of over 1,100 engagements with VC or NVA units. In these actions, the regiment had killed an estimated 1,160 enemy, taken 44 prisoners, and captured 291 weapons. These accomplishments had cost the 7th Marines over 950 combat casualties, including 120 Marines killed in action or dead of wounds.[114]

Results

Measurement of the results of six months of small-unit action in relation to the overall progress of the war was not an easy task. The war as the Marines were fighting it had become a slow contest in attrition, seemingly to be won or lost by accumulated tiny increments. By the mid-point of 1970, the 1st Marine Division could point to many indications that it was hurting the enemy worse than it was being hurt. Casualty statistics offered an indication: a claimed 3,955 VC and NVA killed within the Marines' TAOR as against 225 Marines killed in action, 58 more dead of wounds, and 2,537 wounded, to which, however, had to be added ARVN and Korean casualties. The Marines could also point to captured enemy materiel: 826 individual and 76 crew-served weapons, tons of rice and foodstuffs, countless rounds of assorted ammunition, rockets, medical supplies, and communications equipment.[115] They could add the count of base camps, hospitals, and other installations destroyed, installations the enemy would have to replace instead of building more to increase his capabilities. Captured documents, taken a few at a time from the bodies of enemy dead and prisoners or seized in larger quantities in camps and caves, would often add to the mosaic allied intelligence was trying to build of enemy strength and intentions, and also would expand the list of hidden VC terrorists and operatives in the hamlets.

An operations summary prepared late in June by the 1st Marine Division's G-3 suggested another and perhaps more reliable indication of progress:

> . . . Unlike other wars, and even other areas in South Vietnam, the success of combat action in Quang-Nam Province cannot be measured in terms of numbers of enemy killed. Rather, effectiveness of 1st Marine Division operations must be considered in light of the relative safety of Da Nang City and the security of the surrounding populace. Some indication of this security is evidenced by the fact that for the past two years the enemy has made no serious attempt to inflict major damage on the Da Nang Vital Area. Even the occasional enemy massacre of [the inhabitants of] a village, as horrible and regrettable as it may be, must be viewed in perspective of the relatively secure position of the total civilian populace in the lowlands of the Division TAOR . . . .[116]

CHAPTER 3

The Cambodia Invasion and Continued Redeployment Planning, April-July 1970

The War Spreads Into Cambodia—Redeployment Planning Accelerates: Keystone Robin Alpha Plans for the 3d MAB

The War Spreads into Cambodia

While the day-to-day war absorbed the full attention of most of the officers and men of III MAF, commanders and staff officers at MAF, division, and wing headquarters, besides directing current operations, had to keep track of developments elsewhere in the war and plan for events and contingencies as much as a year away. During the spring and early summer of 1970, the attention of these officers centered on three problems: the probable effects in I Corps of the allied invasion of Cambodia; plans and preparations for major new troop withdrawals; and the organization of the Marine air and ground forces that would be left in Vietnam after most of III MAF redeployed.

During the spring, the allies opened a new theater of war in Cambodia, South Vietnam's neighbor to the west. They acted in response to the collapse of Cambodia's long maintained but increasingly precarious neutrality. In March, the Cambodian premier, General Lon Nol, led a successful *coup d'etat* against the country's ruler, Prince Norodom Sihanouk. When the new government tried to expel the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong from the extensive base areas they had built up on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border, fighting broke out between government troops and the NVA and VC, who were assisted by the growing forces of the Communist-inspired Khmer Rouge movement.

The American and South Vietnamese high commands had long wanted to strike at the border base areas only 35 miles from Saigon. Taking advantage of the Cambodian upheaval, the allies, beginning on 29 April, sent division and brigade-size task forces slashing into what had been enemy sanctuaries. During May, the U.S. Army and the ARVN carried on search and destroy operations in a dozen base areas adjoining the II, III, and IV Corps areas of South Vietnam. A U.S.-Vietnamese naval task force* commanded by Rear Admiral Herbert S. Matthews, Deputy Commander Naval Forces Vietnam (ComNavForV) at the same time swept up the Mekong River to open a supply line to Cambodia's besieged capital, Pnomh Penh. The fighting continued through June. At the end of that month, in accord with a promise by President Nixon that this would be a limited attack for the sole purpose of preventing enemy offensives against South Vietnam, all U.S. ground troops left Cambodia. ARVN units continued to range the base areas, however, and American arms and supplies flowed to the ill-trained and hard-pressed forces of General Lon Nol.

While bitterly controversial in American politics, the invasion of Cambodia seriously weakened the enemy. By early July, MACV estimated that the Communists had lost as a result of the invasion 10,000 men, over 22,000 weapons, 1,700 tons of munitions, and 6,800 tons of rice. According to allied intelligence, the attack had forced *COSVN Headquarters* to displace, causing the enemy to lose command and control of many of their units in South Vietnam. Destruction of the base areas combined with Lon Nol's crackdown on pro-Communist elements in Cambodia had left the NVA and VC in southern South Vietnam temporarily without sufficient supplies for a major offensive. Replenishment of the Cambodian caches with material brought down the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos would require much time and the commitment to supply operations of thousands of additional troops and laborers. Further weakening their position, the NVA now had to use their own soldiers to control a large portion of northeastern Cambodia as well as to support Khmer Rouge units.[1]

The invasion of Cambodia had little immediate impact on conditions in I Corps. Of the allied forces there, only Marine aviation units participated in the invasion. During May and June, jets from MAGs-11 and -13 flew 26 missions over Cambodia, most of them in support of the U.S. Army's 4th Division and the ARVN 22d Division as they swept an enemy base area about 40 miles west of Pleiku. Other Marines, advisors to the Vietnamese Marine brigades, accompanied the Mekong River task force.*[2]

*According to Admiral Matthews, the supply line up the Mekong River to Pnomh Penh remained open until January 1971 when heavy interdiction by the VC necessitated a second Vietnamese task force to reopen it. RAdm Herbert S. Matthews, Comments on draft ms, 3Mar83 (Vietnam Comment Files).

*For details of air operations, see Chapter 15, and for the Marine advisory role see Chapter 21.

While Marine forces took only a limited part in the invasion, officers on the XXIV Corps and III MAF staffs closely scanned the intelligence reports for indications of what effect the opening of this new front would have within their own area of responsibility. Colonel George C. Fox, a member of the III MAF Staff, early in May summed up the staff's thinking in these words:

> The question I think that most of us have in I Corps, whether we've stated it openly or whether we haven't, is . . . supposing the enemy isn't willing to take this thing laying down, he can't react in III Corps and he sure can't react in IV Corps, so where does he have to go? He's got to go to II Corps where he's got nothing or I Corps where he has a lot. So there's a feeling amongst us that we could see a pickup of activity in I Corps, if he wants to do it, and I'm talking particularly of northern I Corps, across the D[MZ] and in through the A Shau Valley . . . .[3]

Estimates of enemy strength in northern and central I Corps gave the allies cause for concern. By early summer, 19 Communist battalions were reported in Quang Tri Province, 20 in Thua Thien, and 16 in Quang Nam. Many of the units in Quang Tri and Thua Thien had moved in since the beginning of the year and remained in mountain base areas for training, refitting, and stockpiling of supplies. Supported from North Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh Trail, they retained the ability to launch large-scale attacks.[4]

True to their pattern, however, the NVA seemed content merely to maintain the threat. While they displayed occasional instances of aggressiveness during

President Richard M. Nixon prepares to board Marine 1, the Presidential Helicopter from Marine Helicopter Squadron (HMX) 1. The President ordered the accelerated redeployment of U.S. forces from Vietnam simultaneously with the incursion into Cambodia.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A419542

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Gen Creighton Abrams, USA, Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam is seen in a formal ceremony at XXIV Corps Headquarters. Gen Abrams, in overall command, oversaw the planning of the withdrawal of U.S. forces in Vietnam.

the spring, such as harassment of the new allied Fire Support Base Ripcord 35 miles west of Hue and attacks on the villages of Hiep Duc and Thuong Duc in Quang Tin and Quang Nam Provinces respectively, the Communists mounted no major offensive.[5] Nevertheless, the possibility of such an offensive remained and had to be taken into account as the commanders in Vietnam entered into a new discussion of troop redeployments with the authorities in Washington.

Redeployment Planning Accelerates: Keystone Robin Alpha

On 30 April, in his speech announcing the raids into Cambodia, President Nixon told the American people that the operation would pave the way for continued and accelerated U.S. troop withdrawals from Vietnam. In fact, planning for additional redeployments had begun in Washington and Saigon even before the last personnel of Keystone Bluejay boarded homebound ships and planes.

Throughout the first months of 1970, the now familiar dialogue recurred between General Abrams and the authorities in Washington, the latter pressing for early additional withdrawals and Abrams urging delay. Abrams asked that no more American units be scheduled for removal until late summer or early fall. The allies, he insisted, still needed reserves to deter or counter a major offensive, which the enemy remained capable of launching. The South Vietnamese needed time to enlarge and reposition their forces to replace the Americans removed in Keystone Bluejay, and it would take several months to embark all of the equipment which was to accompany the personnel of Keystone Bluejay.

In anticipation of new withdrawals, MACV in February prepared plans for redeploying 150,000 men during 1970 in three increments of 50,000 each, with the scheduling of each increment to be decided later. If implemented, these plans would leave about 260,000 Americans—mainly service and support troops—in Vietnam at the year's end.[6]

Under MACV's plans, the first 50,000 men to go would include most of the Marines of III MAF. As before, MACV preferred a "Marine-heavy" first increment because it would allow them to send aviation units home early while retaining more Army ground troops until the very last stages of redeployment. Marine planners now assumed that the Marines' combat role in Vietnam probably would end late in 1970. They intended to organize the 10,000 or so Marines remaining after the next withdrawal into a Marine amphibious brigade (MAB)—a balanced air-ground force built around a reinforced infantry regiment and two air groups, one of fixed-wing aircraft and one of helicopters.[7]

On 20 April, only 10 days before the invasion of Cambodia, President Nixon established the framework for withdrawal planning for the rest of the year. In a nationally broadcast Vietnam "Progress Report" to the American people, Nixon declared that while negotiations at Paris remained deadlocked, encouraging advances had been made in training and equipping the ARVN and in pacification. Therefore, he said, the United States could safely adopt a longer-range and larger-scale withdrawal program. He announced that 150,000 Americans would leave Vietnam before 1 May 1971. The President made no mention of a schedule for this redeployment, but on 27 April Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird ordered the withdrawal of 50,000 men by October. The 150,000-man redeployment soon received the codename Keystone Robin, and its first increment was called Keystone Robin Alpha.[8]

During May and early June, MACV and the Joint Chiefs of Staff debated various ways to apportion the 150,000 troops into withdrawal increments. Throughout, they remained committed to a pull-out of 50,000 by 15 October. MACV, still in favor of a Marine-heavy withdrawal, suggested early in May that almost 30,000 Marines (two full regimental landing teams and a proportional slice of the wing) be included in the first 50,000 troops. To retain adequate combat power in I Corps, neither RLT was to begin preparations for embarkation until early September. Lieutenant General McCutcheon objected that this plan would not permit the necessary balanced removal from action of combat and support units and that it could not be executed with the available shipping. If two RLTs were to leave by 15 October, he insisted, one must stand down as early as 15 July. By the end of May, MACV had tentatively decided to remove only 20,000 Marines, including one RLT, in Keystone Robin Alpha and to redeploy 9,400 more (a second RLT) in the expected second Keystone Robin withdrawal (Keystone Robin Bravo) between 15 October and 1 January. This would leave in-country about 12,600 Marines of the MAB and a logistic cleanup force which would probably stay until mid-1971.[9]

By 30 May, the III MAF staff had drafted tentative troop lists for two withdrawal increments, the first to be completed by 15 October and the second by 1 January. The first list included the 7th Marines; its support artillery, the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines; and three fixed-wing and two medium helicopter squadrons. The 5th Marines headed the second list, which included the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines; two fixed-wing squadrons; and three helicopter squadrons.[10]

On 3 June, President Nixon publicly announced the initial withdrawal of 50,000 men. MACV then informed III MAF that 19,800 Marines—as expected, a regimental landing team with aviation and support units—would be included in this increment. In response, III MAF submitted a proposed roster in mid-June of units for Keystone Robin Alpha. As already decided, the 7th Marines would depart in this redeployment, with the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, elements of the 4th Battalion, 11th Marines, and an assortment of support units and detachments. The aviation contingent would include Marine Composite Reconnaissance Squadron (VMCJ) 1, Marine (All-Weather) Attack Squadron (VMA[AW]) 242, Marine Fighter/Attack Squadrons (VMFAs) 122 and 314, and two medium helicopter squadrons, HMMs -161 and -262. III MAF also proposed to redeploy the Marines of three of the four combined action groups (CAGs), which were to be deactivated, leaving only one, the 2d CAG, operating in Quang Nam. In order to retain as many troops as possible for the summer campaign, the 7th Marines and the aircraft squadrons would delay their stand-down until well into September. The CAGs would cease operations, a few platoons at a time, between 1 August and 1 October.[11]

Hardly had III MAF developed this list of units when XXIV Corps, supported by MACV, demanded changes in it. As Lieutenant General Leo Dulacki, then

III MAF Chief of Staff, would later evaluate XXIV Corps reaction: "The continuing withdrawal of forces dictated that, in structuring the remaining forces, emphasis must be placed on fully integrated combat units. The Marine task-organized air-ground teams, whatever the size, provided a ready solution to this requirement."[12]

In particular, the XXIV Corps staff had realized the full impact of the loss of the Marine helicopter and attack squadrons. Lieutenant General Zais and his officers feared that the departure of these squadrons would leave the allies in I Corps dangerously short of tactical air support and transport helicopters. XXIV Corps also wanted to keep VMCJ-1 for its photographic reconnaissance capability and the 1st Radio Battalion, one of the support units scheduled for redeployment, which provided irreplaceable intelligence by intercepting enemy radio messages. At a Saigon meeting on 15 June, MACV and III MAF agreed to postpone the redeployment of most of the 1st Radio Battalion and of one squadron each of jet attack aircraft and medium helicopters. The MACV staff officers also argued for retention of VMCJ-1, but gave way on this issue when the III MAF representives pointed out that keeping this unit would overcrowd Da Nang Airbase and force continued operation of the base at Chu Lai which the Marines planned to close during Keystone Robin Alpha. To provide adequate control for the additional aircraft that would remain in-country, MACV at III MAF's request cancelled withdrawal orders for Marine Air Control Squadron (MACS) 4, another support unit supposed to leave in Keystone Robin Alpha. The changes decided upon would reduce the Marines' share of the coming redeployment by about 1,200 men who would be taken instead from Army, Navy, and Air Force elements, while the retained Marine units would probably leave after 15 October in the second Keystone Robin withdrawal.[13]

III MAF's revised trooplist, issued in late June, incorporated the changes agreed upon. Besides the 7th Marines and the artillery battalions already provided for, the list included the 1st 8-inch Howitzer Battery and 3d 175mm Gun Battery. The two remaining force engineer battalions with III MAF, the 7th and 9th, were scheduled to leave, as were more than 400 men of the 1st Marine Division's organic 1st Engineer Battalion. III MAF's reconnaissance strength would be reduced by redeployment or deactivation of the 1st and 3d Force Reconaissance Companies and by withdrawal of a large detachment from the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion. Most of the Marines of the 1st and 3d MP Battalions, which had defended the Da Nang Vital Area, would also redeploy. VMFA-314 and HMM-262 had been dropped from the aviation contingent, which still included VMFA-122, HMM-161, VMA(AW)-242, and over 2,300 personnel from headquarters and maintenance squadrons. Detachments from division and wing headquarters, from Force Logistic Command, from various transport and service units, and over 1,300 CAP Marines completed the roster of withdrawing troops.[14]

With the size and composition of Keystone Robin Alpha apparently set, planning began for execution of the complex movement of men and equipment. From 6-10 July, staff officers of FMFPac and III MAF attended a Keystone Robin Alpha movement planning conference at CinCPac Headquarters in Hawaii. There, with representatives of other Pacific-area commands, they began working out stand-down, embarkation, and movement schedules.[15]

At Da Nang during June and July, the III MAF, division, and wing staffs completed plans for repositioning their forces to fill in for the departing units. As the 7th Marines left its TAOR around LZ Baldy and in the Que Son Mountains, the 5th Marines (which was expected soon to follow the 7th Marines out of Vietnam) would evacute its combat base at An Hoa and probably also its positions covering the highway to Thuong Duc and shift its battalions to LZ Baldy and the Que Son Valley.[16] Colonel Floyd H. Waldrop, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, 1st Marine Division explained:

> We have made a point to strive to get rid of An Hoa prior to the [fall monsoon] rains, because . . . once the monsoons start and Liberty Bridge gets about nine feet under water, nothing moves to An Hoa* except by air until the rains subside, which could be several months. So we are trying to turn over An Hoa and get our forces—at least all of the non-helicopter-transportable forces—north of the river . . . prior to the monsoon.[17]

*Reducing a base like An Hoa was no small order. "Not only did the area in question have to be immaculate, all equipment left in place must be functioning properly," recalled Colonel Miller M. Blue, then Assistant Chief of Staff, G-4, 1st Marine Division. "Early liason between USMC/SVN forces was essential; joint inspections were required, in some cases by the Division Commander and Quang Da area commander." Blue explained further that "the requirement to reduce bases to their pre-war appearance caused the expenditure of vast amounts of diminishing engineer resources." Reducing or turning over a base at times required a weapons transfer, and the weapons had to be in perfect order. All of this "was a time-consuming process at an inconvenient time." An Hoa was, nevertheless, turned over within the targeted time schedule. Col Miller M. Blue, Comments on draft ms, 5Apr83 (Vietnam Comment File).

As the aviation units redeployed, almost five years of Marine air operations would come to an end at Chu Lai. There in 1965, on a lightly inhabited stretch of land along the South China Sea about 57 miles south of Da Nang, Marines had proved the workability of their experimental Short Airfield for Tactical Support (SATS). Since then, Chu Lai had ranked with Da Nang and Marble Mountain as a major Marine air facility. Now, with the number of Marine squadrons in I Corps being reduced, the III MAF staff decided to end operations at Chu Lai around 1 October. Da Nang and Marble Mountain could accommodate all the remaining aircraft of the 1st MAW, and the closing of Chu Lai would reduce the demands upon the aircraft wing's diminishing force of ground security, maintenance, and supply personnel.[18]

Plans for the 3d MAB

As the selection of troops for Keystone Robin Alpha and the planning for relocation of the units to remain in-country went forward, the Marine staffs also began preparations for replacing III MAF with a MAB. By mid-July, Colonel Noble L. Beck, just finishing a tour of duty as Chief of Staff, 1st Marine Division, could report that "There's a lot of thrashing around [at Da Nang] currently to get a MAB established and to get a MAB headquarters going and to get the MAB shaken down so they can assume control . . . ."[19]

Planning for the MAB had begun late in 1969 as the troop lists for Keystone Bluejay were being completed. By that time, two related sets of facts had become apparent to the Marine Corps. First, given MACV's commitment to a Marine-heavy withdrawal, most elements of the 1st Marine Division and 1st MAW would probably leave Vietnam during 1970 in redeployment Increment Four. Second, under the plans of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, all the Services were to keep units in Vietnam as long as the American combat role continued.

While most Marines would redeploy during 1970, not all would, and the composition of the force to remain had to be determined early to assure the retention in-country of the units required for it. Marine Corps leaders from the Commandant on down wanted the last Marine force in Vietnam, whatever its size, to be an air-ground team. As Lieutenant General William J. Van Ryzin, Chief of Staff, HQMC, later recalled, the Marine Corps' main concern "was in keeping that balanced force in there and keeping the Marine command entity out there, regardless of the level of forces, starting from III MAF down . . . . We didn't want to get into [a] World War I type of organization where we just became another brigade of an Army Division . . . ."[20]

Marine Corps doctrine prescribed standard organizations for air-ground task forces from the division-wing size MAF through the battalion-squadron size Marine amphibious unit (MAU). Among these, the Marine amphibious brigade seemed ideally suited to the probable numbers and mission of the residual Marine combat force in Vietnam. According to the official Marine Corps definition:

> The MAB, normally commanded by a brigadier general, is capable of conducting air-ground amphibious assault operations in low- and mid-conflict environments. The ground element of the MAB is normally equivalent to a regimental combat team (RCT). The air element is usually a MAG with varied aviation capabilities. The combat service support element includes significant resources from force troops, including the FSR (Force Service Regiment), division and wing combat service support units, and the Navy support units.[21]

In mid-December 1969, the Commandant of the Marine Corps ordered the headquarters of FMFPac and III MAF to begin planning for the organization of a MAB in Vietnam of about 10,800 men built around a regimental landing team and two aircraft groups—one fixed-wing and one helicopters. In addition to the MAB, FMFPac and III MAF were to plan on retaining after Increment Four between 600 and 1,200 CAP Marines and a logistic "rollup" force of about 1,200 support and service troops who would finish packing and shipping the equipment of the units leaving in Increment Four.

FMFPac then drafted a more detailed plan of organization for the MAB, proposing a ground element consisting of an infantry regiment, an artillery battalion, a platoon of 8-inch howitzers, and a battery of 175mm guns supported by reinforced companies of reconnaissance Marines, engineers, and tanks. For the aviation component FMFPac suggested a single composite aircraft group of two fixed-wing squadrons, a light helicopter squadron, and a medium helicopter squadron. FMFPac sent this plan to III MAF for its comments and for the designation of specific units for the brigade.[22]

On 6 January 1970, Lieutenant General Nickerson, still Commanding General, III MAF, sent FMFPac his proposals for a 10,800-man MAB. III MAF based its plan on the assumption that the brigade would oper-

ate around Da Nang or in the lowlands of Quang Nam and that it would remain in Vietnam for about one year. Both of these assumptions would govern discussions of the MAB throughout most of 1970. III MAF's proposals for the ground element of the MAB followed those of FMFPac with the 1st Marines designated as the infantry regiment and the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, as the principal artillery unit. For the aviation element, III MAF favored two aircraft groups—MAG-11 (fixed-wing) and MAG-16 (helicopter)—rather than a single composite MAG on the grounds that two groups were needed to control eight different aircraft types flying from two separate airfields. III MAF also provided a tentative list of jet and helicopter squadrons and heavy artillery, armor, reconnaissance, support, headquarters, and maintenance units. Many of these designations would change during the next several months, but throughout the planning process the major elements—the 1st Marines and MAGs -11 and -16—would remain the same.[23]

FMFPac quickly approved III MAF's proposal. The next step was to persuade MACV which thus far had envisioned a post-Increment Four Marine force of one RLT (about 7,500 men with no aviation component), to incorporate the MAB in its planning. Early in February, General Abrams asked his corps area and component commanders for comments on the next redeployment. General Nickerson took the occasion to request approval for planning purposes of the formation of a 10,800-man MAB from the Marines not removed in Increment Four. Nickerson pointed out that the MAB, with its own air, artillery, and logistical support, would provide MACV with a reserve force in I Corps of greater mobility and firepower than would the smaller RLT. He stressed also the greater ability of the MAB to assist the ARVN with artillery, helicopter transport, and tactical air support. Uncertain whether MACV would accept the MAB and with the overall size and composition of the 1970 redeployments undetermined, FMFPac and III MAF during the next two months developed fall-back proposals for MABs of 9,400 and 8,900 men. These plans involved removal from the 10,800-man MAB of various combinations of aviation, artillery, and support units. All the plans, however, maintained the MAB as an air-ground task force.[24]

During March and April, while they waited for MACV's approval of the MAB concept and for decisions from Washington on new redeployments, staff officers of the MAF, division, and wing, in close consultation with FMFPac Headquarters, refined their plans for the 10,800-man brigade. With the overall structure of the force already set, discussion centered on two issues—the organization of the aviation element, and the size and organization of the MAB headquarters.

From the start of planning for the brigade, Major General William G. Thrash, commander of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, insisted that as long as both fixed-wing and rotary-wing squadrons stayed in Vietnam, it was "absolutely essential" that they be organized in two separate aircraft groups. Thrash argued that the different support requirements of jets and helicopters would necessitate retention of most of the headquarters, maintenance, and housekeeping squadrons of two groups even under a single composite structure. He pointed out also that with Marine fixed-wing squadrons operating under single-management arrangements with the Air Force,* a full Marine aviation staff was needed to assure proper coordination with the other Services. Finally, Thrash contended a single MAG could not direct operations effectively from the two separate fields at Da Nang and Marble Mountain. General McCutcheon, an experienced aviator, agreed with Thrash on this point after he took command of III MAF in March.[25]

Nevertheless, late in February, Lieutenant General Henry W. Buse, Jr., commanding FMFPac, directed further study of the feasibility of a composite MAG in the hope of meeting the air support needs of the brigade with a force requiring fewer scarce headquarters and maintenance personnel. McCutcheon and Thrash reexamined the problem, but reached the same conclusion as before. In mid-March, they informed FMFPac that a composite group could operate with fewer men than two groups only if all of its squadrons, both fixed and rotary wing, could fly from the same base. This would mean operating helicopters from Da Nang, already crowded with aircraft of the Marines and of the U.S. and Vietnamese air forces. Such an effort, McCutcheon and Thrash pointed out, would cause major air traffic control and safety problems and would meet strong opposition from the U.S. Air Force. McCutcheon and Thrash, therefore, reiterated their preference for separate MAGs on separate fields.[26]

With the issue still unsettled, the 1st MAW staff

*For details of the complicated and controversial question of "single management" of aircraft, which involved the placing of Marine aircraft under Air Force control for some purposes, see Chapter 15.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

MajGen William G. Thrash, Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, greets Adm John S. McCain, Jr., Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, who is visiting Da Nang. Redeployment would be a topic of concern for senior U.S. commanders in 1970-1971.

submitted troop lists on 19 March for both single-MAG and two-MAG organizations. Each list contained two jet attack squadrons, an observation detachment of OV-10As, and two helicopter squadrons—one medium and one light. The two-MAG list provided for MAG-11 and the fixed-wing squadrons to be based at Da Nang while MAG-16 and the helicopter units remained at Marble Mountain. In the composite group, all units would be based at Da Nang under MAG-11, which would have its headquarters and maintenance squadrons reinforced with personnel from counterpart units of MAG-16.[27]

While FMFPac, III MAF, and the 1st MAW debated aviation organization, the size and composition of the MAB headquarters came under discussion. During March, a committee of officers representing all sec-

tions of the III MAF staff, under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas P. Ganey of the G-3 section, drafted a proposed table of organization for the brigade headquarters. The committee's plan called for an "austere" staff of 88 officers and 171 enlisted men supported by a small headquarters company. To keep the entire establishment under a previously set limit of 380 officers and men in Headquarters and Headquarters Company, the drafting committee proposed that a number of key brigade staff jobs, such as that of engineer officer, be taken over by commanders of the brigade's component units.[28]

On 26 March, the committee sent its plan to the various staff sections for review and comment. The staff sections responded with an almost unanimous demand for more headquarters manpower and with protests against imposing brigade administrative duties on unit commanders. Such a doubling of functions, many of the sections pointed out, might be possible in a MAB engaged only in normal combat missions, but the brigade in Vietnam would have much larger responsibilities. As the senior Marine command in-country, it would have to maintain relations with MACV, XXIV Corps, the ARVN, and the other U.S. Services, and this would involve much complicated staff work. Colonel Wilbur F. Simlik, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-4, III MAF, objecting to the plan to make the commander of the engineer battalion the brigade engineer officer, summed up the probable results of such "double-hatting" in the MAB:

> To depend on the harried commander of a bobtailed far flung Engineer Battalion to: (a) be available when required; (b) have the time to spare from his command to sit in on endless conferences and briefings, compose immediate, detailed action briefs, to attend conferences at XXIV Corps, Okinawa, [and] Hawaii away from his command, and (c) demand from his separated staff the necessary research for meaningful recommendations, is . . . courting failure.[29]

The committee revised the table of organization, submitted it for additional staff comment, and by the end of April had created a version which incorporated many of the staff sections' demands for more men and eliminated most of the extra duty for unit commanders. By reducing the strength of the headquarters company, the committee increased the number of headquarters staff personnel to 321 while keeping the combined total within the 380 ceiling. Lieutenant General Leo Dulacki, who was then Chief of Staff of III MAF, later remembered the frustration of tailoring the MAB headquarters, "incongruously, the proposed MAB Headquarters actually would contain more officers and men than did the much reduced III MAF Headquarters."[30]

While the MAF, division, and wing staffs refined the details of the brigade's organization, General McCutcheon sought approval of the overall concept from XXIV Corps and MACV. Early in April, McCutcheon suggested, and Lieutenant General Melvin Zais, Commanding General, XXIV Corps, approved as a basis for planning, creation of a Marine brigade under the operational control of XXIV Corps to operate around Da Nang. Also during April, without formal announcement, the 10,800-man MAB replaced the 7,500-man RLT in MACV's discussions of Increment Four and its aftermath. Colonel George C. Fox, Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, III MAF, reported on 6 May that "MACV started out loud and clear for 7,500 Marines to stay in-country, and we have brought him up, and he has bought this 13.2 [thousand].* I haven't seen a figure come out of him with anything less than 13.2 in some time."[31]

Colonel Fox recalled the process which brought the MACV staff to accept the MAB:

> There was a lot of shoe work going on . . . . We never told them specifically what was in that thing except that it had artillery, and it had tanks, and it had this and so, . . . and we never gave them any specific figures of so much artillery, and so much this and so on. We kept it pretty broad . . . And I know there was some working going on back here [at FMFPac]. There was some work going on in Washington along the same lines, too, but it all jelled, and . . . that's the important thing.[32]

By mid-April, both XXIV Corps and MACV had given tentative approval to the MAB, and at III MAF Headquarters the list of units composing the MAB was taking permanent form. The ground element continued to be built around the 1st Marines and the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, an 8-inch howitzer battery, a 175mm gun battery, and a tank company. The aviation component, now set at two aircraft groups, consisted of MAG-11 (VMA-311, VMA[AW]-225, and a detachment of four OV-10s) and MAG-16 (HMM-262,

*The 13,200 figure to which Fox referred consisted of the MAB (10,800); the 2d Combined Action Group (600 men who by previous agreement between General Abrams and Lieutenant General Nickerson would remain after Increment Four in addition to the MAB); the logistic cleanup force of 1,200; and 600 more Marines of ANGLICO, the advisory group, the Embassy security detachment, the MACV staff, and other detachments not under III MAF.

HML-367, and a detachment of six CH-53s from HMH-463). The brigade would have a logistic support group of about 900 officers and men and would have attached to it companies of engineers, shore party, military police, medical and dental personnel, a detachment from the 1st Radio Battalion, and Communications Support Company, 7th Communications Battalion,* which would replace 5th Communications Battalion.[33]

As the troop list for the brigade began to take shape, so did its mission and area of operations. Early in April, III MAF proposed that the MAB take charge of the present 1st Marines TAOR in the Rocket Belt while retaining the ability to conduct mobile operations of short duration anywhere in Quang Nam. This concept became the starting point for further discussion of the brigade's mission.[34]

By early June, Marine staff officers involved in MAB planning were facing without enthusiasm the likelihood that much of the MAB's infantry would be immobilized defending Da Nang airfield. III MAF had been long charged with protecting the airbase and had employed the 1st and 3d Military Police Battalions for that purpose. These battalions were scheduled to redeploy in Keystone Robin Alpha. XXIV Corps, while it issued no formal directives on the subject, indicated that the MAB would inherit III MAF's base defense task and that neither U.S. Army nor ARVN troops would be provided to replace the MPs. Thus, in the words of Colonel Beck, the 1st Marine Division Chief of Staff, "obviously somebody is going to be tied to that dad-blamed airfield, and it looks as if inevitably this is going to fall on the MAB. The circles in which I operated . . . were very fearful of this happening, but we were braced to accept it . . . ."[35]

With the MAB likely to be responsible for both the Rocket Belt and the Da Nang Airbase and city, late in June Marine planners began reconsidering the composition of the brigade's ground element. At III MAF and 1st Division Headquarters, staff officers suggested that the heavy artillery and armored units of the MAB, which probably would find little use in a brigade committed to defense of populated areas in a period of diminishing combat, be dropped and replaced with a fourth infantry battalion. This battalion could protect the airfield, freeing the three battalions of the 1st Marines for mobile operations. On 29 June, at a III MAF generals' conference, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, the new assistant division commander of the 1st Marine Division, who had assumed his duties 13 days before and had been made the division's principal spokesman on MAB planning, endorsed the proposal for a fourth infantry battalion. Lieutenant General McCutcheon initially doubted that another battalion could be squeezed into the MAB under existing manpower ceilings, but finally he also gave the idea his support. By mid-July, the substitution of more infantry for the brigade's tanks, heavy guns, and howitzers appeared to be on the way to adoption.[36]

Although the final details of organization for what now was designated the 3d MAB remained unsettled, by late July the staffs of III MAF and FMFPac had developed a schedule for activating the brigade headquarters as the MAF, division, and wing headquarters left Vietnam with the redeploying troops. The plans were based on the assumption that all Marine units except those designated for 3d MAB and the other residual forces would have withdrawn by 31 December. According to the schedule approved by Lieutenant General McCutcheon and by Lieutenant General William K. Jones, who replaced Lieutenant General Buse in July as Commanding General, FMFPac, a small MAB planning staff would begin operations on 15 September. About a month later, 3d MAB would start directing ground operations of the 1st Marines under operational control of the division, and about 15 November, the brigade would take charge of the activities of MAGs-11 and -16. In late November and December, the division and wing headquarters would leave, and toward the end of December, III MAF would turn over all of its functions as senior in-country Marine command to 3d MAB. Then the MAF headquarters itself would redeploy.[37]

As the Marines entered their last summer of combat in Vietnam, the end of their participation in the

*Reorganization often required organizational redesignation that had an effect on command relations. For example, 5th Communications Battalion, which included four companies, was redesignated to Communications Support Company, 7th Communications Battalion, and was organized into seven platoons. The mission assigned the company was identical to that of the battalion. To effect the change, officers, staff noncommissioned officers, and administrative and other enlisted personnel were transferred to the newly designated units. Major Robert T. Himmerich, who commanded Communications Support Company, recalled that he "was authorized almost twice the men and equipment as was the parent battalion in Okinawa and had half the officers and staff NCOs. Ours was not the only Force Troops unit to experience this anomaly." Maj Robert T. Himmerich, Comments on draft ms, 28Apr83 (Vietnam Comment File).

war seemed close at hand. III MAF was expected to redeploy two-thirds of its strength by the end of the year. Plans were well advanced for reorganization of the remainder into a smaller air-ground task force. The Marines still had time, however, for a final offensive, and by mid-July that attack was getting under way.

PART II
SUMMER AND FALL-WINTER CAMPAIGNS, 1970

CHAPTER 4

The Summer Campaign in Quang Nam, July-September 1970

New Campaign Plans—Summer Offensive: The 7th Marines in Pickens Forest
The 1st and 5th Marines Continue the Small-Unit War—Combat Declines, But the Threat Continues
Deployment Plans Change: More Marines Stay Longer

New Campaign Plans

On 10 June, MACV issued orders for an aggressive summer campaign to exploit the Communist reverses caused by the allied invasion of Cambodia. The orders directed allied regular forces to attack enemy bases and main force units. The Americans and other non-Vietnamese contingents would operate only within South Vietnam while the Vietnamese, besides taking part in the in-country offensive, would also continue limited operations in Cambodia. RFs and PFs were to speed up their takeover of local defense responsibilities to free more regulars for mobile warfare in the back country. The MACV directive enjoined continued concern for pacification and population security, but for the U.S. and ARVN units, at least, the emphasis for the summer was to be on wide-ranging attacks to drive the enemy still further from the populated regions.[1]

The announcement of the summer campaign was followed by a reorganization of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces (RVNAF) command structure. On 2 July, President Nguyen Van Thieu issued decrees incorporating the RFs and PFs into the Vietnamese Army and redesignating Corps Tactical Zones as Military Regions (MRs).* Under the new arrangement, I Corps, for example, became Military Region 1 (MR 1). Each corps commander now received two deputies—a corps deputy commander and a military region deputy commander. The corps deputy commander would conduct major offensive operations and furnish artillery, air, and other support to the MR, while the MR deputy commander, in charge of territorial defense and pacification, would command the RFs and PFs and supervise their training and administration. Concurrent with these decrees, MACV and the Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) completed plans for incorporating the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups into the ARVN as Border Defense Ranger Battalions. As the summer campaign opened, many American and Vietnamese officers expressed uncertainty about how much change in day-to-day activities and working relationships these decrees would actually bring about. The overall purpose seemed clear: to unify command and strengthen the administration of the RVNAF.[2]

In I Corps, or MR 1 as it was now called, the fruition of III MAF's effort to build up Quang Da Special Zone (QDSZ) into an effective tactical headquarters coincided in time with the larger RVNAF reorganization. During the spring, the able commander of QDSZ, Colonel Nguyen Van Thien, moved his command post from downtown Da Nang to Hill 34, about five miles south of the city, a more suitable site from which to direct field operations. In the same period, QDSZ's combat operations and fire support direction centers finally reached the stage of development where they could support multibattalion operations.

General Lam, the commander of MR 1, turned over tactical direction of the ARVN summer campaign in Quang Nam to QDSZ. By early July, besides the 51st Regiment, QDSZ had received from General Lam operational control of the 1st Ranger Group, the CIDG 5th Mobile Strike Group, the 1st Armored Brigade, the 17th Armored Cavalry Squadron, and the 44th and 64th Artillery Battalions. On 11 July, when the 258th Vietnamese Marine Brigade—three infantry and one light artillery battalions—arrived to reinforce I Corps for the summer campaign,* General Lam placed it under control of QDSZ.[3] When the Vietnamese Marines reached Quang Nam, a III MAF staff officer recalled that QDSZ:

> . . . [was] given the full responsibility for receiving [them] from Saigon and getting them staged . . . and they took hold of this job in comparable fashion to how a Marine division headquarters would respond. They moved them in, got them bivouaced, got them squared away . . . .[4]

*These decrees, and another issued on 7 July, also reorganized the JGS in Saigon by, among other changes, abolishing the posts of the separate RF/PF commander and Special Forces Command and placing the inspector general of the RF/PF under the Inspector General Directorate of the JGS. *MACV Comd Hist 70,* II, chap. VII, pp. 16-20.

*Discussion of bringing in a Vietnamese Marine Brigade to strengthen I Corps had gone on since the beginning of the year, but its arrival was delayed until July. Col Floyd H. Waldrop, Debriefing at FMFPac, 19 Aug 70, Tape 4926 OralHistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373406

LtGen James W. Sutherland, USA, center, Commanding General, XXIV Corps, looks out from FSB Ryder with Col Edmund G. Derning, Jr., left, Commanding Officer, 7th Marines, and MajGen Charles F. Widdecke, Commanding General, 1st Marine Division.

This Quang Da Special Zone troop reinforcement was part of the preparations for the XXIV Corps/MR 1 joint summer campaign. Lieutenant General James W. Sutherland, USA, who in June had succeeded General Zais as XXIV Corps commander, had worked out an ambitious plan with General Lam to implement MACV's call for a summer offensive. In Thua Thien, the 101st Airborne and 1st ARVN Divisions would strike toward the Da Krong and A Shau Valleys, base areas from which the NVA threatened Hue. (The establishment of FSB Ripcord in March and April had been a preliminary to this operation). In Quang Tin, elements of the Americal and 2d ARVN divisions would reopen an abandoned airstrip at Kham Duc, deep in the mountains, and from there fan out, hunting enemy troops, supply caches, and lines of communication. In Quang Nam, QDSZ, controlling a division-size force for the first time and supported by two battalions of the 7th Marines, would attack Base Areas 112 and 127 west and southwest of Da Nang.[5]

Summer Offensive: the 7th Marines in Pickens Forest

In early July, as preparations began for the summer offensive, the 7th Marines had two of its battalions deployed in what its commander, Colonel Edmund G. Derning, called "pacification mode," the 1st Battalion covering the eastern part of the regiment's TAOR around LZ Baldy and the 3d Battalion guarding the Que Son Valley. The 2d Battalion also operated from LZ Baldy. It functioned as the regiment's "Swing Battalion," or mobile reserve, providing companies to reinforce the Rocket Belt during threatened enemy offensive "high points" and conducting multi-company operations where intelligence found profitable targets, usually in the Que Son Mountains or their foothills.

By early July, the 7th Marines faced what seemed to be a diminishing enemy threat. Colonel Derning's Marines now rarely encountered enemy soldiers in groups of more than 10, and the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong usually avoided sustained combat, relying on sniper fire and boobytraps to inflict Marine casualties. Derning, who had commanded the regiment since February, had gradually altered tactics in response to this decline in combat intensity. A graduate of the Army Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg,

North Carolina, he was well versed in counterguerrilla tactics and regarded pacification as his main mission. His training with the 1st Marine Raider Battalion in World War II provided him with an excellent understanding of night combat. Derning's new plan drew heavily on both of these elements of his experience.

Fundamental to Derning's "pacification mode," was the substantial abandonment of daytime patrols, sweeps, and searches by the 7th Marines' battalions around Baldy and in the Que Son Valley. Daytime maneuvers at the level of combat then prevailing, Derning believed, physically exhausted the troops without achieving significant results. Extensive daytime patrolling also increased the risk of boobytrap casualties with little probability of seriously hurting the enemy in the lowlands since the VC/NVA usually did not move much in the daylight. Instead of maneuvering, Derning's battalions by day surrounded known Viet Cong-controlled hamlets. Manning checkpoints, the Marines supervised the movement of the people between their houses and the fields, to prevent supplies from going out of the hamlets and VC from infiltrating.* The cordons, which consisted of static observation posts and firing positions, could be maintained with relatively few Marines. The rest could sleep, repair equipment, or train while company and platoon commanders planned extensive night ambushes and patrols to intercept small enemy units during the VC's preferred time for movement. Derning was convinced that these tactics both weakened the enemy by denying them supplies and mobility and reduced allied losses.[6]

While two of the battalions followed Derning's scheme of operations, the "Swing Battalion" continued daytime search and destroy maneuvers, usually in the Que Son Mountains. These operations at times proved productive. On 13 July, for instance, Company H of the 2d Battalion pursued a wounded Viet Cong into a cave in the Que Son foothills west of Baldy and discovered that it had trapped almost 30 VC.

A night-long siege ensued during which seven of the Viet Cong were killed, some of them by Marines who crawled into the cave and shot them at close range with pistols. A total of 20 VC, most of them the Communist leaders of a village, eventually surrendered. Colonel Derning considered this mass surrender and other defections by guerrillas an indication that his pacification strategy was succeeding.[7]

*For more detail on the pacification aspect of this strategy, see Chapter 9.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373325

Marines from the 2d Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines ford the Thu Bon River. Note many of the Marines are wearing soft floppy hats.

In mid-July, Colonel Derning and his staff put aside pacification plans and, instead, took up preparations for Operation Pickens Forest.* This, the 1st Marine Division's first operation of the year outside its regular TAOR, would form part of the general allied summer incursion into Base Areas (BAs) 112 and 127, the enemy's two principal mountain refuges in Quang Nam.

Each of these areas was a quadrangle of mountain and jungle which served as a collection point for supplies brought from Laos or the Quang Nam lowlands. Each contained cleverly hidden and fortified headquarters, communications centers, and training and rest camps. Here enemy main force units normally spent most of their time between operations. Command groups, including, it was believed, the *Front 4*

*In July the division staff resumed the practice of assigning names to operations of battalion or larger size.

Headquarters, directed enemy military and political activity from both bases. BA 127 extended north from Thuong Duc and eastward into Charlie Ridge. BA 112, larger in area and considered by allied staffs to be the more important of the two, was bounded on the north by the Vu Gia River. It stretched eastward to the western fringes of the Arizona Territory, southward into Quang Ngai Province, and westward to the Song Cai, a river which runs northeastward to enter the Vu Gia five miles west of Thuong Duc.

Allied reconnaissance teams had conducted almost 250 separate patrols in these two base areas since January, killing about 300 enemy and confirming the presence of many more. Hundreds of air attacks, including 22 Arc Light B-52 strikes, had showered bombs and napalm on suspected campsites and supply depots, and artillery had pounded still other targets. Now ground forces were scheduled to go in and stay long enough and in sufficient strength to deny the enemy use of these areas for the summer, find hidden supplies, and clear out any surviving enemy formations.[8]

Marines of Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines are seen on the march in the Thu Bon River Valley in Operation Pickens Forest southwest of Da Nang.
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373921

Under the plan worked out by Quang Da Special Zone and the 1st Marine Division, South Vietnamese forces would penetrate deep into the western reaches of the base areas while the Marines swept an area closer to the populated regions. In July, continuing activities begun in May to relieve Thuong Duc, the 51st ARVN Regiment launched Operation Hung Quang 1/32B in southern BA 127. Southwest of Thuong Duc, in northwestern BA 112, the 1st Ranger Group continued Operation Vu Ninh 12, which it had started on 16 June. This operation expanded on 13 July when the 256th Vietnamese Marine Brigade began searching an area of operation south of that of the Rangers. By mid-July, Quang Da Special Zone, which had established its forward command post at An Hoa, had 11 battalions under its control scouring the base areas—three of the Vietnamese Marine battalions, two of the 51st Regiment, three of the 1st Ranger Group, and three of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group Mobile Strike Force.[9]

The block of terrain selected for Operation Pickens Forest was southwest of the Vietnamese Marines' area of operations. Encompassing the southeastern portion of BA 112, the area straddled the Thu Bon River. Its center lay about nine miles southwest of An Hoa where a small stream flowing northeastward out of the mountains of BA 112 empties into the Thu Bon. Here several major infiltration routes to and from Base Area 112 came together. To the west, a complex of stream beds and trails led into the mountains. To the south, enemy units could follow the Thu Bon into the Americal Division's TAOR while northward the same river offered access to the Arizona Territory, the An Hoa Region and, where the Thu Bon branched eastward into Antenna Valley, to the Que Son Mountains. Aerial and ground reconnaissance had observed continual enemy use of the area, which was known to be pocked with bunkers, caves, fighting holes, and probably large supply caches. In late 1969 and early 1970, the 1st Marine Division had made tentative plans for a drive into the region by the 5th Marines, but the operation had never been launched. Now, in Pickens Forest, the 7th Marines would take up the task.[10]

In the western part of their operating area, the Marines would encounter typical Vietnamese mountain terrain—a tangle of ridges cut up by steep-sided gullies and stream beds, and overgrown with dense jungle, underbrush, and in many places bamboo. Near

the Thu Bon, they would find a few hamlets where Viet Cong-controlled farmers grew rice and corn for the enemy. Surrounding the hamlets, level paddy and farm land was interspersed with treelines, palm and rubbertree groves, and stretches of elephant grass. Immediately east of the Thu Bon, the ground is hilly, but less densely forested than the terrain west of the river. Near the southern boundary of the area of operations, jungled hills close in on the Thu Bon, confining it to a series of narrow, steep-sided gorges.

According to allied intelligence estimates, this terrain probably concealed about 400 enemy troops. These included elements of *Front 4 Headquarters* and headquarters and supply units of the *38th NVA* and *1st VC Regiments* and the *490th Sapper Battalion.* Should they choose to counterattack the Marines, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong could bring into the area perhaps 1,500 combat troops of the *1st* and *38th Regiments*, but allied officers considered this a most unlikely course of action for the enemy, who probably would evade the Marines while harassing them with sniper fire and boobytraps. In fact, all the estimates of enemy strength and capabilities were only tentative. As Colonel Derning put it, "The real problem was what was the enemy, where was he, or was he really there at all?"[11]

Pickens Forest would be what the 1st Marine Division defined as a Category III operation, "designed to locate and destroy NVA forces, supplies and installations in the highlands before they can interfere with pacification . . . . Maintenance of a personnel presence in these areas is not envisioned." Because the enemy's strength and disposition were uncertain, the operation plan emphasized deployment of a substantial Marine force at the start, able to envelop any hostile units encountered and positioned to bring all of its men and firepower quickly into action in the event of a major engagement.

The scheme of maneuver centered around a triangle of hilltop fire support bases (FSBs): Defiant, just west of the Thu Bon at what Colonel Derning labelled "the hub of the whole AO"; Mace, about three and one-half miles northwest of Defiant; and Dart, five miles southwest of Defiant. The latter two FSBs had been used in earlier Army and Marine operations, so they could be reopened quickly. In the first phase of the operation, one rifle company would land from helicopters to secure FSB Defiant, followed closely by a battery of 105mm howitzers. Two more rifle companies would then land along the banks of the Thu Bon to search that area and to provide a blocking force for units driving toward them from Mace and Dart. In the second phase, Mace and Dart would each be occupied by a battalion command post with two rifle companies and a 4.2-inch mortar battery. The rifle companies from each of the western firebases would work their way toward FSB Defiant, along the hill trails and stream beds, carefully searching the ground and, it was hoped, driving groups of enemy before them into the blocking force on the Thu Bon. As the companies reached the river valley, the reunited force would begin the third phase, a thorough search on both sides of the river.

The 7th Marines committed two of its battalions to the operation, the 1st under Lieutenant Colonel Charles G. Cooper and the 2d under Lieutenant Colonel Vincent A. Albers, Jr. Cooper's battalion, controlling three of its own rifle companies* and one from Albers' battalion, would establish the blocking force east of the Thu Bon and FSB Mace. Albers' battalion with two companies would secure FSB Dart. A Pacifier company from the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, temporarily under control of the 7th Marines, would protect the main artillery position at FSB Defiant. The artillery contingent would consist of Battery G (six 105mm howitzers) and Battery W (six 4.2-inch mortars) from Lieutenant Colonel David K. Dickey's 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, reinforced by two 4.2 mortars and their crews from Battery W, 1st Battalion, 11th Marines. While these forces conducted the operation, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth L. Robinson, Jr., would protect the regiment's TAOR with its four rifle companies, the regimental CUPP company, and one company from Albers' battalion, aided by the RFs and PFs.[12]

Early in the morning of 16 July, D-Day for Pickens Forest, CH-46s and CH-53s of MAG-16 loaded with Marines, artillery, and supplies descended on their initial objectives. At about 0800, the Pacifier unit, Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, took position on FSB Defiant. Thirty minutes later, the first three howitzers of Battery G were landed, followed shortly by the rest of the battery and Colonel Derning's regimental command post. About at the same time, Company B of the 1st Battalion dropped into LZ Bluejay just north of Defiant on the west bank of the Thu Bon, and Company E, 2d Battalion, deployed at LZ

*Company A, of the 1st Battalion was serving as the 7th Marines' Combined Unit Pacification Program (CUPP) company. See Chapter 9.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373328

Three Marines of Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines search the high grass in the Thu Bon River Valley southwest of Da Nang for the enemy during Operation Pickens Forest. Starting in early July 1970, Pickens Forest was the first named operation of the year.

Starling, about two miles south of Defiant on the east side of the river.

About 0930, the 1st Battalion command group with Companies C and D and four mortars of Battery W began landing at FSB Mace, while the 2d Battalion CP and four more mortars of Battery W occupied Dart, and Companies F and G landed just to the south in LZ Robin to achieve surprise. The Marines had not prepared Mace and Dart with air strikes or artillery fire. Instead, patrols from the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, airlifted into the vicinity the previous day, determined that the landing zones were safe, and on D-Day, guided in the troop-carrying helicopters.[13] By 1500 on the 16th, the entire attack force, brought in by helicopters, had moved into its planned positions. Colonel Derning, who spent much of the day aloft with the airborne helicopter commander, called the initial insertion "a beautiful example of air-ground team work . . . I've never seen school solutions work quite that well."[14]

As the Marines had expected, the enemy offered no opposition to their landings. The rifle companies quickly began searching the areas into which they had been inserted. The artillery used air-transported miniature bulldozers ("mini-dozers") to clear undergrowth from the fire support bases and to scoop out gun emplacements and ammunition storage pits. Each of the three fire bases had its own fire direction center, and Lieutenant Colonel Dickey set up a small artillery battalion CP and communications center at FSB Defiant to coordinate the batteries' efforts.[15]

For the next ten days, the operation went forward as planned. Company E gradually worked its way southward up the Thu Bon while Company B and the Pacifier company searched the river valley north of FSB Defiant. The units from FSBs Mace and Dart, meanwhile, pushed across country toward the river. In the extremely rough and overgrown mountains, Cooper's and Albers' Marines followed the major trails and streambeds on the assumption that this was where the enemy should be. The assumption proved correct, but the channelling of the Marines' approach into predictable routes often allowed Communist troops to escape before the Marines advanced into their base camps.

The enemy in the area avoided sustained combat, but small parties occasionally harassed the Marines with sniper fire and grenades, usually to cover the evacuation of base camps or the escape of a larger group. Until late in the operation, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, presumably for lack of time, set few boobytraps. By attacking aggressively when the enemy showed themselves, the Marines killed a few NVA and VC, and they often forced the Communists to leave food and equipment behind when they fled. In the southern part of the operational area, night am-

bushes on the trails produced several significant contacts with the enemy. During the most important of these skirmishes on the night of 26 July, elements of Company E ambushed about 30 NVA in an exchange of gunfire and grenades that wounded six Marines. Searching the area of the fight the next morning, the Marines found 5 dead North Vietnamese soldiers, 3 weapons, and 24 packs, evidently abandoned by the retreating enemy survivors. Documents taken from the packs identified the ambushed men as members of a naval sapper group which had started south from Hanoi in February.[16]

Spreading out in squad and platoon patrols, the companies uncovered bunkers, camps, and caches of food, ordnance, and medical supplies. Many of these discoveries resulted from the careful search of target areas identified by intelligence sources. On 27 July, for example, a patrol from Company E, working with Vietnamese province officials and RF troops and guided by a Viet Cong defector, located a cache of 139 SKS rifles in the hills east of the Thu Bon. Colonel Derning later commented that "Most of . . . our scoring was done with intelligence. Intelligence targets are the key."[17]

As the companies that landed at Mace and Dart moved toward the Thu Bon, the artillery shifted position to support them. On 22 July, the mortar battery from Mace and the 1st Battalion CP were lifted by helicopters to a new position near the Thu Bon about two miles north-northeast of Fire Support Base Defiant. The next day, the other mortar battery moved from FSB Dart to Defiant, completing the concentration of the artillery to cover the Thu Bon Valley.

While most of the Pickens Forest area of operation contained few civilians, FSB Defiant overlooked several hamlets and a rice and corn growing area. Colonel Derning, in the first couple of days of the operation, had over 200 inhabitants of the hamlets collected and temporarily resettled in friendly villages to the north. He did this to screen the civilians for enemy soldiers and agents and to clear the area for Marine fire and maneuver. On the second day of the operation, Derning's Marines used helicopter-borne loudspeakers to order all civilians to move towards the Thu Bon, warning them that anyone moving away from the river would be considered hostile and fired upon by supporting gunships. The technique proved effective, but failure to use it immediately after insertion of the troops, in Colonel Derning's opinion, probably allowed most of the enemy hidden among the people to slip away into the hills. "I wish," Derning said later, "I had been able to use that technique to begin with, and I think I would have scored better."[18]

In the fields near FSB Defiant, acres of corn were ripe for harvesting. To deny this food to the enemy, Colonel Derning persuaded 1st Marine Division Headquarters to give him 50,000 piastres with which to hire friendly Vietnamese civilians to pick the corn. He offered the corn to the local Duc Duc District Chief, who did not think his people could use it. Derning then turned to the authorities in Que Son District, back in the 7th Marines' regular TAOR, who responded favorably.

Beginning on 24 July, CH-53s roared into LZ Baldy each morning to pick up loads of eager peasants, many of whom had assembled at the base gate at daybreak so as not to miss the trip. Loaded with people and with two and one-half-ton trailers slung underneath them, the big helicopters then flew to selected corn fields, set down the trailers, and disgorged the pickers who fanned out and went to work. By 1100 or 1130 each day, the trailers would be full, and the helicopters would fly them and the people back to Baldy. The 50,000 piasters ran out quickly, but, according to Derning, "it was just like taking a very small cup of water and priming the well." The peasants continued working for the corn itself, turning part in to their district authorities and keeping the rest to feed themselves and their animals. By 8 August, when the harvest ended, the Vietnamese had taken over 42,000 pounds of the enemy's corn, much of which could be seen laid out to dry on the paving of Route 1 "from Ba Ren River . . . to . . . just outside of Baldy."

Colonel Derning was "delighted" with the harvest he had set in motion. "I thought that every day we pulled that out we were really dealing old Charlie a good blow . . . and it was a good morale factor. It was good to be a member of the GVN."[19]

During the corn harvest, the 7th Marines began realigning and reducing its forces in Pickens Forest. All the infantry companies were now operating in the hills near the Thu Bon.

On 26 July, the 1st Battalion command group and Company B returned to LZ Baldy. The next day Company C followed them, leaving Company D to continue operations attached to Lieutenant Colonel Albers' 2d Battalion. Albers' battalion had resumed control of Company E on the 22d, and on the 27th, Company H, which had been under operational control of the 3d Battalion, arrived in the Thu Bon Val-

ley and began combing the hills north of FSB Defiant. On 28 July, the Pacifier company boarded helicopters to return to Division Ridge and control of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. That same day, the 7th Marines command group moved back to LZ Baldy, and a regimental order assigned the 1st Battalion to defense of the eastern AO around Baldy and the 3d to protection of the Ross-Ryder area. The 2d Battalion, its CP now located on Hill 110 about three-quarters of a mile northeast of Defiant, would continue Pickens Forest.

The artillery also reduced and realigned forces. On 25 July, the mortar battery located north of FSB Defiant was broken up. Two of its weapons and their crews went from the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, to Baldy, and two more from the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines returned to their parent unit near Da Nang. Two days later four howitzers of Battery G and the artillery battalion command group moved to LZ Ross. The other two howitzers and their crews displaced to Hill 110. There they joined the four remaining mortars and crews of Battery W to form a provisional battery which continued to support Operation Pickens Forest.[20]

The Marines of the 2d Battalion continued searching along the Thu Bon. On 30 July, Company E, working its way upstream (southwesterly) along both banks of the river, ran into the strongest enemy opposition yet encountered in the operation. The contact occurred about four miles south of Hill 110 at a point where the river flows through a narrow, steep-sided gorge about 2,000 feet deep. At about noon on the 30th, eight Marines from Company E in two boats were hunting for caves in the cliffs overhanging the water, while other patrols moved along the bank. Without warning, perhaps 50 NVA or VC with as many as four machine guns, well concealed in caves and bunkers in the sides of the gorge close to water level, opened fire. They quickly riddled and sank the two boats, killing two Marines and wounding three. The survivers, both wounded and unwounded, were left floundering in the stream. The Marines on land returned fire, covering the retreat of their swimming comrades whom the current carried northward toward safety. Three flights of jets came into support Company E. In spite of low clouds, rain showers, and the narrowness of the gorge, which made direction of the strikes difficult, the Marine pilots managed to drop enough napalm to silence the enemy weapons and allow the infantry to regroup while a CH-46 evacuated the wounded. The skirmish had cost the company two men killed and a total of four wounded; enemy losses, if any, could not be determined.[21]

That evening, Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, returned to Pickens Forest. Helicopters landed the Pacifier company in a valley south and west of the site of Company E's fight in the hope of blocking withdrawal of the hostile force. Sweeping northward up a mountain the next day, Company C killed one VC sniper and detained six civilian suspects but found no sign of the enemy main body. Companies C and E continued to sweep the area on 1 August, without significant contact, and that evening the Pacifier company returned to Da Nang.[22]

For another week after the fight at the river, the Marines continued searching the Thu Bon Valley. They killed or captured a few more Viet Cong and uncovered three large food caches and several smaller ones of weapons and medical supplies. The number of troops in the operation steadily dwindled. On 1 August, Company F returned to LZ Baldy for rest and rehabilitation. Its place was taken by Company G which had just finished a similar rest period. On 5 August, Company E also left the Thu Bon Valley for Baldy.

On 9 August, companies of the 2d Battalion moved into a new area of operations farther west. This change of position resulted from a decision by General Lam late in July to send several Vietnamese battalions beyond the western border of BA 112 in a raid on suspected enemy logistic and communications centers. Lam, supported by Lieutenant General Sutherland, the XXIV Corps commander, asked III MAF to extend the 7th Marines' area of operation to support this advance. General McCutcheon argued against the movement. He pointed out that information about the advance probably would reach the enemy, eliminating any chance of major finds or contacts, and that the ARVN could achieve more by renewing and intensifying operations nearer the populated areas. Lam insisted on the westward thrust and Sutherland backed him, so McCutcheon finally agreed reluctantly to commit a Marine battalion to support the ARVN.[23]

Accordingly, on the 9th, Lieutenant Colonel Albers received orders to occupy FSB Hatchet about 20 miles northwest of Hill 110 while leaving one company in the Thu Bon Valley. That same day, Company E, fresh from its rehabilitation at Baldy, supported by two 105mm howitzers of Battery G from FSB Ross, took position at FSB Hatchet. The firebase, recently vacat-

ed by a Vietnamese Marine battery, crowned a high hill just east of the Cai River, which borders BA 112 on the west. The surrounding country is mountainous with the exception of some level ground and a few hamlets near the river. A major, but long unused highway, Route 14, which ran from Thuong Duc southward into the Central Highlands, passed by the east side of the firebase.

The enemy reacted to the Marines' arrival at Hatchet with a salvo of five 122mm rockets. The rockets inflicted casualties—one Marine wounded and one ARVN soldier killed and another wounded from a South Vietnamese unit still operating in the area. On 10 August, more Marine artillery arrived; helicopters lifted in two 105mm howitzers of Battery G and two 155mm howitzers of Battery W from FSB Ross.* On the 11th, the 2d Battalion command post established itself at FSB Hatchet, and within the next few days, Companies F and H of the battalion joined Company E in search and destroy operations in the hills around the base. The howitzers fired in support of the Marines and also of the ARVN units to the west.[24]

While Albers' Marines searched the hills along the Cai River, Operation Pickens Forest and the concurrent South Vietnamese operations moved into their concluding phases. On 16 August, Company G of Albers' battalion and the provisional battery from Hill 110 left the Thu Bon Valley for LZ Baldy, ending Marine activity in the original Pickens Forest area. At the same time, General Lam informed XXIV Corps and III MAF that on 23 August he would start withdrawing his South Vietnamese Marine and Ranger battalions from the western mountains to have them back near the coast before the onset of the fall monsoon rains made air support and supply difficult. To cover this ARVN pullback, III MAF would keep Albers' battalion at FSB Hatchet until 24 August.[25]

During its last few days around FSB Hatchet, the 2d Battalion made contact with North Vietnamese regulars. About 0915 on 20 August, the 3d Platoon of Company H was sweeping toward the northeast through open forest and elephant grass near the hamlet of My Hiep (2) which was two miles north of the firebase. An estimated platoon of NVA opened fire from bunkers with machine guns and grenade launchers, wounding three members of Company H. The Marines replied with small arms and grenades and called in artillery and air support. The fight continued through the morning. Other elements of Company H assisted the engaged platoon. Company F marched toward the action from its search area to the southeast, and Company G was brought in by helicopter from LZ Baldy. The action ended around 1300, when the Marines lost contact with the enemy. By that time, they had suffered one man killed and a total of nine wounded; the fleeing NVA left behind three dead.[26]

Before dawn the next day, Lieutenant Colonel Albers led Companies G and H in a sweep through the abandoned enemy position. His troops found 12 bunkers, 1 more dead NVA, and 5 boobytraps, one of which exploded and wounded three Marines. Continuing to search near My Hiep (2) on 22 August, Company G found a group of six more large bunkers a short distance east of the site of the engagement. Intelligence revealed that these had housed the headquarters of an element of the *38th NVA Regiment*.[27]

These events partially confirmed other indications that troops of the *38th Regiment* were forming in Lieutenant Colonel Albers' area of operations. Evidence gathered from many sources from 20-23 August suggested that the NVA were preparing to attack FSB Hatchet. On the 23rd, for example, Marines of Company E sighted four enemy, probably a reconnaissance element, about 1,200 meters from the perimeter of the firebase and fired a 106mm recoilless rifle at them. Albers later concluded that it was "probable that had the operation not ended on 24 August and evacuation of FSB Hatchet been executed the *38th NVA Regiment* would have launched an attack."*[28]

Albers' battalion did not wait to receive the attack. As previously planned, the CP and all four companies were airlifted back to the 7th Marines' TAOR on the 24th while the artillery displaced to rejoin their parent units at FSB Ross and LZ Baldy. With these movements, Operation Pickens Forest came to an end.

During the six weeks of the operation, the batteries supporting the 7th Marines fired 771 missions, most of them at targets designated by intelligence as probable base camps and avenues of enemy movement. For the 2d Battalion alone, aircraft of the 1st MAW flew 37 close air support missions with 500- and 1,000-pound bombs, 5-inch Zuni rockets, and 500-pound napalm cannisters. Besides making repeated trooplifts, helicopters of MAG-16 carried out 147

*The Mortar Battery (W) of the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines consisted of six 4.2-inch mortars and two 155mm howitzers.

*In Thua Thien to the north, the allies had evacuated FSB Ripcord late in July under heavy NVA pressure, and during August a second outlying firebase, O'Reilly, came under continual mortar attack.

medical evacuations and performed over 150 other missions.[29]

Throughout the operation, the 7th Marines relied entirely upon helicopters to resupply its wide-ranging battalions. All supplies for the units engaged in Pickens Forest went to the field from the regiment's logistic support area (LSA) at LZ Baldy. Here personnel of the regiment's logistic support unit (LSU)* maintained stockpiles of food, fuel, and ammunition which were brought in daily by truck convoys from Da Nang. Each battalion at Baldy set up its own supply dump of clothing, individual equipment, and construction and fortification material. Daily requisitions from the maneuvering battalions went to regimental headquarters where the S-4 section of the staff consolidated them and transmitted them to the LSA while the air liaison officer arranged for helicopters from MAG-16. At the LSA, a work crew from each battalion, stationed at Baldy for this purpose, packed its unit's supplies, drawn either from its own stockpile or from the general reserve, and placed them at assigned points on the helicopter pad. The morning after the requisition was received, helicopters picked up the shipment and flew it out to the battalion. To prevent shortages in the field if bad weather interrupted this flow of supplies, the battalions maintained two days' reserve stocks at their fire support bases.

Under this system, helicopters of MAG-16 lifted over 3,500,000 pounds of cargo for the 7th Marines between 16 July and 24 August. As a result of their efforts, no major supply shortages or interruptions occurred during the operation.[30]

During Pickens Forest, the 7th Marines killed a total of 99 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong at a cost of four Marines dead and 51 wounded. Units of the regiment uncovered 5 major weapons and ordnance caches, 6 significant stockpiles of food, 12 base camps, a large hospital, 121 bunker complexes, and the enemy's *Quang Da Post Office.* Weapons and stores taken from the caches included 174 SKS and AK-47 rifles, over 72,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, almost 500 82mm mortar rounds, over 55,000 pounds of corn, and 215 pounds of medical equipment. In the *Quang Da Post Office*, the Marines found 50 letters from North Vietnam and a Communist manual of postal procedure.[31] Temporarily at least, the operation had

*Logistic support units, ordinarily collocated with regimental command posts, consisted of supply and mainenance personnel from Force Logistic Command who worked hand in hand with representatives from 1st Division units. For further detail on their organization and operation, see Chapter 18.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Col Paul X. "P.X." Kelley, facing the camera, accepts the colors of the 1st Marines from Col Edward A. Wilcox in a formal change of command ceremony.

blocked a major part of the enemy's trail network. Colonel Waldrop, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, 1st Marine Division, summed up: "It [Pickens Forest] has not been a fantastic success, but it has considerably hampered the enemy, not so much in the kills that were made, but in the fact that it blocked and cleaned out the caches in one of his choke points in his transportation system."[32]

Pickens Forest's South Vietnamese companion operations, Vu Ninh 12 and Hung Quang 1/32B, had produced comparably modest but still significant results. The Vietnamese infantry, rangers, and Marines claimed over 500 enemy casualties while losing 44 of their own killed and 227 wounded. They had captured some 290 weapons and had found a number of base camps and supply caches. Their most important discovery occurred on 10 August when the rangers west of BA 112 came upon 30 huts which allied intelligence later identified as a recently abandoned site of *Front 4 Headquarters.* The huts contained much communication equipment, including 21 telephones, over a mile of wire, and about 100 pounds of documents.[33]

The 1st and 5th Marines Continue the Small-Unit War

While the 7th Marines drove into the enemy's mountain bases during the summer, the 1st and 5th

Marines continued small-unit operations in defense of Da Nang. The TAORs of the two regiments and the deployment of their battalions remained as they had been since the rearrangements that followed the departure of the 26th Marines. The 1st Marines defended the Rocket Belt, and the 5th Marines protected An Hoa and the Vu Gia River Valley while conducting periodic forays into the Arizona Territory.

The 1st Marines underwent a change of command on 29 June when Colonel Wilcox, in a ceremony at the regimental CP at Camp Perdue on Division Ridge, turned over the colors to Colonel Paul X. Kelley. Colonel Kelley would remain in command of this regiment, already designated as the principal ground element of the proposed MAB, until the end of operations at Da Nang in June 1971. A native of Massachusetts, Kelley wore Army jump wings and earned Marine jump wings while commanding 2d Force Reconnaissance Company. He had attended Commando school in England and jungle warfare courses in Malaysia as an exchange officer with the British Royal Marines. During his previous Vietnam tour in 1966, he had won the Silver Star Medal while commanding the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines. Aggressive and athletic, Colonel Kelley spent much of his time in the field with his troops. Nicknamed "PX," he had a reputation as a hard-driving commander, but one who inspired officers and men alike to achieve his high standards.

On 10 August, a rearrangement of command of the close-in defense of Da Nang occurred when the 1st Marine Division discontinued the Northern and Southern Sector Defense Commands. The 3d Battalion, 1st Marines extended its TAOR to the southeast to embrace part of the old NSDC, with its commander now responsible for coordinating the defense of the resident support and supply units. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, still the division reserve, continued to direct the defense of most of the former SSDC and enlarged its area of responsibility to include the division command post and the installations on Division Ridge. These changes in designation and command responsibility had little effect on the day and night routine of patrols and ambushes that protected the division's rear area.[34]

By the time these command rearrangements were made, another long-standing feature of the defenses of Da Nang had been almost completely dismantled. This was the Da Nang Barrier, or Da Nang Anti-infiltration System (DAIS), the line of mine fields, cleared land, barbed wire fences, and electronic sensors which Marine commanders had hoped would allow them to stop infiltration of the Rocket Belt with fewer troops. The system had never been put in full operation, and the 1st Marine Division lacked the engineers and equipment to finish its construction and the infantry to man it. The sensors which had been installed furnished little useful intelligence because activations caused by passing farmers and water buffaloes could not be distinguished from those caused by rocket-bearing NVA or VC. Maintenance of the sensors had proved, in the words of a division report, "nearly impossible, due to indigenous personnel cutting and removing sections on the cables." The barrier, by restricting civilian movement, retarded pacification, and the Marines now were emphasizing mobile tactics rather than barrier defense. Therefore, on 3 May, III MAF approved a 1st Marine Division request for permission to demolish the barrier. By 3 June, efforts to control population movement through it had ended. Removal of sensors began late in July and was completed by 15 August.[35]

Thus, by mid-summer, protection of the Rocket Belt depended primarily on Colonel Kelley's three infantry battalions. Their deployment did not change. The 3d Battalion, its TAOR enlarged, continued to defend the northern and northwestern quadrants of the arc drawn around Da Nang; the 1st Battalion protected the western and southwestern approaches; and the 2d Battalion guarded the southern sector. To block enemy infiltration of the Rocket Belt, each battalion conducted daily small-unit patrols and ambushes, varying these with larger operations. The Marines cooperated in cordon and search operations with Vietnamese territorials, or, in the case of the 2d Battalion, with Korean Marines. Occasionally, the 1st and 3d Battalions sent two or more of their companies on short reconnaissances in force into the hills on the edge of the populated area. The 2d Battalion, in its heavily boobytrapped TAOR, continued the practice adopted in June of covering its terrain in daytime from static observation posts and doing most of its patrolling, ambushing, and fighting at night when the Viet Cong often removed many of their mines to permit their own forces to maneuver.[36]

Throughout the regiment's TAOR, the enemy appeared to be concentrating on collecting supplies and maintaining contact with the underground in the villages. Small groups of VC and NVA, rarely numbering more than 10, continually tried to move in and

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373915
Marines of Company L, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines cross a fast-moving stream in the Elephant Valley, a jungled enemy base area 17 miles northwest of Da Nang.

out of the Rocket Belt. In brief exchanges of grenades and small arms fire, Marine patrols and ambushes frequently intercepted the infiltrators, and batteries of the 11th Marines continued to fire their nightly harassing and interdiction fire* at suspected rocket launching sites and infiltration routes. The effect of this sporadic skirmishing on the larger tactical situation was difficult to measure, as always, but at the end of September, as an indication of effectiveness, the 2d Battalion could report that for 100 consecutive days no rocket or mortar shell had been fired at Da Nang from within its TAOR.[37]

The enemy's reduced effectiveness in the 2d Battalion's area may have resulted from an unusually successful attack on a VC command post by elements of the battalion.[38] Late in July, a combined sweep south of Marble Mountain by units of the 2d Battalion and the Korean Marine Brigade captured a woman member of the Viet Cong's *District III Da Nang Headquarters*, the control authority for enemy activity in the area from Marble Mountain north to Tien Sha Peninsula. Under interrogation, the woman detailed the operations of the headquarters and pointed out the approximate location of the bunker complex which housed it. A Marine search then discovered the bunkers in flat paddy land near the hamlet of Quang Ha (1) about six miles south of Marble Mountain airfield. Finding the bunkers empty, the Marines left them intact in the hope the enemy would continue to use them. The enemy did so, but two attempted surprise night attacks on the bunker complex failed when the assaulting force encountered VC pickets and boobytraps.

In spite of the increasing attention their hideout was receiving from the Marines, the Viet Cong leaders continued to conduct regular work sessions in the bunkers. They evidently thought that lookouts among the farmers in the fields by day and rings of sentries and boobytraps at night would assure them time to evade any attacking force. Lieutenant Colonel William G. Leftwich, Jr., the 2d Battalion's commander, decided to try to exploit the enemy's overconfidence with a surprise daytime raid. Under the plan he and his staff worked out, helicopters would land an assault force directly on top of the bunkers with no prior preparation of the landing zone, thus avoiding the enemy's security ring and trapping them.

Lieutenant Colonel Leftwich organized an assault force under his personal command, consisting of a detachment of staff and communications personnel from battalion headquarters, the 3d Platoon of Company G, the battalion reconnaissance squad, and a group from the 3d Counterintelligence Team.* These units would conduct the helicopterborne asault while a second rifle platoon and a section of tanks from Company C, 1st Tank Battalion stood by on the ground to lend support if required.

At 1400 on 4 August, the assault force took off from Camp Lauer, the 2d Battalion's CP, in four CH-46s of HMM-364 and flew northward away from the target area to mislead enemy observers. At the same time, the command Huey from HML-167 and two Cobra gunships of HML-367 lifted off and flew toward the west. At 1430, after making a wide, circuitous approach, the entire force swooped down on the bunkers. No overflights by reconnaissance aircraft or preparatory bombing or shelling had forewarned the VC of the impending attack, and they were caught. The bat-

*Harassing fire: Fire designed to disturb the rest of enemy troops, to curtail movement, and, by threat of losses, to lower morale. Interdiction fire: Fire placed on an area or point to prevent the enemy from using it.

*Counterintelligence Teams (CITs) and Interrogation and Translation Teams (ITTs) consisted of Marines specially trained in interrogation of prisoners and translation of captured documents.

talion's after action report described the ensuing scramble.

> The VC were caught by surprise and attempted to flee. The first action upon landing was a melee in and around the bunkers as the Marines chased down the slower moving VC. Another more far ranging pursuit then developed as the C & C ship and Cobras chased the faster moving VC. By swooping low and firing guns into the nearby ground the helicopters forced the VC to stop until the foot Marines closed with their quarry. In some cases, CH-46's dropped in and quickly shifted rifle squads over to the next target. If VC shot at a chasing helicopter, door gunners or on board ordnance quickly dispatched them.[39]

By 1600, the fight had ended, and the Marines spread out to collect the enemy dead and wounded. There were no Marine casualties. The raiders had killed 12 Viet Cong, including the district chief, the military affairs officer, and the security officer of *District III Da Nang*. They had captured 9 others, 8 rifles, 14 grenades, and headquarters papers of considerable intelligence value.

That night, the Marines left an ambush in the bunker area, and the next day, after further search, engineers destroyed the bunkers. The Marines delivered the bodies of the dead VC leaders to the GVN's Dien Ban District Chief, who planned to display the corpses in the hamlets as gruesome but graphic evidence that the allies were winning the war.

In September, Lieutenant Colonel William M. Yeager's 3rd Battalion conducted Operation Dubois Square, the 1st Marines' only named operation of the summer. This operation was a reconnaisance in force to determine whether or not major enemy units were massing in the mountains northwest of Da Nang. On 9 September, three rifle companies, Company K of the 3d Battalion and Companies B and F of the 1st and 2d Battalions respectively, under operational control of Yeager's battalion, landed by helicopter in rugged hills on both sides of the Cu De River about 15 miles northwest of Da Nang. At the same time, a composite howitzer and mortar battery from the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines established FSB Sam on a hilltop just north of the Cu De east of where the infantry had landed. After six days of searching the steep jungle slopes and boulder-strewn ravines near the initial landing zones, Company K moved by helicopter about 10 miles to the northeast to investigate another suspected enemy base area. The Marines ended the operation on 19 September, having encountered no VC or NVA. They found a few small, abandoned camps and other indications of enemy activity, but no sign of the presence of any large Communist force.[40]

Southwest of the 1st Marines, the 5th Marines operated throughout the summer along Route 4 and in the broad basin where the Thu Bon and the Vu Gia River flow together. Like the 1st Marines, the 5th Marines underwent a change of commanders. On 27 June, Colonel Clark V. Judge took over the regiment from Colonel Estey. Colonel Judge, a Pennsylvanian, had entered the Marine Corps as a reservist and received his regular commission in 1953. A veteran of Korean combat, he was now beginning his first tour in Vietnam.

As had been the case since the Keystone Bluejay redeployments, Colonel Judge, as regimental commander, directly controlled only his 2d and 3d Battalions. The 1st Battalion, as division reserve, operated under control of 1st Marine Division Headquarters. Of the battalions under Judge's control, the 2d continued to defend Liberty Bridge and An Hoa while conducting mobile operations in the Arizona Territory and on eastern Go Noi Island. The 3d Battalion remained in position on Hills 52, 25, and 65 guarding the supply line to Thuong Duc.

LCpl Larry Hicks from Company G, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines guards an enemy suspect after a successful operation that netted several Viet Cong leaders.
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373441

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373430

LCpl William R. Brown cautiously approaches an old boat tied up to a river bank. After several years of combat in Vietnam, 1st Division Marines had learned through bitter experience that the most innocent appearing objects often concealed dangerous boobytraps.

In July and August, the regiment removed most of its headquarters and support units from An Hoa, implementing the division's plans to evacuate Marines from that base. The 3d Battalion, which had maintained a rear command post at An Hoa to manage administrative and supply matters while its forward CP on Hill 65 directed combat operations, moved its rear CP to Hill 37 in July. The following month, the regimental headquarters, also located at An Hoa, divided into forward and rear elements. The forward command post, consisting of Colonel Judge with the intelligence and operations sections of the staff and detachments of the personnel and supply sections, relocated to Hill 37. The regimental rear, composed of the executive officer with the personnel, supply, and pacification sections of the staff, moved to Camp Reasoner* on Division Ridge. At the same time, the headquarters battery of the regiment's direct support artillery unit, the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, joined the 5th Marines forward CP on Hill 37, while a rear element of the artillery headquarters established itself at the 11th Marines' regimental CP. Several artillery batteries and support units also left An Hoa in August, displacing to Hill 65, LZ Baldy, and the Da Nang area. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines continued to maintain its command post at An Hoa and would take charge of the base's defense until the ARVN assumed responsibility in the fall.[41]

The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, besides protecting its TAOR around the division command post, conducted as many as four Pacifier operations each week during the summer. The division now used the infantry-helicopter combination primarily for quick reaction to sightings of large groups of enemy and to forestall expected enemy attacks. As the division operations officer explained it:

> We get indications, for instance, that the enemy is building up for an attack on Hill 55, and we have a pretty good idea of which unit it is that's going to do the attacking, and we . . . through his normal patterns know where his assembly areas and attack positions will be, or we have a pretty good idea, so what we'll do is put the Pacifier in there all the way up to a company size . . . and they will . . . maybe not get many kills, but we find it highly effective in preempting the enemy actions.[42]

Lieutenant Colonel Bernard E. Trainor, then battalion commander of 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, later explained that he modified use of Pacifier operations during this period to minimize the casualties taken from mines and boobytraps. "Nobody pursued. There was only pursuit by fire," he said. "Each of the units would have a different colored (cloth) patch (yellow, white, red) on the top of its helmets . . . I would usual-

*Camp Reasoner was named after 1st Lieutenant Frank S. Reasoner, Commanding Officer, Company A, 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, 3d Marine Division, who was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions on 12 July 1965 while leading a reconnaissance patrol near Da Nang.

ly land two units (platoons) and we'd keep one airborne. . . ." When contact was made, the VC would usually withdraw, often trying to draw Marines into heavily mined areas. Trainor's battalion would not follow on foot.

"The unit that made contact immediately pursued by fire and the unit that I had airborne we would put in to do the pursuit by air . . . . So the guys on the ground never had to do any humping which would put them into the minefields." The colored patches on helmets facilitated control from the air. "I'd be able to look down and see the color of the helmet and be able to talk . . . red, yellow, blue," said Trainor, "and that's the way we would command and control the thing. And it was quite effective." The new procedures were successful, resulting in numerous enemy killed and captured while totally avoiding friendly casualties by mines and boobytraps during Pacifier Operations.[43]

Pacifier companies often reinforced other Marine or South Vietnamese units to cordon and search villages. They also took part in sweeps of mountain base areas, such as Operation Pickens Forest. Their operations produced a modest but steady accumulation of enemy casualties. In August, for example, Pacifier activities accounted for 11 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese killed, took 15 prisoners, and captured four weapons.[44]

The regiment's 2d and 3d Battalions carried on the pattern of operations they had established earlier in the year. The 2d Battalion emphasized two- and three-company cordons and searches of enemy hamlets, varied with tank-infantry sweeps, mostly in the Arizona Territory. In the Thuong Duc corridor, the 3d Battalion and the Vietnamese territorial forces in July abandoned and razed their defense position on Hill 25 while continuing to garrison Hills 52 and 65 overlooking Route 4. In August and September, Marines of the 3d Battalion launched an increasing number of helicopter-borne forays into Charlie Ridge and the northern Arizona. The battalions encountered only small groups of enemy during the summer, either flushed from ditches, huts, and spider holes during sweeps of villages or colliding with patrols and ambushes as the enemy sought food or tried to infiltrate populated areas. In August, a typical month of this kind of action, the regiment killed 29 NVA and VC,

Marine tanks and infantry from the 5th Marines and Company C, 1st Tank Battalion move out through a corn field in Operation Barren Green in the My Hiep sector south of Da Nang during July 1970. This was the first named operation for the 5th Marines.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A 373933

took nine prisoners, and captured 14 weapons at a cost of six Marines killed in action, three dead of wounds, and 60 wounded. Boobytraps caused many of the Marine casualties. In August, the battalions reported finding 50 of these devices and accidentally detonating 26.[45]

The 5th Marines conducted two named operations during the summer. The first, Operation Barren Green, centered on the VC-controlled My Hiep area just south of the Song Vu Gia in northern Arizona Territory. Here large fields of corn had ripened which allied intelligence expected to be harvested by enemy sympathizers and then carried by infiltrators southwestward into the mountain base camps of the *38th NVA Regiment.* In an effort to keep the enemy from obtaining this corn, on 15-16 July, a reinforced platoon from the 3d Battalion, in cooperation with RFs from Dai Loc District, protected civilians brought in from north of the river to harvest the crop. In two days, the civilians collected 30 tons of corn, but on the second day enemy sniper fire and boobytraps killed three PFs, wounded eight RFs, five civilians, and 12 Marines, and so frightened the harvesters that the operation had to be discontinued with much corn still standing in the fields.

In Operation Barren Green, from 24 to 27 July, companies from the 2d and 3d Battalions, supported by a platoon from Company C, 1st Tank Battalion, returned to the My Hiep area. In the first phase of the operation, controlled by the 2d Battalion, a cordon and sweep routed out and captured a few enemy. A reconnaissance team nearby ambushed a party of NVA from the *38th Regiment* fleeing the area with a load of corn and killed seven of them. In the second phase of the operation, the 3d Battalion took charge and oversaw the destruction of the rest of the standing corn, much of which was crushed by the tanks. When the operation ended on 27 July, the Marines had killed 18 NVA and VC, captured three prisoners and four weapons, and destroyed about 10,000 pounds of the enemy's corn.[46]

The 5th Marines' second named operation, Lyon Valley, was also aimed at stopping the movement of food from the northern Arizona to the base areas of the *38th Regiment*, in this case by blocking trails and destroying camps and caches in the mountains bordering the Arizona area on the southwest. On 16 August, Companies F and H of the 2d Battalion with a battalion command group were inserted by helicopter into mountain landing zones. At the same time, Company L of the 3d Battalion, under operational control of the 2d Battalion, screened the northern face of the mountains. The 2d Battalion companies pushed northeastward from their landing zones along the trails toward the blocking company while searching for enemy troops and installations. In two small firefights, Marines of Company F killed three North Vietnamese, but the companies encountered no large enemy units. The trails the Marines followed showed signs of frequent use, and the companies found numerous bunkers, holes, and rocket launching sites. They also came upon several antiaircraft gun positions and in one they captured a 12.7mm machine gun. On 22 August, Companies F and H reached the northern foot of the mountains, where they boarded helicopters and flew back to An Hoa. Company L on the same day returned to the control of the 3d Battalion.

On 23 August, Companies F and H resumed the operation. With minimal air or artillery preparation of their landing zones, they landed by helicopter in the southwestern Arizona in an effort to surprise and trap enemy combat and transportation troops who might have hidden there while the earlier maneuvers blocked movement into the hills. The Marines captured only one North Vietnamese soldier, but they found a large quantity of food. Operation Lyon Valley ended on 24 August; results were modest. The Marines suffered no combat casualties, although 11 men were incapacitated by heat stroke and accidents. They killed five enemy and captured one, uncovered and destroyed 13 base camps, and collected two weapons, assorted other ordnance, and over three tons of food.[47]

Combat Declines, But the Threat Continues

For the Marines—whether combing Base Area 112 in Operation Pickens Forest or patrolling and ambushing in the Rocket Belt, the Arizona Territory, the Thuong Duc corridor, and the Que Son Valley—it had been a summer of diminishing contact with the enemy. Throughout the summer, and in fact throughout the first eight months of 1970, *Front 4* had withheld most of its main force units from battle. By early September, there were indications that *Front 4's* main force strength actually had decreased. Documents captured in Operations Pickens Forest, Lyon Valley, and Dubois Square, supported by other information developed through continuous patrolling by infantry and reconnaissance units, pointed to a consolidation and reduction of *Front 4's* military command organization and to the disbanding or departure from the province of three of the four North Vietnamese infantry regiments reported there at the beginning of the year.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A 373546

A Marine from the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines searches a bomb crater in the "Arizona Territory," named after the Western badlands and an enemy stronghold.

Only the *38th Regiment*, which had probed ARVN defenses at Thuong Duc in May and threatened FSB Hatchet in August, still seemed to be active.[48]

Month by month, the amount of local force activity had also diminished. By late August, in Quang Nam, III MAF was conducting an average of 21 percent more small-unit and company-size operations per month than it had conducted in the province in 1969, but the average number of contacts per month had fallen to only 78 percent of that in the previous year.[49]

South of III MAF's TAOR, the results of the summer offensive reflected a similar decline in enemy activity and aggressiveness. The 196th Infantry Brigade of the Americal Division and elements of the 2d ARVN Division in Operation Elk Canyon had secured Kham Duc airfield in the mountains of western Quang Tin on 12 July.

From then until 26 August, they defended the airstrip against enemy fire attacks and light ground probes while carrying on search and destroy activities in the surrounding hills. By the 26th, when they evacuated Kham Duc and fell back toward the coast, the Army and ARVN troops had achieved only minor contact, killing 66 enemy and taking one prisoner at a cost to the Americans of five men killed in action.[50]

North of Quang Nam, on the other hand, where elements of the 101st Airborne and 1st ARVN Divsions advanced toward the enemy's vital A Shau Valley infiltration routes, the North Vietnamese reacted strongly. During July, they massed troops against the 101st Airborne's Fire Support Base Ripcord in the mountains west of Hue and pounded it with mortars, recoilless rifles, and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs). Artillery fire, air strikes, and ground sweeps failed to drive off the determined NVA, who appeared to be preparing for a full-scale attack. Rather than fight a bloody, politically embarrassing, and militarily unproductive battle in the highlands, the U.S. and ARVN high commands decided to evacuate the firebase. The evacuation was carried out under fire on 22-23 July, at a cost to the Americans of eight helicopters damaged and one shot down and several artillery pieces abandoned. Combat around Ripcord between 13 March and 23 July had resulted in American losses of 112 killed and 698 wounded, but the 101st Airborne Division considered the occupation of the firebase a successful operation. Air strikes and artillery fire had killed an estimated 400 of the NVA troops concentrated around the base, and by massing against it the enemy had left major cache areas unguarded elsewhere, opening the way for several productive allied sweeps.

In August and September, the story of FSB Ripcord was repeated at FSB O'Reilly, another allied firebase menacing the A Shau Valley. From 6 August to 16 September, the NVA mortared the base and massed troops around it in defiance of allied artillery and air attacks which included 19 B-52 Arc Light missions. The South Vietnamese Joint General Staff decided to abandon the base before the fall monsoon restricted supporting air operations, and by 7 October all of the defenders, elements of the 1st ARVN Regiment, had been extracted by helicopter. In two months of heavy contact around O'Reilly, the 1st ARVN claimed to have killed over 500 North Vietnamese while losing 61 of its own men.[51]

As the summer ended, the military situation in MR 1 remained ambiguous. In areas where the allies were strong, such as Quang Nam Province, the enemy maintained a persistent but declining level of small-scale activity and avoided major contact. However, the

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A 194245

Marines from the 1st Military Police Battalion near Da Nang search for hidden Viet Cong. LCpl Bobby Rose, in the foreground, uses a metal rod to prod a haypile for any enemy who might have sought refuge there. The Viet Cong were adept at evading pursuers.

Communists vigorously protected their most important base areas and supply routes, especially in northern MR 1, and their pressure on FSBs Ripcord and O'Reilly indicated that they still had enough strength to exploit allied points of weakness. Further confusing the allies' anticipation of enemy actions, documents captured during the summer appeared to MACV analysts to suggest the enemy would renew emphasis on large-scale attacks as well as enjoining continued guerrilla activity.[52]

Late in 1970, Lieutenant General John R. Chaisson, Deputy Chief of Staff (Plans and Programs) at HQMC and a former director of MACV's Combat Operations Center, summed up the enemy's strategy and offered an explanation for its apparent contradictions:

> For the past five years the enemy has employed a mixed strategy, which may be defined as the sum total of violence perpetrated against a variety of GVN and U.S. targets by a spectrum of enemy forces with distinct organizational characteristics, intended purposes and doctrines. The enemy's strategy is also "mixed" in a geographic sense, with the level (as well as the causes) of violence differing markedly from one locale to another. In a given area, he is liable within the same short time frame to strike at hamlet officials, PF outposts, ARVN forces on sweeps, and U.S. fire bases . . . . He exploited weakness or carelessness by attacking. And while his directives stressed some target categories (such as combined action platoons) more than others, his actual attacks reflected tactical opportunism.
>
> That in different areas of the country we have seen different enemy styles and targets should not be attributed *a priori* to his deliberate choice. In various areas he may not have the wide range of strategic options we have attributed to him . . . . He may be impeded by the U.S./GVN actions, or by command-and-control problems, or by the decentralized, localized nature of the war.[53]

In MR 1, more than in any other region of South Vietnam, the enemy had available their entire range of military options, from large-unit offensives to guerrilla raids and terrorism. The diminishing level of actual combat did not diminish the continuing enemy threat. To be prepared to counter any possible Communist assault, MACV and XXIV Corps wanted to retain strong American forces in reserve in MR 1 until

quite late in the Keystone Robin and subsequent troop redeployments. Their effort to maintain this reserve in the face of reduced Service budgets and manpower strengths forced radical changes in the Marines' withdrawal schedule during the last weeks of the summer campaign.

Deployment Plans Change: More Marines Stay Longer

Since the start of redeployment planning, MACV had favored a rapid clearing out of the Marines from I Corps, both to simplify command and administrative relationships and to trade Marine aviation spaces withdrawn for Army ground troops able to remain in-country. Repeatedly, Army manpower shortages had forced slowdowns of the Marine withdrawal. Indeed, as Lieutenant General Van Ryzin later put it, "The conditions of the Army and the Marine Corps dictated the redeployment. I don't care what Abrams said or what the JCS said or what the President said, conditions were such that things . . . work[ed] themselves out."[54]

This pattern repeated itself early in August, causing major revisions in the timetable for Marine withdrawals and for activation of the 3d MAB. In mid-summer, plans seemed set for pulling out about 18,000 Marines before 15 October in Keystone Robin Alpha and 9,400 more by 31 December in Keystone Robin Bravo. At the beginning of the new year, the 3d MAB Headquarters would go into operation as III MAF Headquarters redeployed.

Between 1 and 4 August, however, the JCS informed General Abrams, through CincPac, that reductions in the Army's budget and manpower would leave that Service unable to maintain the troop strength in Vietnam envisioned to be retained in current redeployment plans. The JCS directed Abrams to suggest revisions of the withdrawal timetable to take this fact into account, and in particular they instructed him to consider postponement of some Marine redeployments.

Abrams replied to the Joint Chiefs on 6 August. He reaffirmed the need to keep strong forces in Military Region 1 to counter possible large-scale enemy efforts to disrupt Vietnamization and pacification. He proposed a new withdrawal plan under which 50,000 men, including the previously planned 18,000 Marines, would leave as scheduled by 15 October. A second increment, Keystone Robin Bravo, consisting of 40,000 men, all but 1,900 of them Army and the rest Navy and Air Force, would be out by 31 December. The remaining 60,000 of the 150,000 promised by President Nixon in April would redeploy between 1 January and 1 May 1971. This contingent would include about 11,000 Marines, leaving 12,600 still in-country, who would withdraw between 1 May and 30 June. This proposal, which reduced Army strength in Vietnam more quickly while relying on the Marines to maintain allied power in MR 1, received prompt approval from the JCS. Although review and final acceptance of the plan by the Secretary of Defense and the President took several more weeks, the Services in mid-August, on the advice of the Chairman of the JCS and with the permission of the Secretary of Defense, began detailed planning on the basis of it.[55]

These changes left III MAF with a much lengthened withdrawal schedule. The 5th Marines, instead of redeploying almost on the heels of the 7th Marines, now would not leave until late spring of the following year, and aviation withdrawals would be slowed as well. Activation of the MAB would have to be postponed for at least another five or six months, and the MAF, division, and wing headquarters would have to remain in-country for the same length of time. General McCutcheon and his staff now confronted a problem anticipated by a III MAF staff officer back in May: "When you start . . . getting a MAF of about 27[000], you get yourself in a pretty good hum, because you have a hell of a time balancing off a force like that. It's . . . too doggone big to be a MAB, and it's an awful small MAF . . . ."[56]

Marine commanders and staffs viewed this change in withdrawal timetables without enthusiasm. For the Marine Corps as a whole, it meant major readjustments in recruiting requirements and in personnel assignment and separation policies. For III MAF, it necessitated a hurried revision of the troop list for Keystone Robin Alpha. Throughout its redeployment planning, III MAF had tried to maintain a balance between combat and service and support elements, so that combat units remaining in-country after each withdrawal would have ample maintenance, transport, engineer, medical, and other assistance. In planning Keystone Robin Alpha, III MAF had violated this rule on the assumption that the 5th Marines, scheduled for redeployment in Keystone Robin Bravo and sure to cease combat operations soon after 15 October, could get along for a short time with less than the normal support for a regiment. Therefore, they had included extra support personnel in Robin Alpha to

make room in the smaller Robin Bravo for the 5th Marines and the units deleted in June from Alpha. Now with the 5th Marines due to remain in combat four or five months longer than expected, III MAF had to extricate additional support units from Keystone Robin Alpha. Some of the affected units already were cancelling requisitions, turning over cantonments and equipment to the Vietnamese, and preparing for September stand downs, so whatever changes in the troop list were going to be made would have to be made quickly.[57]

Accordingly, in mid-August, Lieutenant General McCutcheon proposed to General Abrams the deletion of a total of 2,395 Marine spaces from the Keystone Robin Alpha redeployment. Some of these spaces would be filled, for McCutcheon wanted to withdraw an additional jet squadron, VMFA-314 (which Fiscal Year 1971 budget limits on the Marines' monthly aircraft sortie rate had rendered superfluous in Vietnam); the 1st 175mm Gun Battery; a detachment of the 5th Communications Battalion; and Company C, 1st Tank Battalion, the last Marine tank unit in Vietnam. This would leave 1,550 Marine Corps Keystone Robin Alpha spaces which McCutcheon said would have to be reassigned to other Services or taken out of Marine combat units. General Abrams quickly approved these alterations and agreed to shift the 1,550 spaces to the Army. Early in September McCutcheon's plan to stop the stand-down of several of the affected units at once was also approved while awaiting final JCS acceptance of the proposed changes.[58]

These actions came too late to halt the departure of two important Marine support units. On 22 August, the 9th Engineer Battalion and most of the 7th Engineer Battalion began embarkation. Their departure left the 1st Marine Division, still responsible for the same TAOR it had had at the beginning of the year, with less than half of its former engineer support.[59]

The authorities in Washington accepted McCutcheon's proposals, and the Marines' share of the Keystone Robin Alpha redeployment finally was fixed at a little over 17,000 men. No Marines would withdraw in Keystone Robin Bravo between 15 October and 31 December, but probably in March and April of 1971 over 11,000, including the headquarters of the MAF, division, and wing, would go out in Keystone Robin Charlie. This would leave in Vietnam about 13,000 Marines of the 3d MAB, 2d CAG, and logistic rollup force whose exact date of departure remained to be set.[60]

The final Marine troop list for Keystone Robin Alpha, issued on 29 September, reflected the last minute changes arranged by McCutcheon. The 175mm Gun Battery had been added to the roster. Company C, 1st Tank Battalion was now scheduled to redeploy. The detachment from the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion had been reduced in size from 376 men to 245. The 1st MP Battalion had been dropped from the list, but the 3d remained under orders to leave and in fact had embarked before the final troop list was issued. The 7th and 9th Engineers had already left. Four fixed-wing squadrons—VMFAs -122 and -314, VMA(AW)-242, and VMCJ-1—and one helicopter squadron, HMM-161, made up the bulk of 1st MAW's contribution. They would be accompanied out of Vietnam by Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron (H&MS) 13, Marine Airbase Squadron (MABS) 13, the housekeeping units of MAG-13 which was standing down, and detachments from other aviation support units. Over 1,100 CAP Marines were still to go. Many of the support and service troops had begun preparing for departure in mid-August, and most of the air and ground combat units were in the process of following them by the end of September.[61]

The abrupt changes in withdrawal timetables and troop lists forced reexamination of plans for the 3d MAB. The brigade's activation now would be delayed for almost six months, and as a result its probable time in combat in Vietnam would be very short. In mid-August, Major General Widdecke's 1st Marine Division staff proposed to General McCutcheon that the MAB headquarters be formed around 15 October, as initially planned, to control the two RLTs and the aircraft groups remaining after Keystone Robin Alpha. They argued that with Marine manpower so much reduced, a brigade could manage the remaining troops as efficiently as could the understrength MAF, division, and wing headquarters and could do it with fewer personnel, thus saving expense to the Marine Corps and allowing MAF, division, and wing staffs to redeploy on schedule. McCutcheon did not adopt this plan, preferring to retain the wing and division until after the next Marine withdrawal.[62]

The new redeployment schedule also made necessary a reexamination of the issue of adding a fourth infantry battalion to the MAB. Early in August, General McCutcheon, adopting the proposal of his staff, had recommended to FMFPac the exchange of the brigade's heavy artillery and tanks and possibly of a fixed-wing squadron for more infantry, and

FMFPac had given tentative approval. During September, XXIV Corps Headquarters informed McCutcheon that the MAB definitely would be responsible for defense of both the Rocket Belt and Da Nang airfield. This information confirmed the need for more infantry, but at the same time inclusion of the 175mm guns, the tanks, and an additional jet squadron in Keystone Robin Alpha took away most of the units McCutcheon had planned to trade for the extra battalion. A memorandum from Major General Widdecke, Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, to General McCutcheon reflected the division's concern over having sufficient infantry units to protect the Da Nang TAOR: "The outer perimeter of Da Nang, now the AO of the 1st Marines, is a large one and even with four battalions (including 1st Battalion, 5th Marines) still must be reinforced during high threat periods to reduce the enemy rocket capabilities. As the more distant forces are withdrawn the outer perimeter forces become even more vulnerable . . . . This situation is further aggravated by the redeployment of most of the service support units presently located in the NSDC and SSDC who provide forces for the security and defense of much of the area west of Da Nang."[63] At the end of September, the issue remained unsettled, with the III MAF and division staffs still hoping to secure the additional infantry.[64]

Although questions of MAB organization remained unresolved, the timetable for Marine withdrawal from Vietnam had taken final form. It would undergo no more radical changes. For the remaining months of 1970, III MAF could look forward to major strength reductions and repositioning of troops. The Marines would continue pacification activities, and they would renew efforts to eradicate the centers of enemy strength within their TAOR.

CHAPTER 5

Offensives and Redeployments: Imperial Lake, Catawba Falls, and Keystone Robin Alpha, July-October 1970

Preliminaries to Imperial Lake—Operation Imperial Lake—Keystone Robin Alpha Redeployments Begin Operation Catawba Falls—The Regiments Realign

Preliminaries to Imperial Lake

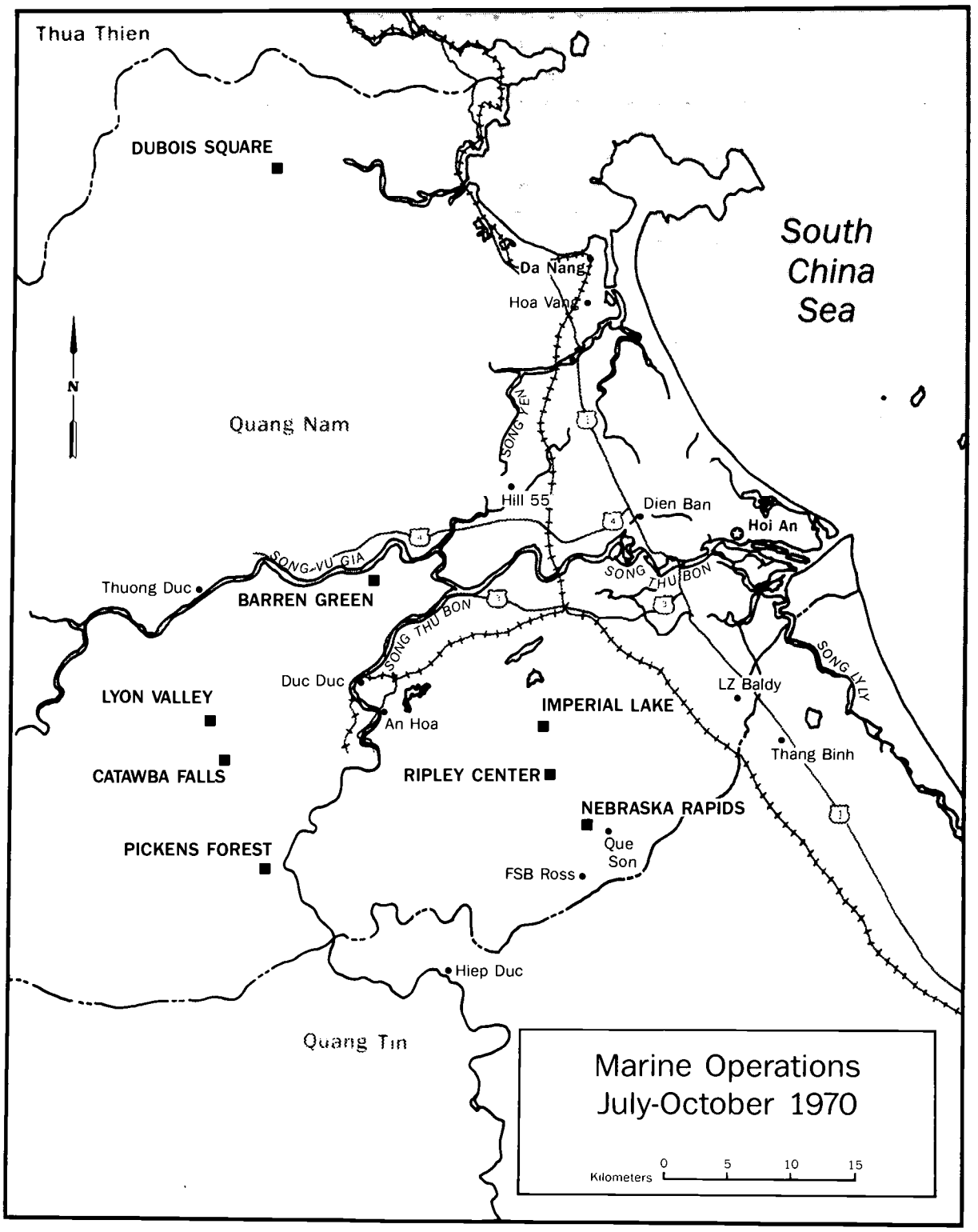
While battalions of the 7th Marines swept the hills west of the Thu Bon during Operation Pickens Forest, the staffs of the regiment and the 1st Marine Division kept much of their attention fixed further to the east on the Que Son Mountains. This range, which projects toward the coast from the rugged, jungle-covered mountains of Base Area 112 about 20 miles south of Da Nang, long had constituted a major military problem for the allies. From its hilltops, as Colonel Edmund G. Derning, Jr., commander of the 7th Marines, put it, "You could see all of Da Nang; you could see any airplane that took off; you had complete observation . . . of the whole terrain up to the north."[1] The canopied ravines and numerous caves of the range sheltered Communist headquarters, hospitals, supply dumps, and training and rest camps. Innumerable infiltration routes connecting hinterland base areas with the coastal rice fields and hamlets ran through the tortuous terrain. Here North Vietnamese regulars and main force Viet Cong often massed for operations in the lowlands, and guerrilla units gathered for training or political indoctrination. A 1st Marine Division staff officer called the Que Sons "a geographical tragedy . . . . If those mountains were not there, the war, as far as the NVA or the Viet Cong are concerned, would have been over years ago in Quang Nam Province."[2]

Since late spring, the 7th Marines had maintained forces in the Que Sons. The effort began with a multi-company operation by the 3d Battalion in late May and early June which resulted in numerous small contacts and discoveries of enemy camps and hospitals. From the results of this operation, Colonel Derning concluded that "it didn't take a battalion to go into the Que Son[s]."[3] In late June, he proposed, and Major General Widdecke approved, a plan for keeping a reinforced Marine rifle company continually in the mountains.

Thereafter, throughout July and the first part of August, company after company from the 7th Marines spent five days at a time combing the ridges and ravines. Each company went in by helicopter and was reinforced with an additional rifle platoon, an engineer detachment, and a forward air controller. By day, the company deployed in platoon patrols and ambushes to cover a search area assigned on the basis of current intelligence and reconnaissance information, and by night it pulled into defensive positions. At the end of five days, helicopters would land a relieving company in a zone covered by the out-going unit.[4] The companies had many small contacts with enemy parties and uncovered a growing number of installations. In one day, 3 July, for example, Company I of the 3d Battalion killed four NVA in two encounters, lost one Marine killed, and found a large cave containing weapons, food, and medical supplies. Marine commanders believed that this continuous pressure was disrupting enemy operations by denying the NVA and VC use of their bases.[5]

In addition to pursuing the VC/NVA aggressively in small-unit patrols, the 7th Marines also developed deceptive measures to conceal the actual movement of units by helicopter within its area of operation. Normal practice was for the troops to board the helicopters, lash in, then sit upright next to the windows (assuming the zone was not hot) as they entered the landing zone. Recognizing that enemy observers around the Que Sons got fairly accurate troop counts and knew the precise locations of some Marine units, Colonel Derning changed tactics. In a given zone the unit might enter by helicopter with the Marines visible through the windows. Rather than deploy, the Marines would lay down on the floor of the aircraft and the aircraft would exit the zone, giving the impression that a unit had landed. In another zone, the tactic might be reversed with the unit unseen on the way in but visible when extracted. A third option was to keep the Marines concealed on the way into the zone, crawl the unit off quickly, and exit the zone, making it appear that the helicopter had gone empty both into and out of the zone. Since the enemy had observers throughout the Que Son mountain area, the intent was to confuse the reports to enemy command posts, thus immobilizing or slowing down the movement and reaction time of enemy forces.[6]

On 5 August, the 7th Marines changed com-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manders. Colonel Derning, his Vietnam tour ended, handed the regiment over to his relief, Colonel Robert H. Piehl. Colonel Piehl, a native of Wisconsin, had enlisted in the Marines in 1940 and two years later entered the United States Naval Academy, graduating in 1945. A Korean War veteran, he came to the 7th Marines from the 3d Marine Division on Okinawa, where he had served as Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3. Under Colonel Piehl's direction, the 7th Marines completed Operation Pickens Forest and continued and enlarged its campaign in the Que Sons.

At this point, the 1st Battalion was engaged in patrolling around LZ Baldy while the 3d Battalion kept up counterguerrilla and pacification operations in the Que Son Valley and provided companies in rotation for the continuing search of the mountains. These two battalions retained these areas of operation until they ceased combat activity in middle and late September.[7]

Using elements of the 1st and 3d Battalions and reinforcements from the division reserve (1st Battalion, 5th Marines) on 13 August, Colonel Piehl expanded his regiment's company-size effort in the Que Sons into a series of battalion-size operations, later grouped for reporting purposes under the codename Operation Ripley Center. Besides continuing to disrupt enemy facilities in the central and eastern Que Sons, these operations were aimed at capturing elements of *Front 4 Headquarters* which allied intelligence sources believed were hiding in the mountains. In conjunction with Ripley Center, the South Vietnamese launched Operation Duong Son 4/70 in the eastern Que Sons with two battalions of the 51st Regiment, the 101st RF Battalion, and a troop from the 17th Armored Cavalry Squadron, all under control of the 1st Armored Brigade Headquarters.[8]

Operation Ripley Center began on the 13th when three rifle companies—Companies I and L of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, and Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines—deployed from helicopters in two landing zones in the south-central Que Sons. Company A then was serving as the division Pacifier company, and the entire operation began under command of Lieutenant Colonel Cornelius F. ("Doc") Savage, Jr., of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, whose mobile battalion CP had been placed temporarily under the 7th Marines.

Ripley Center continued for the rest of the month. The 5th Marines' elements returned to Da Nang on the 15th, leaving the 7th Marines' Companies I, L, and D to continue the search. As soon as Operation Pickens Forest ended on 24 August, Lieutenant Colonel Albers' 2d Battalion, 7th Marines was airlifted directly from western BA 112 to a landing zone in the Que Sons to take over the operation. Companies from this battalion swept north and east farther into the mountains.

Neither the composite force under Savage nor Albers' battalion found any trace of *Front 4 Headquarters*, but they uncovered numerous base camps and small supply caches and had brief firefights with enemy groups. In the most significant contact of the operation, on 30 August, Company F of the 2d Battalion ambushed 12 Viet Cong. The Marines killed nine and captured three, one of whom identified the group as a hamlet guerrilla unit on its way to an indoctrination meeting. The operation ended on 31 August, and the 2d Battalion moved at once into Operation Imperial Lake. In Ripley Center, the Marines had killed 25 Communists and captured eight, while losing 27 of their own men wounded, mostly from boobytraps. The caves and base camps had yielded an assortment of weapons, food, and documents.[9]

Operation Imperial Lake

In September, a month of new offensives and redeployments for the 1st Marine Division, the 7th Marines launched Operation Imperial Lake, the regiment's most ambitious effort of the year in the Que Sons. Planned by the 1st Marine Division and 7th Marines' staffs while Albers' 2d Battalion was still scouring the hills in Operation Ripley Center, Imperial Lake was targeted against the *Front 4 Headquarters* element which had eluded the earlier American sweeps in the Que Sons. Intelligence sources now believed this unit to be concealed somewhere northeast of Hill 845, one of the highest elevations in the central Que Sons. According to information derived from reconnaissance patrols and from the 7th Marines' spring and summer operations, the same area also might contain headquarters and combat elements of the *R20th*, *V25th*, and *D3d Infantry Battalions*; the *3d*, *T89th*, and *T90th Sapper Battalions*; and the *42d Reconnaissance Battalion*. Units of the *160th Transport Battalion* were also thought to be active in the mountains.

Expecting the enemy to try to evade any sweeping force, the Marines planned to begin Imperial Lake with several hours of artillery and air bombardment of the target area. The Marines' intent was to force the Communists to take cover in their caves and bunkers and

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LCpl Lewis A. Raborn of the War Dog Platoon, 1st MP Battalion is shown with Scout Dog Nick in Operation Imperial Lake searching for enemy caches.

stay there while helicopters deployed all four companies of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines into 12 separate landing zones, establishing a cordon around presumed enemy locations. The infantry companies would then drive the NVA/VC into the center. Directly supporting the battalion, the 4.2-inch Mortar Battery of the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines would establish a firebase on Hill 845, and the 1st Platoon, Company D, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion would set up three observation posts surrounding the operation area. Simultaneous with the start of Imperial Lake, two battalions of the 51st ARVN Regiment would begin operations in the Que Sons south and east of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.[10]

Just after midnight on 31 August, ten batteries* coordinated by Lieutenant Colonel Dickey's 3d Battalion, 11th Marines opened fire in one of the largest single preparatory bombardments delivered by Marine gunners in Vietnam and certainly the largest of the war for the 11th Marines. From FSBs Ross and Ryder, from LZ Baldy, from An Hoa, and from Hill 65, 105mm and 155mm howitzers, 8-inch howitzers, and 175mm guns for six hours rained shells on 53 selected targets in the Que Sons. These targets had been chosen on the basis of information from the 1st Marine Division and 7th Marines intelligence staffs, and the artillerymen carefully had prepared a fire plan for each. By 0645, when the bombardment ended, the batteries had thrown 13,488 shells—a total weight of some 740,000 pounds of metal—into the Que Sons. Two hours of fixed-wing air strikes followed in which 63 tons of ordnance were delivered.[11] The 7th Marines commander, Colonel Piehl, who had recommended a far shorter preparation, years later recalled its effects: "I believe only one or two enemy bodies were found, although admittedly many may have been sealed up in the numerous caves in the area."[12] At 0900, the first flights of CH-46s and CH-53s carrying the assault troops dropped into predesignated landing zones.[13]

According to plan, the 2d Battalion command post and two platoons (four 4.2-inch mortars) of Battery W, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines took position on Hill 845, codenamed LZ Vulture. South of Vulture, Company E deployed to form the southwest side of the cordon while Company H filled in to the north and Company F closed in from the east. Company G, held in reserve during the initial assault, landed two hours after the other companies to complete the ring on the southeast. During this first day of the operation, the companies made no contact with the enemy.

For the next four days, Lieutenant Colonel Albers maneuvered his Marines south, east, and north of Landing Zone Vulture, guided by information from the regimental intelligence staff. He continually tried to position his companies so they could quickly envelop any hostile force discovered and prevent it from breaking contact.[14]

On 5 September, in a ravine near LZ Vulture, the Marines finally trapped an enemy unit, estimated later to have been 30-50 North Vietnamese. Company E, sweeping toward the southeast along the ravine, had a man wounded while chasing a lone NVA into a cave. When a helicopter came in to evacuate the wounded

*The batteries involved were: Batteries G, H, and I of 3/11; K, L, and M of 4/11; E and W (155s) of 2/11; the 3d 8-inch Howitzer Battery (-); and the 3d 175mm Gun Battery (-).

man, heavy small arms fire drove it out of the area.* Five other evacuation attempts failed because of the volume of enemy fire. The other three Marine rifle companies worked their way over the rough ground to encircle the contact area and by 2230 they had closed the ring.

From 6-9 September, the Marines fought the encircled North Vietnamese. The enemy resisted tenaciously and skillfully from caves and behind boulders. As always in the mountains, the steepness of the ravine's banks, the many caves, and the thick trees and brush aided the defense. Repeatedly, the Marine companies advanced along the bottom of the ravine or down the sides. Each time they met accurate fire from AK-47s, SKSs, and American-made M14s. Assisted by artillery fire, helicopter gunships, and jet attack aircraft, the Marines tried to eradicate the enemy. Several of the air strikes caused secondary explosions, and Marines claimed they could hear small arms rounds going off in the fires started by bombs and napalm.

As the Marines gradually pressed the NVA back, the fighting at times came to close quarters. On the 8th, for instance, as Company G worked its way down the side of the ravine, small arms fire wounded four Marines. A corpsman went to aid one man and was himself hit. As the company, aided by gunships, fired at the enemy positions, several NVA broke cover and ran. The corpsman, who later died from loss of blood, shot one with his pistol. A Marine with a grenade launcher dispatched another enemy soldier who had bolted for a cave. Two more NVA plunged into the mouth of a cave which the Marines promptly blasted shut with a 106mm recoilless rifle.

On 9 September, with the Marine casualty toll at three dead and 12 wounded, Lieutenant Colonel Albers pulled his rifle companies back from the contested ravine while jets of the 1st MAW in nine strikes dropped over 40 tons of ordnance into it. The air attacks, in the words of the battalion's report, "rearranged the terrain considerably" and sealed up several caves, probably killing many of the NVA. At any event, when the Marines resumed their search of the ravine the following day, they encountered only sporadic sniper fire. During the next couple of days they found several large caves. Two of them contained still-defiant NVA whom the Marines dispatched with bullets and grenades or left to die behind blocked tunnel mouths.[15]

By 12 September, the North Vietnamese in the ravine had been killed, sealed up in their caves, or had slipped through the encircling Marines. Among the enemy dead were a battalion commander and a political officer. Albers' troops resumed routine search and destroy activities. To reduce the risk of his men hitting boobytraps or running into prepared enemy positions, Lieutenant Colonel Albers instituted what he called the "Duck Hunter" scheme of maneuver. Instead of moving through the hills in search of the enemy, most units of the battalion under this plan established numerous day and night ambushes along known enemy trails and at assembly areas and water points and waited, like hunters stalking game, for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong to come to them. Some came. Between 14 and 30 September, Marines of the 2d Battalion killed 14 enemy.[16]

From LZ Vulture, the four mortars of Battery W, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines helped maintain pressure on the enemy. The Marine gunners fired an average of 170 rounds per day, mostly in evening preemptive bombardment of suspected hostile mortar positions and escape and supply routes.[17]

While Albers' battalion swept the central Que Sons, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth L. Robinson, Jr.'s 3d Battalion on 5 September began Operation Nebraska Rapids in the flat paddy land south of FSB Ross along Route 534 where the 1st Marine Division TAOR adjoined that of the Americal Division. In this operation, the battalion, with three of its own companies (I, K, and M), Company B of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, and several RF platoons worked in coordination with Americal Division elements. Their mission was to open long-unused Route 534 all the way from LZ Baldy to Hiep Duc, a district town on the upper Song Thu Bon about 12 miles southwest of Ross. Once the Marines and Army troops repaired and secured the road, a South Vietnamese truck convoy would travel along it with supplies for Hiep Duc.

During the four-day operation, Company K protected the Marines of the 1st Platoon, Company C, 1st Engineer Battalion as they swept a portion of the highway for mines, repaired it, and installed a temporary bridge. The other three Marine companies searched the nearby countryside for enemy soldiers and

*Referring to the incident years later, Colonel Piehl said the Marine was finally evacuated by helicopter: "The doctor, I believe, cut off several feet of protruding intestine and put a bandage on the wound. When the helo took off, the wounded Marine was holding the bandage with one hand, waving with the other and grinning broadly. . . ." Col Robert H. Piehl, Comments on draft ms, 23Apr83 (Vietnam Comment File).

caches, then moved into position to block for a drive from the south by Americal Division troops. They encountered only small groups of local guerrillas, who harassed the Marines with sniper fire and boobytraps. On 6 September, the ARVN truck convoy made an uneventful round trip from Baldy to Hiep Duc, and two days later the Marines' part of Operation Nebraska Rapids came to an end. In brief exchanges of fire, the Marines had killed two of the enemy, captured one carbine, and detained two Viet Cong suspects while losing one of their own men killed and 13 wounded.[18]

The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, now under Lieutenant Colonel Franklin A. Hart, Jr., who had taken over command from Lieutenant Colonel Robinson on 6 September, joined Operation Imperial Lake on 13 September. On that date, Company I and a battalion command group were lifted by helicopters into the Que Sons southwest of the 2d Battalion's area of operations. They entered the mountains in response to reports that enemy troops might have moved southward to escape Albers' encircling maneuvers. The 3d Battalion had minor contact with a few enemy but found no major force. On 20 September, with its own Company K, Company H of the 2d Battalion, and Company K of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, the 3d Battalion launched Operation Imperial Lake South in the Que Son foothills southeast of the 2d Battalion's search area. Once again following up intelligence reports, the 3d Battalion was hunting for *Front 4 Headquarters* elements. Hart's Marines did not find the enemy command group, and the number of troops committed to the operation rapidly dwindled. The 5th Marines company left the mountains on 21 September and Company H of the 2d Battalion followed the next day. This left Company K of the 3d Battalion to continue searching the mountains, which it did until relieved by Company I, on the 25th. Company I operated in the mountains until the end of the month.[19]

View of LZ Vulture, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines command post in Operation Imperial Lake. Mortars of Battery W, 11th Marines can be seen in the foreground.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Lieutenant Colonel Albers' units, meanwhile, were using enemy defectors and other sources of information to make significant discoveries. On 16-17 September, a VC defector led Company F to two company-size base camps of the *91st Sapper Battalion*, and Company G walked into the abandoned camp of another unidentified NVA or VC unit. On 20 September, a squad-size unit from the 2d Battalion command group entered what was probably an abandoned headquarters complex hidden in caves in the slopes of Hill 845 almost underneath the Marine CP and fire base. Here the Marines found about a dozen connected caves, one large enough to contain a log hut, that extended 70 feet into the ground and included a kitchen cavern with running water from an underground stream. Near the headquarters, in 10 more caves, the Marines uncovered a hospital with a primitive operating room and wards radiating out from it; they captured two Viet Cong near the hospital, a nurse and a medical corpsman. The prisoners claimed the installation had been evacuated by guards, staff, and patients immediately after the artillery shelling and air strikes of 31 August. These prisoners and another, a NVA corporal, taken elsewhere proved a rich source of information on enemy units and operations in the Que Sons.[20]

On 18 September, as the 7th Marines prepared to stand down for redeployment, the regiment began reducing its forces in Imperial Lake. Company H of the 2d Battalion returned to Baldy on that date, only to move into the Que Sons again on the 20th in Imperial Lake South. On the 22d, Company F ceased operations in the Que Sons, and the next day Company G, the mortar battery, and the 2d Battalion command group boarded helicopters for the flight back to Baldy. Company E continued combing the Imperial Lake areas of operations for the rest of the month, while Company I of the 3d Battalion maintained a Marine presence in the southern Que Sons.[21]

By the end of September, in 35 contacts, the Marines of the 2d and 3d Battalions in Imperial Lake had killed 30 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. The 2d Battalion claimed about 20 more killed, most of them trapped in caves during the fight at the ravine. Intensive searches of the rugged terrain had uncovered six major Communist base camps with substantial quantities of weapons, food, and medical supplies. From captured documents and interrogation of the three prisoners, allied intelligence obtained valuable information on the enemy underground and order of battle. Most important, Marine commanders were convinced that the presence of their forces in the Que Sons was disrupting enemy operations and reducing the possibility of large-scale attacks on populated areas. Imperial Lake, therefore, would continue into the fall and winter, with the 5th Marines taking over for the redeploying 7th Marines.[22]

Keystone Robin Alpha Redeployments Begin

By the time the 7th Marines began Operation Imperial Lake, the redeployment of the units of III MAF scheduled for Keystone Robin Alpha was already well under way. On 9 July, the ships carrying Embarkation Unit One of the withdrawal, consisting of elements of the 7th Engineer Battalion, 3d Force Reconnaissance Company, and Force Logistic Command, sailed from Da Nang. Three other embarkation units, made up mostly of detachments of support and service troops, would soon follow. From the 1st MAW, VCMJ-1 flew from Da Nang to its new station at Iwakuni; personnel from various support and service squadrons left Vietnam by ship and plane. Beginning the process of removing Marine aviation from Chu Lai, the A-4s of VMA-311 moved north to Da Nang, where the squadron transferred from MAG-13 to MAG-11.

During August, redeployment of both ground and air units accelerated. From the 1st Marine Division, the 3d Platoon, 1st 8-inch Howitzer Battery; the bulk of the 7th and 9th Engineer Battalions; the 1st Bridge Company (-); and the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company (-) embarked for the United States. The other platoons of the 1st 8-inch Howitzer Battery; Company C, 1st Tank Battalion; and the 3d 175mm Gun Battery ceased combat operations and began preparing for September departures. The 1st MAW gave up one of its medium helicopter squadrons, HMM-161, which on 16-18 August loaded its CH-46Ds on ships for transfer to MCAS El Toro, California. On 24 August, VMFA-115 continued the evacuation of Chu Lai by

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A cargo hook lifts a CH-46 helicopter from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161 on board a LSD at Tien Sha Deep Water Pier as redeployment begins.

shifting its base of operations to Da Nang and passing under the control of MAG-11.

During September, the aircraft wing completed its Keystone Robin Alpha reductions. On 3 September, jets from MAG-13 flew Marine aviation's last combat missions from Chu Lai. MAG-13 spent the rest of the month redeploying its remaining tactical and support squadrons. The last two jet squadrons of the group, VMFAs -122 and -314, joined VMA(AW)-242 from Da Nang in Operation Key Grasp, the second major trans-Pacific flight of redeploying 1st MAW aircraft. Begun on 10 September, this long-water flight ended without serious incident 12 days later. As in the earlier operation Key Wallop, the squadrons stopped for fuel, rest, and repairs at Okinawa, Guam, Wake, Midway, and Kaneohe, Hawaii. VMFA-122 remained at Kaneohe as part of MAG-24 while the other two squadrons continued on to MCAS El Toro. MAG-13's housekeeping squadrons, H&MS-13 and MABS-13, also displaced to El Toro by ship and airlift.[23]

These withdrawals left the 1st MAW, now commanded by Major General Alan J. Armstrong, who had replaced Major General Thrash in July, with two

aircraft groups. Colonel Albert C. Pommerenk's MAG-11 at Da Nang had four fixed-wing squadrons, VMA-311 (A-4Es), VMFA-115 (F-4Bs), VMA(AW)-225 (A-6As), and VMO-2 (OV-10As). At Marble Mountain, MAG-16 under Colonel Lewis C. Street controlled six helicopter squadrons: HML-167 (UH-1Es); HML-367 (AH-1Gs); HMMs -262, -263, and -364 (CH-46Ds); and HMH-463(CH-53Ds). Among them, these squadrons possessed over 80 fixed-wing aircraft and 170 helicopters.[24]

The most complex and potentially dangerous part of the Keystone Robin Alpha redeployment began in September. This was the takeover of the 7th Marines' area of operations by the 5th Marines. All three of the division's infantry regiments would have to shift position to accomplish this. The 7th Marines would give up its bases at Ross and Baldy and extricate its companies from the Que Sons; the 5th Marines would move southeast from An Hoa and the Thuong Duc corridor; and the 1st Marines would send forces to the southwest to fill in behind the 5th Marines. Complicated enough in themselves, these rearrangements would involve the portions of the 1st Marine Division TAOR closest to enemy bases and most exposed to attack. Hence the redeployment would have to be conducted so as to avoid as far as possible any slackening of allied pressure on the NVA and VC and to deny the Communists any chance of disrupting the movement with a major offensive.

As the Marines thinned out their forces in Quang Nam, ARVN and Korean units would have to assume new TAORs or enlarge the ones they already had. During August and September, III MAF, XXIV Corps, I Corps, QDSZ, and the 2d Korean Marine Brigade negotiated who would take over what. Initially, the Marines wanted the South Vietnamese to relieve them of the defense of An Hoa, FSBs Ross and Ryder, and LZ Baldy, but the ARVN proved unwilling to enlarge its responsibilities that rapidly. Early in September, Lieutenant General Lam agreed with Lieutenant General McCutcheon that one battalion of the 51st ARVN would occupy An Hoa, but for the time being Marines would continue to defend the other major bases. Even at An Hoa, the South Vietnamese would accept responsibility for only a portion of that sprawling combat base. Marines would defend the rest of it until their engineers could remove equipment, dismantle buildings, and destroy bunkers and entrenchments.[25]

On 3 September, the 1st Marine Division issued a warning order to its subordinate commands detailing the plans and timetable for the shift of regiments. The operation would begin on 5 September when the 5th Marines would place one rifle company under operational control of the 7th Marines to relieve the 7th Marines' CUPP company in the hamlets along Route I and on Route 535 between Baldy and Ross. Six days later, the 5th Marines was scheduled to turn over An Hoa to the 51st ARVN and begin moving its 2d Battalion to LZ Baldy. At this point a complex series of temporary exchanges of battalions between regiments would begin, designed to maintain continuity of operations, especially in the 7th Marines TAOR, while allowing the battalions and regimental headquarters of the 7th Marines gradually to cease combat activity. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines upon arrival at Baldy would come under the 7th Marines; at the same time the 7th Marines' 1st Battalion would be standing down and preparing to embark. On 20 September, the headquarters of the 5th Marines would begin operations at LZ Baldy, having moved there from Hill 37 and Camp Reasoner. The 5th Marines would then assume control of the 7th Marines' TAOR, with its own 2d Battalion and the 2d and 3d battalions of the 7th Marines. On the same day, the 1st Marines would take control of the 5th Marines' 3d Battalion in the Thuong Duc corridor, which now would become part of the 1st Marines' TAOR. Between 20 September and 4 October, companies of the 1st Marines would relieve the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines in its positions along the Vu Gia River, and the battalion would go south to Baldy to rejoin its parent regiment. During the same period, the regimental Headquarters Company and the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 7th Marines would end active operations and prepare to sail for the United States.[26]

The final 1st Marine Division order for the redeployment, issued on 8 September, modified the original timetable to allow for expected delays in completing the partial demolition and the ARVN takeover of An Hoa. The 5th Marines would now turn over formal responsibility for An Hoa to the 51st ARVN on 20 September, but most of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, would not move immediately to Baldy. The 2d Battalion would remain at An Hoa protecting the base and Liberty Bridge and Road until the last Marine engineers left An Hoa. The relief of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, on the other hand, would be speeded up so that it could reassemble at Baldy by 24 September.[27]

On 11 September, plans for the enlargement of South Vietnamese and Korean responsibilities reach-

ed completion. At a conference of commanders of the 1st Marine Division, Quang Da Special Zone, and the 2d Korean Marine Brigade, at which Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, the assistant division commander, represented the Marines, the Koreans agreed to take over the eastern portion of the 7th Marines' TAOR between Route 1 and the South China Sea* and to extend the boundaries of their enclave to the north and west. Quang Da Special Zone accepted a 1st Marine Division proposal that the 51st ARVN take charge of a TAOR around An Hoa covering most of the An Hoa Basin and the Arizona Territory. The South Vietnamese refused, however, to accept a definite tactical area of responsibility around FSB Ross, claiming that the RF company they planned to station there lacked the men to cover it. Brigadier General Simmons and the QDSZ commander decided to give the RF company "a smaller, floating boundary to be determined at a later date by mutual agreement." This meant that Marine defense responsibilities at Ross would continue for some time.[28]

The relief of the 7th Marines began on schedule. Captain Marshall B. "Buck" Darling's Company G of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines on 5 September moved from An Hoa to LZ Baldy and the Que Son Valley. There it took the place of Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines in the Combined Unit Pacification Program, distributing its rifle squads in nine hamlets along Routes 1 and 535. The relief actually was an exchange of personnel, as about 55 percent of the Marines of Company A, those whose length of time in Vietnam did not qualify them for redeployment, transferred to Company G and remained in their assigned hamlets. Their presence eased the integration of the new rifle squads with the Popular Force platoons with which they would live and fight. Within a week of the relief, Company G and the PFs resumed the usual routine of patrols and ambushes. On 9 September, Company A joined the rest of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines at the former 9th Engineer Battalion cantonment near Da Nang, where redeploying units of the 1st Marine Division made their final preparations for embarkation.[29]

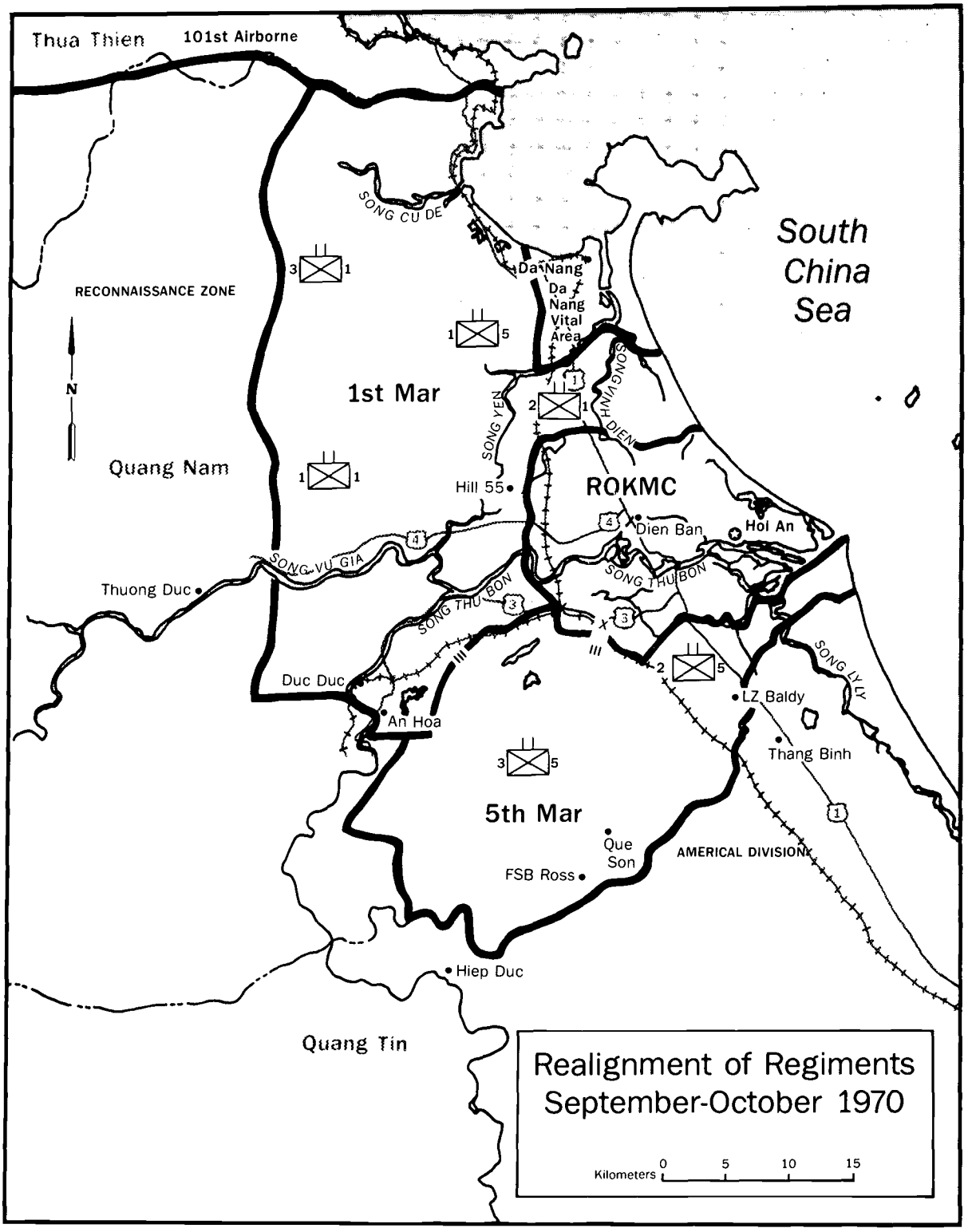
Operation Catawba Falls

To throw the enemy off balance during the 5th Marines' move From An Hoa and the Vu Gia River Valley, the 1st Marine Division carried out a large-scale diversionary artillery attack in Base Area 112. This attack had its origins early in August in plans for a conventional infantry operation. At that time, intelligence reports located the headquarters of the *38th NVA Regiment* and a number of other NVA and VC combat and support units in the mountains northwest of the area swept by the 7th Marines in Pickens Forest. In response to these reports, Colonel Clark V. Judge, commander of the 5th Marines, had his staff begin planning for a two-battalion operation in the area, to be called Operation Catawba Falls.[30] On 26 August, as a preliminary to launching the main operation, a command group and two 105mm howitzers of Battery D, 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, with the 3d Platoon of Company I, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines as a security force, landed from helicopters deep in Base Area 112 on Fire Support Base Dagger. The base, intended as the center of the proposed operation, covered the flat top of Ban Co, a peak 1,031 meters high which lies about 10 miles west of An Hoa. About 100 by 400 meters in area with sheer cliffs dropping away on all sides, Dagger overlooked the maze of ridges and valleys in which the enemy were believed to be concealed.[31]

On 16 September, the 1st Marine Division issued orders for the execution of Operation Catawba Falls, but in a form far different from that originally contemplated. The orders called for a two-phase operation. Phase I, to be conducted by the 11th Marines under direct control of the division commader, Major General Widdecke, would consist of intensive bombardment of the target area by howitzers and mortars airlifted into FSB Dagger. Quickly emplaced, these weapons would fire rapidly for a short period of time, alternating their shelling of selected targets with intensive air strikes. This phase would begin on 18 September. A second phase, to consist of a sweep of the objective area by the 5th Marines, was included in the original orders, but only as a ruse to confuse enemy intelligence. Division headquarters hoped that the Communists, battered by the shelling and bombing, would spend the crucial period of the American redeployment preparing to resist or trying to evade the threatened infantry assault rather than conducting an offensive of their own.[32]

Responsibility for conducting Phase I fell to Major George W. Ryhanych's 2d Battalion, 11th Marines. Ryhanych and his staff began detailed planning for the attack on 15 September. Given little time for their fire

*This area constituted a narrow corridor bounded on the north by the Korean TAOR and on the south by that of the Americal Division.


Thua Thien
101st Airborne
SONG CU DE
South China Sea
RECONNAISSANCE ZONE
Da Nang
Da Nang Vital Area
1st Mar
SONG YEN
SONG VINH DIEN
N
Quang Nam
Hill 55
ROKMC
Dien Ban
Hoi An
SONG VU GIA
SONG THU BON
Thuong Duc
Duc Duc
An Hoa
LZ Baldy
SONG LY LY
Thang Binh
5th Mar
Que Son
AMERICAL DIVISION
FSB Ross
Hiep Duc
Quang Tin
Realignment of Regiments
September-October 1970
Kilometers 0 5 10 15

planning, they worked long hours allocating the 10,000 rounds allowed for the attack among 160 targets furnished by intelligence. They developed a daily schedule for firing and for suspending artillery fire periodically to allow jets of the 1st MAW to make bombing runs. To carry out the plan, Ryhanych would have the two 105mm howitzers from Battery D already on Dagger, two more 105s from Battery E of his battalion, and two from Battery H of the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines.* Ryhanych also had available six 4.2-inch mortars, four from his own battalion and two from the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, and four 155mm howitzers, two from the 2d Battalion and two from the 3d. All 16 of these artillery pieces would be emplaced on Dagger. For still heavier long-range support, Ryhanych could call on the 1st 175mm Gun Battery at An Hoa and a platoon of Army 175s from the 2d Battalion, 92d U.S. Artillery, located on Hill 65. For this operation, the Army unit was integrated into the 2d Battalion's communications and fire direction system.[33]

On 17 September at 0800, the first of a total of 76 helicopters—CH-53Ds of the 1st MAW and Army CH-54s—began lifting guns, crews, ammunition, and equipment from Hill 65, An Hoa, and Baldy to FSB Dagger. Detachments of engineers and artillerymen swarmed over the mountain top preparing gun positions and helicopter landing zones. They were hampered in their labors by a shortage of equipment. The one minidozer on Dagger broke down after a few hours, as did a second sent in to replace it. The single chain saw "was exceedingly dull and broke down on the second day of operation." With hand tools and explosives, the Marines continued work throughout the day and into the night of the 17th. They finished gun positions and other installations and distributed thousands of rounds of ammunition.

By dawn on 18 September, 14 artillery pieces (two of the mortars were held in reserve) were emplaced and prepared to fire, and 10,000 rounds of ammunition lay ready for their crews' hands. Major Ryhanych, who remained on Dagger for the first two days of the operation, organized his guns and crews into a provisional composite battery commanded by his battalion operations officer, Major Robert T. Adams. Under him, Adams had three sections, one of 105mm howitzers, one of 4.2-inch mortars, and one of 155mm howitzers, each commanded by a first lieutenant. A central fire direction center controlled all three sections.

At 0300 on the 18th, the provisional battery opened fire. For the rest of the day, howitzers and mortars methodically pounded each suspected base camp, cave, bunker complex, and troop position. At intervals, the battery ceased firing while jets delivered their strikes. It became apparent as the day went on that the original fire plan could not be carried out in the two days initially allotted for the operation without exhausting the gunners. The resulting fatigue would increase the risk of accidents and firing errors. Therefore, on the 18th Major General Widdecke ordered the operation extended through 20 September. The following day, another division order postponed the end of Plase I to 21 September. This order also declared that "Preparation for Phase II having accomplished its intended diversion mission . . ., Phase II [is] postponed indefinitely . . . . Op[eration] Catawba Falls will terminate concurrently with termination of Phase I."[34]

Throughout the 19th and 20th and part of the 21st, the battery on Dagger kept up its rain of destruction on Base Area 112. Preliminary intelligence reports indicated that the enemy had been hit hard in certain of the target areas, and additional fire was directed there. The soft sand and loam which formed a shallow layer over most of the flat mountain top caused recoiling howitzers to shift position and required the mortar crews periodically to dig out and reset the base plates of their weapons, but hard work and ingenuity overcame these problems. During the second day of firing, heaps of trash and expended cartridge cases "became an almost overwhelming problem," but the riflemen of the 3d Platoon, Company I, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, who manned the firebase perimeter throughout the operation, helped the gunners dump the trash over the side of the mountain and also furnished what Major Ryhanych called "invaluable" assistance in moving ammunition to the guns. The Marines burned the mound of trash when they left the firebase.

Operation Catawba Falls ended at noon on 21 September. The weapons and crews of the composite battery were lifted by helicopter back to their permanent positions. Between 18 and 21 September, Major Ryhanych's artillerymen had fired over 11,500 rounds, and jets of the 1st MAW had dropped 141 tons of bombs. Allied intelligence later estimated that Operation Catawba Falls had inflicted casualties on several ene-

*Battery H was under operational control of the 2d Battalion at this time as part of the Keystone Robin Alpha troop rearrangements.

my units and destroyed a suspected training center. Further indicating the success of the operation, no major enemy attacks or harassment marred the relief of the 7th Marines by the 5th Marines.[35]

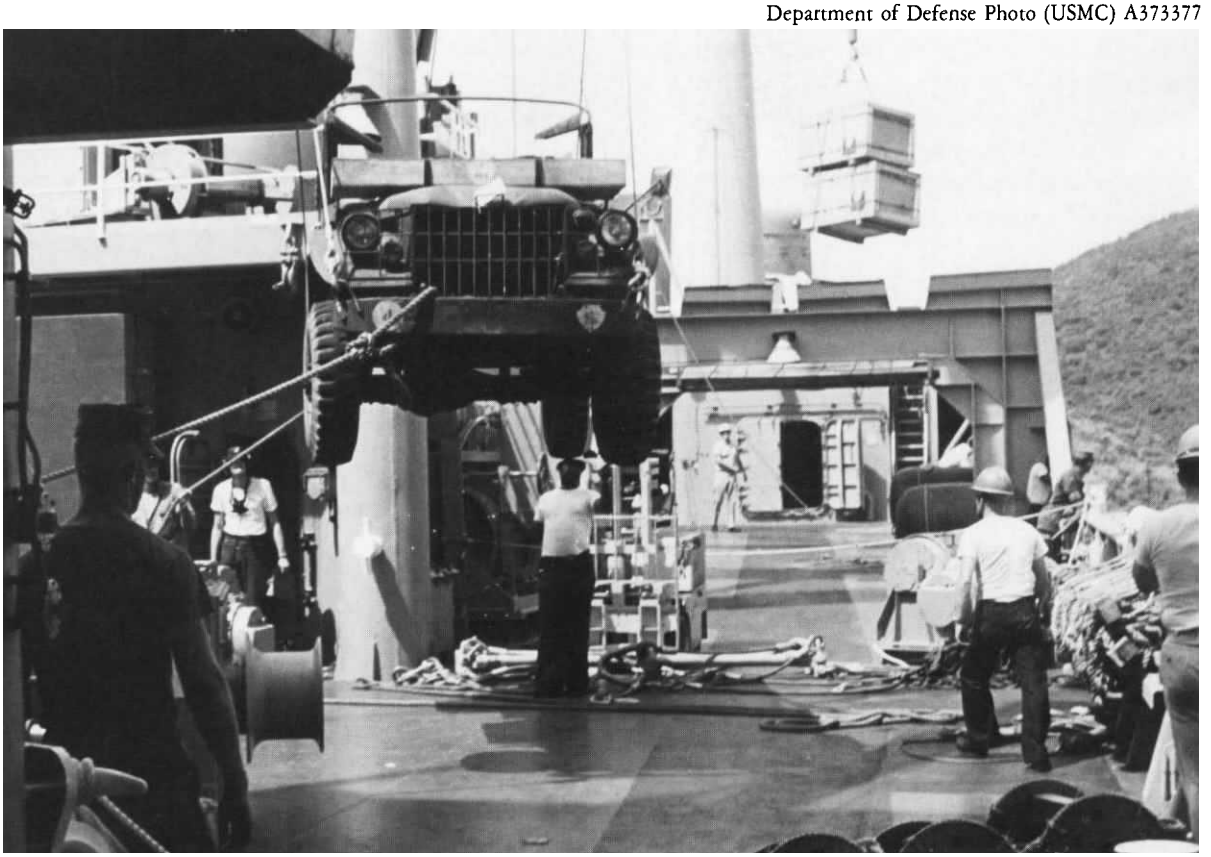
The Regiments Realign

Protected by the artillery fire of Catawba Falls, the regiments of the 1st Marine Division carried out their complex exchanges of position. On 18 September, companies of Lieutenant Colonel Robert P. Rose's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines began relieving units of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines on Hills 52, 65, and 37. The relieving companies came under temporary operational control of the 5th Marines' battalion, which in turn on 20 September passed under the control of the 1st Marines. During this relief, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines took command of Company M, the 1st Marines' CUPP unit, which had its squads defending hamlets along Route 4. Company M was part of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines. On the 21st, Battery A, 1st Battalion, 11th Marines assigned direct support of Rose's battalion, moved its six 105mm howitzers and two 155mm howitzers from Hill 10 to Hill 65. The following day, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines assumed control of its new TAOR.

To fill in for the 1st Battalion as it extended itself to the southwest, the other battalions of the 1st Marines enlarged and rearranged their operational boundaries. The 2d Battalion surrendered a strip of the southwestern part of its TAOR between Route 1 and the coast to the Korean Marines while extending westward to take over Hill 55. The 3d Battalion sent companies southward to occupy several square miles of the old 1st Battalion TAOR including OP (Observation Post) Reno. By the end of September, as a result of these realignments, the 1st Marines' TAOR extended from the Cu De River on the north southwestward to where the Vu Gia and Thu Bon Rivers join. Near the coast, it abutted the enlarged Korean enclave, which extended well north of the Thu Bon-Ky Lam River line.

A jeep is lowered onto the deck of the cargo ship Saint Louis *(LKA 116), as the 7th Marines and Marine Aircraft Group 13 begin their redeployment from Vietnam as part of Operation Keystone Robin. The 7th Marines departed Vietnam on 1 October 1970.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373377



From the South China Sea on the east, the 1st Marines' TAOR stretched westward to Hill 52. The regiment also now had responsibility for An Hoa, having taken operational control of the elements of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines remaining there.[36]

The 5th Marines took the better part of a month to extricate itself from its old TAOR and move all its elements into positions around LZ Baldy and FSB Ross. Between 18 and 20 September, the regimental headquarters displaced from Hill 37 and Division Ridge to Baldy. There, on the 20th, the regimental commander, Colonel Judge, and his staff assumed control of the units operating in the 7th Marines' TAOR, which now became the 5th Marines' TAOR. These units included the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 7th Marines. Using companies from these battalions, the 5th Marines continued Operation Imperial Lake. During the rest of September, all of the 5th Marines' 3d Battalion and about half of the 2d Battalion redeployed a company or two at a time by helicopter into the 7th Marines' TAOR. This operation was complicated by frequent exchanges of control of companies between regiments and battalions. On 18 September, for example, Company K of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines turned over its positions on Hill 52 to Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. Company K then moved to Baldy where on the 20th it was placed under the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines for Operation Imperial Lake South. Two days later, it returned to the control of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines. Two other companies of the 3d Battalion were attached temporarily to the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 1st Marines to reinforce the Rocket Belt against a threatened enemy offensive; they finally rejoined their parent battalion on 28 September. Throughout the month, a forward command post and the better part of two companies of the 2d Battalion remained at An Hoa under control of the 1st Marines.[37]

By 30 September, the 5th Marines had all elements of its 2d and 3d Battalions but those at An Hoa, ready for operations in its new TAOR. The 3d Battalion, its CP at FSB Ross, deployed its companies in the Que Son Valley; the 2d Battalion, its headquarters at Baldy, operated in the eastern part of the regiment's sector. By 30 September, also, the artillery battalion assigned to direct support of the regiment, the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, had placed its batteries at Baldy, Ross, and Ryder, relieving the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, which had stood down for redeployment.[38]

Throughout these readjustments, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines continued to perform its mission as division reserve. It protected the installations on Division Ridge and conducted Pacifier operations. On 25 September, the battalion extended its TAOR northward to the Cu De River between the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, and the sea. This placed the battalion in charge of coordinating the defense of all the units and cantonments in what had been the Northern and Southern Sector Defense Commands. Deploying one platoon into the extension of its area of operations, the battalion also kept up Pacifier operations until October.[39]

The 7th Marines meanwhile gradually withdrew its units from combat and prepared to leave Vietnam. The regiment's 1st Battalion had started redeploying on 6 September. On the 23d, reduced to cadre strength, the battalion left Da Nang for Camp Pendleton. The regimental headquarters and Headquarters Company ceased operations and displaced from LZ Baldy to Da Nang on 20 September, leaving the remaining two active battalions under control of the 5th Marines. Of these, the 3d Battalion began departure preparations on the 26th, followed on 2 October by the 2d Battalion.[40]

On 1 October, in a ceremony at the 1st Marine Division CP attended by Lieutenant General McCutcheon, Lieutenant General Sutherland of XXIV Corps, Lieutenant General Lam of I Corps, Major General Widdecke, and other high-ranking guests, III MAF officially bade farewell to the 7th Marines. Under a drizzling sky, Lieutenant General Lam bestowed Vietnamese decorations on Colonel Piehl and 18 other members of the regiment. The colors of the regiment, and its 2d and 3d Battalions, and those of the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines were paraded for the last time in Vietnam, and the 1st MAW band played "Auld Lang Syne." At 2000 that same day, the regimental command group boarded planes for the flight back to Camp Pendleton, and the Headquarters Company began loading equipment and supplies on ships at the port of Da Nang.[41]

The ceremony on 1 October ended a long war for the 7th Marines. The regiment had entered the conflict on 14 August 1965, landing at Chu Lai. Four days later, the 7th Marines acted as controlling headquarters for Operation Starlite, the first major American battle with main force Viet Cong, and its 1st and 3d Battalions participated in the fight. Since 1967, the regiment had operated around Da Nang, conducting large and small operations with distinction. From

spring 1969 until its departure from the country, the 7th Marines had scoured the Que Son Mountains and Valley and killed over 2,300 enemy.

It took another two weeks after the farewell ceremony for the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 7th Marines to actually leave Vietnam. In the same period, all the other remaining combat and support units scheduled for Keystone Robin Alpha also embarked for destinations in the United States and the Western Pacific. On 13 October, the amphibious cargo ship USS *Saint Louis* (LKA-116) pulled away from the dock at Da Nang carrying detachments of the 7th Marines; MAG-13; the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines; the 1st Motor Transport Battalion; and the 1st 175mm Gun Battery. Her sailing brought to an end the Marines' part of Keystone Robin Alpha. The redeployment had reduced III MAF's strength from 39,507 officers and men in July to 24,527 on 15 October.[42]

On 15 October, the last Marines finally moved out of An Hoa. Throughout September and into October, Marines of the 1st Engineer Battalion and helicopter support teams of Company C, 1st Shore Party Battalion had worked to dismantle the base, protected by elements of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. While the engineers rearranged the base with bulldozers, the helicopter support teams rigged the many watchtowers of An Hoa for helicopter relocation to other bases using CH-54 heavy lift helicopters and the Army's "Flying Cranes." Division headquarters viewed the slow progress of the job with increasing anxiety, as the heavy rains of the fall monsoon had begun. Any day, flood waters might make the single road and bridge out of An Hoa impassable for the heavy artillery and engineer equipment still there.

On 11 October, work had reached the point where division headquarters could finally issue withdrawal plans. The operation, coordinated by the 1st Marines, was to emphasize secretly scheduled and heavily guarded movement of the road convoys. The infantry would hold their positions covering Liberty Road and Bridge until the last Marine vehicle rolled onto the north bank of the Thu Bon. They would then turn protection of the bridge and road over to RFs and PFs of QDSZ and board helicopters for movement to LZ Baldy. Even then, five bulldozers, their engineer crews, and a rifle company, were to be left behind for final cleanup.[43]

Worsening weather cancelled plans for leaving Marines at An Hoa any longer. On 15 October, early in the morning, with Typhoon Joan approaching and heavy rains and flooding threatening, the division ordered immediate removal of all Marines and equipment from the base. Evacuation of the vehicles by road and the personnel by helicopter went forward through a stormy day in what the 1st Marines' report called "an orderly and expeditious manner." By 1900, An Hoa belonged entirely to the South Vietnamese.[44]

CHAPTER 6

The Fall-Winter Campaign in Quang Nam, October-December 1970

New Campaign Plans and Changes in Tactics—The Course of the Fall-Winter Campaign
Operation Imperial Lake Continues—5th Marines in the Lowlands: Noble Canyon and Tulare Falls I and II
1st Marines Operations, October-December 1970—The War in Quang Nam at the End of the Year

New Campaign Plans and Changes in Tactics

As Marine strength declined, allied staffs throughout Military Region 1 drafted their fall and winter campaign plans. With fewer allied troops available and with the monsoon rains sure to restrict air support of operations deep in the mountains, Americans and South Vietnamese alike prepared to commit their regular units alongside the Regional and Popular Forces in major pacification efforts in the lowlands. At the same time, III MAF modified its operating methods to get the most out of its remaining Marine air and ground forces.

On 8 September, XXIV Corps and MR 1 issued their Combined Fall-Winter Military Campaign Plan for 1970-71. The plan, which would guide operations from September 1970 through February 1971, assigned tasks to each component of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces (RVNAF) and allied forces in the military region. Mostly restating earlier directives, the plan called for a balance between offensive actions against base areas and protection of population centers, with an increased emphasis on efforts to eliminate the Viet Cong and their administrative apparatus at the village and hamlet level. The plan directed III MAF essentially to continue what it already was doing: to protect the Rocket Belt; to cooperate with the Government of Vietnam (GVN) in pacification activities; and to continue its drive against enemy bases in the Que Son Mountains.[1]

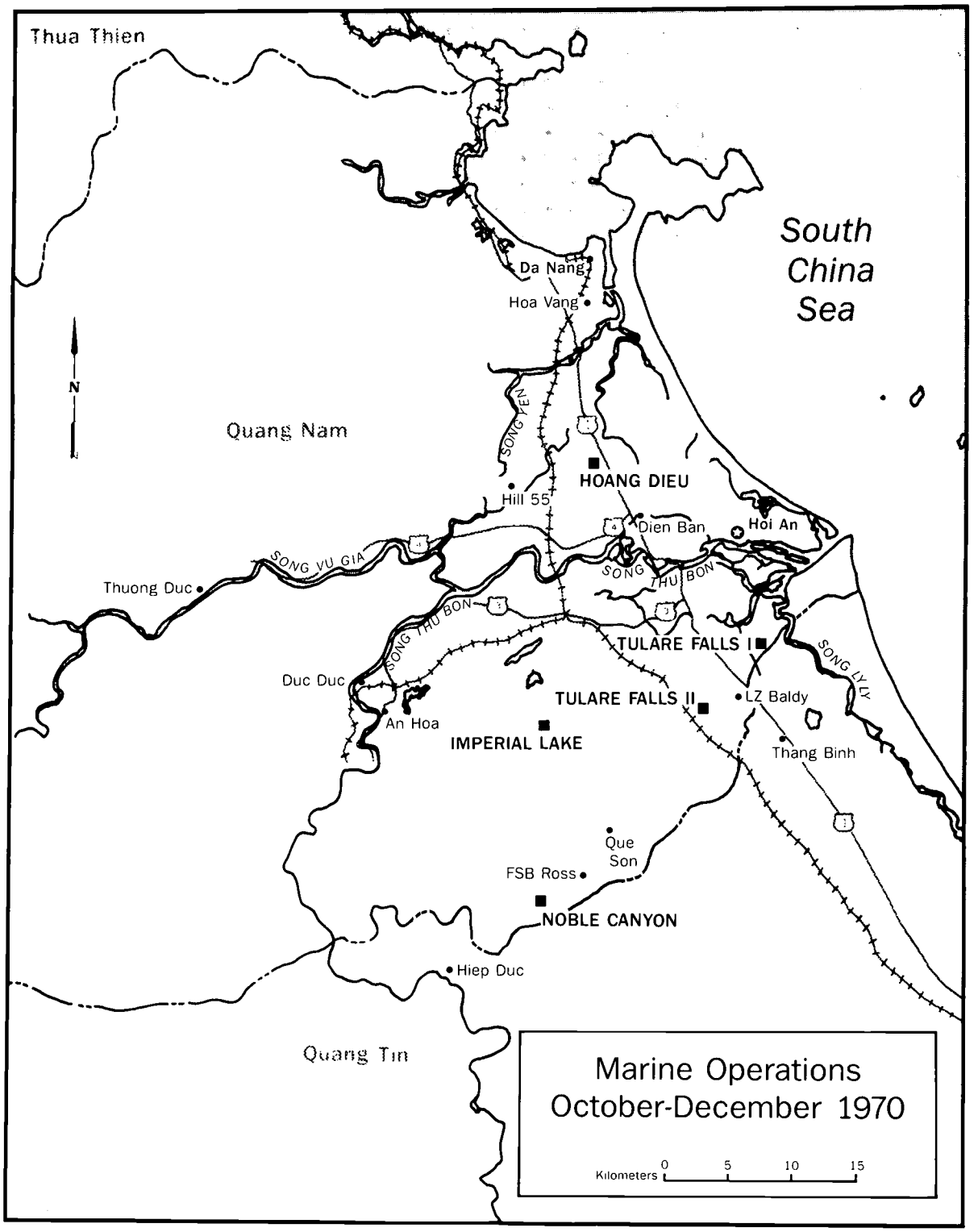
The XXIV Corps/MR 1 Combined Campaign Plan conformed closely to MACV guidelines. The MACV fall and winter campaign directive, which was formally issued on 21 September, instructed all U.S. forces to concentrate on small-unit action to protect pacified and semipacified areas. Units were to undertake large-scale offensives only when intelligence sources identified and located especially important targets.[2]

Lieutenant General Lam soon committed all the ARVN forces in Quang Nam to support pacification. On 22 October, he launched Operation Hoang Dieu. Conceived by Lam and named after a 19th Century Vietnamese national hero* who had been born in Quang Nam, the operation involved the 51st ARVN Regiment, the 1st Ranger Group, and the 2d and 3d Troops of the 17th Armored Cavalry Squadron. These Vietnamese regular units would cooperate with over 300 RF and PF platoons, the People's Self Defense Force (PSDF), and the national police in a province-wide combined offensive against Viet Cong who had infiltrated the populated areas. Lam assigned each military unit and each district in the province an area of operations to be covered by the troops under its command. In the case of the districts, which controlled the RFs and PFs, these areas usually were smaller in size than the territory encompassed within their political boundaries. Lam also arranged for III MAF to cover areas in the northern and western fringes of the populated region of Da Nang and in the Que Son Valley and for the Korean Marines to conduct saturation operations in two portions of their TAOR.

Within each command's zone of responsibility, troops would fill the countryside around the clock with small-unit patrols and ambushes. They would cooperate with police and local officials to cordon and search hamlets, concentrating on about 80 known VC-infested communities. In an attempt to restrict clandestine movement of Communist personnel and supplies, the allies would set up check points daily at a changing series of positions on major roads. They also planned to establish two combined holding and interrogation centers for persons detained by the roadblocks and by cordon and search operations, thus assuring rapid correlation and distribution of current information. Operation Hoang Dieu initially was planned to last 30 days. In fact, it continued through November and into the first days of December.[3]

By shifting his forces from search and destroy operations in the mountains to saturation of the populat-

*Hoang Dieu was born in 1828 in Phy Ky in Dien Ban District, Quang Nam. In 1882, during the French conquest of Indochina, he served as governor and minister of defense of Bac Ha City (later renamed Hanoi). When the French overran the city, Hoang Dieu hanged himself. 1st MarDiv FragO 62-70, dtd 19Oct70, in 1st MarDiv Jnl File, 20-31Oct70.


Thua Thien
South China Sea
Da Nang
Hoa Vang
N
Quang Nam
SONG YEN
HOANG DIEU
Hill 55
Dien Ban
Hoi An
SONG VU GIA
SONG THU BON
Thuong Duc
SONG THU BON
TULARE FALLS I
SONG LY LY
Duc Duc
TULARE FALLS II
LZ Baldy
An Hoa
IMPERIAL LAKE
Thang Binh
Que Son
FSB Ross
NOBLE CANYON
Hiep Duc
Quang Tin
Marine Operations
October-December 1970
Kilometers 0 5 10 15

ed areas, Lieutenant General Lam was following a course of action long advocated by Lieutenant General McCutcheon and many other Marines. III MAF, therefore, welcomed Operation Hoang Dieu. Summing up the predominate opinion, Colonel Ralph F. Estey, G-3 of the 1st Marine Division, rejoiced that the South Vietnamese finally:

> . . . were actually getting out and doing the things they're supposed to do. I'm talking about population control and resource control . . . They've saturated the lowlands and the populated areas, and got the territorial forces and . . . the 51st ARVN Regiment actually operating in the lowlands instead of out there in the bush.[4]

On 19 October, the 1st Marine Division committed all of its forces to support Operation Hoang Dieu. This operation and the continuation and enlargement of Imperial Lake constituted the focus of Marine activity in Quang Nam for the rest of the year. The two remaining regiments of the 1st Marine Division more or less divided these responsibilities between them. The 1st Marines, cooperating closely with the Vietnamese units involved in Hoang Dieu, concentrated on small-unit action in the Rocket Belt and the Vu Gia River Valley and conducted search and destroy operations on Charlie Ridge. The 5th Marines, reinforced by elements of the 1st Marines, the 2d ROKMC Brigade, and the Americal Division, continued and expanded Operation Imperial Lake while defending the hamlets around Baldy and in the Que Son Valley.[5]

Both to assist the South Vietnamese in Operation Hoang Dieu and to improve general military effectiveness, the 1st Marine Division during October and November changed its methods for employing artillery, developed new helicopter-infantry reaction forces, and revamped the deployment of its reconnaissance teams. The division staff late in the summer had begun a review of the use of artillery. They especially questioned the value of the 4,000-5,000 rounds of harassing and interdiction fire* (H&I) delivered daily by the 11th Marines. Analyses showed that this fire, aimed at such targets as known or suspected rocket launching sites, infiltration routes, and troop concentration points, had little disruptive effect on the small-unit guerrilla operations which the enemy were now conducting. Therefore, the division began reducing the number of H&I missions. By late September, for example, the number of rounds expended for this purpose in the TAOR of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines had declined by 90 percent. The division instead used more ammunition in short, concentrated attacks on well-defined targets, as in the first day of Imperial Lake and in Catawba Falls.[6]

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Col Clark V. Judge, commanding officer of the 5th Marines, on LZ Baldy briefs 1st Marine Division staff officers on his regiment's quick reaction operations.

To avoid hitting friendly patrols in Operation Hoang Dieu, the division curtailed H&I still further. On 19 October, Major General Widdecke issued an order forbidding most artillery fire at targets within 500 meters of inhabited areas. Troops in actual contact, of course, could still call for fire against observed enemy within the 500-meter limit. In the heavily populated TAOR of the 1st Marines, this order stopped H&I fire in all but the foothills west and northwest of Da Nang. Elsewhere in Quang Nam its effects were less drastic but still evident. Ammunition expeditures by the 11th Marines dropped sharply. In October, the regiment fired 50,735 rounds in 3,420 missions. The following month, with the restriction order in effect, its batteries expended only 21,532 shells in 1,919 missions.[7]

The reduction had no noticeable adverse military effects. In fact, in the estimate of Marine commanders, it had positive benefits. These included reducing the chance of casualties to friendly troops and civilians from American fire and lowering the level of battle noise in the villages and hamlets. Lieutenant General McCutcheon attached special importance to the latter benefit, arguing that minimizing the sound of gunfire would give Vietnamese civilians a greater sense

*Harassing and interdiction fire in late 1970 was referred to by the euphemism "fire at pre-emptive/intelligence targets."

of security and perhaps increase their confidence in the GVN.[8]*

As it reduced the use of artillery, the division, in cooperation with the 1st MAW, increased and decentralized helicopter support of its infantry regiments. This development began with a proposal by Colonel Clark V. Judge, commander of the 5th Marines. Judge suggested to the division and the wing that his regiment's mobility and tactical flexibility would be much increased if the wing would station at LZ Baldy a helicopter force assigned exclusively to support the 5th Marines and to operate under control of the regimental commander. Both the division and the wing agreed to try out Judge's plan. Beginning on 14 October, the 1st MAW daily dispatched six CH-46Ds, four AH-1G gunships, one UH-1E command and control aircraft, and usually a CH-53 to Baldy. The wing also furnished an officer to serve as helicopter commander (airborne). These helicopters were at Colonel Judge's disposal for trooplifts, supply runs, medical evacuations, and other support missions previously conducted from Marble Mountain. In consultation with the helicopter commander from the wing, Colonel Judge and his staff could plan and execute heliborne combat operations, often in rapid response to current intelligence. With an infantry platoon stationed at Baldy, the helicopter package constituted the 5th Marines' Quick Reaction Force (QRF), which was employed for much the same purposes as the old Pacifier, but, unlike Pacifier, it was controlled by the 5th Marines rather than by the division.[9]

The assignment to the 5th Marines of what amounted to its own miniature helicopter squadron proved satisfactory to both air and ground Marines. According to Major General Alan J. Armstrong, the 1st MAW commander:

> . . . The flexibility it gave the commander of the 5th Marines was marvelous. If he wanted to have a tactical operation, he could suspend the logistics runs and say, "Well, all right, we won't schedule any in the morning. We'll put all the birds on logistics in the afternoon and have . . . five CH-46s doing them and doing them in a hurry, and take the larger number of 46s available in the morning and run a tactical operation." And at other times they were there with a ready platoon for immediate reaction if they got a flash call. And so was the helicopter commander (airborne), right there, right outside the Three Section [operations]; and they planned everything together. And this got to be a very, very successful thing . . . .[10]

As the dedicated package system demonstrated its value, the 1st Marines on 22 November was given one UH-1E, three CH-46Ds, and three AH-1Gs, to be kept on call daily under regimental control at Marble Mountain. The 1st Marines then created its own QRF by stationing an infantry platoon at the regimental command post at Camp Perdue. As each regiment acquired its own airmobile reserve, the division discontinued its Pacifier force. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, while still acting as division reserve and protecting its TAOR of rear area installations, began sending two of its companies at a time in rotation to reinforce Operation Imperial Lake.[11]

The 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, which had been reduced to two letter companies and a subunit of the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company by the Keystone Bluejay and Keystone Robin Alpha redeployments, modified its operations to assure full employment of its men during the monsoon and to help the infantry regiments cover their enlarged TAORs. Early in October, the battalion began establishing platoon patrol bases within the regiments' TAORs. From each of these bases, which would be maintained in one place for several weeks and which could be reached by foot in bad weather, reconnaissance teams would fan out to patrol assigned areas. By the end of October, the battalion had conducted five patrol base operations, two on Charlie Ridge, two in the Que Sons, and one in the Cu De River Valley.*[12]

The next logical step soon came: combination of the reconnaissance teams with the regimental QRFs in a new system for rapid exploitation of sudden contacts. On 18 October, the division ordered the 5th Marines to implement a new plan of operations for Imperial Lake. Under the new plan, continuous infantry patrols in the Que Sons would be supplemented by 6-10 reconnaissance teams working out of one or more patrol bases. The six-man teams, their activities closely coordinated with those of the infantry, would seek out base camps and enemy troops. If a team found a site worth intensive search or became involved in a larger fight than it could handle, the regimental commander could send in the QRF to assist in the

*Not all Marines in the field agreed that H&I fires were unproductive. For example, Major John S. Grinalds, S-3 of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines during the last half of 1970, reported that intercepted enemy radio messages and other sources indicated H&I fire was taking a toll of guerrillas and VCI. Maj John S. Grinalds intvw, 8May71, pp. 115-116 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

*For further detail on 1st Reconnaissance Battalion operations during 1970-1971, see Chapter 17.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Marines of a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) from the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines scramble aboard a waiting helicopter. About 30 North Vietnamese troops have been spotted in the open from LZ Baldy. The QRF was a tactic to exploit fast-breaking intelligence.

search or exploit the contact. With this concept, Marine commanders hoped to combine the stealth of movement of the reconnaissance team with the greater firepower of the conventional rifle platoon. The plan was expected to enable the Marines to engage and destroy small enemy groups that usually evaded infantry sweeps and to overrun base camps before the NVA or VC could strip them of valuable equipment and documents.[13]*

After the QRF-reconnaissance combination proved effective in Imperial Lake and after both regiments had employed QRFs, on 8 December the division issued an order further refining the procedure. Under the revised system, the location of reconnaissance platoon patrol bases in the regiments' TAORs would be determined by the regimental commanders in consultation with the commander of the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion and would be subject to review by the division. A rifle platoon from the host infantry regiment would protect each patrol base while the reconnaissance teams operated around it. When a team made a potentially significant sighting or contact, the regimental commander was to consider deployment of the QRF. The QRF could land at the team's location and act with the team; it could land near the team and maneuver in cooperation with it; it could go in after the team was extracted; or it could be inserted in the same helicopters that took out the team in hopes of luring the enemy into an ambush. The QRF

*The 7th Marines had considered a similar scheme of operations in August. At that time, reconnaissance teams in the Que Sons were encountering enemy units of platoon or larger size and often had to be extracted hastily under fire. Colonel Derning and his staff worked out a plan for exploiting this Communist aggressiveness against the reconnaissance teams. They wanted to insert an infantry platoon in the same helicopters that carried the reconnaissance Marines. The platoon, its arrival concealed from the Communists, could set up ambushes into which the reconniassance teams would lead pursuers. This plan was never carried out. Col Edmund G. Derning, Jr., debriefing at FMFPac, 10Aug70, Tape 4958 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

could also operate independent of the reconnaissance teams.

The order directed both the 1st and 5th Marines to keep one rifle company on QRF duty with one platoon on 15-minute alert and the rest of the company on one-hour alert. In addition, the division reserve battalion, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, was also to establish a QRF company. Each QRF would have its own helicopter package, that for the 1st Marines based at Hill 37, and that for the 5th Marines remaining at Baldy. Helicopters for the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines QRF would stand by at Marble Mountain when ordered by the division. The division delegated full authority to the regimental commanders to conduct QRF operations within their TAORs, while the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines QRF would be controlled directly by the division and could be employed anywhere in the division's TAOR. In close cooperation with the regiments, the 1st Reconniassance Battalion would make the final decisions on insertion and extraction of its reconnaissance teams and on the conduct of their missions.[14]

The Course of the Fall-Winter Campaign

The intensified clearing effort in the hamlets and the continuing sweeps in the Que Sons went forward against slackening enemy resistance. The NVA and VC had avoided major engagements with allied troops throughout the year, but during the last four months of 1970 even low-level harassing activity declined in frequency. In September, for instance, the 1st Marine Division reported 133 enemy initiated contacts in its TAOR, mostly sniper fire and small ground probes. During October, only 84 such contacts occurred, and in November only 79 incidents were reported. As the worst of the monsoon weather ended in December, the Communists increased their effort to 165 attacks, but these continued to be small in scale and usually ineffective.

Mortar and rocket attacks followed a similar pattern. In September, the NVA and VC fired 125 mortar rounds and 19 rockets at allied installations. In October, they fired 145 mortar rounds and maintained their rate of rocket fire at 18. In November, their fire dropped off sharply, to only 25 mortar rounds and seven rockets, and during December they managed to fire only 41 mortar rounds and seven rockets.[15]

Much of the reduction in enemy activity resulted from unusually severe monsoon rains and floods. Throughout October, intermittent heavy rains fell in Quang Nam, and four tropical storms hit the province: Typhoon Iris on the 4th; Typhoon Joan on the 15th; and Tropical Storms Kate on the 25th and Louise on the 29th. The last two storms brought more than 17

Vietnamese villagers pick their way through flood waters caused by Tropical Storm Kate in October 1970. The unusually severe deluge temporarily brought the war to a standstill in Quang Nam Province during the month. These were the worst floods since 1964.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Marine Corps Historical Collection

An aerial view shows the Ba Ren Bridge under water as a result of the October flash floods caused by more than 17 inches of rain falling in less than eight days. As can be seen in the picture, the rushing waters isolated thousands of villagers in Quang Nam.

inches of rain within eight days. The deluge overwhelmed the natural drainage system of the Quang Nam lowlands. On the 29th, as rivers and streams burst their banks, flash floods inundated most of the area extending from about a mile south of Da Nang to Baldy and from Hoi An on the coast west to Thuong Duc. The floods, the worst in Quang Nam since 1964, transformed most of the populated area into a vast shallow lake broken by islands of high ground. Over 200 people, most of them civilians, drowned; over 240,000 temporarily or permanently lost their homes; 55 percent of the season's rice crop was ruined.[16]

The floods all but halted allied military activity in the lowlands just as Operation Hoang Dieu was be-

ginning. Many units had to evacuate their TAORs to escape the rising water. The 2d Battalion, 1st Marines for example, with most of its operating area under several feet of water, had to extract most of its patrols from the field by helicopter and collect them at Hill 55 and the battalion CP at Camp Lauer just south of Marble Mountain. In the 5th Marines' AO, over 350 Marines of the 2d CAG, numerous CUPP units, advisory teams, and RFs and PFs, and the Headquarters Company of the 2d Battalion, 2d ROKMC Brigade used LZ Baldy as a temporary refuge. Advance warning of the approaching storms and carefully planned disaster-control procedures kept III MAF's storm losses in men and material to a minimum, but casualties occurred. Both the 1st and 2d Battalions, 1st Marines lost men swept away by rushing water as patrols caught in the field by the flood tried to cross swollen streams.[17]

The rapidly rising waters threatened the lives of thousands of Vietnamese civilians, and air and ground units of III MAF cooperated with the U.S. Army and ARVN forces in a large-scale rescue effort. Disaster-control sections were established at III MAF and 1st Marine Division, and General McCutcheon called on the wing to support the evacuation. Colonel Rex C. Denny, Jr., who was awaiting assignment as Wing G-3, was in the G-3 bunker when General McCutcheon arrived to discuss the evacuation of thousands of stranded Vietnamese. "A rather heated discussion ensued with the Wing and MAG-16 reps concerned with weather conditions and, of more importance," said Denny, "was the lack of control of the evacuees—they stated they would be hauling VC as well as legitimate citizens." According to Denny, General McCutcheon listened patiently, then responsed, "As of now the war is over, let's get on with the evacuation."[18]

The helicopter pilots and crews of MAG-16 especially distinguished themselves. Between 29 and 31 October, they braved darkness, high winds, driving rain, and 500-foot cloud ceilings to fly 366 hours and 1,120 sorties on rescue missions. In the words of the 1st Marines' Command Chronology, "extraordinary feats of heroism and airmanship were commonplace."[19] Assisted by Marine and Vietnamese ground troops, the Marines of MAG-16 rescued over 11,000 persons and later delivered a total of 56.3 tons of food, clothing, and emergency supplies to thousands more. In addition to the wing, the 1st Motor Transport Battalion was instrumental in rescuing the Vietnamese from a dire situation. In desperate need of resupply for his pacification program, Colonel John W. Chism, USA, the Senior Province Advisor, whose headquarters was in Hoi An, appealed to the 1st Marine Division for 30 trucks to move supplies. "Within fifteen minutes after making our needs known to General Widdecke, . . . [the division] had the first convoy rolling. A convoy which grew to 90 trucks and lasted three days. This action saved the entire program."[20] As the flood waters receded, Marine engineers began repairing roads and bridges, and the GVN with extensive American assistance, began the resettlement and reconstruction effort.[20]

By 1-2 November, the floods had begun to subside, although rain, fog, and swollen streams hampered military operations for the rest of the month. As the civilians began returning to what was left of their homes, allied troops quickly moved back into the field and resumed the hunt for the enemy. The Americans and South Vietnamese soon discovered that the floods had hurt the Communists, too. The water had covered innumerable caches of food and supplies. With many infiltration routes blocked, other material had piled up in the Que Sons where it soon fell into the hands of Marine patrols on Operation Imperial Lake. Groups of enemy soldiers, their usual hiding places inundated, were caught in the open by allied troops and killed or captured in sharp fighting. In Dien Ban District alone, the ARVN claimed 141 VC and NVA killed and 63 captured between 2 and 5 November. These bands of displaced enemy would also furnish profitable targets for the new regimental quick reaction forces.[22]

Hoping to capitalize on the natural disaster the enemy had suffered, the allies pushed ahead during November with Operation Hoang Dieu in the lowlands and continued Operation Imperial Lake in the Que Sons. Operation Hoang Dieu ended on 2 December. The South Vietnamese forces reported killing over 500 enemy and taking almost 400 prisoners. Lieutenant General McCutcheon declared the operation an "unqualified success" in denying the Communists access to food and the people, and he urged Lieutenant General Lam to continue saturation operations.[23]

Lam did so. On 17 December, he initiated Operation Hoang Dieu 101, a second province-wide saturation campaign.* As in Operation Hoang Dieu, the Vietnamese regulars and RFs and PFs concentrated their forces in the lowlands. They patrolled and am-

*The operation had actually begun on 24 November by a few ARVN units south of Hoi An, and Lam's order of 17 December enlarged it to the whole province.

bushed around the hamlets, conducted cordon and search operations of known VC hideouts, and established roadblocks. In support of the operation, the Marines continued to restrict artillery fire in the populated areas and did most of their patrolling in the hills west of Da Nang and in the Que Sons. This pattern of operations continued through December.[24]

Operation Imperial Lake Continues

From the completion of Keystone Robin Alpha through the end of the year, the 1st Marine Division continued and expanded Operation Imperial Lake. Using the Quick Reaction Force and reconnaissance patrol bases, the division refined and improved its tactics for scouring the mountains. The division steadily increased the number of Marines committed to the operation, and its forces were supplemented by contingents of Korean Marines and U.S. Army troops. By the end of the year, Imperial Lake had produced no major engagements with enemy units, but it had uncovered large amounts of food and equipment, had led to the destruction of numerous base camps, and had yielded much information on Communist operating methods, personnel, and order of battle.

In late September, when the 5th Marines took control of the units in Imperial Lake, the forces operating in the Que Sons had dwindled to two companies of the 7th Marines, one operating around LZ Vulture (Hill 845) and the other in the southern foothills four or five miles north of FSB Ross. On 2 October, Lieutenant Colonel Herschel L. Johnson, Jr.'s 3d Battalion, 5th Marines relieved the remaining 7th Marine units. Company M of Johnson's battalion occupied LZ Vulture and began patrolling around it while Company L launched operations in the southern Que Sons. These companies worked in the mountains until 20 October. From 13-15 October, they were reinforced by a forward command post and Companies A and C of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. In one of the last Pacifier operations there, 1st Battalion companies, reacting to current intelligence, searched an area about three and one-half miles south of Vulture. As 7th Marine units had before them, the companies found many small caches of arms, food, and clothing and killed a few North Vietnamese and Viet Cong in brief firefights.[25]

On 18 October, beginning implementation of the division's new QRF-reconnaissance concept of operations, Lieutenant Colonel William G. Leftwich, Jr.'s 1st Reconnaissance Battalion established a patrol base at LZ Vulture, which was now renamed LZ Rainbow. From this base and later from another at LZ Ranchhouse one and one-half miles east of Rainbow, 8-10 reconnaissance teams continually operated in the mountains. To ensure rapid response to their reports, Leftwich stationed a liaison officer and a communications team at the 5th Marines' combat operations center.[26]

The 5th Marines on 18 October issued orders directing a new battalion to take over Imperial Lake and organize a quick reaction force. The regiment instructed Lieutenant Colonel Thomas M. Hamlin, commanding the 2d Battalion, to deploy one of his companies to LZ Rainbow to relieve Company M of the 3d Battalion. Another company of the 2d Battalion would constitute the Quick Reaction Force, based at LZ Baldy. Lieutenant Colonel Hamlin's battalion headquarters would remain at Baldy but be prepared to establish a forward command post in the Que Sons if operations expanded to multi-company size. The 3d Battalion, relieved of responsibility for Imperial Lake, would continue patrolling the southern foothills of the Que Sons, defend FSBs Ross and Ryder, and provide one rifle company as regimental reserve for use in emergencies anywhere in the 5th Marines' TAOR.[27]

The relief of the 3d Battalion by the 2d Battalion in Imperial Lake took place on 21 October. Company F of Hamlin's battalion occupied LZ Rainbow and patrolled around it while Company H acted as the Quick Reaction Force. Two companies and a mobile CP of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines moved to LZ Baldy to join the operation, but diversion of their escorting gunships to another mission prevented their insertion in the Que Sons on the 19th, and Tropical Storm Kate prevented it on the 27th. The 1st Battalion elements remained at Baldy and finally entered the mountains in November.

The QRF-reconnaissance combination soon produced results. On 21 October, the 3d Platoon of Company H was inserted four miles southeast of Rainbow in reaction to a reconnaissance team's sighting of four enemy. The platoon found over 1,000 pounds of rice buried in urns covered with dead leaves. The following day, in two separate actions, two QRF platoons of Company H killed four North Vietnamese, captured one rifle and 700 pounds of rice, and discovered a bunker complex.[28]

Late in October, the tropical storms which swept Quang Nam sharply restricted activity in Imperial Lake, although they did not force a complete halt to operations. Marines caught in the hills by the storms,

while safe from floods, endured miseries of their own as they huddled under wet ponchos in muddy holes and vainly attempted to ward off wind and rain. The weather and the need for helicopters for rescue work temporarily prevented aerial resupply of Companies F and H of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. These companies tightened their belts and lived on short rations or none at all as they combed the ridges and ravines.[29]

Significant discoveries and contacts occurred during the stormy last days of the month. On 26 October, for example, the 2d Platoon of Company H, which had been inserted as a QRF just south of Rainbow before the arrival of Tropical Storm Kate, found an enemy communication wire strung along a trail. Weather-beaten and hungry after three wet, chilly days in the hills, the Marines followed the wire into a deserted battalion-size base camp. The platoon spent three days searching the holes and caves of the enemy haven, which yielded a substantial cache of arms, ammunition, and boobytrap material.[30]

Also on the 26th, two reconnaissance teams, Cayenne and Prime Cut,* combined in a surprise attack on 10-15 NVA in a small camp north of FSB Rainbow. The reconnaissance Marines killed five enemy while suffering no losses of their own, and they captured an AK-47 rifle, a Chinese Communist-made radio, and a small amount of other equipment. The next day, to the west of the firebase, a squad from Company F attacked another small camp, killed six NVA in the first burst of fire, then came under atttack by an estimated 10 more. Reinforced by a second squad, the

*Each reconnaissance team had a codename which also served as its radio call sign.

Maj James T. Sehulster, the operations officer of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines enjoys an improvised meal of C-rations on Hill 381 in the Que Son Mountains during the Christmas season. A Christmas wreath can be seen in the foreground outside the battalion CP.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Marines, who lost one man killed and three wounded in the fight, called in artillery and air strikes. The enemy fled. On 30 October, another squad from Company F killed three more enemy in the same area. By the end of October, the 5th Marines could claim 74 NVA and VC dead in Imperial Lake and 34 weapons captured.[31]

While the rifle companies searched the mountains, the 1st Marine Division and 5th Marines intelligence staffs during October sought ways to more quickly and thoroughly exploit information discovered in or useful to Imperial Lake. During the month, division G-2 personnel began holding daily meetings with the 5th Marines' S-2 staff to exchange information. The regimental staff used every expedient to increase the amount of intelligence collected in the field. For example, units operating in Imperial Lake received orders to send photographs and, when possible, the actual corpses of all enemy dead back to Baldy by helicopter. At Baldy, enemy POWs and defectors would try to identify the slain NVA and VC. Major Jon A. Stuebe, the 5th Marines' S-2, claimed to have discovered by this means the names or ranks of 80 percent of the VC and NVA killed during October in Imperial Lake.[32]

During November, the 5th Marines committed still more troops to Imperial Lake. The 2d Battalion, which directed operations in the mountains throughout the month, on 6 November established a forward command post on Hill 381, two and one-half miles south of Rainbow. From there the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Hamlin, controlled three of his own companies and two from the 3d Battalion, which rotated its companies between Imperial Lake and other assignments, as they searched the central and western Que Sons. A 2d Battalion rear CP remained at Baldy to direct base defense and logistic support and to conduct QRF operations. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, by 1 November, had inserted a forward CP and two companies in the northern Que Sons, where they continued operations for the rest of the month. The 1st Reconnaissance Battalion had 5-10 teams in the mountains at all times. On 26 November, the reconnaissance Marines moved their patrol base from LZ Ranch House to Hill 510 deep in the western Que Sons.

The reconnaissance teams shifted westward in part to make way for units of the 2d Republic of Korea Marine Brigade. The Korean Marines joined Operation Imperial Lake on 19 November. On that date, a newly formed ROKMC reconnaissance unit, trained by the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion and ANGLICO Sub-Unit One and accompanied by advisers from those units, established a patrol base on Hill 322 in the northeastern Que Sons. To exploit their sightings, the Koreans stationed a quick reaction infantry platoon at Baldy. Later in the month, two Korean Marine infantry companies, the 6th and 7th of the 2d Battalion, began patrolling in the northeastern Que Sons. The Korean Marines would remain committed to Imperial Lake for the rest of the year.[33]

All the units in Imperial Lake kept up the pattern of small-unit patrolling and thorough searching of any area where it was suspected enemy camps or supply caches were concealed. Operations increased the toll of NVA and VC dead in ambushes and brief firefights, and resulted in the capture of over 50,000 pounds of rice. A patrol from Company B, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines made the most important discovery of the month. On 5 November, while searching a base camp, the patrol found a cache of documents, photographs, and tape recordings. The material when examined turned out to be the central files of the Viet Cong security section for Quang Nam Province. The file was full of names of enemy underground leaders and agents. Other base camps and cave complexes yielded weapons, radios, communication equipment, and explosives. As the Marines uncovered bunkers and tunnels, they blew up the structures with plastic explosive and seeded caves with crystallized CS riot gas. If the enemy reoccupied a seeded cave, the heat from their bodies and from lamps or cooking fires would cause the CS to resume its gaseous state, and render the cave uninhabitable.*[34]

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong continued to avoid combat except when small groups were

*Lieutenant General Bernard E. Trainor, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, remarked in 1985 that Company B did not just happen by chance on the enemy headquarters complex. As a result of a successful Pacifier operation in late September, the Marines captured the chief of *Da Nang-Que Son Communications Liaison Network, Espionage Section, Quang Da Special Zone.* After extensive questioning the prisoner finally agreed to lead the Marines to the enemy headquarters complex. Based on this and other intelligence, the Marine battalion in late October and early November launched an operation in an "almost inaccessible portion of the central Que Son Mountains." A VC company, the *C-111*, attempted unsuccessfully to draw off the Marines from the headquarters complex. As described in the text, Company B "captured intact the central files of the *VC Quang Da Special Zone*." According to General Trainor, "The captured files were described by the intelligence community, both military and CIA, as the most significant find of the war in I Corps." LtGen Bernard E. Trainor, Comments on draft ms, 1Dec85 (Vietnam Comment File).

brought to bay by Marine patrols. Only sporadically and on a limited scale did they strike back at the units in Imperial Lake. On 8-9 November, for instance, an estimated 10 NVA or VC probed the defenses of LZ Rainbow, but fell back before the Marines' fire. During the night of the 28th, the enemy struck harder. They fired rockets and grenades into the command posts of Company F of the 2d Battalion and Company K of the 3d Battalion, killing one Marine and wounding nine. On the 30th, in an exchange of small arms fire during a Marine search of a base camp, the Communists killed 1st Lieutenant James D. Jones, commander of Company I, 3d Battalion.[35]

A helicopter accident cost the Marines more lives than did this occasional harassment. During the afternoon of 18 November, reconnaissance team Rush Act, on patrol from LZ Ranch House, had a man severely injured in a fall down a cliff and called for an emergency extraction. The call reached the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion CP at Camp Reasoner on Division Ridge just as a CH-46D from HMM-263 piloted by First Lieutenant Orville C. Rogers, Jr., landed on the pad after completing another mission. The helicopter was carrying the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel William G. Leftwich, Jr., and six other Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Leftwich, a 39-year-old honor graduate of the Naval Academy and holder of the Navy Cross, had come to the battalion in September from command of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. He often flew on missions to extract his patrols when they ran into trouble, and this day he decided to pick up Rush Act in his own helicopter. As one of his officers later said, "There was no regulation which said he had to go, but he always went."*[36]

It was a difficult and dangerous mission. Clouds and fog hung low over the Que Sons. With no clear space near the patrol for a landing, the helicopter would have to pick the team out of the jungle with an emergency extraction rig, a 120-foot nylon rope to which the men could hook themselves with harnesses that they wore. In spite of the weather and the rough terrain, the helicopter found and extracted the team. With the seven Marines of Rush Act dangling from the extraction rig, the helicopter climbed back into the clouds to return to base. Instead, it smashed into a mountainside about two miles southeast of FSB Rainbow. The next day, two reconnaissance teams worked their way through jungle and thick brush to the crash site. They found all 15 Marines dead amid the strewn wreckage. The tragedy was the worst helicopter crash in I Corps since 26 August, when an Army aircraft had been shot down, killing 31 soldiers. It had cost III MAF one of its best liked and most highly respected battalion commanders.[37]*

The tragic crash also necessitated a change of commanders. Lieutenant Colonel Bernard E. Trainor, who had experience as a reconnaissance company commander, was moved from command of 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, to command of 1st Reconnaissance Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Franklin A. Hart, Jr., who had commanded the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines in the Que Son area of operations earlier in the fall, was transferred from the division plans section to command the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. As Lieutenant Colonel Hart would later observe, making these changes put experienced officers into the vacated command billets and enabled the division "to continue Operation Imperial Lake with the least disruption of operation."[38]

Imperial Lake continued into December with elements of all three of the 5th Marines' battalions; companies of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines; and troops of the Americal Division taking part. On 2 December, a forward command group of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines replaced that of the 2d Battalion on Hill 381. Initially this command group controlled the operations of two of its own companies and three from the

*Colonel Albert C. Smith, Jr., was present at the briefing when Lieutenant Colonel Leftwich was given a verbal order by the division commander, General Widdecke, to accompany emergency extracts "to prevent mismangement faults by Recon and 1st MAW inexperienced personnel." Col Albert C. Smith, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 1May83 (Vietnam Comment File).

*A native of Memphis, Tennessee, Leftwich graduated from the Naval Academy in 1953, having held the rank of brigade captain of midshipmen. He served his first Vietnam tour in 1965-1966 as advisor to Task Force Alpha of the VNMC. He earned the Navy Cross for heroism during operations with the Vietnamese Marines in the Central Highlands. Fluent in the Vietnamese language, he had made himself an expert on pacification and the role of the American advisor. From Vietnam, he went to assignments with the Marine Corps Schools and HQMC and from March 1968 to May 1970 was Marine Corps Aide and Special Assistant to Undersecretary of the Navy John W. Warner. In June 1970 he returned to Vietnam to command the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines and in September took over the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion. Respected by fellow Marines for courage and professional skill, he was believed by many to be destined for the highest military ranks. The *Spruance* class destroyer USS *Leftwich* (DD 984), named in Lieutenant Colonel Leftwich's honor, was commissioned on 25 August 1979. For a list of his writings on Vietnam, see Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, *The Marines in Vietnam, 1954-1973: An Anthology and Annotated Bibliography* (Washington, 1974), pp. 264-265.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

A Marine firing party from the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion fires a salute at the funeral service of LtCol William G. Leftwich, Jr. LtCol Leftwich commanded the battalion when he was killed together with 14 other Marines in a helicopter crash on 18 November 1970.

2d Battalion, but rotations during the month reduced the number of companies under its control to two. From 2-20 December, the 2d Battalion, its headquarters located at LZ Baldy, directed operations in the lowlands and maintained the regimental QRF. On the 20th, a 2d Battalion forward command group with two companies returned to Imperial Lake. Deployed by helicopter, the command group took station at the reconnaissance patrol base on Hill 510, and the companies moved out to search the western Que Sons. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines continued operations in the northern Que Sons throughout the month, rotating companies to keep two in the mountains while the other two protected the division rear. Reconnaissance teams kept up their saturation patrolling, and on 18 December the 5th Marines implemented the division's orders which refined and elaborated upon the system for using the QRF to support them. The Korean Marines continued working in the northeastern Que Sons.

On 16 December, a mobile battalion command post and Companies G and H of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines landed from helicopters northwest of Hill 510 to join Imperial Lake. Until the 23d, they patrolled and searched, making no major discoveries or contacts. Then they returned to their TAOR south of Da Nang.

Elements of the Americal Division also entered Imperial Lake. On 2-3 December, the 1st Marine Division granted the Americal an extension of its TAOR northward into Antenna Valley and the southern Que Sons. Americal Division companies operated in those areas throughout the month to seal off the infiltration routes between the Que Sons and the enemy bases farther to the south and west.[39]

The pattern of operations in Imperial Lake continued unchanged in December. Usually as squad and platoon patrols, the Marines searched the mountains and occasionally ambushed or collided with groups of 5-10 enemy. The Communists continued to evade

rather than resist. As Colonel Ralph F. Estey, the division G-3 put it, "In the mountains we're finding the enemy is not standing to fight. He's running away; he's leaving weapons and other . . . things in the caves."[40] The toll of enemy dead, captured weapons and equipment, and destroyed base camps continued to mount.

On 24 December, Company L of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines stumbled upon a major NVA or VC command post. At 1515 on the 24th, a squad from Company L, returning to base after a patrol, saw nine enemy—eight men and a woman—sitting in front of a cave about one and one-half miles southwest of the battalion CP on Hill 381. The patrol cut down three or four of the enemy with small arms fire, but the survivors, aided by others from inside the cave, dragged away the bodies and disappeared into the brush. Sweeping the area of the contact, the Marines quickly realized they had an important cave complex. Elements of Companies K and L came in to help in the search, which continued into the afternoon of Christmas day.

The Marines discovered six large caves, two of the biggest floored with bamboo. Besides a scattering of weapons, ordnance, food, and medical supplies, they collected over 100 pounds of North Vietnamese uniforms, about 10 pounds of documents, and 8 wallets containing letters and pictures. Most important in indicating the function of the complex, they found three Chinese Communist-made radios, three portable generators, headsets, telegraph keys, and quantities of spare tubes and transistors. The radios could be attached to cunningly constructed and concealed cable antennas which ran from the caves to ground level and then were threaded inside or wrapped around tree trunks. From the quantity and type of equipment found and from the layout of the caves, one of which appeared to have been a combat operations center, some allied intelligence officers believed that at last they had found the elusive *Front 4* forward CP.[41]

While the burden of effort in Imperial Lake fell on the infantry and the reconnaissance teams, Marine aviation and artillery also helped keep pressure on the NVA and VC. Jets of the 1st MAW flew 137 sorties in support of troops in Imperial Lake in October, 108 in November, and 54 in December, dropping hundreds of tons of bombs and napalm. Helicopters of MAG-16 launched 3,000-4,000 sorties per month, mostly carrying troops and cargo and evacuating wounded. By November, Marines in the Que Sons could call for fire support from 44 light, medium, and heavy artillery pieces, most of them controlled by the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, in batteries at Ross, Baldy, and FSB Ryder. In December alone, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines directed 87 fire missions on observed targets using 1,794 rounds. The battalion also called for 76 missions, expending 968 rounds, on intelligence and preemptive targets.[42]

Imperial Lake continued into the new year. Between 1 September and 31 December, the operation had cost the 1st Marine Division 20 Marines and 2 Navy corpsmen killed and 156 Marines and 2 personnel wounded. Enemy losses amounted to 196 NVA and VC dead and 106 prisoners and suspects detained. Captured materiel included 159 individual and 11 crew-served weapons and tons of other ordnance, food, and equipment. In addition, the Marines had wrecked innumerable enemy camps and installations.[43] Even more damaging to the Communists was the continuous denial to them of safe use of their long established mountain haven. As Colonel Estey summed up on 14 December:

> Our presence there now is certainly keeping him [the enemy] off . . . balance, and he doesn't have a sanctuary in the Que Son Mountains that he enjoyed . . . before. I know we've conducted operations in the Que Son Mountains . . . , but we've never actually maintained a presence there, and this is what we're doing now . . . .[44]

5th Marines in the Lowlands: Noble Canyon and Tulare Falls I and II

While the 5th Marines kept most of its companies in the Que Sons during the Fall-Winter Campaign, it still had to protect populated areas around LZ Baldy and in the Que Son Valley. The regiment employed elements of its 2d and 3d Battalions for this purpose, and it relied heavily on South Vietnamese RFs and PFs and units from the Americal Division to supplement its own thinly spread manpower.

In the area north and west of Baldy, Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines conducted most of the defensive operations. Squads from this Combined Unit Pacification Program (CUPP) company, integrated with Regional and Popular Force platoons, patrolled and ambushed in nine AOs along Routes 1 and 535. With their Vietnamese allies, the CUPP Marines had numerous small contacts and carried out occasional company sweeps and cordon and search operations.

Other 2d Battalion companies also operated around Baldy when they could be spared from Imperial Lake

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A 373814

Marines from Company L, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines move off Landing Zone Ross into the Que Son Valley to begin Operation Noble Canyon on 23 October 1970. Bad weather continued to hamper the operation and forced cancellation of a planned helicopter lift.

and from QRF duty. From 26-31 October, for example, Company E patrolled just south of Baldy, killing four Communists. In December, with all of the battalion's organic companies under operational control of other units (Company G, as a CUPP unit, was under regimental control), Company G of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines reinforced the defense of Baldy. The company captured 400 pounds of rice, took five prisoners, and killed three VC while under the operational control of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. On 17 December, Company G moved to the Que Sons to join another company and a command group from its parent battalion, now also temporarily under control of the 5th Marines, in Operation Imperial Lake.[45]

The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, with its CP at FSB Ross, rotated its companies between Imperial Lake and various other missions. During most of the fall and winter, the battalion kept two companies at a time in the Que Sons. A third, under operational control of the 11th Marines, stationed a platoon at FSB Ryder and platoons or squads at the artillery integrated observation device (IOD)* sites on Hill 425 in the Que Sons, Hill 119 overlooking the An Hoa Basin, and Hills 218 and 270 commanding the Que Son Valley. The remaining rifle company, stationed at Ross, conducted small unit operations around the fire base and constituted the 5th Marines' regimental reserve which stood by to relieve district headquarters and CUPPs. The battalion Headquarters and Service Company at Ross formed its own CUPP platoon which defended two refugee hamlets close to the base.

The 3d Battalion Marines around Ross operated in a joint AO with the Que Son District Regional and Popular Forces. The RFs and PFs concentrated on close-in protection of the hamlets while the Marines, with the exception of the CUPP platoon, patrolled and ambushed on the edges of the populated areas in an effort to prevent infiltration.[46]

The 3d Battalion conducted one named operation

*The IOD was a highly sophisticated and effective day and night observation instrument.

during the Fall-Winter Campaign. This was Operation Noble Canyon, which was aimed at clearing enemy troops from the area around Hill 441 four miles south of FSB Ross. This section of rugged terrain, pocked with caves, had long served the NVA and VC as an assembly area for attacks northward into the Que Son Valley and southward toward Hiep Duc.* Operation Noble Canyon began on 23 October when Company L of the 3d Battalion marched into the objective area after the weather had forced cancellation of a planned helicopter lift. From then until 3 November, Company L, hampered by the late October storms, searched its assigned AO. In light and scattered contacts, the Marines killed four Communists and detained one VC suspect, at a cost to themselves of eight men wounded. They found no large enemy units or supply caches.[47]

When suitable targets were located, the 5th Marines employed its Quick Reaction Force in the lowlands. Late in the morning on 4 November, for example, as the paddy lands were beginning to emerge from the floodwaters, a CUPP unit from Company G engaged 15-20 enemy near the Ba Ren River three miles north of Baldy and called for support. The regiment dispatched the QRF to head off the enemy, who were moving north, while the CUPP squad and elements of the 162d RF Company took blocking positions south of the Communists.

The QRF unit, First Lieutenant John R. Scott's 2d Platoon of Company F, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines caught the enemy on an island in the Ba Ren. The helicopters carrying the platoon landed in the middle of the enemy column. A melee ensued. The NVA and VC, a few of them armed with AK-47s but most equipped only with pistols, scattered in all directions. Some dove into the brush and began firing at the Marines. Others fled, only to be stopped by the surrounding water. The AH-1G gunships escorting the QRF cut down many of the enemy with rockets and machine guns, while Scott's men dispatched others with grenades and rifle fire. Scott later recalled that "it got pretty vicious for a while . . . . We were sweeping the area toward the river, firing and throwing grenades all the time . . . . The NVA were firing and throwing grenades too."[48] One Communist soldier tried to escape by submerging in the river and breathing through a hollow reed, but the Marines spotted him and killed him with a grenade. By 1410, the fight had ended. While one Marine was killed, Scott's Marines had killed nine enemy, and the gunships claimed 11 more. Policing the battlefield, the Marines picked up one AK-47, three 9mm pistols, and an assortment of American and Chinese grenades, packs, and miscellaneous equipment.[49]

Throughout October and November, units from the Americal Division took over the defense of much of the lowland part of the 5th Marines' AO. The Army troops came in initially for Operation Tulare Falls I, a large U.S.-Vietnamese-South Korean effort to forestall a predicted series of Communist attacks in the populated area between Hill 55 and the Que Son Mountains. The 5th Marines was given command of all the American troops in the operation, which was coordinated by the Quang Nam Province Chief. Since the 5th Marines' battalions were fully committed to other operations, III MAF and XXIV Corps decided to place a battalion-size task force from the Americal Division under the operational control of the 5th Marines. Named Task Force Saint after its commander, Lieutenant Colonel C. E. Saint, USA, the task force consisted of the 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry reinforced by the 1st Squadron (-), 1st Armored Cavalry; a troop of air cavalry (several served with the task force in rotation); and a 105mm howitzer platoon from the 3d Battalion, 82d Artillery. All these units were drawn from the 196th Brigade of the Americal Division.

Task Force Saint established its CP at LZ Baldy on 2 October, and on the following day it began operations in an area north and east of the combat base. Guided by CUPP Marines from Company G, the Army troops saturated the countryside with small-unit patrols and ambushes, using their air-cavalry troop as a quick reaction force. In minor contacts, Task Force Saint killed 30 NVA and VC and detained 21 suspected Viet Cong while suffering 19 wounded. Operation Tulare Falls I ended on 15 October, having succeeded in its purpose of forestalling a wave of enemy attacks. The same day, Task Force Saint departed for the Americal Division TAOR.[50]

At the end of October, the Army units of Task Force Saint returned to the 5th Marines' TAOR as Task Force Burnett. In Operation Tulare Falls II, jointly planned by the 1st Marine Division and the Americal Division, Task Force Burnett was again under operational control of the 5th Marines. Between 27 and 31 October, the Army force established its CP at Baldy and from then until 30 November, it patrolled around the northeastern foothills of the Que Sons. Using the same tactics they had employed earlier, the Army troops

*For details of earlier Marine activities in this area, see Chapter 2.

killed 22 VC, captured two, and seized 14,950 pounds of rice, while suffering casualties of four killed and 26 wounded. By 1 December, the units of Task Force Burnett had returned to their parent division, but Army operations in the Marine division TAOR continued through the end of the year in the far southwestern Que Son Mountains.[51]

While the Americal Division operations had produced only modest results, they had helped the thinly spread 5th Marines to keep pressure on the Communists throughout its TAOR and had assisted Operation Hoang Dieu by blocking the enemy's routes of withdrawal from the lowlands to the mountains. As Colonel Estey, the 1st Marine Division G-3, said, "Colonel Judge just doesn't have the units that are necessary to adequately saturate his AO and this is what the 23d Infantry [Americal] task force is doing, and they're welcome any time in the area."[52]

As the meager results of the Tulare Falls operations indicated, the enemy in the lowlands of the 5th Marines' TAOR seemed few and unaggressive throughout the fall and winter. They moved in groups of no more than three to five men and devoted their efforts to recruiting, accumulating supplies, and harassing the allies with sniper fire and boobytraps.

Only in early December did the Communists show a willingness to fight. On 3 December, two platoons of VC, believed to have been members of the *105th Main Force Battalion*, attacked the Que Son District Headquarters. They struck at 0230 with fire bombs and small arms, only to be met and driven off by the RF and PF defenders. The raid resulted in the destruction of three huts, the death of one PF soldier, and the wounding of eight. The Viet Cong left one man dead on the field.[53]

The enemy launched a more intense attack on 9 December. Before dawn on that day, an estimated 60-80 VC asaulted the CP of the 1st Platoon of Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines near the village of Phu Thai three miles southwest of Baldy. Covered by a barrage of mortar rounds, rockets, grenades, and small arms fire, the VC rushed the east side of the perimeter and became entangled in the wire. CUPP Marines and RFs blasted the attackers with rifle, machine gun fire, and mortars and called for artillery support. The action continued until sunrise when the enemy, unable to penetrate the perimeter, withdrew. The VC left 11 dead in the wire and a litter of abandoned weapons, including four AK-47s and one B-40 rocket launcher. Two of the Marine defenders were wounded seriously enough to need medical evacuation; the RFs lost two soldiers killed and 14 wounded. On the afternoon of the 9th, Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky of the Republic of Vietnam, then on a tour of Quang Nam, visited the compound and congratulated the Marines and RFs for their small but unquestionable victory.[54]

1st Marines Operations, October-December 1970

During the last months of 1970, Colonel Paul X. "PX" Kelley's 1st Marines continued to protect the Rocket Belt. Each of the regiment's battalions defended the same general area of operations it had had since March, although the boundaries of each battalion's TAOR had been shifted and enlarged by the Keystone Robin Alpha troop redeployments. The 3d Battalion remained responsible for the arc of the Rocket Belt north and northwest of Da Nang. The 1st Battalion, now extended into the Thuong Duc corridor, guarded the western and southwestern sector. The 2d Battalion operated in the heavily populated and Viet Cong-infested farmlands between Hill 55 and the South China Sea.

The two massive Vietnamese saturation operations, Hoang Dieu and Hoang Dieu 101, increased the number of ARVN and RF/PF small-unit activities within the 1st Marines' TAOR and forced curtailment of the use of artillery. For each of these operations, Colonel Kelley directed his battalions to conduct as many joint activities as possible with the RFs and PFs in their TAORs, emphasizing cordon and search operations. Kelley enjoined his battalions to give "maximum support" to the efforts of the districts in which they operated—Dai Loc and Hieu Duc for the 1st Battalion, Hoa Vang for the 2d, and Hoa Vang and Hieu Duc for the 3d. The battalions were to take special care in coordinating their patrols and ambushes with those of the ARVN, RFs and PFs, making sure that Marines in the field always knew where their allies were operating. Beyond reductions in artillery fire and limitation of small-unit activities in some areas, however, Hoang Dieu and Hoang Dieu 101 had little effect on the endless round of squad and platoon patrols and ambushes with which the 1st Marines protected the Rocket Belt.[55]

The 1st Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert P. Rose, had moved companies onto Hills 52, 65, and 37 to protect Route 4 where it passed the foot of Charlie Ridge toward Thuong Duc. On Hill 52, the westernmost of the three defended by the battalion, Company C came under persistent Communist

pressure early in the fall. The company, commanded by First Lieutenant James N. Wood, Jr., had its CP on the hill, a low elevation which overlooks Route 4 and the Vu Gia River to the south of it and is itself overlooked from the north by Charlie Ridge.

On 28 September, the enemy began a series of harassing attacks on Hill 52. The action started close to midnight when a trip flare went off on the west side of Company C's perimeter, revealing two enemy soldiers trying to work their way through the barbed wire. The alerted Marines attacked the infiltrators with small arms and grenades, but with no observable result. This incident was followed by a night of sightings of groups of four or five NVA or VC and brief exchanges of fire. In the most costly of these for Company C, a Marine squad shooting at enemy in the wire was hit from the rear by two RPG rounds, losing two men killed and two more wounded. Early on the 29th, Marines on Hill 52 spotted nine enemy swimming across the Vu Gia from the south bank. Catching the Communists in the middle of the river, the Marines opened fire with mortars and recoilless rifles and directed artillery on the Communists' position. By dawn, the NVA and VC around the perimeter had withdrawn. Marines sweeping the area of the various contacts discovered four enemy dead and picked up a 9mm pistol, 31 grenades, and an RPG launcher with five rockets.[56]

Enemy harassment of Company C continued until 9 October. Daily, the North Vietnamese or Viet Cong fired at the Marine position with mortars, and they occasionally used recoilless rifles, RPGs, and rockets. Snipers in a treeline northwest of the hill also harassed the Marines. Helicopters in the area frequently came

Marines of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines prepare to celebrate the 195th birthday of the Marine Corps on 10 November 1970 in a formal ceremony on the aluminum helicopter pad on Firebase Ross. The Ross observation tower can be seen in the background.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

under fire. In a total of 20 attacks, the Communists hit Hill 52 with 52 60mm and 10 82mm mortar shells, 33 75mm recoilless rifle rounds, 2 RPG rounds, and 4 122mm rockets.

Company C met every attack with mortar and recoilless rifle fire and called for counterbattery artillery fire against the suspected enemy positions. The enemy gunners, who usually fired from the hills north and southwest of Hill 52, were well protected by the rough terrain and proved difficult to silence. Nevertheless, the rapid and well-directed Marine counterfire forced the Communists to change position frequently and kept the bombardment sporadic and inaccurate. In the entire series of attacks by fire, Company C suffered only six Marines seriously wounded. Beginning on 4 October, jets of the 1st MAW flew a series of strikes against enemy mortar positions which the artillery could not reach. By 9 October, these strikes had forced the Communists to break off their attack. Marine commanders believed that ammunition shortages caused by the heavy October rains also had helped curtail the Communists' harassment.[57]

Enemy aggressiveness in the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines' TAOR diminished after the October floods. The battalion spent the last months of 1970 carrying out small-unit patrols and ambushes and protecting engineer minesweeping teams on Route 4. As Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces increased their activity around the villages and hamlets, the battalion, in November, conducted a company-size sweep on Charlie Ridge and later established a patrol base there for reconnaissance teams. From 12-15 November, and again on 19-20 November, two companies swept the Football Island area near the Thu Bon north of An Hoa. Hunting for enemy food caches, the companies found about 2,000 pounds of hidden rice and corn. They also engaged one group of five NVA/VC, killing one and wounding and capturing another. During December, the battalion conducted two search and destroy operations on Charlie Ridge, and it provided two companies to block for an ARVN sweep south of Route 4 near Hill 37. None of these operations produced significant contact.[58]

During December, the 1st Battalion turned over the static defense of two of its major fortified positions to the South Vietnamese. In the far northern part of its TAOR, the battalion handed Hill 10 over to local Vietnamese forces between 27 November and 2 December. Shortly thereafter, it gave up Hill 52 on which Company C had earlier stood siege. The division and 1st Marines staffs had begun a reconsideration of the military value of the hill on 24 October, and on 3 December, III MAF agreed to their proposal for its abandonment on grounds that the Marines no longer needed it as a patrol base or an artillery position. Instead of holding the hill, the 1st Marines would protect Route 4 to Thuong Duc by mobile operations and by establishing an infantry reconnaissance patrol base north of Hill 52 on Charlie Ridge. Withdrawal of Marines from Hill 52 began on 9 December and was completed by the 13th. The redeployment left the 1st Battalion with fixed positions on Hills 65 and 37 and with the better part of three companies free for maneuver in the field.[59]

The 2d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Donald J. Norris, who had taken over on 13 September from the ill-fated Lieutenant Colonel Leftwich, emphasized population control and efforts to eradicate the VC underground in the many hamlets in its TAOR. As it had since June, the battalion deployed three of its companies throughout the fall and winter in assigned AOs and kept one in reserve for special operations and, after 22 November, for QRF duty. The 2d Batalion also conducted operations with ROKMC and 51st ARVN units. To reduce boobytrap casualties, the three companies in the field did most of their patrolling and ambushing at night (when the 2d Battalion believed the enemy removed many mines to let their own men move) and tracked movement in their AOs during the day from observation posts and watchtowers. After Operation Hoang Dieu began, the 2d Battalion cooperated with Vietnamese RFs and PFs and with CAP Marines to maintain daily checkpoints on major roads and to cordon and search hamlets or conduct surprise raids on suspected VC hideouts and headquarters.

On 10 November,* in order to increase mobility, the battalion directed its three rifle companies in the field to dismantle all their fixed defensive positions, mostly CPs and patrol bases. This would leave the battalion with only the fortifications of Camp Lauer and

*The 10th of November 1775 is the Marine Corps birthday. While the war went on throughout the III MAF TAOR, Marine commands took time to conduct modest ceremonies to honor the 195th birthday of the Marine Corps. Colonel Don H. Blanchard, the Chief of Staff, 1st Marine Division, later remembered visiting several of the more remote outposts, and was guest of honor of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines (with whom he served in Korea) in the morning and celebrated with the Marines at FSB Ross in the afternoon. Col Don H. Blanchard, Comments on draft ms, 2Jun83 (Vietnam Comment File).

with two observation posts and four watch towers, the latter manned only during the day and on moonlit nights. The companies in the field were to change position daily within their AOs. Each day the battalion S-2 provided the companies a list of recommended patrol missions on the basis of which each company commander would plan his activities for the next 24 hours. While three companies operated in this manner, the fourth would remain at Camp Lauer, serving as both the regimental Quick Reaction Force and the battalion reserve.[60]

Rapid and imaginative exploitation of current intelligence proved successful for the battalion during November. On the 15th, the battalion responded to a report from an informant that the VC were going to hold a political meeting that night in An Tru (1), a hamlet just south of Marble Mountain and Camp Lauer. Lieutenant Colonel Norris and his operations officer, Major John S. Grinalds, set a trap. They knew that the VC customarily approached An Tru (1) by boat along a shallow lake south of the hamlet and would flee by the same route if infantry approached from Camp Lauer. Therefore, they arranged for a Vietnamese Seal* team to swim stealthily to an ambush position overlooking the lake on the west side. Then they sent a squad of Company G sweeping noisily into the hamlet from the east side. The Marines flushed out five VC who, as expected, piled into two sampans and paddled out into the lake toward what they thought was safety. They ran directly into the Seal ambush, which blew them out of their boats at close range. The Marines and Seals recovered the body of one of the enemy. The others, almost certainly killed, sank with their weapons and were not found.[61]

Three days later, at 1322, Companies E and G deployed from helicopters to assault the hamlet of Quang Dong (1), one and one-half miles east of Hill 55, where intelligence indicated a VC headquarters might be located. Company G swept into the hamlet while a platoon from Company E and elements of the 4th Battalion, 51st ARVN Regiment took up blocking positions around it. An enemy force of unknown size fled the hamlet and ran into the Marines of Company E who, with the aid of a Cobra gunship, killed three and wounded and captured two others, one of them a NVA lieutenant. A search of the hamlet turned up 150 pounds of wheat and 125 pounds of rice in buried caches, 5 boobytraps, 1 AK-47, and 2 bunkers made of steel-reinforced concrete. The Marines sent 85 civilians to Hill 55 to be screened as VC suspects and set ambushes around the bunkers and food caches. Before the operation ended on 20 November, the ambushes had resulted in three more enemy dead and three weapons captured. The Marines suffered no casualties.[62]

In December, two companies of the 2d Battalion and a mobile battalion CP were detached for most of the month to support the 5th Marines in Imperial Lake. As a result, the battalion made fewer attacks within its TAOR. Nevertheless, on 7 December, again working with a Seal team, two rifle companies and a RF company cordoned off a known VC haven near a finger lake one and one-half miles south of Camp Lauer. After the cordon had been established, the Marines worked over the area within it with mortar fire and air strikes and then began a thorough search which continued through the end of the month. By 31 December, they had found 1 dead VC, 3 rifles, 1,350 rounds of AK-47 ammunition, 40 boobytraps, 11 81mm and 60mm mortar shells, and about 6 pounds of documents in the target area.[63]

In the northwestern part of the Rocket Belt, Lieutenant Colonel Marc A. Moore's 3d Battalion operated in the thinly populated foothills west of Da Nang and in the villages along the Cu De River. Small-unit patrols and ambushes, most of them aimed at preventing rocket and mortar attacks on Da Nang, continued to form the bulk of the battalion's activities, varied with frequent company-size sweeps of the hills west of Outpost Reno and the rugged mountains north of the Cu De. From 22-31 December, the battalion furnished the 1st Marines' Quick Reaction Force.

During the Fall-Winter Campaign, the 3d Battalion centered much of its attention on the villages of Ap Quan Nam and Kim Lien in the northern part of its TAOR. Ap Quan Nam, just south of the Cu De, long had been a center for enemy infiltration, political agitation, and rice collection. Kim Lien was located on Route 1, a mile north of the vital Nam O Bridge over the Cu De, and bordered the large Esso gasoline storage depot. It offered the enemy an assembly and supply distribution point easily accessible from base areas in the mountains above Hai Van Pass.

On 19 October, in cooperation with the 1/158th RF

*Seal teams operated under the Vietnamese Coastal Security Service. Each consisted of 12 South Vietnamese Navy personnel dressed in black pajamas like the enemy and carrying AK-47s. The teams, accompanied by U.S. Navy advisors, were used to block traffic along waterways or, as in this case, to move into position by water and conduct ambushes.

Company, Company I of Moore's battalion started an intensive population control campaign in Ap Quan Nam (1) and (2). The two companies first surrounded the hamlets with checkpoints to control movement of people in and out. Then they began a house-to-house census, registering each inhabitant and preparing a detailed map of each home and its surroundings. By continually comparing actual observation of the hamlets with this recorded information, allied officers hoped to stop infiltration and the accumulation of supplies by the enemy more quickly. By 20 December, the Marines and RFs had finished the census and registration. They had channeled all movement into and out of the hamlets past guard posts where they verified each person's registration and checked names and descriptions against a blacklist of known local VC. By the end of the year, the campaign seemed to be succeeding, since the number of enemy sightings and contacts in the Ap Quan Nam area declined.[64]

Action around the village of Kim Lien intensified early in November. At 2400 on the 4th, three enemy entered Kim Lien and killed an assistant hamlet chief, two members of the People's Self-Defense Force, and a civilian. They threatened similar action against anyone else who took up arms for the GVN. Early in the morning of 6 November, 30 NVA and VC returned to the village, collected 400 pounds of rice, and kidnapped a minor local official.

The enemy came back before dawn on 7 November, but this time Marines of the 1st Platoon of Company I were waiting. At 0200, the platoon, in ambush west of Kim Lien, saw 10-15 NVA, all armed, approaching the village from the northwest and six others at the same time leaving the community. The Marines opened fire at a range of about 30 meters with small arms, M79s, and M72 LAAWs and set off several claymore mines. The NVA returned small arms fire and fled, and two mortar rounds exploded near the Marines, but they suffered no casualties in the brief fight. Searching the area later, the Marines found three dead North Vietnamese, two AK-47s, a pistol, and an assortment of equipment and documents.[65]

Following this encounter, on 16 November the 3d Battalion helilifted a platoon from Company I into the foothills west of Kim Lien to hunt for a suspected enemy base camp while a platoon of Company K blocked to the eastward. The brief operation produced no contacts or discoveries. From 21-30 November, Company K and elements of Company L, directed by a mobile battalion CP, cooperated with troops of the 125th RF Group in a cordon and search of Kim Lien, and the following month the battalion began a population control operation there similar to the one in Ap Quan Nam. By 31 December, Company I, which had returned to the area north of the Cu De after operating for several weeks further south, had established a permanent cordon around the village to keep out enemy food details and propaganda detachments. The battalion issued orders on the 31st for a population census to begin on 2 January.[66]

The 1st Marines' Quick Reaction Force, established on 22 November and initially consisting of the 3d Platoon of Company H, 2d Battalion, was employed six times during November. In the most successful of these actions, on the 28th, the 3d Platoon landed near the hamlet of Le Nam (2), six miles northeast of An Hoa. Responding to an IOD sighting of three enemy, the 3d Platoon, later reinforced by the 2d Platoon of Company H, swept through the hamlet, driving two VC to their deaths under the guns of the escorting Cobras. The Marines later found another dead VC in the hamlet and rounded up a defector and two suspects. They set up an ambush near the hamlet that night which killed one more VC and captured three. QRF operations continued through December, with the 3d Battalion and later the 1st Battalion furnishing the rifle platoon, but produced no significant results.[67]

The 1st Marines' use of artillery and air support declined during the fall and winter under the impact of the division's restrictive fire plans. Nevertheless, the regiment continued to employ aircraft and artillery against both observed and intelligence targets, mostly in the thinly populated or uninhabited western and northwestern fringes of the 1st and 3d Battalions' TAORs. The 3d Battalion consistently required about 50 percent of the artillery fire used by the regiment. In November, for example, of 12,196 rounds expended, 6,611 fell in the 3d Battalion's TAOR, while the 2d Battalion called for no artillery missions at all in November.[68]

Use of supporting air strikes by the 1st Marines, already limited by the restrictions imposed in connection with Operation Hoang Dieu, was confined to the area west of Route 1 by a division order of 13 December. East of the highway, Marines could call in air strikes only to support troops in contact or when ground troops intended immediately to sweep the target area. The division issued this order because recent strikes

east of the highway had produced little evidence of casualties or damage to the enemy and because "tactical air strikes east of QL 1 have an adverse psychological impact on the local Vietnamese populace residing in the area since the area is regarded as a secure area."[69]

In the last three months of the year, the 1st Marines lost 11 men killed in action or dead of wounds and 127 wounded. Its battalions in the same period killed 31 NVA and VC and took six prisoners. Four enemy defected in the regiment's TAOR, and Colonel Kelley's Marines captured 33 individual and two crew-served weapons. Probably more significant as an indication that the regiment was accomplishing its primary mission, the enemy during October, November, and December launched only three rocket attacks on Da Nang. None of the 12 missiles fired in these attacks did significant damage.[70]

The War in Quang Nam at the End of the Year

The 1st Marine Division in December was operating with less than half the number of troops it had at the beginning of the year. From over 28,000 officers and men in 12 infantry and five artillery battalions, it had shrunk, by December, to about 12,500 officers and men in six infantry and two artillery battalions. Nevertheless, the division continued to defend essentially the same TAOR it had defended in January.[71]

The division's ability to protect the same area with fewer men resulted, in part, from improvements in the South Vietnamese forces in Quang Nam and even more from drastic reductions in enemy strength in the province. From an estimated 11,000-12,000 troops of all kinds in January, by December Communist strength had fallen to about 8,500. Much of this decline, according to American analysts, resulted from the Communists' inability to replace their casualties. Fewer troops had infiltrated from North Vietnam in 1970 than in 1969, and captured documents indicated that the Communists' local recruiting efforts were falling short of their goals.

Changes in Communist organization in Quang Nam appeared to parallel the enemy's dwindling troop strength. By the end of the year, *Front 4* was believed to have discontinued its three subordinate wing headquarters, probably for lack of personnel to staff them and units for them to control. American intelligence in December located only one full NVA regiment, the *38th*, in the province. Of the other two which had been there in January, the *141st* had moved elsewhere and the *31st* had been reduced to one battalion. The enemy seemed to be continuing and expanding the practice of disbanding NVA and VC main force units to rebuild local guerrilla organizations.

According to increasingly numerous and reliable reports reaching allied intelligence, hunger, disease, and despair were eroding the fighting efficiency of the remaining enemy troops. A year of systematic allied attacks on base areas and supply routes had reduced many enemy units to half their usual rations of rice and other foodstuffs. The capture of hospitals, medical personnel, and medical supply caches in the Que Sons and elsewhere had diminished the Communists' ability to offer even rudimentary care to their sick and wounded. Prisoners and deserters carried tales of enemy soldiers refusing to fight, of friction between North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, of military and civilian discontent with Communist policies, and of loss of confidence in the possibility of victory. Such evidence had to be heavily discounted, drawn as so much of it was from the fainthearted, the discontented, and the disillusioned in the enemy ranks. (American opponents of the war spread similar stories about allied troops, and, in fact the Marines, like the other American Services in Vietnam, faced increasingly severe discipline and morale problems during 1970.)*

Declines in all forms of enemy activity constituted more tangible evidence of diminished Communist strength. In the single month of January 1970, allied troops and aerial observers reported sighting 4,425 enemy troops. By contrast, in four months between 1 September and 31 December, only 4,159 NVA and VC were spotted. Fire attacks followed a similar pattern. In January, the Communists fired 658 rounds, mostly mortars and rockets, at allied troops and installations. They took the last six months of the year, July through December, to approximate their January total, firing in that period 638 rounds. Even terrorism, now the enemy's principal offensive tactic, appeared to decline, although weaknesses in the reporting system made the figures on this subject unreliable.**[72]

As they examined casualty statistics for the year, many 1st Marine Division officers concluded that the

*For details of III MAF's efforts to cope with these problems, see Chapter 20.

**The accuracy of the figures on terrorism is doubtful, as the South Vietnamese were believed by the Marines to conceal many incidents.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

A Marine carrying an M60 machine gun plods over a slick and muddy rice paddy dike, participating in a search for suspected Viet Cong infiltrators in a hamlet near Da Nang.

division's combat effectiveness was improving, even as its troop strength and the intensity of the fighting declined. The division's total loss during 1970 of 403 killed and 1,625 wounded represented a reduction by about 61 percent from the 1969 totals of 1,051 killed and 9,286 wounded. From over 9,600 killed in 1969, reported Communist casualties had fallen to about 5,200 killed in 1970, a reduction of some 46 percent. Summarizing the division staff's analysis of the meaning of these figures, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, the assistant division commander, declared:

> Kill ratios are always invidious, but it can be seen that while enemy losses went down in 1970 they did not decline at the same rate as Marine losses. So we can conclude that the combat effectiveness of the division actually improved during 1970.[73]

Throughout 1970, the 1st Marine Division had accomplished its mission with diminishing resources. In

spite of reductions in strength, it had continued to protect Da Nang and the populated areas around it, and it had continued to maintain offensive pressure on the Communists' mountain bases. As the year ended, the division's military efforts appeared to be succeeding and, if anything, to be increasing in effectiveness. Regular military operations, however, in Quang Nam as elsewhere in South Vietnam, were conducted largely in support of what earlier in the conflict had been called the "Other War"—the allied effort to break the Viet Cong's political hold on the people and to prepare the Government and Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam to assume the whole task of defending and rebuilding the nation. That effort, also, had continued throughout 1970, and Marines had contributed to it.

PART III
PACIFICATION

CHAPTER 7

Pacification 1970: Plans, Organization, and Problems

Pacification: The Nationwide Perspective—The 1970 GVN Pacification and Development Plan
Pacification Plans and Organization in Military Region 1—Pacification Situation in Quang Nam, Early 1970

Pacification: The Nationwide Perspective

In 1957, a French officer, summing up the lessons of his country's defeat in Indochina, wrote of warfare against guerrillas:

> The destruction of rebel forces is not an end in itself: we know that as long as the enemy's infrastructure remains in place, he is able to maintain his control over the people and can replenish his decimated forces. Military operations are therefore only worthwhile insofar as they facilitate winning the people and contribute to the dismantling of the revolutionary politico-military organization . . . .[1]

This lesson, which the French had learned painfully in the 1950s, the Americans and their South Vietnamese allies had relearned, equally painfully, in the 1960s. By early 1970, "pacification," long a major concern of the Marines in Vietnam, had become the center of country-wide allied strategy. In theory and to an increasing extent in practice, all allied military operations, from battalion-size sweeps of enemy base areas to squad ambushes on the outskirts of hamlets, were conducted in support of pacification. Increasingly, too, allied forces engaged in a variety of paramilitary and nonmilitary pacification activities.

Definitions of "pacification" varied with time and with the agency using the word. The III MAF/ICTZ Combined Campaign Plan for 1970 defined pacification as:

> The military, political, economic, and social process of establishing or re-establishing local government responsive to and involving the participation of the people. It includes the provision of sustained, credible territorial security, the destruction of the enemy's underground government, the assertion or re-assertion of political control and involvement of the people in government, and the initiation of economic and social activity capable of self-sustenance and expansion . . . .[2]

After years of confusion about goals and policies, resulting in divided authority and fragmented administration, the Americans and South Vietnamese had developed and were implementing a comprehensive pacification strategy. This strategy involved, first, the use of regular military units to clear the NVA and VC main forces and most of the guerrillas from the populated rural areas. The regular forces then were to keep the enemy out by a combination of small-unit patrolling, ambushing, and larger sweeps of base areas. Within the screen thus established, Regional and Popular Forces and paramilitary forces and civilian agencies of the Republic of Vietnam would attempt to destroy the enemy political organization among the people, reestablish government control in each village and hamlet, and, it was hoped, win the allegiance of the people through economic and social improvements.

In the GVN's Accelerated Pacification Campaign, proclaimed in October 1968 by President Nguyen Van Thieu, the allies broke down these general concepts of pacification into specific tasks and assigned responsibility for each task to particular civil or military agencies. The plan set goals to be met for each task at national, corps, and province levels. Expanding upon the 1968 plan, the GVN Pacification and Development Plan for 1969 continued and refined the definition of tasks and assignment of goals and provided the framework for a nationwide effort.

By early 1970, both the United States and South Vietnam had achieved substantial central control over the many civilian and military agencies involved in pacification. For the Americans, the U.S. Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), formed in mid-1967, combined most of the personnel engaged in pacification and in advising GVN nonmilitary agencies into one chain of command under MACV. The CORDS organization paralleled the military and political structure of the South Vietnamese Government, with a deputy for CORDS under each U.S. corps area commander and lower-ranking CORDS deputies at province and district headquarters. In Saigon, the national head of CORDS in 1970, Ambassador William Colby, was a member of General Abrams's staff. On the South Vietnamese side, a Central Pacification and Development Council (CPDC),* chaired by the Prime Minister and including represen-

*The CPDC was defined in the 1970 Combined Campaign Plan as the "ministerial council at the cabinet level responsible for planning, coordinating and executing the national Pacification and Development Program."

Marine Corps Historical Collection

South Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky is shown with MajGen Charles F. Widdecke, Commanding General, 1st Marine Division on a visit to I Corps.

tatives of all government agencies, prepared the annual Pacification and Development Plans. Similar military region and province councils, working closely with their counterpart CORDS organizations, oversaw implementation of the national plans at lower levels of government.

Between 1967 and 1970, President Nguyen Van Thieu had consolidated his administrative and political control over South Vietnam. In the process of doing so, he devoted increased attention to pacification and made important advances on the crucial problems of development of local government and land reform. Thieu's regime restored to the villages and hamlets their ancient right, suspended under Ngo Dinh Diem, to elect their own governing councils.

President Thieu delegated to these elected councils increased control over local budgets and taxation, and he gave the village chiefs, who were chosen by the councils, command of the PF platoons, Revolutionary Development teams, and national police working in their villages. To enlarge their prestige and self-confidence as well as improve their training, he held national conferences of village and hamlet officials. Thieu also took the province chiefs out from under the authority of the senior ARVN commanders in their provinces and made them responsible directly to their military region commanders and through them to Saigon. At the same time, he transferred the power to appoint province and district chiefs from the local ARVN commanders to the central government. American observers interpreted these changes as efforts by Thieu to create a new political constituency for himself outside the RVNAF and the established Saigon political parties, but the changes also offered the promise of a more responsive and efficient civil government—a major goal of pacification.[3]

Land reform, for years urged upon the GVN by its American advisors as a means of winning the loyalty of the peasants and half-heartedly attempted by previous Saigon regimes, also took a step forward under President Thieu. Early in 1970, he signed the "Land to the Tiller" bill passed the year before by the National Assembly after long debate. The bill drastically limited the amount of land any one person could own and required distribution of the excess acreage (for which the owners would be compensated) to the tenants who actually worked it and to other categories of needy and deserving Vietnamese. While implementation of the law quickly bogged down in administrative and legal difficulties, its adoption gave the GVN a means of matching Communist promises on an issue long monopolized by the VC.[4]

The 1970 GVN Pacification and Development Plan

On 10 November 1969, President Thieu promulgated his government's 1970 Pacification and Development Plan which was approved by President Thieu, the Prime Minister, and the Cabinet. It was to be signed in formal ceremony by each province chief and American province senior advisor. Designed to complement the allies' military combined campaign plan for the year, the Pacification and Development Plan constituted the guiding directive on pacification for South Vietnamese and Free World Military Armed Forces (FWMAF). General Abrams distributed copies of it to the United States corps area commanders, including the Commanding General of III MAF, with instructions to regard it as "guidance, directive in nature to advisory personnel at all echelons."[5]

The 1970 plan was designed to expand the pacification advances of 1969. During that year the GVN and its allies had been able to extend their military presence and influence into most of South Vietnam's villages and hamlets. This had resulted in impressive territorial gains. By the end of the year, CORDS estimated that about 90 percent of the South Vietnamese people lived in localities wholly or partially GVN-controlled and that the enemy remained a major military threat in only nine provinces, including Quang Nam and Quang Ngai in MR 1.*[6] The GVN and its allies now planned to consolidate these security gains and to reinforce them by extending local self-government and intensifying efforts at economic and social improvement. As the preamble to the 1970 plan put it:

> . . . We will vigorously push our attacks into the Communist base areas and exploit their weakness to eliminate them completely from pacified areas, and thus create an advantageous milieu so we can increase the quality of life in the future. At the same time we must bring a new vitality to our people in a framework of total security, so that the people can build and develop a free and prosperous society.[7]

The 1970 plan contained five guiding principles, five operational principles, and eight objectives. The guiding and operational principles were pacification truisms and generalities, such as "Pacification and Development must unite to become one" (Guiding Principle One), and "Establish the hamlet where the people are; do not move the people to establish the hamlet" (Operational Principle Three). The practical goals for action for the year were established in the eight objectives, which were: "Territorial Security; Protection of the People against Terrorism; People's Self Defense; Local Administration; Greater National Unity; Brighter Life for War Victims; People's Information; and Prosperity for All." These titles covered programs or combinations of programs, most of which had been underway for many years.[8]

Under "Territorial Security," the Vietnamese Government committed itself to assuring that 100 percent of its people lived in hamlets and villages with pacification ratings of A, B, or C, the three highest grades on the six-level evaluation scale employed in the CORDS Hamlet Evaluation System (HES).* The government set the goal of reducing attacks, shellings, terrorism, and sabotage by 50 percent of the 1969 level in areas being pacified and 75 percent in areas rated secure. Expansion in numbers and quality of the national police "in order to help the local governments maintain law and order in both rural and urban areas" also came under this objective.

"Protection of the People against Terrorism" covered the program codenamed Phoenix by the Americans and Phung Hoang by the Vietnamese. This program had been previously conducted under tight secrecy by Vietnamese police and intelligence agencies with supervision and advice from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Its objective was "neutralization" by death or capture of members of the VCI, the Com-

*The other seven were Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Pleiku, and Kontum in MR 2; and Kien Hoa, Vinh Binh, and An Xuyen in MR 4. Reportedly there were no enemy-controlled villages in MR 3.

*The Americans had instituted HES in 1966 to reduce the vast amount of pacification-related information to a more or less reliable set of statistical indicators of progress or lack of it. Data for the system was collected by the U.S. senior district advisors who completed periodic questionnaires on each hamlet and village. The questions covered all aspects of pacification—security, political, and socio-economic. The information thus obtained was collated and translated into statistics. The system came under much criticism for incompleteness and biases in reporting and analysis, and on 1 January 1970, CORDS put into effect the improved Hamlet Evaluation System (HES)-70. While always controversial and viewed with skepticism by many Americans in the field, HES did provide a unified quantitative picture of what was going on in pacification, and its numbers and percentages at least served to indicate trends.

CORDS in July 1969 defined its security letter categories as follows:

A. Hamlet has adequate security forces; Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) has been eliminated; social and economic improvements are under way.

B. A VC threat exists, but so do organized and "partially effective" security forces. VCI has been partially neutralized; self-help programs and economic improvements have been undertaken.

C. The hamlet is subject to VC harassment, the VCI has been identified; the hamlet population participates in self-help programs and local government.

D. VC activities have been reduced, but an internal threat still exists. There is some VC taxation and terrorism. The local populace participates in hamlet government and economic programs.

E. The VC is effective; although some GVN control is evident, the VCI is intact, and the GVN programs are nonexistent or just beginning.

VC. The hamlet is VC-controlled, with no resident government officials or advisors, although military may come in occasionally. The population willingly supports the VC. IDA Pacification Report, 3, p. 296.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

A crying child sits on the steps of what had been his home. Communist gunners had shelled the village, destroying his house and killing his parents.

munist clandestine government and political movement. Late in 1969, the U.S. and the GVN decided to acknowledge Phoenix/Phung Hoang openly as a major element of the pacification program. By doing so, they hoped to rally popular support for it and to coordinate all allied military and political agencies for a more intensive and wide-ranging attack. Therefore, the 1970 Pacification and Development Plan established the goal of eradicating 1,800 known VCI per month and identifying additional members of the infrastructure who were believed to exist, but did not yet have dossiers on file. It prescribed the structure of Phung Hoang organizations down to the district level, in which the national police were to be the "principal operational element" and all other military and civil agencies were to participate. It specified which Communist activists could be considered members of the VCI and which could not and laid out procedures for apprehension, trial, and sentencing.

"People's Self Defense" denoted further expansion and improved equipment and training for the People's Self Defense Force (PSDF). The PSDF, a civilian home guard, had come into spontaneous existence in portions of Saigon, Hue, and other localities after the Communist attacks on the cities during the Tet Offensive of early 1968. The GVN by law extended the organization nationwide in June of 1968 with the ultimate intention of enrolling entire urban and rural populations including women, children, and all men above or below ARVN draft age. The men were to be formed into combat groups, armed, and trained to guard their hamlets and neighborhoods. The women, children, and old people, organized in support groups, would be instructed in first aid, firefighting, and other noncombatant defense tasks. All members were to aid in identifying and capturing local VCI. Many American officials considered the PSDF potentially one of the GVN's most promising pacification devices, more for its mass involvement of people in supporting the government than for its still unproven military value. By early 1970, the PSDF included about 1,288,000 men in combat groups—armed with 339,000 weapons—and 2,000,000 members of support groups.[9] The 1970 Pacification and Development Plan called for enlarging the membership figures respectively to 1,500,000 and 2,500,000 and for increasing the armament of the combat groups to 500,000 weapons, including 15,000 automatic rifles, by the end of the year.

The remaining five objectives constituted the development part of the pacification program. "Local Administration" prescribed plans for electing hamlet, village, municipal, and provincial councils and for improving the skills of local officials.* "Greater National Unity" directed continuation of the "Chieu Hoi" Program under which enemy soldiers and political cadres who surrendered voluntarily were resettled in civilian pursuits or put to work for the allies. The plan set a nationwide goal of obtaining 40,000 new Hoi Chanhs (persons who gave up under the Chieu Hoi program) during the year. "Brighter Life for War Victims" covered aid to refugees, disabled veterans, war widows, and orphans "in order that these people can continue a normal and useful life." The "People's Information" objectives outlined propaganda and psychological warfare themes for the year. "Prosperity for All" covered an array of programs for improving ur-

*These would include second elections for many hamlets and villages whose officials had been elected in 1967 for three-year terms.

ban and rural life, including land reform under the "Land to the Tiller" Act.

The plan assigned responsibility for achieving its goals to the various government ministries and to military regions, provinces, municipalities, and districts. For each of the eight objectives, the plan designated one "responsible ministry," such as the Ministry of Defense for Territorial Security, and listed a number of "participating" and "interested" ministries. Officials of the concerned ministries were to carry out their portions of the plan at military region, province, and district levels. They were to coordinate their activities with each other and with local officials through military region and province Pacification and Development Councils (PDCs) which were also to draft pacification and development plans, based on the national plan, for their areas of responsibility. The national plan for 1970 declared that:

> The CTZ and the province/municipal PDCs must play an active role in local pacification and development, insuring that implementation is comprehensive, not neglecting some areas by concentrating on too narrow a spectrum, and orchestrated so as to create a pacification effort that is interrelated and mutually supporting throughout the land.[10]

Pacification Plans and Organization in Military Region 1

In Military Region 1 (MR-1), as elsewhere in South Vietnam, 1969 had been a year of progress in pacification. Of the 2,900,000 inhabitants of the corps area's five provinces, 2,800,000 people or 93.6 percent by the end of the year resided in hamlets rated A, B, or C under the HES. This percentage dropped to 85.7 early in 1970 under the stricter standards of HES-70, the revised evaluation system introduced by CORDS in January. Elected governments were operating in 91 percent of the villages and 99 percent of the hamlets. The PSDF had enrolled 548,000 members, 287,000 of them in combat groups with 81,000 weapons. Over 5,300 VCI had been neutralized during 1969, and almost 6,000 Hoi Chanhs had rallied to the GVN. I Corps still contained more refugees than any other corps area, between 600,000 and 900,000, but a start

Residents of the same village shown on the previous page rebuild their home after the Viet Cong attack. The Vietnamese Government with supplies donated by CORDS provided the villagers with the necessary building material and tools to reconstruct their houses.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

had been made on resettling them and there were other indications of economic and social improvement.[11]

Corps and province level pacification and development plans for 1970 included efforts to achieve the national goal of 100 percent of the people in A, B, and C hamlets, to kill or capture more than 2,200 VCI during the first half of the year and identify 3,800 others, and to bring in 3,000 Hoi Chanhs in the same period. Plans called for no major enlargement in numbers for the PSDF but for an increase of about 10,000 weapons and the establishment of a military training cadre for each two villages. About one-third of the villages and hamlets and all the provinces and municipalities were to participate in the planned local elections, and over 9,000 officials were to receive training at province or national level. The planners set no numerical goals for refugee resettlement or economic improvement but promised much activity, including training, which would facilitate the self-sufficiency of refugees upon relocations.[12]

The U.S. organization for pacification in I Corps/MR 1 conformed to the standard CORDS structure established in 1967.*[13] Until the change of command in March, III MAF acted as controlling military headquarters for pacification with the civilian Deputy for CORDS as a member of its staff. After the change of command, control of CORDS passed to the Commanding General, XXIV Corps. The Deputy for CORDS, George D. Jacobson, who held Foreign Service rank equivalent to that of a major general, directed the efforts of over 700 military personnel and 150 civilians who were drawn from the Agency for International Development (AID), the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), the Department of Defense, and other agencies. The staff had a division for each major element of the pacification program: Territorial Forces, Phoenix/Phung Hoang, Chieu Hoi, Public Safety, Revolutionary Development, Government Development, Economic Development, Refugees, and Public Health.

Under the regional Deputy for CORDS, the five province senior advisors (PSA), each with a staff similar in structure to that at corps level, worked closely with the GVN province chiefs. The position of the province chiefs, who commanded the RFs and PFs and PSDF as well as directing all aspects of civil government, made the senior advisors attached to them the key American officials for carrying out pacification policies. According to Colonel Wilmer W. Hixson, the senior Marine on the I Corps CORDS staff, the PSA was "the most important single individual in all of Vietnam" in making pacification work. "The scope of his duties are more broad than [those of] any other single officer, of comparable rank . . . . He's the guy that makes it tick in the province."[14] Of the five province senior advisors in MR 1 during the first half of 1970, three were military officers and two were civilians. Under control of the PSAs, the 44 district senior advisors (DSAs) worked with the GVN district chiefs who in their administrative hierarchy were responsible to the province chiefs.

In comparison with the size of its forces in I Corps, the Marine Corps had only small representation on the CORDS staff. During the first half of 1970, the highest-ranking Marine with CORDS was Colonel Hixson, who served as Chief of Staff to the Deputy for CORDS and as Program Coordinator for Security. In the latter job, he supervised the staff sections for Regional and Popular Forces, Phoenix/Phung Hoang, Chieu Hoi, Public Safety, and Revolutionary Development cadre.* Besides Hixson, seven other Marine officers and five enlisted men held corps-level CORDS billets, and four officers served as province psychological warfare advisors. When the 3d Marine Division left Vietnam late in 1969, six officers still having time to serve in-country temporarily joined CORDS as advisors to the paramilitary Revolutionary Development cadres. They were replaced by Army officers as their Vietnam tours ended.

The Marines had no representation at the important province and district senior advisor level, not even in Quang Nam where they were the principal allied military force. Colonel Hixson believed that this situation reduced Marine influence in pacification, saying:

> The Marine Corps made a mistake when they did not get into this program, particularly in Quang Nam Province. It

*In the pre-CORDS days in Vietnam, III MAF had made some of the first American attempts to coordinate civilian and military pacification activity by U.S. and Vietnamese agencies. A relic of the *ad hoc* groupings of those days, the I Corps Combined Coordinating Council, continued to meet sporadically throughout 1970, but it now was "used primarily by the Vietnamese as a channel to short-circuit . . . the proper channels whereby they should get things done." Col Clifford J. Peabody, Debriefing at FMFPac, 8Sept70, Tape 4956, (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

*Hixson received his CORDS assignment from the MACV staff, to which he was attached, rather than from III MAF. For further detail on the activities of other Marines in Vietnam not assigned to III MAF, see Chapter 21.

> would have been an excellent chance to have had the Province Senior Advisor in Quang Nam a Marine, and as many of the District Senior Advisors as we could have . . . . Not that the liaison [between III MAF and CORDS] was not good, but it would have been much better had there been Marines on the staff.[15]

Lieutenant Colonel Warren E. Parker, a retired Army officer, who was PSA in Quang Nam from 1968-1970 and who spent eight total years as a PSA after serving two years as a Special Forces officer, years later challenged Colonel Hixson's contention that the PSAs in I Corps should have been Marine officers:

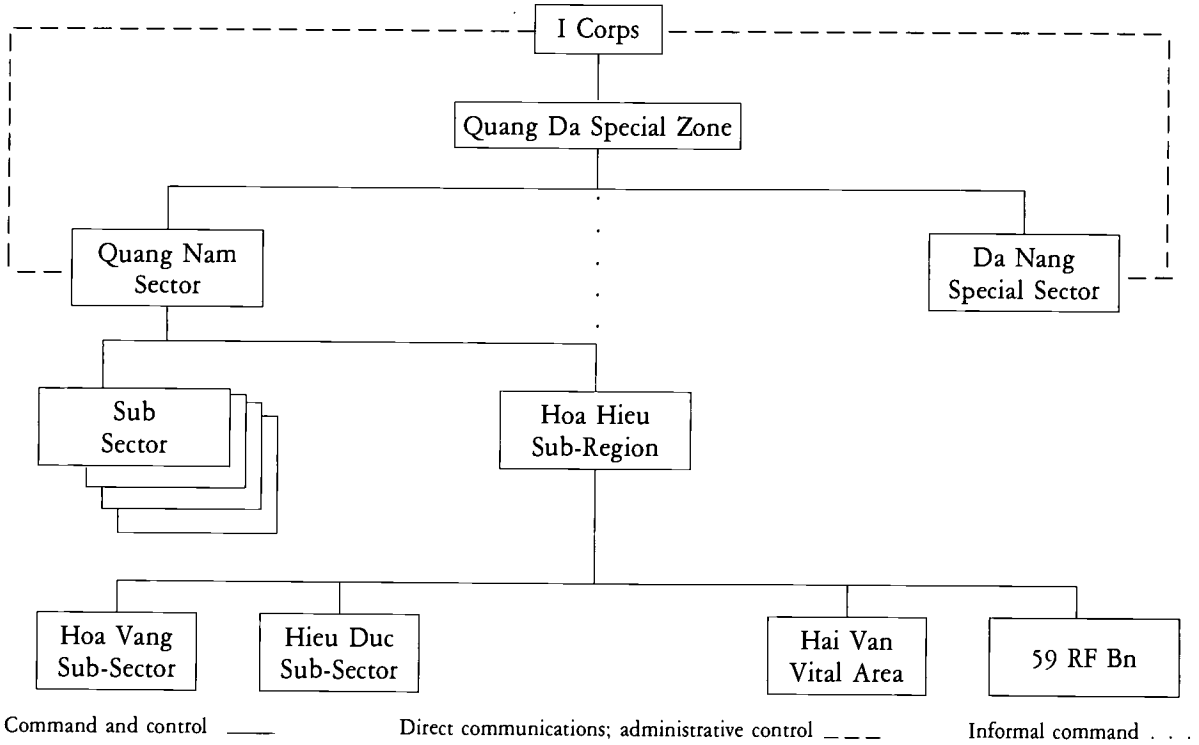
> I consider [the argument] debatable. Although the CG, III MAF was the Corps senior advisor, the PSA was directly responsible to the CORDS chain of command. A Marine officer in the role as a PSA probably would have been more intimidated by the III MAF and Marine division staff. Fortunately, I thought the CORDS-Marine staffs worked remarkably well together.[16]

Pacification Situation in Quang Nam, Early 1970

Throughout most of 1970, Marine pacification efforts were concentrated in Quang Nam Province. Here the Marines had to deal not only with the inherent difficulties of rooting out the Viet Cong, but also with the complexities of divided Vietnamese military and political authority.

As was quite common in Vietnam, an ARVN officer, Colonel Le Tri Tin, served as Province Chief of Quang Nam. Colonel Tin directed civil government and as military sector commander he controlled Quang Nam's RFs and PFs and PSDF units. In his military capacity, Colonel Tin, under an arrangement established by the I Corps commander, Lieutenant General Lam, came under tactical control of Quang Da Special Zone (QDSZ), the senior ARVN headquarters in the province. Reflecting his combined civil and military functions, Tin had two staffs, one military and the other civilian. The latter consisted of 23 officials concerned with administrative, economic, and social matters. Land clearing operations, rice harvesting, and refugee resettlement were among the largely nonmilitary responsibilities with which the province chiefs had to concern themselves. Under Tin, the nine district chiefs/subsector commanders, all ARVN officers, also had both political and military authority within their areas. Separate from Quang Nam Province, the city of Da Nang had its own mayor, appointed from Sai-

ORGANIZATION FOR AREA SECURITY IN QUANG NAM AND DA NANG



gon, to control its civil affairs and militia forces. The city, like the province, came under the control of QDSZ for military purposes.*[17]

Interference from Lieutenant General Lam, who maintained his corps headquarters in Da Nang, complicated and disrupted this apparently straightforward distribution of authority. While QDSZ, for example, controlled the operations of the 51st ARVN Regiment, other regular units stationed in Quang Nam, notably the 1st Ranger Group, the 1st Armored Brigade, and the 17th Armored Cavalry Squadron, were usually under the direct control of Lam. These units displayed little sense of obligation to assist in pacification and security activities. Major John S. Grinalds, S-3 of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, recalled that the armored cavalry, which camped near Hill 55 between operations:

> . . . never provided any support to anyone within the area immediately around Da Nang . . . . Once they got back in our area . . . we couldn't count on them for any kind of support at all. They were also, I think, tied up to General Lam who considered them his special reserve for a lot of reasons and just wouldn't let them deploy and run the risk of getting sunk in somewhere else.[18]

Further confusing command relationships, Lieutenant General Lam on 16 January 1970 established still another military headquarters in Quang Nam called the Hoa Hieu Defensive Area. Supposedly subordinate to Quang Nam Province, this area encompassed Hai Van Pass and the districts of Hieu Duc and Hoa Vang which surrounded Da Nang. Hoa Hieu controlled the 1/25 RF Group, which protected Hai Van Pass, the RFs and PFs of Hieu Duc and Hoa Vang Districts, and an independent RF unit, the 59th Battalion. The new headquarters was to "utilize the RF and PF that are available . . . for ARVN only operations or for coordinating operations with allied forces," "to give Hoa Vang and Hieu Duc a hand in military matters for the good of . . . Pacification and Development," and to "deal accordingly and effectively with enemy intention of launching mortar and ground attacks on Da Nang City and its outskirts."[19]

In July, a U.S. Army advisor summed up the convoluted South Vietnamese command relations in the province:

> Quang Da [Special Zone] is a tactical headquarters, primarily concerned with tactical operations in the unpopulated areas. It has the authority to establish AO's and it has tactical command over Quang Nam Sector [Province] and Da Nang Special Sector. It also exercises rather direct supervision over Hoa Hieu Sub-Region, issuing orders direct to Hoa Hieu without going through Quang Nam Sector. As a result, Quang Nam is often uninformed concerning the tactical situation in Hoa Hieu and has abdicated its responsibility in that area. In the southern districts, however, Quang Nam does exercise tactical command under QDSZ. As a further complication, General Lam will sometimes issue instructions directly to Quang Nam, Da Nang, or Hoa Hieu.[20]

As was true throughout I Corps, the Quang Nam CORDS organization, which worked alongside the Vietnamese province and district staffs, contained few Marines. The majority of key CORDS positions were held by active or retired Army officers. Of the three province senior advisors who served during the year,* two were active-duty Army officers and the third was a retired officer employed by AID. Most of the district senior advisors and the members of the province CORDS staff also came from the Army.[21]

III MAF and its subordinate units maintained contact with CORDS and the province government primarily through the G-5 or S-5 (Civil Affairs/Civic Action) sections of their staffs. The Marines had added this section (G-5 at MAF, division, and wing, and S-5 at regimental and battalion level) to the usual four headquarters staff sections early in the war in recognition of the close relationship between pacification and the military effort. The G-5 and S-5 officers, responsible for pacification and civil affairs, kept in close touch with the GVN and CORDS officials at the various levels of command. They attempted to fit military civic action into overall pacification plans, settled civilian damage claims against Marines, and in some instances helped to coordinate Marine operations in populated areas with those of local security forces.

Lieutenant Colonel Parker, who was PSA from January to April, recalled that among the American, Viet-

*For the development and organization of QDSZ, see Chapters 2 and 4. This was a departure from the prescribed chain of command under which province chiefs were to report directly to the MR commander. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of defense and pacification in the Da Nang Vital Area and Da Nang City.

*PSAs during 1970 were Lieutenant Colonel Warren E. Parker, USA (Ret) who had begun his tour in July 1968 and served until 24 April 1970; Lieutenant Colonel William R. Blakely, Jr., USA (Acting PSA), from April to July 1970; and Colonel John Chism, USA, from July through the end of the year. Colonel Hixson considered Chism one of the best PSAs in Vietnam. Hixson Debrief.

namese, and Korean units with which he worked on a daily basis the Marine Corps appeared to have the "clearest understanding that in a situation such as Vietnam pacification operations were as important as combat operations." He observed that "with very few exceptions, even the Vietnamese military and political leaders failed to grasp this basic, but very important, fundamental. The Vietnamese people, for very good reasons, distrusted and feared the Government of Vietnam and its military forces."[22]

Both III MAF and the 1st Marine Division kept the same G-5 officers for most of the year. At III MAF Headquarters, Colonel Clifford J. Peabody, who came to Vietnam from the Operations Branch, G-3 Division, at HQMC, headed the G-5 office from September 1969 through September 1970, when Major Donald E. Sudduth replaced him. The 1st Marine Division G-5, Colonel Louis S. Hollier, Jr., held his position for 11 months of 1970.* Since the division controlled most of the Marine units directly involved in security and pacification and was roughly equivalent in the chain of command to QDSZ and Quang Nam Province, Colonel Hollier became the principal liaison officer between the Marines and the GVN and CORDS authorities. According to Colonel Hixson, "Most of the work between the 1st Marine Division and the Province Senior Advisor in Quang Nam . . . is accomplished by G-5—some G-3 work, too."[23]

In February 1970, to improve coordination with other allied commands on a wide range of matters including pacification, the 1st Marine Division instituted a weekly conference of commanders and principal staff officers of the division, Quang Da Special Zone, and the 2d ROKMC Brigade. The conference, which met at each headquarters in rotation, had as its purpose "to ensure thorough coordination and mutual understanding in planning and execution of operations and to determine procedures for approaching other areas of common interest."[24] Besides military problems, the meetings dealt with pacification-related matters such as security during GVN elections, protection of the rice harvest, military support for refugee resettlement, and plans for civic action. The assistant division commander of the 1st Marine Division recalled that the meetings were "useful but required constant reenergizing as Vietnamese commanders changed and interest lagged."[25] With the exception of a six-week period during July and August, meetings were held almost every work day during 1970.

Besides the regular forces of the ARVN, III MAF, and the Korean Marine Brigade, the allies in Quang Nam had at their disposal the whole range of military and civilian agencies which had evolved to conduct pacification. The province and district governments were active and relatively efficient. A province Pacification and Development Council met monthly, bringing together all GVN officials concerned with the effort. The district chiefs met regularly with their village chiefs to coordinate activities. At the beginning of the year, Colonel Tin had under his command about 14,000 men of the RF and PF, organized in 52 RF companies and 177 platoons. In the judgement of their American advisors, the RF and PFs were improving steadily in military effectiveness, but they still did not have enough competent small-unit leaders, and too many of them were tied to static defensive positions. The People's Self-Defense Force boasted over 73,000 members, about 14,000 of whom were armed. In April, the Province Senior Advisor reported of the PSDF: "I have seen this program develop from nothing to a formidable, potential element . . . . In many incidents, the PSDF have been instrumental in driving the VC/NVA out of their hamlet areas."[26] The province's 4,500 members of the National Police Field Force (NPFF) and national police, formerly concentrated in the province capital and the larger towns, were now moving out into the countryside to relieve the militia in maintaining public order. By late April, each district had its NPFF platoon, and the national police had 68 village substations in operation.

In addition to the territorials, PSDF, and police, 50 Revolutionary Development Cadre (RDC) groups were working in Quang Nam's hamlets. In units of four to eight men, these youths, recruited and trained by the central government, were supposed to help the people organize themselves for defense and for political, economic, and social self-help. Under the operational control of the village chief, the RDC served as one of the GVN's political extensions into villages and hamlets, providing a bridge between the people and their government. The cadres varied greatly in ability and motivation, and in some parts of Quang Nam animosity existed between the RDC and the RFs and PFs, but American advisors considered the cadres generally helpful in bringing government programs to the people.

*The 1st MAW during 1970 did not have a G-5 officer, although aviation units conducted civic action.

Quang Nam by the beginning of 1970 possessed an active Phoenix/Phung Hoang program organized at province, district, and village levels and had exceeded its VCI neutralization quotas for both 1968 and 1969. The province maintained a Chieu Hoi center at Hoi An for reception, training, and indoctrination of Communists who voluntarily surrendered. Four resettlement hamlets for former VC in the province contained over 400 families. Two GVN Armed Propaganda Companies kept teams in the field seeking out VC and relatives of VC in an effort to encourage additional desertions. To further spread the GVN's message across the province, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), an agency under CORDS, and the Vietnamese Information Service (VIS), were attempting to expose more Vietnamese to television, both by distributing government-purchased sets to the villages and by encouraging private buying of receivers. A relay station at Hai Van Pass allowed Quang Nam to receive broadcasts from the Vietnamese Government studios in Hue.[27]

Yet for all the efforts of all these agencies, Quang Nam in 1970 was still far from completely pacified. Of its 950,000 people, about 830,000 lived in communities rated secure or semi-secure under HES-70. Another 50,900 resided in areas considered "contested." The rest were under Viet Cong domination or in localities "not rated," which meant about the same thing. Thus, 86.7 percent of the people were supposedly under GVN control, but this figure was deceptive. Marine intelligence officers were convinced that a clandestine VC government continued to operate, even in areas relatively free of overt Communist political and military activity, and that many Viet Cong had infiltrated GVN agencies. Especially in the heavily populated districts south of Da Nang, VC guerrillas, while probably less numerous than they had been earlier in the war, still remained active and tenacious.[28]

GVN social and economic improvement efforts still left much to be desired. About 44 percent of the province's school age children, in late April 1970, were enrolled in primary schools, and the government was training new teachers and (with much help from the

Army LtGen James W. Sutherland, left, discusses with South Vietnamese pacification officials the Go Noi Island Refugee Resettlement Program. Go Noi Island, a long-time enemy strongpoint, had been cleared out and made into a refuge for displaced villagers.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Marines) building new schools about as rapidly as additional villages were being protected from the VC. The secondary school system, however, remained ill-organized and ineffective. The province government annually announced ambitious public works plans, but delays in release of funds by the national ministries and shortages of construction equipment and skilled workers prevented completion of many projects. The amount of land under cultivation in the province had increased during 1969, with about 70 percent of the acreage devoted to rice, but land reform had made little progress due to a lack of trained administrators in the villages and hamlets. Quang Nam's social welfare program, according to the PSA, was:

> . . . very poor. Little has been accomplished in care of the needy or in caring for war victims, widows, orphans, and disabled soldiers. The program in this province consists mainly of feeding the orphans, war victims, blind, and widows
> . . . . In the past this has been a token program at best. . . .[29]

Quang Nam's most distressing social problem was its large refugee population, probably the largest single refugee concentration anywhere in South Vietnam. The exact number of refugees was obscured by the peculiarities of GVN reporting. Colonel Hixson explained:

> The refugee figures that are shown as refugees . . . are official refugees who have not been paid their [GVN] refugee allowances. Once they have been paid their refugee allowances, they go in a refugee camp. They are still not back in their home. They're still a "social welfare problem. . . ."[30]

To keep the number of officially recognized refugees awaiting payment constant or declining and thus show progress to their superiors, GVN officials habitually paid some their allowances, taking them off the rolls, and then added controlled numbers of actual but hitherto unacknowledged displaced persons. As a result, while estimates of the "official refugee" population in Quang Nam ranged from 75,000 to 100,000, Colonel Peabody, the III MAF G-5, estimated the actual number of refugees as nearer 200,000.[31] GVN policy called for returning refugees to their home villages, or for upgrading long-inhabited refugee camps into permanent hamlets and villages. The allies in Quang Nam would launch ambitious resettlement projects during 1970. Even so, the size of the problem would continue to dwarf the efforts toward a solution.

In the struggle for the allegiance of the people, accurate information about how many people there were and where they lived was vital for success. In Quang Nam, the GVN lacked such information, not only about refugees, but about permanent residents. Late in 1970, in connection with the 1st Marine Division's effort to reduce harassing and interdiction fire in populated areas, Colonel Paul X. "PX" Kelley reported that in the 1st Marines TAOR:

> . . . Maps currently available are outdated and do not represent a reliable picture of local habitation. . . . The migratory habits of many Vietnamese civilians are such that they move constantly from place to place, more often than not without the knowledge of any GVN officials . . . . Many district officials can provide only vague, inconclusive estimates relative to the location of civilians, theoretically under their political cognizance.[32]

The most severe deficiencies in the pacification effort were rooted in the character of the GVN and the nature of South Vietnamese society and hence beyond III MAF's authority or capacity to remedy. Nevertheless, insofar as they could, Marines throughout Quang Nam worked to strengthen and extend pacification. Throughout 1970, with men and material diminishing as redeployment proceeded, the Marines continued and further refined pacification programs and techniques they had developed earlier in the war.

CHAPTER 8

The Struggle for Security: Combined Action

Combined Action Platoons—Reducing the Combined Action Force
Building on Success: The Combined Unit Pacification Program

Combined Action Platoons

As a military force, the Marines concerned themselves primarily with the security aspect of pacification. They devoted most of their activity to keeping enemy military units out of the villages and hamlets and to assisting the GVN in eradicating the VCI. While almost all Marines directly or indirectly took some part in this effort, those involved in the Combined Action Program had protecting the villages and hamlets from local guerrillas as their sole mission.

The Combined Action Program originated with the Marines in Vietnam and was unique to them. It had begun in 1965 when III MAF, in trying to secure the heavily populated area around Hue/Phu Bai, discovered a potential ally in the then disparaged and neglected Popular Forces. Platoons of these parttime soldiers, under command of the district chiefs, guarded particular hamlets and villages. If their deficiencies in training, weapons, and morale could be overcome, they could relieve regular Marine units of many static defensive tasks and help tear out the local roots of enemy strength.

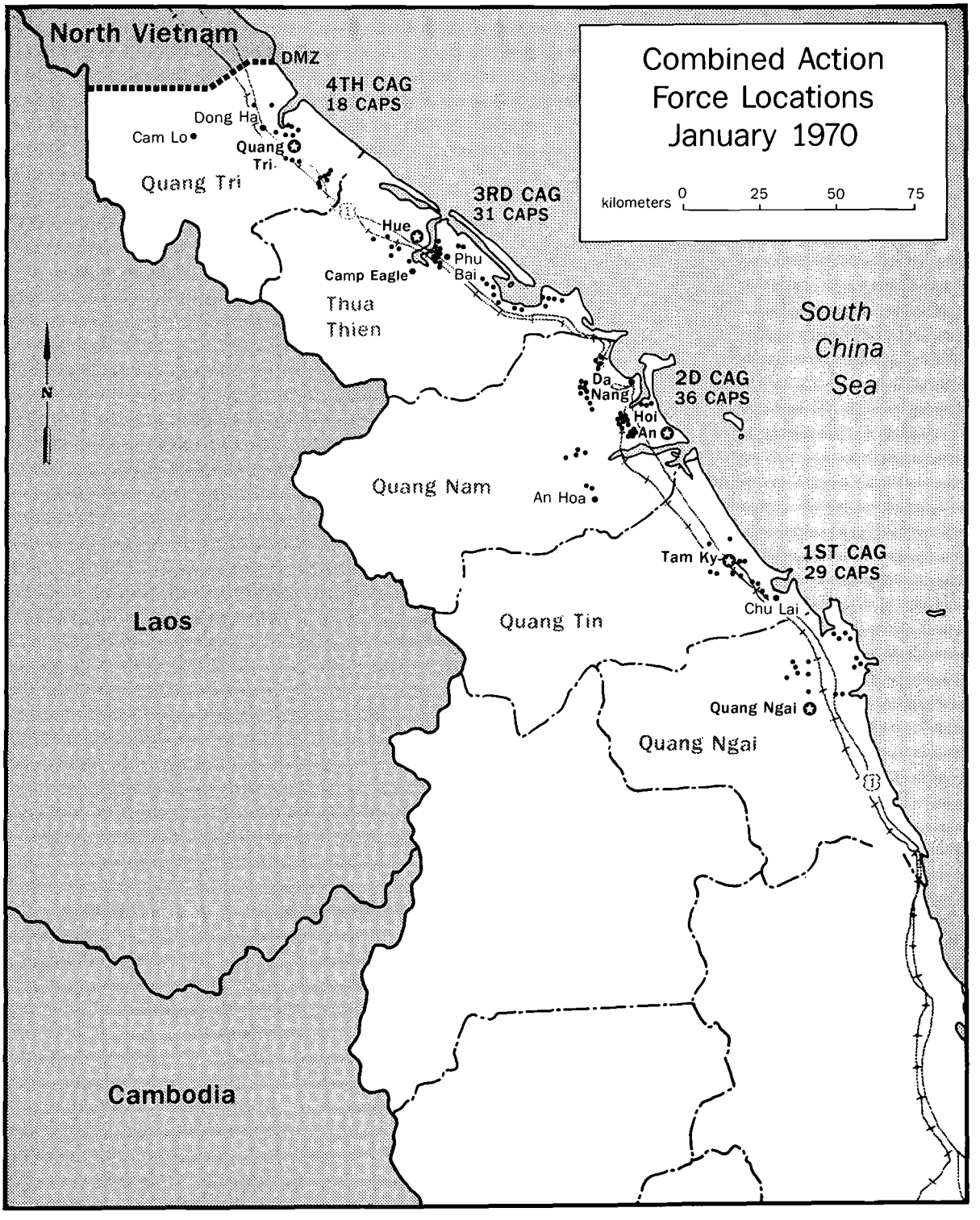
To work with the PFs, III MAF instituted the combined action platoon (CAP), consisting of a 15-man Marine rifle squad paired with a 15- to 30-man PF platoon to defend one particular village. Each element of the team strengthened the other. The Marines contributed firepower, training, and access to American medical evacuation and artillery and air support. The PFs furnished intimate knowledge of the terrain, the people, and the local VC. In the villages where they were stationed, CAPs won fights against local guerrillas and small main force detachments and drove out or killed the VC political cadres. Then, unlike conventional American and ARVN units which swept an area and moved on, the CAPs stayed and furnished the people continual protection against Viet Cong terrorism, recruiting, and taxation. As the Marines won the confidence of the villagers, the CAPs became a major source of allied intelligence, and behind the security shield they afforded, the GVN could reestablish its authority and undertake social and economic improvements. With proven success, the number of CAPs grew, and during 1966 III MAF extended the program to the Marine TAORs around Da Nang and Chu Lai. To administer the CAPs and to coordinate their activities, III MAF created combined action companies (CACOs) and then combined action groups (CAGs).

At the begining of 1970, Marine strength in the Combined Action Program had reached its peak. Four CAGs were in operation: the 1st, under Lieutenant Colonel David F. Seiler, in Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces; the 2d, under Lieutenant Colonel Don R. Christensen, in Quang Nam; the 3d, under Colonel John B. Michaud, in Thua Thien; and the 4th, under Lieutenant Colonel John J. Keenan, in Quang Tri.*

In January 1970, the four CAGs consisted of a total of 42 Marine officers and 2,050 enlisted men, with two naval officers and 126 hospital corpsmen. Organized in 20 CACOs and 114 CAPs, these Americans worked with about 3,000 RF and PF soldiers. The 2d CAG in Quang Nam, largest of the four, consisted of eight CACOs with 36 CAPs and almost 700 Marine and Navy officers and men, while the smallest, the 4th in Quang Tri, had three CACOs and 18 CAPs.[1]

Until January 1970, III MAF exercised command over the four CAGs through an Assistant Chief of Staff and Director, Combined Action Program. To improve coordination and administration of the program, Lieutenant General Nickerson late in 1969 requested permission to establish a Combined Action Force (CAF), with its own headquarters under III MAF. Lieutenant General Buse, Commanding General, FMFPac, approved his request on 8 January. Three days later, III MAF formally activated the CAF, to consist of a headquarters, staffed from the combined action section of the III MAF staff, and the four CAGs with their subordinate CACOs and CAPs. The existing III MAF Direc-

*The CAGs underwent relatively few changes of command during 1970. On 5 February, Lieutenant Colonel Claude M. Daniels took over 3d CAG from Colonel Michaud, and on 18 February Major Robert D. King relieved Lieutenant Colonel Keenan at 4th CAG. Major King was relieved by Major Willis D. Ledeboer on 27 June. On 1 July, Major George N. Robillard, Jr., took over 1st CAG. CAF ComdCs, Jan-Sep70.


Combined Action Force Locations January 1970
kilometers 0 25 50 75
North Vietnam
DMZ
4TH CAG 18 CAPS
Dong Ha
Cam Lo
Quang Tri
Quang Tri
3RD CAG 31 CAPS
Hue
Phu Bai
Camp Eagle
Thua Thien
South China Sea
Da Nang
2D CAG 36 CAPS
Hoi An
N
Quang Nam
An Hoa
Tam Ky
1ST CAG 29 CAPS
Chu Lai
Laos
Quang Tin
Quang Ngai
Quang Ngai
Cambodia

Marine Corps Historical Collection

LtGen Henry W. Buse, Jr., Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific inspects Marines and Popular Force troops of Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, one of the newly formed integrated CUPP (Combined Unit Pacification Program) companies.

tor, Colonel Theodore E. Metzger, became commanding officer of Headquarters and Service Company, III MAF, which continued to provide administrative and logistic support, while the 5th Communications Battalion handled the CAFs communications needs. Colonel Metzger was also charged with conducting the CAF School for training new CAP Marines and the CAF Vietnamese Language School.[2]

On 26 March, after XXIV Corps became the senior U.S. headquarters in I Corps, III MAF transferred operational control of the CAF to XXIV Corps, while retaining administrative control. Since the CAF still had CAPs deployed throughout ICTZ, this change was necessary to assure effective support of the CAPs by the U.S. Army and ARVN. The shift of command had little effect on the day-to-day operations of CAP Marines and PFs. Indeed, Lieutenant General Zais, the XXIV Corps commander, on 3 May, declared that the "organization, deployment, training, administration, and combat operation of the CAF were to continue as previously ordered by CG, III MAF . . . ." Colonel Metzger remained in command of the CAP until 9 July, when he was replaced by Colonel Ralph F. Estey, who had just completed a tour as commanding officer of the 5th Marines.[3]

In the field, the CAPs operated under a complex chain of command which reflected their unique character and mission. The Marines assigned to CAPs were commanded by the CAF through the CAGs and CACOs, while the PFs were responsible in theory to their village chief but in practice usually took orders from their district chief and through him from province and I Corps. Each CAG headquarters, usually located near a province headquarters, provided administrative support to the CACOs under it, trained both Marines and PFs, and, in consultation with province chiefs and regular unit commanders, assigned CAP areas of operation. The CACO headquarters, the counterpart of the Vietnamese district in the command structure, arranged for artillery and air support, evacuation of casualties, and reinforcement for its CAPs with the district and with the U.S., ARVN, or

Korean infantry battalion in its vicinity. Operational control of each CAP unit of Marines and PFs rested with the Vietnamese district (subsector) commander.

By mutual agreement, the province chief, the CAG commander, and the commander of the regular battalion operating in the area assigned each CAP a tactical area of coordination (TAOC), normally encompassing a single village. The TAOC was considered the exclusive territory of the CAP, and non-CAP units were not supposed to enter it without previous permission of the district and CACO commanders. Within each CAP, the Marine squad leader and the PF sergeant, or *trung-si*,* neither of whom had command over the other, directed operations by consultation and agreement.

If a dispute arose which the Marine squad leader or *trung-si* could not resolve, each had to refer it to a higher level of his own chain of command. This awkward system depended for effectiveness almost entirely on trust and respect between the Marines and PF leaders.[4] While the system worked well generally, Marine small-unit leaders did not hesitate to take charge. Looking back on his experience as commander of the CAF, Colonel Metzger observed that "when push came to shove, the Marines had to assume direct command and frequently did so, particularly when critical situations developed . . . the agreed chain of command was not often a major problem." Metzger suggested that in most cases Marines asserted themselves with the compliance of the Vietnamese. He emphasized, however, that when Marines had to, "at all levels," they took command.[5]

In mid-March, just before XXIV Corps took operational control of the Combined Action Force, a CORDS study group which had been reviewing the Combined Action Program proposed to Lieutenant General Zais that the CAPs be "integrated into CORDS." The study group claimed that at the village level, the CAP PFs' tendency to look to the district for direction undermined the authority of the village chief, and that the CAF, CAGs, and CACOs duplicated many functions of province and district senior advisors, thus weakening single management of American support for territorial security. Colonel Metzger in reply argued against transfer of control of the CAPs to CORDS. He pointed out that the CAPs still were tactical units engaged in combat operations and the CORDS "possesses no . . . capability to direct or support military operations." His view prevailed. The CAF remained separate from CORDS under overall control of XXIV Corps.[6]

During 1970 the CAF received most of its Marines directly from training centers and staging battalions in the United States, although it continued to accept a few volunteers from other Marine units in Vietnam. Most Marines assigned to the CAF from the United States were not volunteers, but they had to have high general classification test scores and records free of recent disciplinary action. In Vietnam, the CAF Headquarters possessed and exercised the right to screen and reject incoming replacements. Those rejected were sent to other III MAF units. In some drafts, the CAF refused up to 50-55 percent of the men, most of them for medical or disciplinary reasons, but the usual rejection rate was 20-25 percent.

Colonel Metzger gave particular care to the selection of NCOs for the critical position of CAP squad leader. He said:

> . . . I personally interviewed every sergeant that came into the CAF. I would say that the majority—and I'm making a conservative estimate—the majority we rejected. We rejected them usually because they simply did not, based on interview, have the leadership . . . capabilities. This would be evidenced in terms of record, in terms of motivation, in terms of their own willingness to make the effort . . . .[7]

Once they had arrived in Vietnam and been accepted by the CAF, CAP-bound Marines spent about two weeks at the Combined Action Force School in East Da Nang before joining their units. There they received refresher training in basic infantry weapons, small-unit tactics, first aid, and map and compass reading. They attended classes on the use of war dogs, and learned how to request and control artillery fire, air strikes, and medical evacuation flights. They also studied Vietnamese language, history, and culture, GVN politics, and the history and organization of the PF, and received about six hours of instruction in VC and VCI organization, weapons, and tactics. During the two-week school, CAP Marines received 53 hours of instruction in general military subjects and 38 hours in Vietnamese subjects. Another 18 hours were consumed with examinations, critiques, and reviews. For practical experience, CAF school students, with local PFs, conducted night security patrols around the CAF Headquarters compound. Many Marines returned to Da Nang during their CAP tours for 28 days of in-

*PFs had no formal rank structure, and their leaders were simply designated by village and district chiefs. No organization for the PF existed beyond the platoon, which theoretically numbered 30 men.

tensive instruction in Vietnamese at the CAF Language School.[8]

Throughout most of the year, as redeployments and changes in the flow of replacements disrupted the personnel "pipeline," the CAF operated at less than full strength. According to Colonel Metzger:

> Our T/O [for a CAP] was 15 to include a corpsman. Much of the time I was there we operated at about a 9.5 level, which meant that we were at least a third understrength, continually, and which meant more specifically . . . that instead of, say, putting out three night activities, or three night ambushes in each CAP, we could only put out two, or maybe one . . . While I was there, no solution was found.[9]

The manpower shortage created a number of interrelated problems for the Combined Action Force. Even to keep nine men per CAP in the field, the CAGs often had to reduce their already inadequate headquarters staffs and rotate men between CACOs. Lacking enough qualified senior NCOs, in early 1970 the CAF had to place over one-third of its CAPs under corporals or lance corporals, some hardly out of their teens and few with previous Vietnam combat experience. Because few Marines could be spared from the field for the extra training, the CAF had a chronic shortage of men fluent in Vietnamese. Fortunately, enough PFs had learned some English during five years of contact with Americans to permit at least basic communication within the CAPs.[10]

During 1970, the CAPs continued to perform the seven missions assigned them in earlier years. These were: to neutralize the VCI in the village or hamlet; to provide security and help maintain law and order; to protect local GVN authorities; to guard important facilities and lines of communication within the village and hamlet; to conduct combined operations with other allied forces; to participate in civic action and psychological operations; and to assist in economic and social development. The Marine element of the CAP had the additional mission "to provide military training to the PF soldiers in order to prepare them to effectively perform the [seven regular] missions . . . when the Marine element is relocated."[11]

A Marine member of Combined Action Platoon 2-5-3 demonstrates to his Vietnamese counterparts the breaking down of an M60 machine gun. The training of the Popular Force troops was one of the primary missions of the Combined Action Marines.

Abel Papers, Marine Corps Historical Center

Abel Papers, Marine Corps Historical Center

Members of a mobile combined action platoon have stopped in a friendly village where they are the dinner guests of one of the village elders. The platoon does not remain in any one hamlet but moves throughout its assigned area from village to village.

Throughout 1970, the CAPs accomplished their security mission primarily by continual day and night patrolling and by setting ambushes in and around their assigned villages. By the middle of the year, almost all units of the CAF had adopted the "Mobile CAP" concept of operations. This meant that the CAPs abandoned the fortified compounds from which they usually had worked in the past. The compounds, Marines had found, tied down too much of the combined platoon in defending a fixed position, thus weakening the screen around the village and offering the VC comparatively easy access to the people. Also, the compound itself offered enemy local and main forces an attractive target for attack, and several "compound CAPs" had been overrun and all but annihilated.*

Colonel Metzger recalled that after he was assigned as commander of the CAF several CAPs were either overrun or badly mauled. In some cases the losses resulted from Vietnamese treachery. At this point he realized that a static CAP compound was too easy a target, and the decision was made to go "mobile." Metzger said, "It was darned tough on the CAP Marines, but it saved many lives and greatly enhanced our security capability. Under this regimen, CAP Marines literally went to the bush for their entire tours." When the change was made, only a couple of CAPs remained in compounds and then only because of the necessity to safeguard radio gear which "would only operate from certain terrain features."

The CAPs now moved daily from place to place among the hamlets, keeping no position more permanent than a patrol base. During May and June, the 4th CAG abandoned even those; its CAPs kept their radios and other heavy equipment at village chiefs' headquarters, or non-CAP territorial force compounds. As far as possible, all the Marines and PFs remained continually active on patrols or night ambushes. This tactic allowed a CAP to screen a larger area more effectively with the same number of men, and it kept the VC uncertain of the CAP's whereabouts and hence less likely to try to enter the village to attack the CAP or to extort supplies and recruits from the people. It also conformed to the GVN policy of assigning a more mobile, aggressive role to the RF and PF while the PSDF took over the task of guarding bridges, village

*For a vivid description of a VC/NVA assault on a CAP compound see Francis J. West, Jr., *The Village* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 105-127.

offices, and other installations. Colonel Metzger summed up:

> . . . With its mobility, the CAP can keep the VC guessing . . . .They don't like to come after you unless they've had a chance to get set and do some planning. Mobility throws this off. It . . . means that the CAP can be found anywhere outside a village or hamlet, and they don't like this when they're trying to come in for rice, or money, or recruits, or just plain coordination.[12]

While patrols and ambushes occupied most of their time, CAP units also took part in other types of operations. They often worked with Regional and Popular Forces or with U.S. or ARVN regular units to cordon and search villages. Sometimes, one or more CAPs conducted an offensive sweep outside their TAOCs. During April, for example, units of the 1st CAG began sweeping areas which Americal Division or ARVN units had just left, in order to engage enemy units coming back after evading the earlier allied operations. CAPs relied for protection primarily on their organic weapons and on their mobility, but they could and did call for artillery and air support when they needed it. During March, for example, units of the 2d CAG called in 23 artillery fire missions and seven mortar fire missions. They used helicopter gunships twice and requested and controlled 26 medical evacuations for Vietnamese civilians, PFs, and wounded Marines.[13]

When General McCutcheon assumed command of III MAF and was briefed on the CAF situation, he expressed concern to Colonel Metzger over the casualties the CAF had sustained through 1969. "I answered by saying that our experience had taught us that to survive in many CAP TAORs, CAPs had to patrol aggressively," said Metzger, adding, however, that General McCutcheon had an arguable point, given the casualty figures. In 1969, the CAF had killed 1,952 VC/NVA, took 391 POWs, and captured 932 weapons. CAP losses included 111 Marines and 6 Navy corpsmen killed and 851 wounded, over 50 percent of whom were evacuated for wounds. The CAF, nevertheless, remained committed to an aggressive operational mode.

The CAPs' mobile tactics produced results. Throughout most of the year, units of the CAF conducted an average of 12,000 to 14,000 patrols and ambushes per month, about 70 percent of them at night. They took a steady toll of enemy dead and prisoners in brief firefights, over two-thirds of which, according to Colonel Metzger, were CAP-initiated. In the first three months of 1970 alone, the CAF accounted for 288 enemy killed and 87 prisoners, rounded up 487 VC suspects, received 82 Hoi Chanhs, and captured 172 weapons. In the same period, the CAF lost 22 Marines and 42 PFs killed and 165 Marines and 122 PFs wounded. The 1st and 2d CAGs in southern I Corps, where VC guerrillas were both numerous and active, had most of the contacts and inflicted and absorbed most of the casualties. The 3d and 4th CAGs, in more thinly populated northern I Corps where the main enemy threat came from the NVA, saw less action.[14]

CAF units devoted much attention to training the PFs working with them. In the field, most training occurred during combat operations, with the PFs learning from the example and the informal instruction of their Marine counterparts. As a CAF fact sheet put it, the CAP Marine's "classroom was in the 'bush' where the VC provide necessary training aids."[15]

Each CAG also provided formal instruction for both Marines and PFs. The 4th CAG, for example, brought two entire CAPs each week from their villages to the CAG Headquarters compound. There, the members, Marines and PFs together, received a one-day marksmanship course followed by a medical examination and, if necessary, treatment, a hot dinner, and a movie. The 3d CAG conducted similar refresher training for individual Marines and PFs. When a shortage of Marines forced cancellation of this program in March, 3d CAG established a mobile training team of one Vietnamese lieutenant and one Marine sergeant which travelled from CAP to CAP for the rest of the year.[16] To further assist the Marines and Vietnamese in forming more proficient CAPs, General Lam began phasing some CAP PFs through the full ARVN basic training program at the ARVN training base near Hue.

The CAGs provided periodic refresher courses for the CAP Marines about particular weapons or tactics. They paid careful attention to the Marine CAP leaders because, as Colonel Metzger put it:

> . . . If you have a good, strong CAP leader—strong in all respects, you have a good, strong *trung-si*, because they learn by sort of a process of osmosis, and observation, and emulation, and I saw this happen time after time. We all commented on this. This isn't to say that a weak CAP leader couldn't start with a strong *trung-si*, but it wasn't long before he was down to . . . the Marine's level . . . .[17]

With so many inexperienced young corporals and lance corporals leading CAPs, CACO and CAG commanders had to spend much time, in the words of one of them, "establishing a close relationship with this kid and checking him daily, and I don't mean inspect-

ing him. I mean visiting him and finding out what his problems were . . ."[18] Both to train and to counsel squad leaders, the 3d CAG during May instituted monthly CAP leaders' seminars. At these sessions, CAP NCOs, brought to CAG Headquarters from the field, spent most of a day undergoing instruction in various subjects and talking over common problems. They also enjoyed lunch and an opportunity for "a little socializing with contemporaries."[19]

In both formal and informal training, the Marines emphasized PF self-sufficiency. All the CAGs tried to teach PF leaders and selected soldiers such skills as use and care of the M60 machine gun, 60mm mortar, and AN/PRC-25 radio. They attempted to qualify PFs to act as artillery forward observers and to call for and direct artillery fire missions, air strikes, and medical evacuations. Modifying a long-standing requirement that all CAP operations involve both Marines and PFs, the Marines encouraged PF *trung-sis* to plan and execute their own all-PF patrols and ambushes.[20]

The success of this training in enabling the PF to fight their own battles varied from province to province, even from CAP to CAP. By early 1970, many CAPs in Quang Tin, where the Americal Division,* 2d ARVN Division, RFs, and PFs now formed a relatively strong military network, had worked themselves out of a job. In this province, an increasing number of village chiefs had begun asserting effective control over PF operations. Many PFs, according to Lieutenant Colonel Seiler, the 1st CAG commander, were showing "interest and ability" in the use of 60mm mortars and M60 machine guns. Seiler reported that in some CAPs, the PFs "do not want the Marines to go on patrols and ambushes, but rather want them to stay in the patrol base or night defensive positions as a react[ion] force or fire support and medevac coordinators."[21]

In Seiler's opinion, Vietnamization in the province was working fairly well and the local forces increasingly wanted to assert themselves. This, as Seiler pointed out, restricted the CAP Marines' role to the degree that they weren't permitted to perform as their charter directed, hence necessitating Seiler's decision to encourage the progress of Vietnamization, and to move CAP Marines to areas where they were more needed. He characterized this important change in Quang Tin Province in a 1st CAG letter in April 1970:

> . . . CAPs in Quang Tin Province are developing a go-it-alone capability. The Marine squad leaders have been taking a less dominant role in operations and have been emphasizing Vietnamese capabilities. The major problem occurs when the CAP passes the line of equal partnership in a joint venture and it becomes a predominantly Vietnamese operation. We are faced with a paradox of encouraging Vietnamese participation and control but still requiring Marines to follow certain operating principles such as mobility, active patrolling over a wide area, a specific number of activities and a minimum size of forces. These are all sound procedures and must be adhered to for U.S. units but are considered less important in the overall scheme of operations for Vietnamese units. It is not desirable to attempt to have Vietnamese forces conform to our operating principles after they have demonstrated their ability to handle their own security problems. Rather, it is recommended that the Marine component of the CAP continue to be withdrawn when the need for its services has diminished to the point that the Vietnamese forces can satisfactorily do the job on their own. It should not be a CAP mission, however, to remain in the AO to serve primarily as fire support coordinator."[22]

In other provinces, where the Regional and Popular Forces were less assertive and the VC stronger, the Vietnamese remained more dependent on their Marine counterparts, but throughout I Corps CAP training improved PF performance. During the first quarter of 1970, for example, the CAP PF platoons, representing about 12 percent of the total number of PFs in I Corps, accounted for about 29 percent of the enemy killed by PFs and 40 percent of the weapons captured.[23]

During daylight hours, CAP Marines spent much of their time on civic action—helping the villagers to improve their daily lives. The Navy corpsmen assigned to the CAPs held periodic sick calls, known as "medcaps." They gathered the people together for treatment of minor hurts and illnesses, examined the more serious cases, and when possible called for helicopters to take them to U.S. or Vietnamese hospitals. The corpsmen also taught personal hygiene, and trained Vietnamese volunteers in basic first aid and sanitation. CAP riflemen distributed food, clothing, building materials, and school supplies obtained from the U.S. and Vietnamese Governments and from private charities. They also helped the villagers repair and construct dwellings, roads, paddy dikes, schools, public showers, toilets, bridges, and other facilities for com-

*Years later, Major General Lloyd B. Ramsey, USA, who commanded the Americal Division until the spring of 1970, discussed the success in Quang Tin Province containing the VC: "The weakness of the VC was a direct result of the Americal Division, 2d ARVN Division, RFs, PFs, Province Chiefs, CAPs, all under the supervision of III MAF and supported by Marine, Navy, and AF air support. A fine team effort. Also, we received outstanding support from naval gunfire." MajGen Lloyd B. Ramsey, USA, Comments on draft ms, 2Jun83 (Vietnam Comment File).

munity betterment. In all such projects, the Marines were supposed to emphasize local self-help, with the villagers identifying the needs to be met and providing most of the labor while the Marines furnished additional workers, materials, and technical skill. Nevertheless, as they had throughout the existence of the Combined Action Program, CAPs continued to give civic action second priority to combat operations. They did so on the theory that the people would be won to the allied cause primarily by providing security rather than through charitable works. Benevolence without protection would not produce real pacification.[24]

Civic action activities during 1970 as conducted by CAPs were given even less priority because of the effects of redeployment. "As in-country U.S. units in I Corps had to extend their TAORs to compensate for redeployment of the 3d Marine Division and the 26th Marines in late 1969," recalled Colonel Metzger, "the job of village security became much tougher for the CAPs. . . . I remember by early 1970 that we had CACOs in 2d CAG in contact every night as the VC and NVA tried to exploit the reduced major units' presence. For this reason, our civic action efforts were much reduced. The troops simply couldn't do both as the threat intensified."[25]

By 1970, the Combined Action Program had been in operation for five years. While most observers agreed that it was succeeding in its primary mission of improving local security, the program did have problems and shortcomings, some inherent in its nature, others the result of current circumstances. For example, Colonel Metzger complained that the CACO headquarters needed two officers rather than the one usually assigned. He explained that "One officer simply cannot hack it, not when it comes to investigations, resupply, tactical supervision of the CAPs, fire support coordination. Then you lay all this on top of the time-space factor, and he just can't hack it."[26]

Marines in and out of the CAF agreed that the requirement that line units obtain both CACO and district approval before entering a CAP TAOC often prevented allied battalions from effectively exploiting current intelligence. In an effort to solve this problem, Lieutenant Colonel John J. Tolnay, who took command of the 2d CAG late in September, reached an informal agreement with Colonel Kelley of the 1st Marines, in whose TAOR most of Tolany's CAPs were located. Tolnay recalled:

> We got this straightened out pretty well with the 1st Marines. Colonel Kelley and I sat down and talked . . . and I said, "Welcome aboard. Any time you want to come through, just let us know because we do have to coordinate just like any other infantry unit."[27]

In a further effort to improve working relationships with the 2d CAG, the 1st Marines began assigning its rifle companies to operate regularly with particular CACOs and designating particular squads to cooperate with individual CAPs.[28]

Lieutenant Colonel Tolnay felt that much more could have been done in exploiting the CAPs as intelligence sources:

> . . . We had a great intelligence-gathering potential that was not exploited efficiently. Because we were co-located with the district, we maintained a joint COC with the district headquarters, we were privy to all the intelligence that they gathered . . . and we had the pulse of the people. . . . We tried to feed this information up to battalion, but the communication links weren't that good because it meant having to wait till the next day to get it to them because we weren't on the same net and we didn't have telephone communication.[29]

CAP Marines were generally able to establish at least minimally harmonious working relationships with the PFs, but difficulties remained. Many of the PFs were reluctant to attend formal training sessions, particularly classes held during the day after they had spent the night patrolling. Some PFs had to be coerced to operate outside villages and hamlets at night. Sergeant Tom Harvey, who commanded CAP 3-3-5 located just west of Hue, years later remembered the frustration of trying to motivate the PFs to patrol outside of their fixed positions, especially at night. "Our PFs still refused to have the main body of their platoon in a night position outside of the hamlet," said Harvey. Only his Hoi Chanh, who had been abducted by the VC when he was 15 and who hated the VC, readily participated.[30]

The PFs, and the village and district chiefs who controlled them, also responded unenthusiastically to Marine efforts to introduce mobile* tactics. Often, when CAP Marines were shifted to other villages, the PFs

*"I think nearly everyone interested in the matter now recognizes the advantages of the mobile CAP, as opposed to those bound to fixed bases or compounds," said Sergeant Tom Harvey, leader of CAP 3-3-5. "I would certainly agree, and can only surmise that we would have been much more effective at Delta-1 in 2d CAG [the CAP in which Harvey served in 1968] if we had been mobile. The area was much more heavily populated with several hamlets in our AO, and would have been better suited to a mobile mode of operation than our AOs in 3d CAG. . . ." Tom Harvey, Comments on draft ms, 16Jan84 (Vietnam Comment File).

would return to their old habit of staying in compounds or other fixed positions. The general lack of mobility by PFs usually resulted from "village pressure to keep the PFs close in to afford maximum personal security for the village and hamlet officials."[31]

Occasionally, CAP Marines became embroiled in local Vietnamese feuds. During February, for example, Marines of CAP 4-2-1 in Quang Tri had a firefight with a non-CAP PF platoon guarding a bridge at the edge of their TAOC. The non-CAP PFs, strangers to the district, continually harassed and abused CAP PFs and villagers. On 21 February, when the Marines intervened to protect a soft-drink vendor, the hostile PFs opened fire on them, slightly wounding the CAP leader. The Marines returned fire, and a noisy exchange ensued, although a 4th CAG investigation later concluded that "both sides used restraint in the firing, since at the short range involved great harm could have been inflicted if the volume of fire was heavy or aimed accurately." The only casualty besides the CAP leader was a PF wounded in the chin by a grenade fragment. The CACO commander and the Vietnamese district S-3 hurried to the scene and stopped the firing, and the district soon moved the offending PFs to another village. "Fortunately," the 4th CAG report of the incident concluded, "the friendly relations between the CAP Marines, CAP PFs, and villagers in the CAP 4-2-1 AO were not harmed . . . ."[32]

More menacing to CAP Marines than such sporadic hostility was the possibility that their Vietnamese counterparts were actually VC or had reached an accommodation with the VC. More than one CAP found itself trying to defend a village where the chief or the PF *trung-si* was working for the enemy. On 12 January, for example, the Marine squad leader of CAP 4-1-5, located in a village northwest of Dong Ha in Quang Tri Province, observed the PF platoon leader "apparently disclosing information about night locations to unauthorized individuals." The Marine summoned other Vietnamese authorities, and they arrested the PF, whom they had suspected for some time of being a Viet Cong.[33]

A CAP in the 2d CAG had a worse experience. At 2015 on 8 July, Marines on watch at the CP of Company H, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, heard an explosion and small arms fire from the nearby village of Binh Ky. Located about a mile and three-quarters south of Marble Mountain, Binh Ky was defended by CAP 2-7-5. The Marines at the CP of Company H tuned in on the CAP's radio frequency and heard a call for a medical evacuation helicopter and a report that the CAP was in heavy contact. The company at once sent a squad to aid the CAP. By the time the squad reached the CAP's position in Binh Ky, the fight had ended and the Company H Marines found five dead and four wounded Marines from the CAP squad, along with four wounded PFs. The CAP had exhausted its ammunition, and the surviving PFs, completely demoralized, refused to join the Company H squad in a sweep of the village. The area of the fight contained a number of craters, all of which were later determined to have been caused by buried, command-detonated mines. The Marines from Company H helped the remnants of the CAP guard the village for the rest of the night.

Later, the 1st Marines' intelligence officer pieced together the story behind these confused events. He reported:

> . . . Binh Ky's village chief was a VC and had been prosecuted a couple of times and exonerated. The Vietnamese RF or PF there we felt sure had reached some sort of agreement with the VC, if they weren't in fact VC themselves. The hamlet chiefs there were VC or at least frightened by the VC to the point where they'd do anything the VC told them to do. The Marines in the CAP were in a difficult situation. Their activities each night . . . tended to establish a pattern and they never made contact. We never had any trouble with Binh Ky. The reason we never had any trouble was because they [the VC] wanted to keep it quiet. One night the CAP commander was able to break the pattern of activity with his Vietnamese counterparts and get them to set up ambushes on the other side of town in sort of an unknown pattern. . . . They got hit . . . a couple of Marines were wounded and some PFs were killed. It was sort of a slap on the wrist . . . .[34]

In spite of continuing problems, most Marines in 1970 remained convinced of the overall success of the Combined Action Program. In Thua Thien Province, for example, Sergeant Tom Harvey later observed that "we managed to keep the VC out of all the hamlets in Phu Thu District, in which six CAPs operated, with a force of probably no more than 75 Marines, including our CACO headquarters."[35]

Evidence was plentiful that in most villages where they were stationed, the CAP Marines enjoyed a large measure of acceptance, even trust and affection, from the Vietnamese. Time after time, villagers volunteered information which led to the capture of enemy soldiers and equipment. The enemy seemed to avoid CAP-protected villages. In the 2d CAG AO, for instance, it became possible in many hamlets to hold GVN political rallies at night, a thing unheard of in earlier

years. At times, the Vietnamese openly expressed appreciation for the Marines. During the flood in October, the CAPs and their Vietnamese counterparts, as well as the villagers themselves, were evacuated to LZ Baldy. Lieutenant Colonel Tolnay recalled that the Vietnamese returned to CAP villages about two days before the Marines, then added:

> When the Marines returned by helicopter, the village elders and the people were there to greet them and lead them back into their houses where they had food prepared for them, because they really appreciated the fact that Marines were coming back to protect them . . . .[36]

Since the inception of the program in 1965, a total of 93 CAPs had been moved to new locations from villages and hamlets deemed able to protect themselves. Of the former CAP hamlets, none ever had returned to Viet Cong control, at least not as measured in the American HES. Some former CAP villages had achieved a measure of prosperity and stability.[37]

The village of Binh Nghia, a seven-hamlet complex about four miles south of Chu Lai, by 1970 offered a striking example of CAP success. A CAP had been established there in 1966, finding the community under strong VC influence and its GVN leaders and PFs demoralized. For two years, the CAP Marines, aided by increasingly aggressive and confident PFs, fought a savage battle against local guerrillas. During the struggle, the CAP compound was overrun and half the Marine members of the combined platoon killed. The survivors, their ranks filled by replacements, held on and gradually gained the military upper hand and the respect of the villagers. By 1970, the VC rarely entered Binh Nghia, either to fight or to collect taxes. The Marine CAP had moved elsewhere, and the GVN, which regarded the village as pacified, had even transferred the PF platoon to another village. Binh Nghia, now protected by a 100-man People's Self Defense Force, had an active, elected local government and a flourishing economy (by Vietnamese village standards). It seemed to an American visitor who knew the village well that "the war had passed Binh Nghia."[38]*

*For the earlier fight for Binh Nghia, see Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966: An Expanding War* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, 1982), pp. 241-43. and West, *The Village*. It should be noted that from the start Binh Nghia had contained a large pro-GVN element and had had a strong local GVN leader. Much of the rest of the population had been willing to support whomever seemed to them the winning side. It had never been a hardcore VC village, but hardcore VC villages were comparatively few in most areas, and communities like Binh Nghia provided much of what the VC needed to maintain and expand their strength.

Reducing the Combined Action Force

Beginning in late 1969, the question of when and how rapidly to reduce the Combined Action Force came under consideration in Marine Corps redeployment planning. The Marines decided early that the CAF should be reduced—by deactivations of platoons and redeployment of personnel—at a pace roughly proportional to that of the withdrawal of other Marine units.

This stand was based on several considerations. The number of Marines in the CAF counted as part of the total number of men III MAF could have in-country. Hence, as the authorized manpower ceiling was lowered by redeployments, failure to reduce the CAF would force a too-rapid decrease in conventional strength. Combined action units depended on conventional forces for artillery and air support and reinforcement against major attacks, and the Marines preferred not to have to rely entirely on the U.S. Army and the ARVN for such assistance. Accordingly, as other Marine units came out, III MAF decided the CAPs they supported should also come out. Finally, Lieutenant General Nickerson, the III MAF commander, emphasized the need for close and constant supervision of the CAPs by higher Marine headquarters. Without such supervision, Nickerson feared, discipline in these isolated, independent small units would decline and with it effectiveness. As he bluntly put it, "these damn Marines, they go bamboo on you, . . . unless you can get out there and kick ass, take names, and be sure they're up to snuff . . . ."[39]

On the basis of these considerations, the Marines wanted to begin reducing the CAF early in the deployment process. They held to this position in spite of the fact that the U.S. Army had no comparable organization* with which to replace the CAPs and in spite of great ARVN reluctance to lose these particular Marines. Typifying the ARVN reaction to possible CAP deactivations, General Ngo Quang Truong, the competent commander of the 1st ARVN Division in Quang Tri, accepted the inevitable redeployment of

*The U.S. Army and the ARVN never formed CAP-type units. The closest U.S. Army equivalent was the Mobile Advisory Team (MAT), of which the Army would have 487 in operation by late 1970, 88 of them in I Corps. Each MAT consisted of two American officers, three enlisted men, and a ARVN interpreter. Each team was assigned a specific working area throughout which it travelled giving small-unit training to RFs and PFs. MACV ComdHist, 70, II, Ch. 7, p. 67; Gen W. C. Westmoreland, USA, and Adm U. S. G. Sharp, USN, *Report on the War in Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1968), p. 215.

Marine units but pleaded with Brigadier General Dulacki, Nickerson's Chief of Staff, "I don't care what else you do, but please don't take the CAPs."[40]

The Marines still intended to take the CAPs and sought and obtained MACV's permission to do so. On 31 December 1969, Lieutenant General Nickerson requested guidance from General Abrams on redeployment of the CAPs in Phase IV, which at that time was expected to remove all Marines but the residual MAB. Abrams, in reply, left it to III MAF to determine how many CAP Marines to withdraw in Phase IV and how many to retain with the MAB and he promised to send more MATs to I Corps to take over part of the CAPs' training task. Nickerson, on 28 January, with the approval of FMFPac and HQMC, proposed to MACV the deactivation of the 1st, 3d, and 4th CAGs during Phase IV. The 2d CAG in Quang Nam, reduced to about 600 Marines, was to remain until the MAB pulled out. MACV approved the proposal. Even though the total number of Marines to be withdrawn in Phase IV was later reduced, this plan for cutting down the CAF remained in effect. Throughout 1970, the CAF gradually reduced its manpower and the number of its units in the field and concentrated its forces in Quang Nam.[41]

Consoldiation of the CAF began on 9 February, when the 2d CAG deactivated the headquarters of CACO 2-5 and distributed its remaining two CAPs to CACOs 2-1 and 2-7. On 28 April, Lieutenant General Lam and Lieutenant General Zais, at the recommendation of Lieutenant General McCutcheon, the new III MAF commander, agreed to move five CAPs from the 3d CAG and two from the 4th CAG to 2d CAG. CAF Headquarters had been urging this shift of strength for some time, but General Lam, who had to give final approval to any CAP relocation, had been unwilling to act until the threat of a Communist 1970 Tet offensive had abated.* The seven CAPs were withdrawn from the field on 29 April. Between 3 and 5 May, they occupied new TAOCs in Hoa Vang, Dien Ban, and Hieu Nhon Districts in Quang Nam. This reinforcement enlarged the 2d CAG to over 700 Marines.[42]

In mid-April, while plans for reducing the 3d and 4th CAGs were being completed, Lieutenant Colonel Seiler of the 1st CAG suggested to Vietnamese officials in Quang Tin that four CAPs be deactivated. General Lam, the ultimate authority agreed. The Marines of these CAPs, stationed in areas where the PF were now operating independently, had been reduced to the the roles of mobile reserves and fire support coordinators. The four CAPs were disbanded during the last days of May in the first actual deactivation of CAP platoons since 1967. During May, the the 1st CAG obtained permission to deactivate nine more CAPs and the two CACOs controlling them, again because the PFs no longer needed their support and because no other villages in Quang Tin could make use of them. Accordingly, between 24 and 29 June, CACOs 1-1 (four CAPs) and 1-2 (five CAPs) were disbanded.[43]*

Reduction of the CAF speeded up in July, spurred by an almost complete halt of the flow of replacements for CAP Marines.** Between 7 and 30 July, the CAG deactivated the group headquarters, four CACOs, and 16 remaining CAPs of the 4th CAG, thereby terminating the Combined Action Program in Quang Tri. During the same period, it deactivated two CACO headquarters and 14 CAPs from the 3d CAG and five more CAPs from the 1st CAG. Most of the Marines from deactivated units in 3d and 4th CAGs were transferred within the CAF. The CAF thus lost more units than men in this reduction. Nevertheless, by the end of July, the total number of Marines in the CAF had declined to about 1,700.[44].

During July and August, as an increasing number of line units stood down for redeployment in Keystone Robin Alpha, the CAF deactivated the remaining CACOs and CAPs of the 1st and 3d CAGs. The last company of the 1st CAG disbanded on 24 August, followed on 28 August by the last CACO of the 3d CAG. Marines from these units returned to the United States or joined other commands in the Western Pacific. On 7 September, 3d CAG Headquarters closed down, and six days later 1st CAG headquarters ended operations. The 2d CAG meanwhile deactivated

*The procedure for moving a CAP from one village to another was laborious and highly centralized. Approval had to be obtained from every level of Vietnamese officialdom up to I Corps, and requests for transfers required elaborate documentation and certification that the local forces could take care of themselves. See Consul Francis T. McNamara, Political Advisor to CG XXIV Corps, ltr to LtGen Melvin Zais, dtd 14Mar70, in CAF SOP & History Fldr, Box 2, Pacification Study Docs.

*Since the Combined Action Force was not part of the regular Marine Corps T/O, its units were deactivated rather than redeployed. Marines from CAPs either returned to the U.S. with other redeployed formations or were shifted to other CAGs.

**The halt was the result of deployment-related upheavals and disruption in the manpower "pipeline" to the Western Pacific. For further details on manpower problems in 1970, see Chapter 19.

one CACO and five CAPs during August and redistributed the Marines from them to other units. On 1 September, the 2d CAG discontinued still another CACO and four more CAPs. These reductions left the 2d CAG with about 650 Marines and 50 Navy corpsmen in five CACOs and 34 CAPs, all located in Quang Nam and working with about 800 PFs and RFs.[45]

American and South Vietnamese authorities made elaborate efforts to prevent the development of a sense of insecurity among the villagers the deactivated CAPs had protected. Psychological warfare teams saturated each TAOC with posters and leaflets and sent loudspeaker trucks to forewarn and reassure the people. In written and spoken words, they continually emphasized two themes: that the Marines were leaving because they were needed more elsewhere and that the local RFs and PFs could now defeat the Communists without American help.

A formal ceremony proceeded each deactivation. In the 4th CAG, for example, each CAP conducted a farewell parade in its village, attended by the district chief, the village chief and councilors, and as many villagers as could be persuaded to appear. The American side was represented by the CAP Marine squad, the 4th CAG commander, the district senior advisor, the CAC commander, and sometimes other distinguished guests. American and Vietnamese leaders made speeches, the Vietnamese thanking the Marines for their aid, and both Americans and Vietnamese again expressing confidence in the fighting prowess of the PFs. Villagers and CAP Maines exchanged small gifts. Often, according to the 4th CAG report, "social gatherings [were] held at the conclusion of the ceremony." The 1st and 3d CAGs held similar deactivation ceremonies, frequently including the presentation of Vietnamese decorations and awards to CAP Marines. How effective all this was in reassuring the people that they were not being abandoned was hard to determine. American and Vietnamese alike realized that, in the end, only combat successes by the RFs and PFs would maintain the people's sense of security.[46]

On 1 September, after deactivation of all CAPs outside Quang Nam, XXIV Corps returned operational control of the CAF to III MAF. The CAF itself, with only one CAG still in operation, had outlived its usefulness. The force headquarters ceased operations on 21 September, and two days later it was formally disestablished in a ceremony attended by Lieutenant Generals Sutherland, Lam, and McCutcheon, and other distinguished guests.[47]

After 21 September, direction of combined action operations rested with the 2d Combined Action Group, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Tolnay, who had previously been executive officer of the CAF. The 2d CAG, with its headquarters at Hoi An, the capital of Quang Nam Province, constituted the "residual force of the III MAF Combined Action Program."[48] Under III MAF, it would coordinate combined action activities with Quang Nam Province, the 1st Marine Division, and the 2d ROKMC Brigade.

Soon after disestablishment of the CAF, CORDS again sought authority over the CAPs. Lieutenant Colonel Tolnay recalled:

> The Army advisors and the CORDS setup at province initially tried to assume some control over the combined action program, and we had a meeting of the minds there where it was determined and agreed to that it remained essentially a Marine program and that any dealings with CAPs, any dealings with CAP Marines and Vietnamese would be handled between the CAG commander and the Province Chief, and there was no difficulty after that.[49]

The 2d CAG took over the CAF School, which had moved in mid-September from East Da Nang to Hoi An. By the end of November, the school had resumed full operation. It trained the replacements who were coming in again from the United States and also Marines from line companies assigned to the Combined Unit Pacification Program.* To replace the CAF Language School, which had closed in September, the 2d CAG added more Vietnamese language training to the regular school curriculum and used one of the CAG's ARVN interpreters as an instructor. The CAG also established a Mobile Training Team which gave CACOs supplementary instruction in the field.[50]

Within Quang Nam, CAP and CACO operations continued with little change during the remaining months of 1970. The CAPs kept up their routine of patrols and ambushes except when the floods in late October forced many of them temporarily to evacuate their TAOCs. The CACOs continued to depend for artillery support on neighboring U.S., ARVN, or Korean Marine battalions, but they acquired their own 81mm mortar sections.[51] As CAP operations were winding down in the fall of 1970, one operation demonstrated the progress that district level authorities and PFs in combination with CAP Marines had made.

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*In this program, ordinary rifle companies were broken down into squads, each of which was paired with a RF or PF platoon and operated like a CAP.

On 9 September 1970, elements of CACO 2-3 conducted a heliborne assault on a suspected VC rendezvous in Tanh Quit (4) Hamlet. The target area was three miles north of Dien Ban in rice paddy terrain bounded by Route 1 to the west and the Vinh Dien River to the east. Acting on intelligence given to the CACO, the district operations officer and the company commander shifted the adjacent CAP (2-3-8) into blocking positions in preparation for the assault. In order to make it appear like normal daily activity, members of CAP 2-3-7, the assault element, moved to the district headquarters in twos and threes during the afternoon.

"At about 1630 four helicopters landed at the compound, loaded the assault force under the command of the CACO and the district S-3 [operations officer] and flew to the targeted area," recalled Colonel Don R. Christensen, commander of the 2d CAG at the time. "Their operation achieved complete surprise as the assault force landed in the suspected hamlet while 14 VC cadre were meeting." Immediately after insertion, CAP 2-3-7 became engaged in a firefight. Aided by the blocking force, CAP 2-3-8, which now closed on the VC from the west, by the 15th PF Platoon, and two Huey gunships, the Marines concentrated devastating fire on the fleeing VC, killing 14 without sustaining any friendly casualties. Searching the area, the Marines captured one AK-47, two SKS rifles, three 9mm pistols, numerous grenades, and assorted documents and medical supplies.

The operation demonstrated the capabilities of CAP Marines and their counterpart Popular Forces when reacting rapidly to good intelligence. Using the Impact Awards procedures established by XXIV Corps, the CAG commander recognized the performance of the district S-3, the PF platoon commander, and three of his PFs at a ceremony at district headquarters three days later. This timely acknowledgement of performance contributed greatly toward raising the morale and esprit of the local forces at a time when CAP Marines were gradually being withdrawn, leaving the burden of the fighting to the Popular Forces.[52]

Although CAP units had been much reduced through redeployment by September 1970, the 2d CAG inherited many of the problems that had plagued the CAF during the year. The manpower shortage continued, especially at group headquarters. Lieutenant Colonel Tolnay explained:

> . . . The T/O for this 2d CAG was woefully inadequate in terms of the dispersion of forces and the fact that I had to maintain a compound. The 68 personnel that I had in my . . . headquarters would have been sufficient had I been a tenant activity with some other organization, but having to maintain my own security and conduct all the functions of an infantry battalion outside of actually controlling the operations . . . I just didn't have enough people . . . .[53]

The CAG managed to keep an average of 10 Marines in the field per CAP, a number which Lieutenant Colonel Tolnay deemed barely adequate to cover a TAOC of the usual size.

The 2d CAG encountered difficulties in dealing with the ARVN high command. Whereas the CAF had had direct contact with the Deputy for Territorial Forces on the I Corps staff, the 2d CAG had to channel all of its communications with the corps through III MAF or Quang Nam Province. As a result, according to Tolnay, communication "was not too satisfactory."

A change in the type of Vietnamese forces working with the CAPs compounded the CAG's liaison difficulties. During late 1970, the Vietnamese began assigning Regional Force platoons rather than Popular Force platoons to some of the CAPs. Unlike the PF platoons, which had no higher military organization and were answerable directly to the district chief, the RFs had their own companies, groups, and battalions, the commanders of which were not controlled by the district chiefs but were controlled by the province chief. This fact greatly complicated the resolution of tactical disputes between RFs and Marines. Such disputes were frequent, as the RF persistently refused to follow what the Marines considered sound tactics or declined to assign the mimimum of 20 RFs the Marines deemed necessary to conduct operations. The RF organization deteriorated early in 1971 to the point where Lieutenant Colonel Tolnay began withdrawing CAPs from the field until the RFs responded to American requests for more men or changes in tactics.[54]

By the end of 1970, the Combined Action Program had shrunk to the 2d CAG in Quang Nam. This group would continue operations until the withdrawal of the 3d MAB in June of the following year. Combined action had been one of the Marines' most notable contributions to the pacification effort, a daring and generally successful attempt to engage the Viet Cong on their own ground among the people. Probably more effectively than any other American military force, the CAP Marines had done what had to be done to win the war: they had broken the connection between the guerrillas and the peasants. Unfortunately,

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A 373446

Marines from a CUPP unit and a Popular Force soldier, who serves as their interpreter, question a woman suspected of providing assistance to the Viet Cong. The woman was detained and sent back to the district headquarters for more detailed interrogation.

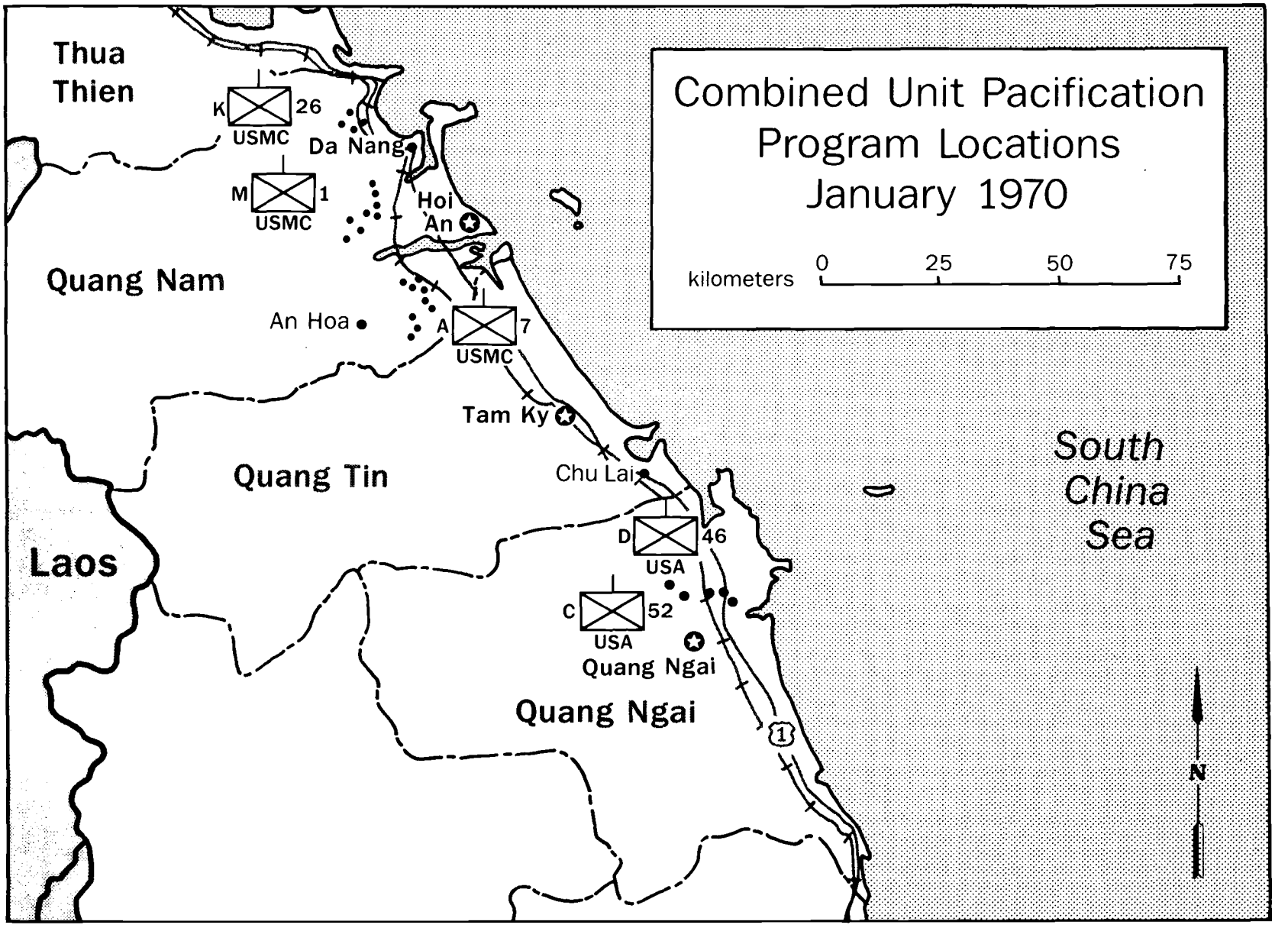
there were many more villages in I Corps, not to mention Vietnam, than there were CAPs.*

Building on Success: The Combined Unit Pacification Program

The effectiveness of the CAPs, combined with the diminution of contact with enemy main forces and the continuing guerrilla threat, led III MAF late in 1969 to institute the Infantry Company Intensified Pacification Program (ICIPP), in January 1970, redesignated the Combined Unit Pacification Program (CUPP). Much of the impetus for this new program came from Lieutenant General Nickerson. Brigadier General Dulacki, the III MAF Chief of Staff, recalled that Nickerson "was . . . quite impressed with . . . what the combined action units were doing. And . . . he felt pretty strongly that perhaps what we should do is start taking battalions and employing them in a similar fashion." Still inclined towards conducting larger scale offensive operations the Army and Marine infantry divisions under III MAF proved unwilling to commit entire battalions to such an unconventional mission and III MAF "didn't want to force the idea on them." Responding to this reluctance, however, III MAF developed a plan for using companies, which the divisions accepted. Divisions were then directed to assign companies based upon their current employment and geographic locations.[55]

The Americal Division, then still under operational control of III MAF, assigned the first two companies to CUPP, or at that time ICIPP, duty in October 1969, deploying squads from them in five hamlets in Quang Ngai. The 1st Marine Division joined the program the following month when Company M of the 1st Marines placed three squads in contested villages around HIll 55. By the end of the year, Company M had squads in eight hamlets, and the 5th and 7th Marines were preparing to establish their own CUPP units.[56] III MAF found that the success of these activities gradually began to instill confidence in the program within the 1st Division.

*According to Colonel Theodore E. Metzger, General Lewis Walt wrote the CAF commander a letter following a tour of CAF units in December 1969, saying, "In the end, I firmly believe this program will be the most important innovation of this war." Col Theodore E. Metzger, Comments on draft ms, 22Mar83 (Vietnam Comment File).


Combined Unit Pacification Program Locations January 1970
kilometers 0 25 50 75
Thua Thien
Quang Nam
Quang Tin
Quang Ngai
Laos
South China Sea
Da Nang
Hoi An
An Hoa
Tam Ky
Chu Lai
Quang Ngai
K 26 USMC
M 1 USMC
A 7 USMC
D 46 USA
C 52 USA
1
N

As in the CAP program, CUPP companies broke down into squads, each of which was paired with a RF or PF platoon to protect a particular village. The company headquarters, usually located near the headquarters of the district in which its squads were stationed, performed many of the functions of a CACO. Each CUPP squad had the same seven missions as a CAP, centering around territorial security and training the RF/PF, and the aim of the new program, as of the Combined Action Program, was to merge Marine firepower and military skill with the militia's intimate knowledge of the local people and terrain.

The CUPP, however, differed from the Combined Action Program in two ways. First, unlike CAP Marines, CUPP Marines were not specially selected or trained. They were regularly assigned members of a rifle company which had been given a special mission. Second, a CUPP company, and the Marine members of its combined units, remained under the operational control of their parent regiment and usually were deployed within that regiment's area of operations. CUPP units requested air and artillery support and medical evacuation through the same channels used by an ordinary rifle company, and the regiment could regroup them into a conventional company when necessary. As the Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, of III MAF put it, "It's a way to take forces and make [them] much more effective by multiplication . . . without destroying the infantry unit itself. . . . As long as you're got them in a CUPP, you can always bring them back together if you had to."[57]

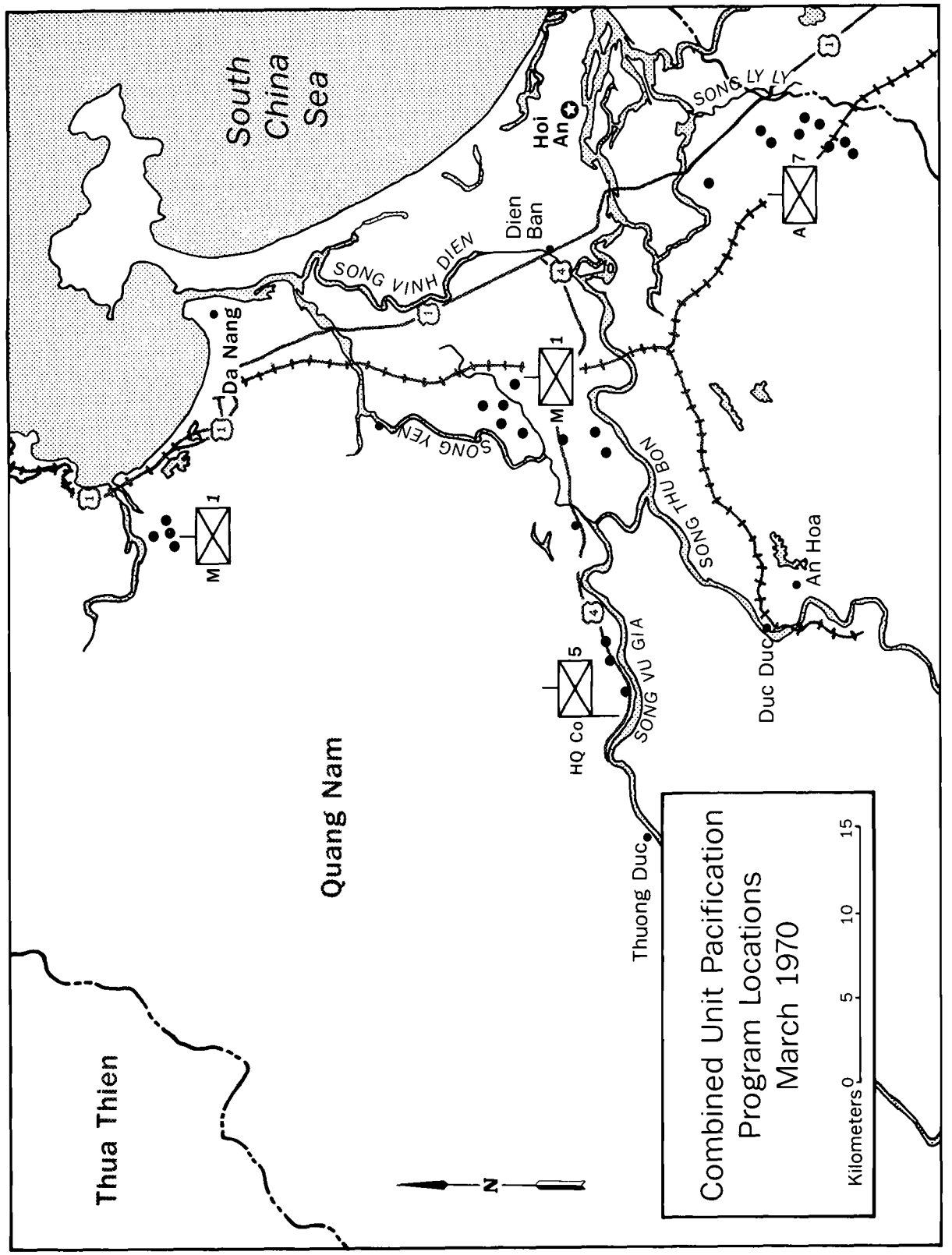
Beginning with the early months of 1970, the CUPP program was expanded and pushed vigorously by both Lieutenant Generals Nickerson and McCutcheon. The latter, according to his Deputy G-3, Colonel John W. Haggerty III, was "very much interested in CUPPing the whole outfit [1st Marine Division] in order to maximize the . . . Vietnamization process."[58]

The program never approached divisional size, but during the year every regiment of the division committed at least a company to combined action. The 1st Marines' Company M continued combined operations throughout the year. During January, the 26th Marines inserted elements of its Company K in four hamlets just south of Nam O Bridge. On 15 January, Company A of the 7th Marines started combined operations in nine hamlets along Route 1 north of LZ Baldy and along Route 535 between Baldy and FSB Ross. The 5th Marines initially did not designate a full CUPP company, but early in February organized a combined action platoon under its headquarters company. The three squads of this platoon established themselves in villages along Route 4 where it passed by the foot of Charlie Ridge.[59]

In March, the redeployment of the 26th Marines and its accompanying realignment of regimental TAORs brought changes in CUPP organization and control. The 1st Marines on 6 March tranferred operational control of its Company M to the 5th Marines, which had expanded its AO to include the villages around Hill 55 where most of the company's squads were stationed. At the same time, the 1st Marines absorbed the personnel of the 26th Marines CUPP squads and concentrated them for defense of two of the four hamlets initially protected by the departing regiment. These rearrangements left the 1st Marines with three CUPP squads under its direct control: the two inherited from the 26th Marines and one squad from Company M in the AO of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. The 5th Marines now had its own Headquarters Company CUPP Platoon and Company M from the 1st Marines, while the 7th Marines continued operations with its Company A.

By the end of April, the 1st Marine Division had 22 CUPP squads protecting some 23,000 villagers and working with 16 PF and 7 RF platoons and over 500 armed PSDF. Most of the CUPP teams were located in villages along Routes 1, 4, and 535 or around major allied bases, such as Hill 55 and LZ Baldy. Unlike CAPs, which usually protected villages more or less friendly to the allies, most of the CUPP squads occupied communities under strong Viet Cong influence. Of the nine hamlets held by the 7th Marines' CUPP company, for instance, eight had C and D ratings under the Hamlet Evaluation System and the remaining one was acknowledged to be VC controlled.[60]

The combined unit pacification companies underwent another reorganization in September, as the 7th Marines redeployed in Keystone Robin Alpha and the 5th Marines took over its TAOR. On 7 September, Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines relieved Company A of the 7th Marines in its hamlets along Routes 1 and 535. The 5th Marines' company incorporated over 50 percent of the men of the 7th Marines CUPP unit. Two weeks later, as the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines turned the Thuong Duc corridor over to the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, the latter regiment resumed operational control of its own Company M and also of the three 5th Marines headquarters CUPP squads along Route 4. The 1st Marines then turned opera-


South China Sea
Hoi An
SONG LY LY
Dien Ban
SONG VINH DIEN
Da Nang
SONG YEN
SONG THU BON
An Hoa
Duc Duc
HQ Co
SONG VU GIA
Thuong Duc
Quang Nam
Thua Thien
N
Combined Unit Pacification Program Locations March 1970
Kilometers 0 5 10 15

tional control of the combined unit squads over to its 1st and 2d Battalions. On 1 December, in the final expansion of CUPP for the year, the 5th Marines created a new CUPP platoon to protect Hoang Que Hamlet just north of LZ Baldy. Created at the request of the South Vietnamese district commander to work with a newly formed PF unit, the new 5th Marines platoon completed a solid network of CUPP hamlets along Route 1 from Baldy to the southern boundary of the Korean Marine TAOR.[61]

Establishment of a new CUPP company required detailed planning by both American and South Vietnamese forces and thorough training and indoctrination of the company itself. The 7th Marines, for example, began preparing for insertion of its CUPP company in early December 1969. Planning began with meetings between staff officers of the regiment and GVN officials of Quang Nam Province and Que Son District. At these meetings, Americans and Vietnamese by mutual agreement selected the nine target hamlets. Each hamlet had to meet two requirements. It had to have a HES rating of C or lower, and it had to have been selected for improvement in the Quang Nam Province Pacification and Development Plan for 1970. Once the hamlets had been chosen, Que Son District gave the 7th Marines detailed information on them, including lists of known and suspected VC, population figures, and designations, leaders' names, and manpower strengths of the RF or PF units defending them.

Meanwhile, the regiment had selected Company A, commanded by Captain Delbert M. Hutson, for the CUPP assignment. Early in January, the company assembled at FSB Ross to prepare for its new mission, its training period enlivened by a sapper attack on Ross on 6 January. All members of the company underwent intensive refresher training in infantry weapons and small-unit tactics by a Division Mobile Training Team, and they received instruction in various aspects of their mission from the Vietnamese district chief, the U.S. province advisors, a division psychological warfare team, and their own company and battalion officers. They also had sessions with a division Personal Response team, the members of which sought to prepare the Marines to live and work with the Vietnamese. To gain practical experience in working in the field

Marines of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines search a grassy site near Hill 55 south of Da Nang. The 1st Marines took over control of the CUPP companies from the 26th Marines, who were about to redeploy from Vietnam. The CUPP program expanded during 1970.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A 373979

with PFs, the company conducted combined day and night patrols in Que Son District with local RFs and PFs.

Key officers and Marines of the company received additional training. During January, all the platoon commanders and squad leaders of Company A attended the CAF School in East Da Nang, and 15 Marines went to Vietnamese language school. A total of 24 Marines from the company spent three or four days on-the-job training with 1st Marines CUPP units, and six others did the same with elements of the 2d Combined Action Group. Captain Hutson spent a day with leaders of a CACO of the 1st CAG. As the final step in preparation, the Que Son District Chief and his American advisor held meetings at which they introduced the Marine squad leaders to the chiefs of the villages and hamlets in which they would be working.

Between 15 and 31 January, the 7th Marines installed its combined action squads in their hamlets. Except for the insertion in VC-controlled Phu Trach, which took the form of a cordon and search by the combined unit and other RFs and PFs, all the insertions occurred at a simple but dramatic ceremony. Each ceremony followed the same pattern, the American part coordinated by the 7th Marines and the Vietnamese part by the district chief. It would begin with the Marine squad and the RF or PF platoon lined up facing each other in front of a speaker's platform. The district chief presided for the Vietnamese and Colonel Gildo S. Codispoti, the 7th Marines commander, for the Americans. (Colonel Cadispoti made a point of attending every insertion after the Que Son District Chief commented that his presence impressed the villagers, who seldom saw a high-ranking U.S. officer.)

After 10-15 minutes of music by a section of the 1st Marine Division band, the district chief, Colonel Codispoti, the village chief, and the hamlet chief, in that order, made brief speeches. Then the Marines marched over to the RFs or PFs and joined them in their ranks. A period of informal handshaking and picture taking followed. The 7th Marines report noted that "Pictures taken using a Polaroid camera [were] found to be very effective. These pictures were immediately presented to various hamlet and village officials with very favorable responses."[62]

In February, the 5th Marines inserted its CUPP platoon in a different manner. The regiment used elements of two rifle companies to surround and screen the targeted hamlets. While this was being done, the three Marine squads and their counterpart RF platoons held a single joint ceremony at Hill 25 and then moved into their hamlets to begin combat operations.[63]

Once established in their hamlets, CUPP units, like CAPs, spent most of their time on patrols and ambushes. The combined units of all three regiments employed "mobile CAP" tactics, constantly shifting position with their AOs. A squad leader from Company A, 7th Marines reported in May:

> . . . We run approximately two or three . . . ambushes a night and . . . one day patrol. Every night, just as it starts getting dark, we move to a night POS [position], and every day as it starts getting light we move to a day POS. We were constantly on the move. We never stay in one place more than once a week, or sometimes even once every two weeks.[64]

CUPP platoons often moved outside their AOs for joint operations with other CUPP platoons and Marine and Vietnamese regular units. They participated in cordon and search operations and provided blocking forces. Their activities could easily be coordinated with those of line companies and battalions. A 7th Marines report noted:

> The success in coordinating and integrating CUPP activities with regular infantry units has been outstanding. CUPP Marines have acted as guides; furnished tactical and intelligence information; and provided other support for various units operating in the vicinity of CUPP AOs. The enemy has lost large quantities of supplies and personnel as a result of these operations.[65]

All the combined pacification squads emphasized training of their Vietnamese counterparts. Informally during operations and through regular classes, they tried to increase the militia's proficiency with infantry weapons and in patrol and ambush tactics, and they instructed some RF and PF soldiers in the use and care of the M60 machine gun and in requesting and controlling artillery and air support. As did the CAPs, the CUPP Marines increasingly encouraged RF and PF platoon commanders to plan and lead their own operations.[66]

In November, in probably the most ambitious training program launched by a CUPP company, Company G, 5th Marines paired each individual Marine with a RF or PF soldier deemed a likely candidate for platoon leader. Each Marine was to work with his counterpart in formal training sessions and in developing "mutual trust and exchange of ideas." The program culminated in a school held at LZ Baldy from 28 to 30 December and attended by 10 Marines, each of whom brought along his RF or PF counterpart. Together, Marines and Vietnamese took instruction in

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373820

CUPP Marines and South Vietnamese Regional Force troops from Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines and the 306th Regional Force Battalion form the cordon in a cordon and search mission in sandy terrain near the coast, 20 miles southeast of Da Nang.

map and compass reading, defense against mines and boobytraps, and patrolling tactics, and they spent a full day on the rifle range. The instruction was "well received by the surprisingly attentive Popular Forces."[67]

When not on operations or engaged in training, CUPP units, again following the example of the CAPs, tried to improve the daily life of the villagers. Each CUPP squad had a Navy corpsman attached to it, who regularly assembled the inhabitants for medical examinations and treatment of minor hurts and ailments. The riflemen worked with the villagers on local improvements. During April, for instance, one of the 5th Marines squads along Route 4 helped the farmers of Lam Phung village build an irrigation canal to carry water to their paddies from the Thu Bon River. The Marines provided rock fill and material for culverts, and the Vietnamese furnished most of the labor, a pump, and a motor. During the October and November floods, CUPP Marines helped evacuate endangered hamlets and then joined the people in relief and reconstruction. In December, Company G, 5th Marines launched a farming project in which each squad and a Vietnamese family together planted and cultivated a plot of vegetables. The Marines hoped by this to improve the farmers' diet and to introduce a new cash crop.[68]

The line companies engaged in combined action, and like their counterparts in the CAF, suffered from a manpower shortage during the year. Many CUPP squads, which were supposed to be reinforced to 15-18 men, had to operate with as few as seven or eight Marines, and they often found themselves paired with understrength RF or PF platoons. A member of a 7th Marines CUPP squad said in May that "We get anywhere from 7 to 8 to 10 PFs a night, and the largest majority of them stay down at the PF compound on the hill which is not needed. We could really use some more men down here."[69]

Morale among CUPP Marines, as a platoon commander pointed out, "is a very touchy subject. Being out here by themselves, working a squad with a platoon of PFs, especially in areas where the PFs are new and are not quite so militarily proficient as one might like, the morale of a CUPP unit can deteriorate very quickly." In the 7th Marines, the CUPP company, un-

like the line companies, was not sent to rear areas periodically for rest and recreation.*

To compensate the men for this extra hardship, the regiment made an effort to send hot food to the units in the villages and assigned individual Marines to various schools "to get them out of the bush for a while."[70] Nevertheless, for many of the Marines, combined action service constituted an interesting change from routine duty. For junior officers, a platoon commander in the 1st Marines commented, the CUPP program:

> . . . gives . . . an opportunity to command rather large bodies of men, up to 200 . . ., and that's almost a company-size unit, in fact, the way most companies run, it is. This is an opportunity that most junior officers don't have. And if they're going on with a . . . career in the Marine Corps, this is very good experience . . . .[71]

The Combined Unit Pacification Program tested the ability of ordinary Marines, not specially selected or motivated, to live and work with Vietnamese PF soldiers and civilians. Marine squads often found the PFs initially unpromising as military allies. PFs assigned to the 1st Marines' CUPP units "were a little raw, to say the least. They didn't exactly know their weapons to start with, and they had very little idea . . . of tactics."[72] The 7th Marines CUPP squads found the PFs initially reluctant to patrol aggressively and prone to steal small pieces of personal property. On the positive side, differences of language proved to be less of a hindrance to communication than many Marines had expected. The Marines found that in most PF platoons, the leader and at least one or two of his men could converse in broken English. A radio operator in the 7th Marines CUPP said, "These people have an unbelievable knowledge of the English language, which surprised me. I only wish that I could pick up their language just as fast."[73]

If the PFs had their deficiencies as military partners, the Marines quickly found that they had their virtues as well. A squad from Company K, the 26th Marines CUPP unit, found this out on 29 January while moving to a night ambush position in the countryside northwest of Da Nang. According to the patrol report:

> The PFs suddenly refused to go any further. Upon questioning, the PFs stated the enemy was waiting to ambush the patrol at the proposed ambush site. The patrol set into a position about 100 meters from the proposed ambush position and began to conduct reconnaissance by fire. The patrol received 30 rounds of small arms fire in return with no friendly casualties . . . .[74]

CUPP Marines in other regiments had similar experiences. A squad leader in the 7th Marines CUPP company, for example, said in May that he and his Marines had "learned quite a bit from the PFs . . . as far as trying to tell where the VC are at. They can tell us where the VC are at without seeing them. . . . On dark nights when you can't see anything, they can smell them out."[75]

To direct operations and resolve individual disputes among Marines and PFs, CUPP units followed the CAP principle of the dual chain of command. The Marine squad leader gave orders only to his Marines and the PF leader only to his PFs. If a Marine had a complaint against a PF, he took it to his squad leader. The squad leader passed it to the PF *trung-si*, who dealt with the offending PF. The same procedure, in reverse, applied to PF grievances against Marines. If the two small-unit leaders could not agree, each would refer the issue to the next highest level of his own chain of command. For example, in the 7th Marines combined unit program:

> On two occasions . . . PFs did not want to go out on night patrols with Marines. The district chief was consulted and the problem was immediately rectified by his action. No Marine leaders attempted to act directly themselves. They instead called upon the district chief through the proper chain of command to assert his influence and power to attain the desired results.[76]

In moments of crisis, CUPP Marines sometimes resorted to rough-and-ready methods of persuasion. A corporal in the 7th Marines recalled that initially in night firefights:

> . . . you'd look around and . . . there wouldn't be no PFs there. They'd be hidin' behind gullies, bushes, trees, anything you could find down on the ground, in a hole. After a while they'd see that we was gettin' up, was goin' into it. 'Course you had every once in a while to knock a few heads and put a few rounds over the top of 'em, but they finally got to where they started to go with us . . . .[77]

The CUPP Marines learned during the year that improving the PF troops was a slow process, but that it could be done. As a platoon leader in the 1st Marines summed it up, it "takes a lot of work, a lot of coordination, a lot of training, and primarily just a lot of running these activities with the PFs, showing them that indeed, . . . as a platoon, as a squad, they are

*During 1970, the regiments, under the "stack arms" program, took each company out of the field in rotation and sent it to a service cantonment where the men could spend several days drinking beer, cooking steaks, swimming, watching movies, reading, or sleeping.

militarily capable of closing with and destroying the local VC."[78]

Marines in the combined unit program had to win the confidence of the villagers as well as the soldiers. This also took time, but signs of success became apparent during the year. Even in strongly VC-influenced villages, initial shyness and suspicion gradually gave way to curiosity and cautious friendliness. Everywhere, the Marines found that medical evacuation of sick and wounded civilians earned them almost instant acceptance. As the CAPs had learned earlier, the Marines observed that the simple fact of their continuing presence, their "belonging" to a particular village, favorably affected the people's attitudes. The Que Son District Chief, for example, reported to the 7th Marines that village and hamlet chiefs were asking him for "their own" CUPPs.[79] Sergeant William A. Dignan of the 1st Marines, stationed with his squad in a hamlet north of Hill 55, had his own measure of the degree of village acceptance of himself and his men:

> We have no trouble with stealing down there at all, and prices . . . for laundry and different things like this, which the people usually have set, they've dropped . . . to just about rock bottom because they know we are living out there with them . . . .[80]

Living among the villagers changed attitudes among Marines also. Corporal Mitchell Y. Jefferies, an assistant CUPP squad leader in the 7th Marines, recalled that when his unit entered its assigned area, "we didn't know any of the people, know their ideas. And we was all more or less against the idea; we didn't give a heck whether they all lived, died, or what happened to 'em." After operating in the village for a while, "we kinda' see how the people work, and they put their backs into what they do and they earn a livin'. When they earn some money, they know what money is. They sweat and work hard to get it." By mid-1970, Jefferies felt that he had learned at least one important thing about the Vietnamese: "These people are smart, and they can get around you. . . . They ain't dumb."[81]

By the end of 1970, the Combined Unit Pacification Program had demonstrated to the satisfaction of Marine commanders that ordinary rifle squads, paired with RF or PF platoons, could perform a CAP-type mission. In the areas where they operated, the CUPP companies were contributing to improved security. Each month, they accounted for a small but steady toll of enemy killed and weapons captured. During March, for example, the 7th Marines CUPP company killed five Viet Cong, three North Vietnamese, and one member of the VCI. The unit collected eight Hoi Chanhs and captured an M1 carbine, an SKS rifle, an M16, and two AK-47s. In the same period, the CUPP company and its attached PFs lost six Marines and three PFs seriously wounded and one PF killed.[82]

In villages occupied by combined units, Viet Cong influence appeared to be declining. In July, for example, 16 VC surrendered in Phu Trach, the hamlet in the 7th Marines AO rated VC-controlled at the start of the year. By the end of November, six CUPP hamlets in Quang Nam showed improved HES security ratings.[83] Civilians were reported to be moving into CUPP villages from enemy-dominated areas. On Routes 4 and 535, along which many CUPP units were deployed, the number of mine incidents declined significantly. Colonel Edmund G. Derning, Jr., who replaced Colonel Codispoti in February as commander of the 7th Marines, reported that when he took over the regiment:

> Route 535 . . . was being mined every day, almost—heavy mines. We were losing vehicles and people. That was in February. And when I left that regiment [in August], there hadn't been a mine in that road in over 130 days [or] a mine casualty, which is phenomenal. . . . And we had our CUPPs along the area, and one of their major missions was to observe the road.[84]

As 1970 ended, redeployment had left the future of the Combined Unit Pacification Program uncertain. The 2d CAG, with its separate T/O of 600 Marines, was assured of survival as long as the 3d MAB remained in the country. The CUPP companies, on the other hand, were subject to redeployment with their parent regiments; and as total Marine strength dwindled, the tactical situation could force the combined unit companies to revert to conventional infantry roles and missions.

CHAPTER 9

The Spectrum of Pacification and Vietnamization, 1970

Line Units in Pacification—Kit Carson Scouts in 1970—Targeting the VCI—Civic Action, 1970
Communist Counter-Pacification Efforts—Vietnamization—Results, 1970

Line Units in Pacification

While their primary mission was to attack enemy military units, Marine rifle companies and battalions often conducted operations directly aimed at improving population control and security. Usually cooperating with Vietnamese police and Regional and Popular Forces and sometimes with CAP and CUPP units, Marine infantry participated in cordon and search operations, protected rice harvests, and furnished security for GVN elections. In addition to these long-standing activities, during 1970 some units began trying to reorient their entire scheme of operation toward protecting the people and eradicating the VC underground.

Cordon and search operations, varying in size from a surprise raid on a hamlet by a platoon searching for a single Viet Cong agent to a two- or three-day sweep of a village complex by a battalion, remained a frequently employed, productive tactic. In the larger cordon and search operations, referred to as County Fairs, several companies of Marines worked with RF or PF units, Vietnamese national police, and U.S. and Vietnamese intelligence and counterintelligence teams. Moving in before dawn, the infantry surrounded the target area, allowing no movement in or out. Then Vietnamese troops and police, occasionally aided by Marines, collected all the civilians at a prearranged spot outside the village. Here each person was questioned and his or her identity checked against lists of known or suspected local VC. At the same time, teams of Vietnamese troops and police searched each house for concealed arms, food, and equipment and combed the village for VC hidden in tunnels and holes.

While the search went on, the Americans and Vietnamese entertained the assembled villagers with motion pictures, plays, and comedy skits by GVN propaganda teams, and often a concert by Marine bandsmen. Whenever possible, the Marines sent in a medical team to treat minor illnesses and injuries and give advice on health. These activities gave the operation its "County Fair" aspect and nickname. By means of them, the allies hoped to win the allegiance of the villagers or at least to make less irritating the disruption of their daily routine.[1]

Late in 1970, the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines began adding a population census to the usual cordon and search. In the villages of Ap Quan Nam and Kim Lien north of Da Nang, the battalion, aided by RF and national police, kept its cordon around the village long enough for the police to conduct a detailed census. The police listed and photographed every inhabitant of each house. They also made a complete inventory of the contents of each dwelling and a drawing showing the building and all objects and structures around it. The troops and police would then leave, only to return a couple of weeks later and compare people and buildings to the earlier lists, pictures, and diagrams. If a young man of military age whose name and picture were not on file, appeared in a house he was taken away for questioning. If a haystack was found where none had been, the searchers tore it apart looking for arms or food, often finding them. The Marines and their allies hoped that this technique, used earlier by the French, would make it easier to detect VC infiltration and VC supply caches in the hamlets.[2]

During the year, the Marines began conducting fewer large County Fairs and more surprise small-scale cordon and search operations. These operations, the S-2 of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines recalled:

> . . . were very short, lasted two or three hours. We just dropped out of the sky with the helicopters with the cordon and then moved in with the A[rmed] P[ropaganda] T[eam], a C[ounterintelligence] sub-team, an ITT [Interrogation and Translation] sub-team to support us, and whatever informants we happened to have that prompted the operation, scoff up the people we wanted and go, all within three hours . . .[3]

By moving quickly with minimal advance planning and coordination, the Marines improved their chances of surprising VC or VCI in the hamlets. The short duration of the actual search meant less inconvenience for the villagers and hence, Marines hoped, less resentment of the government.

Aided by increasingly large numbers of RFs and PFs, the Marines continued their effort—called Operation Golden Fleece—to keep the twice-yearly rice harvest

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373324

After a government informant revealed the location of a hidden Viet Cong rice cache, local villagers and their children dig up the rice for their own use.

from being seized by the Viet Cong. Before the harvest periods, which occurred in April and May and again in September and October, each regiment launched attacks on known enemy base camps and cache areas and arranged its daily patrols to block infiltration routes into rice-growing areas. During the harvest, all units increased the number of patrols and ambushes around the rice paddies. After the harvest, Marines helped guard mills and storage facilities and with the Vietnamese used highway check points to control the movement of the foodstuffs. By 1970, Operation Golden Fleece had merged into the broader continuing campaign to disrupt the enemy's supply system, a campaign which Hoi Chanhs, POWs, and captured documents indicated was keeping the NVA and VC hungry and demoralized.[4]

The Republic of Vietnam held elections in June for village and hamlet officials and provincial and municipal councils. In August, the people went to the polls again, this time to choose members of the National Senate. In Quang Nam, the 1st Marine Division cooperated with provincial and district authorities to protect polling places and voters from VC terrorism. The Marines left actual guarding of the polls to the RFs, PFs, PSDF and national police. They deployed their own forces in the countryside to block likely enemy paths of approach and to deny the Communists access to mortar and rocket launching sites. The Marine regiments also kept platoons on alert for rapid helicopter movement to reinforce localities under attack. All Marine plans and orders for election security repeatedly instructed troops to avoid entering populated areas unless an attack took place and to refrain from any action that could be construed as an American attempt to influence the voting.[5]

Behind the shield thus provided, the elections went forward on schedule, almost unmarred by terrorism and with no major enemy interference. Voter turnouts in Quang Nam, as elsewhere in South Vietnam, were encouragingly large. In the June provincial and municipal elections, for example, 83 percent of the eligible voters in Quang Nam Province and 73 percent of those in Da Nang City cast ballots.[6]

The 7th Marines in mid-April put into effect an ambitious pacification plan. The plan, developed by Colonel Derning after he took command of the regiment in February, was aimed at denying the VC access to the many Communist-dominated villages in the Que Son Valley. These villages had long furnished supplies and recruits to main forces operating in the Que Son Mountains and had served as way stations on infiltration routes between the enemy base areas and Da Nang. Derning's plan also recognized that conventional infantry operations were producing less and less contact.

Responding to what appeared to be a change in enemy focus in the 7th Marines' area from conventional operations to guerrilla warfare, the 7th Marines also refocused, gearing their tactics to population control. The 7th Marines commander, in consultation with Que Son District Headquarters and its CORDS advisor, selected a target list of D- and C-rated hamlets for each of the participating battalions. Derning also arranged to attach a RF or PF platoon, three national policemen, and a team of CORDS advisors to each rifle company. Under the plan, each company was to devote its daylight operations to maintaining a permanent cordon around one or more hamlets. The civilian inhabitants were to be allowed in and out through checkpoints manned by PFs and police who would examine GVN identification cards and search the people for food and other contraband. This was intended, according to Derning, to assure that when

a farmer went out to his field or paddy "he could only take his spade, could only take his little bag of rice." The villagers were also cautioned to avoid even incidental contact with the VC/NVA. Medical and propaganda teams were to work among the villagers, seeking to explain to them the requirements of the program and to win their support for the GVN. Throughout, the plan emphasized humane but firm treatment of the people.[7]

Only the 2d Battalion, operating around FSB Ross, fully implemented the plan. On 15 April, the battalion deployed three of its companies, each with a PF platoon and police and CORDS detachments, to cordon nine D- and C-rated hamlets west and south of FSB Ross. The companies set up their checkpoints, and the PFs and police searched the hamlets for caches of arms and supplies. Each inhabitant received a pamphlet in Vietnamese explaining movement and curfew restrictions, promising rewards for information on the location of enemy troops, caches, and boobytraps, explaining how to obtain medical aid from the teams working in the hamlet, and offering families the chance to resettle in government-controlled areas. Those willing to move, the pamphlet promised, could take all their household goods and property with them. The Marines reinforced the pamphlets with airdropped leaflets, MedCaps, and frequent visits by GVN propaganda and political drama teams.[8]

The program soon produced results. Within 15 days of the establishment of the cordons, according to the 2d Battalion's report, 350 civilians requested resettlement in GVN-controlled villages. In several target hamlets, people pointed out alleged members of the VCI. The military proficiency and self-confidence of the RFs and PFs working with the Marines improved. Most important, the cordons physically separated the VC and NVA from what had been their supply sources and rest areas. Colonel Derning said:

> . . . We cut Charlie right off his hot chow, and we cut him right off his conjugal visits. He couldn't get in or out of the ville. If he got in, he was had; if he got out, he couldn't get in. Naturally we cut the NVA off also. And early in this game we caught quite a few of them drifting in and out of the ville, not knowing we were there . . . .[9]

Operating under this altered approach, those units of the 7th Marines involved were able to efficiently control their areas of operation, minimizing enemy movement among the people. The Marines were briefed and rested during the day in the relative safety of the occupied villages and sought the enemy at night. "The fact was we had an advantage because at night under these circumstances anything moving was, in fact, an enemy force," said Derning, "so that we had not much problem then in identification and not much opportunity to injure or to kill innocent people."[10]

While apparently effective, the program was limited in scope and lasted only a short time. The 7th Marines' 1st Battalion operating around LZ Baldy, and scheduled to take part, did not fully apply the concept, although it did increase its operations with RFs and PFs. Most of the 3d Battalion, operating against base areas in the Que Sons, never participated. The 2d Battalion kept three of its companies on cordon operations during April and May, but in June it diverted one of them to other activities. In July, the entire battalion left the Que Son Valley for Operation Pickens Forest. In August, it moved into the mountains on Operation Imperial Lake, and in September it stood down for redeployment with the rest of the regiment.[11]

Other infantry units had their own special pacification efforts. The 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, for example, formed a combined Marine-PF unit to control Nui Kim Son, a small village at the gates of Camp Lauer, the battalion's headquarters cantonment just south of Marble Mountain. The Viet Cong had strong influence in Nui Kim Son. Repeatedly they put up NVA propaganda posters, and occasionally they set a mine or boobytrap. The GVN village chief refused to stay in the village, living instead in a hut in Camp Lauer. Nui Kim Son acted as a staging point for Communists infiltrating toward Marble Mountain and Da Nang East, and it also harbored prostitutes, drug peddlers, and black marketeers.

On 2 September, the 2d Battalion established a squad of 12 enlisted Marines selected from throughout the battalion for CAP experience and Vietnamese language proficiency. Under operational control of Major John S. Grinalds, the battalion operations officer, the unit was stationed permanently in Nui Kim Son to work as a combined force with the local PFs. The Marines, reinforced to 13 men in November, set up checkpoints to control movement through the village and tried to curtail vice. In their first two months of operation, Marines and the PFs captured 24 confirmed Viet Cong agents trying to pass their checkpoints. Nevertheless, the 2d Battalion, according to Major Grinalds, never fully pacified Nui Kim Son, a fact attested to by the continued refusal of the village chief to live there.[12]

Kit Carson Scouts in 1970

During 1970 III MAF continued to support the Kit Carson Scout program and to benefit from it. The Marines had initiated this program back in 1966 by hiring six Hoi Chanhs—former Viet Cong guerrillas—as combat scouts. Lieutenant General Nickerson, then a major general commanding the 1st Marine Division, gave the former VC their name, in memory of the American scout and Indian fighter. When the program proved successful, MACV extended it to all U.S. commands in Vietnam. Throughout the war, the scouts had rendered loyal and invaluable service in the field while teaching American troops VC methods and tactics.

At the beginning of 1970, over 2,300 Kit Carson Scouts (KCS) were serving with American units, 650 of them under III MAF. III MAF had responsibility for administering the program throughout I Corps until March, when XXIV Corps took it over, leaving III MAF in charge only of the scouts with Marine units in Quang Nam. As Marines redeployed, the scouts attached to them were reassigned within I Corps. From 111 scouts in July, the number working with the Marines fell to 95 in December.

By 1970, III MAF had a well-established procedure for recruiting, screening, and training Kit Carson Scouts. Potential scouts came from the Chieu Hoi centers in Da Nang and Hoi An. There, a team headed by a Marine NCO, experienced in working with KCS, carefully investigated the motivation and background of each candidate. An ex-guerrilla who passed this first screening went to the KCS Training Center west of Da Nang for 28 days of instruction and further evaluation. Classes at the center were small, numbering usually no more than eight men. A typical class, Number 5-70, which graduated on 21 August 1970, consisted of seven trainees, ranging in age from 17 to 32. All had been born in Quang Nam, lived there, and fought there as Viet Cong for periods of three months to six years. Only one of them was married. Most gave as their reason for changing sides: "Fed up, not enough supplies."

KCS candidates at the school received military training from instructors, most of whom were themselves senior scouts. The instructors worked with the candidates day and night, watching them carefully for any sign that they might still be loyal to the VC. Trainees learned such skills as field sketching and the use of sensors. They acquired the rudiments of English, both in formal classes and by viewing English language feature films.

After graduation from the training school, scouts were hired as indigenous employees of the American military.[13] For especially meritorious service or bravery in battle, a scout could receive Vietnamese military decorations or the United States Navy Commendation Medal, Bronze Star Medal, or Silver Star Medal. In the field, as a 1st Marine Division report put it, "Employment of Kit Carson Scouts is limited only by the imagination of their unit commander." Scouts guided Marine patrols, made propaganda broadcasts, directed Marines to supply and equipment caches, and helped identify members of the VCI. Many conducted courses for Marines in Viet Cong mine and boobytrap techniques and other enemy methods and tactics. During 1970, Kit Carson Scouts attached to Marine units conducted over 9,000 patrols and were credited with killing 43 enemy; rounding up 313 prisoners, suspects, and Hoi Chanhs; and capturing 96 weapons.

Targeting the VCI

Main force units and guerrillas were the visible manifestation of the enemy threat to South Vietnam, but the Communists had another, hidden, equally dangerous dimension. This second dimension was the Viet Cong's clandestine political and administrative apparatus, called by the allies the VCI. The VCI extended its tentacles into every hamlet, village, and city, and even into the GVN itself. Its influence reached into the most militarily secure areas, often literally to the very gates of American cantonments. During 1970, as overt military activity declined, the Marines joined other allied forces in an intensified attack on this concealed element of Communist power.

The VCI, according to the MACV command historians, "was not a defined Communist organization; it was a working concept for the GVN, uniting as one target the variety of organizational and political efforts the Communists carefully compartmented and manipulated separately."[14] More specifically, the III MAF/ICTZ Combined Campaign Plan for 1970 defined the VCI as "The political and administrative organization through which the Viet Cong control or seek to control the South Vietnamese people" and as "Those individuals who constitute the command and control element of the communist politico-military organization which exists overtly and covertly throughout RVN."[15]

As the allies understood it, the VCI included the Communist People's Revolutionary Party (PRP), through which North Vietnam directed the entire enemy war effort; the PRP's public political arm, the National Liberation Front (NLF), ostensibly a coalition of nationalist parties including the Communists; and a range of specialized organizations for farmers, workers, women, youth, and other groups. Each of these entities had branches at every level of government, from the nation down to the hamlet. The Communist armed forces—the People's Army of North Vietnam (NVA) and the South Vietnam Liberation Army (VC main and local force units and guerrillas)—operated under the direction of the VCI. Members of the VCI, living among the people, sought to control the people through propaganda and terrorism; provided intelligence, supplies, and recruits for the insurgent armed forces; and, in fact, constituted an alternative government throughout most of South Vietnam. Allied estimates of the total number of VCI members varied greatly depending on what categories of active Communists were included on any one list. Reports of VCI strength and VCI losses could easily be inflated by adding in peasants caught carrying rice into the hills, women and children found planting booby traps, and other low-level functionaries. To assure uniform reporting and to focus effort on the most significant elements of the enemy, the U.S. and the GVN had by 1970 narrowed the definition of VCI to officials and members of the PRP and high-ranking leaders of the NLF and other Front groups (Category A) and to individuals in any enemy organization trained to assume leadership positions (Category B).[16]

In Quang Nam, the local VCI, like the enemy armed forces, was directed by *Front 4*. A political as well as a military headquarters, *Front 4* had three staff sections, labelled by allied intelligence *70A, 70B,* and *70C. Section 70A*, under the North Vietnamese General Nguyen Chanh Binh, controlled the NVA and VC main forces in Quang Nam, while *70C* had charge of military administration, finance, and logistics. Both of these sections took orders from *Section 70B*, the Political Section, often called by the Communists the Current Affairs Section. This section, headed by a civilian PRP member, dictated enemy political and military strategy in Quang Nam, subject to instructions from *Military Region 5*, the Communist headquarters for all I Corps south of the DMZ.*

*For details of the Communist military chain of command, see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

Under *Front 4* each district in the province had its own VCI organization which in turn controlled village and hamlet units. At each level, a military affairs committee conducted minings, boobytrappings, assassinations, and terrorism. A political, or "current affairs" committee established overall policy and coordinated nonmilitary activities and supply efforts. Most district and local committees also had security sections. Members of these groups forged GVN identification cards and other documents, provided bodyguards for important Communists passing through their areas, and when necessary directed main force units preparing attacks in their localities to hidden tunnels, supply caches, and assembly points.

In early 1970, according to allied intelligence, about 7,600 identified Category A and B VCI members were active in Quang Nam. Most of them were South Vietnamese born and raised in the province, although the VCI now contained a growing leavening of North Vietnamese, usually attached to the security sections. Evidence from prisoners and captured documents indicated that VCI strength in the province had declined as a result of continuing allied pressure. The VCI now often had to place ill-qualified people in important jobs or require one individual to perform the tasks of two or three.[17] Nevertheless, the infrastructure remained ubiquitous and threatening. Major Grinalds, the S-2 of the 1st Marines, reported that as late as mid-1971:

> [As] near as I could tell, . . . every political entity in Quang Nam Province—from the province level right down to the lowest hamlet—shared with GVN or at least had right alongside GVN a . . . VC government of its own. . . . The degree to which they were visible, in any one hamlet or village, was sort of in direct relationship to our presence in the area. [If] we were there all the time, they generally tended to work at night and they were less obvious but . . . they were powerful . . . .[18]

Besides politically undermining the South Vietnamese government, the VCI contributed directly to the ability of enemy main forces to attack allied military units. Major Grinalds explained that the "VCI . . . are not a separate entity from the main force . . . they are part and parcel of the conventional force operation in the lowlands. They're not something that can be left alone because the main force looked to the VCI for several things. First, for intelligence. That's their primary intelligence collection-evaluation agency. They also looked to them for supplies." Most important, they relied on the infrastructure to guide their

clandestine movement from their mountain bases to attack positions in the lowlands. The VCI directed the units to tunnels and hidden rest areas and pointed out the paths through boodytrapped sectors. Without the VCI the NVA, strangers to the southern provinces, would face most of the operational handicaps that hindered American units in the Vietnamese countryside.[19]

In the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Program, the Americans and South Vietnamese tried to bring together under one organization the anti-VCI activities of all GVN agencies concerned with pacification and security. By pooling information, the agencies would identify the individual members of the VCI in each locality and then coordinate civilian and military efforts to kill or apprehend them. The national pacification plan for 1970 assigned five Phoenix/Phung Hoang goals for the year: improvement of the organization; enlistment of popular support through publicity; involvement of village and hamlet officials in the effort; improvement of the training of personnel; and an emphasis on "fair, correct, and humane" treatment of VCI suspects.[20]

The Phoenix/Phung Hoang organization in Quang Nam conformed in structure to national guidelines. Province and district Phung Hoang committees, chaired respectively by the province and district chiefs, were composed of representatives of the national police, the military staffs, the Revolutionary Development cadres, the Chieu Hoi program, and other pacification and security agencies. These committees were supposed to develop detailed plans for attacking the VCI in their areas of responsibility. The committees also oversaw the work of the Province Intelligence Operations Coordinating Center (PIOCC) and the District Intelligence Operations Coordinating Centers (DIOCCs). These centers, staffed primarily by the police and the military, were to assemble information from all agencies into dossiers on individual VCI members and then plan and coordinate operations against them. The American province senior advisor had a Phoenix coordinator on his staff to assist the Vietnamese agencies, and the PIOCC and DIOCCs had U.S. advisors, usually Army intelligence officers, assigned by CORDS. Each American district senior advisor acted as Phoenix coordinator for his district.*[21]

In its achievements and failures, Phoenix/Phung Hoang in Quang Nam mirrored many features of the nationwide program. The effort gave rise to much activity. Colonel Tin, the province chief, took strong interest in it. In June, he called a special province-wide meeting of Americans and Vietnamese involved in Phoeinx/Phung Hoang to discuss accomplishments and deficiencies and exhort them to further action and improvement. Following the national plan, the authorities in Quang Nam used leaflets, wanted posters, and even radio and television spots, to enlist citizen support, and they began organizing intelligence coordinating centers in the villages.[22]

All this activity, while impressive on paper, added up to much less than the intensive, coordinated campaign envisioned in Phoenix/Phung Hoang plans and directives. While Colonel Tin supported the program with apparently sincere enthusiasm, all too many of his GVN subordinates gave it little more than lip service. In most of the districts, according to an American advisor, the district chiefs visited their DIOCCs "only to escort visiting US VIP's who express an interest in Phoenix/Phung Hoang."[23] Some of the Vietnamese officials were preoccupied with conventional military operations; others seemed to the Americans to be restrained by taut live-and-let-live arrangements with high-ranking VCI; still others were themselves secret VC agents or sympathizers.

Partly as a result of this lack of continuing command interest, the DIOCCs often were short of trained personnel. The staffs of many centers acted more as keepers of archives than as directors and coordinators of active operations. They diligently assembled and filed dossiers, but rarely used them to mount hunts for particular VCI members. Further weakening the DIOCCs, the national police force, which was supposed to coordinate all anti-VCI operations, was undermanned, low in status among GVN agencies, and heavily VC-infiltrated. The GVN member agencies of the DIOCCs often withheld vital information from them in order to assure themselves credit for successfully exploiting it. Vietnamese administrative habits further compounded the program's difficulties. The principal objective of Phoenix/Phung Hoang was to secure cooperation between the lower level military and civilian officials who knew most about the VCI and could go after them most effectively. This entire concept ran counter to the strictly vertical and hierarchical Vietnamese administrative tradition, under which any dealings by a subordinate with anyone but his su-

*Initially, most U.S. funding and support came from the CIA, but in 1969 CORDS took responsibility for financial support and the provision of advisors in the field while the CIA continued to work with the program at the national level. IDA Pacification Study, 2, pp. 91-95.

perior, and indeed any taking of initiative by a subordinate, were regarded at best with suspicion.[24]

In spite of these limitations, Phoenix/Phung Hoang did involve most elements of the GVN in Quang Nam to some degree in the fight against the VCI. The Marines, when they could, tried to assist and often to intensify the campaign. In doing so, they acted in accord with the III MAF/ICTZ Combined Campign Plan for 1970, which required allied regulars and RFs and PFs to assist Phoenix/Phung Hoang both in intelligence gathering and in apprehending suspects. Free World military forces, including the Marines, were to station liaison officers at the PIOCC and DIOCCs and were to transmit to the intelligence centers any information they acquired on the VCI. They were to provide troops for operations against the VCI "to the maximum consistent with the tactical situation" and to give the campaign against the infrastructure equal priority with attacks on enemy main forces and base areas.[25]

Marine units sometimes went after the VCI directly in specifically targeted operations. During the summer and fall of 1970, for example, the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, which had no enemy main forces to fight in its heavily populated TAOR south of Marble Mountain, directed much of its effort against the VCI. The battalion emphasized surprise attacks and imaginative tactics, with significant results. In August, elements of the battalion, in a quick helicopter raid, captured or killed most of the VCI leadership of the enemy's *District III Da Nang*. Three months later, following up a lead acquired from the girl friend of a Regional Forces intelligence sergeant, Marines of the battalion ambushed and destroyed a veteran VC

As part of the civic action program two Marines struggle to throw a bull so that a Navy corpsman can give a shot of penicillin to the animal which is suffering from pneumonia. Usually the corpsmen are more concerned with the health of the villagers.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A194695

propaganda team which had long eluded allied pursuit.[26]

Operations against enemy military forces and base areas also yielded incidental gains against the VCI. Cordon and search operations led to arrests of suspected VCI agents as well as to the death or capture of enemy main force soldiers and guerrillas. Even sweeps of mountain base areas occasionally resulted in damage to the VCI. On 13 July, for instance, Company H of the 7th Marines, during an operation in the Que Son Mountains, trapped a group of enemy in a cave and captured or killed all of them. The group turned out to have been the entire Communist leadership of a village, who had gone into the hills for an indoctrination meeting. Operation Imperial Lake, besides accomplishing its main purpose of disrupting enemy base areas and infiltration routes, also hurt the VCI. On 5 November, Company B, 5th Marines discovered in a cache of documents the central files of the Viet Cong Security Section for Quang Nam Province. These files, supplemented by interrogation of a high-ranking VC official also captured during Imperial Lake, produced the names of Viet Cong who had infiltrated the GVN in Da Nang. Government authorities as a result arrested many well-placed enemy agents.*[27]

Late in 1970, the 1st Marines staff, at the instigation of the regimental S-2, Major Grinalds, who earlier in the year had served as S-3 of the regiment's 2d Battalion, developed an ambitious plan for a combined attack on the VCI by all military and civil elements in Quang Nam. The plan called for immediate formation of a joint intelligence center for the province to supplement and practically replace the PIOCC. Located at Hoi An, the center would contain liaison officers and communication teams from the 1st Marine Division, the 2d ROKMC Brigade, the 51st ARVN Regiment, QDSZ, Phoenix/Phung Hoang, and the CIA. Here, the 1st Marines staff hoped, "the information would develop on the VCI, the targets would be put in front of the commanders, and they could go." The 1st Marines' plan envisioned a concentrated drive against the infrastructure by all military forces in the province during the first four months of 1971. This effort, it was hoped, would temporarily cripple the enemy command and logistic system and prevent the Communists from taking the offensive after most of the Marines withdrew in the spring and early summer. The plan urged general adoption of tactics used profitably during 1970 by the 1st Marines. These included small-scale, surprise cordon and search operations, establishment of checkpoints on all major roads, and census operations like those conducted by the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines north of Da Nang.

After Colonel Paul X. Kelley, the 1st Marines commander, approved the plan, the regimental staff, in a series of briefings, tried to persuade the other American and Vietnamese headquarters in the province to adopt it. Results were meager. During December, the allies in Quang Nam did establish a Combined Intelligence Conference which brought together representatives from all allied intelligence agencies in the province at periodic meetings. The Phung Hoang organization acted as the permanent secretariat of the conference. Beyond this, most commands were too preoccupied with other missions and commitments to support the total anti-VCI campaign proposed by the 1st Marines. After initial expressions of interest, they allowed the plan to die of neglect.[28]

Marines trying to operate against the VCI and to persuade the GVN to make a greater effort against the underground faced many obstacles and frustrations. The continuing shortage of Vietnamese-speaking Marines, especially in units in the field, hampered the gathering of information. Under the rules of engagement, Marines could not arrest civilian suspects. Hence any unit going after VCI had to have Vietnamese police or Regional or Popular Forces attached. This in turn required consultations and arrangements with Vietnamese headquarters during which information about the forthcoming operation all too often leaked to the VC. The Vietnamese persistently ignored American suggestions that they establish more checkpoints to prevent the enemy from moving men and equipment along the allies' own lines of communication, and they resisted as politically unpopular the adoption of effective controls over private distributors of food, medical supplies, and other material needed by the enemy. Major Grinalds reported that:

> There's a man named Nom Yu, who works on the People's Revolutionary Party of *Quang Da Zone*, a very important man, who drives up and down Highway 1 on a red Honda, and he's been stopped on numerous occasions at checkpoints and bluffed his way through, either as a district chief or a village chief. He's got about six sets of ID cards he carries. The point I'm trying to make is our attempt to monitor the VCI traffic of both their ordnance, their supplies, and their people through our own means of communication is very, very poor . . . .[29]

*See the description of this incident in Chapter 6 together with statement by Lieutenant General Bernard E. Trainor in the informational footnote.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A194078

BGen Mauro J. Padalino, Commanding General, Force Logistic Command presents a plaque to the Marine-sponsored Hoa Khanh Children's Hospital.

Even with conventional military contact declining, both American and ARVN military commands proved reluctant to reorient their operations toward eradicating the VCI. Marines, Koreans, ARVN, and militia alike thought in terms of engaging large units and taking a measurable toll of dead, prisoners, and captured material. Anti-VCI operations involved slow, careful stalking of individuals and often produced no immediately visible result. Coordinating itelligence collection and the response to it was a continual struggle, explained Grinalds:

> The problem was somehow getting the folks who had the information about the VCI together with the folks who had the forces to operate against them, and it's amazing how often these two groups operate without ever coming together. . . . Every once in a while they will find a certain community of interest which allows them to come together and the forces to operate against the VCI, but it's unfortunately too seldom . . . .[30]

Civic Action, 1970

Almost as soon as Marines arrived in I Corps in force in 1965, they began trying to help the civilians among whom they were fighting. The Marines acted from a number of motives, and these same motives in 1970 continued to impel the III MAF civic action program. From the beginning, Marines had believed that by providing food, relief supplies, and medical care, they would win friends and gratitude among the Vietnamese, and that from friendship and gratitude would flow information about the Viet Cong and increased support for the GVN. As pacification programs developed, civic action contributed to them by promoting economic and social improvement, thus giving more people a stake in the existing system. Further, as a III MAF staff officer put it, "Civic action also can be useful as an outlet for the energies of U.S. troops. In a counter-guerrilla war such as this, much time is spent in pre- and post-combat conditions. . . . In this environment civic action . . . can serve usefully to expend excess time and energy."[31]

By 1970, the III MAF civic action program had grown from sporadic acts of charity into a large-scale effort, coordinated by the G-5 and S-5 staffs and closely integrated with GVN pacification and development plans. The G-5, like his tactical partner, the G-3, coordinated his activities with numerous other organizations and agencies, both U.S. and foreign. He maintained close working relationships with four separate U.S. Army organizations, two U.S. Air Force organizations, CORDS advisors, ARVN, the province and district officials, III MAF, and numerous free world and Vietnamese civilian agencies.[32]

The civic action program which the G-5 conducted, emphasized helping the Vietnamese to help themselves. Villagers in Marine areas of operation were supposed to determine their own needs, whether they be a new school, a well, a market place, or an irrigation ditch. Then the Marines would furnish supplies—drawn from their own resources, from AID, or from private charities Marines would also provide technical assistance and some labor. The villagers would furnish most of the labor and as much of the material as they could. As Vietnamese local governments developed, the Marines tried to involve them in every project, often restricting their own efforts to helping villagers obtain aid from the GVN.

G-5 operations ranged far beyond helping the Vietnamese to help themselves with American material and technical assistance, however. Through the "Save the Leg" program, dud rounds and unexpended explosives were purchased from the Vietnamese civilians in an attempt to reduce the incidence of Marine patrols encountering mines and boobytraps. The Voluntary Information Program encouraged the populace to provide information about the enemy for a price, the dollar value of which was made proportionate to the importance of the intelligence provided. The G-5 taxed the capabilities of the 7th Psychological Operations Battalion, USA, employing

its leaflet drops, airborne public address missions, and HB (ground broadcast) and HE (audiovisual) means to undermine the activities of the enemy. The Personal Response section of the G-5 conducted varied activities to foster better relations between Vietnamese and Marines through language classes, symposiums, and cultural tours. Psychological operations relied heavily on Vietnamese capabilities: Armed Propaganda Teams; Cultural Drama Teams; and Politcal Warfare Teams. The G-5 was also supported by two platoons of the 29th Civil Affairs Company, USA, in his wide-ranging activities.

In addition to the numerous on-going tasks assigned the G-5, he responded to requests from province officials to coordinate military involvement of refugee resettlement, such as at Nhon Cau, Tu Cau, Phu Loc (6), and Go Noi Island, and he also coordinated American support for natural disasters which struck within the province. During the catastrophic flood which occurred from 29 October to 3 November 1970, for example, the G-5 coordinated American efforts in the relief operations. From the rescue and evacuation of Vietnamese to delivery of food and clothing to beleaguered areas, the G-5 coordinated all support. In the first few days alone, 190,000 pounds of foodstuffs were distributed outside the Hoi An area. Another 5,000 pounds of clothing and cloth for clothing and some 4,000 paper or canvas blankets were distributed in this same area. The Vietnamese later lauded the support provided by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and the 1st Marine Division under the supervision of the G-5.[33]

In 1970 III MAF, in keeping with the general emphasis of redeployment and turning the war over to the Vietnamese, concentrated on reducing its civic action program. It did so partly as a matter of policy and partly because available manpower and resources were diminishing. The III MAF/I Corps Combined Campaign Plan for 1970 restricted Marine civic action to assisting the Vietnamese Armed Forces in aiding the people. It authorized direct American participation only when a project exceeded the technical capabilities of the RVNAF, when a project "is essential to the success of a tactical operation . . . or is required for humanitarian reasons and cannot be accomplished by the RVNAF," or when a useful project had been started before implementation of the plan.[34]

During the year, the manpower, funds, and materials available to III MAF for civic action steadily declined. Troop redeployments led to the termination of unit civic action projects, and the withdrawal of the force engineer battalions in Keystone Robin Alpha curtailed road improvement and other large-scale activities. U.S. aid agencies, as their own budgets were reduced, correspondingly reduced the money and material allotted to III MAF. Throughout the war, the Marines had relied for school and medical kits, scholarship funds, and other civic action resources on money contributed by members and friends of the Marine Corps Reserve. This money went to the established relief agency, CARE, which purchased the commodities and shipped them to Da Nang for the use of III MAF. As troops redeployed and American public interest in the war waned, these contributions also declined. Partially compensating for these losses, redeploying units often left material behind which could be salvaged for civic action.[35]

As the III MAF G-5, Colonel Clifford J. Peabody, put it, "the name of the game was to phase down, so we did it with somewhat of a vengeance."[36] On 30 May, for example, III MAF ended, for lack of funds, the General Walt Scholarship Program under which it had helped finance the secondary and college education of Vietnamese youths. The Force Logistic Command on 30 June transferred administration and operational control of its largest civic action project, the Hoa Khanh Children's Hospital near Da Nang, to the World Relief Commission. Built with thousands of man-hours of volunteer labor by Marines and sustained by over $300,000 in contributions from servicemen and concerned persons in the U.S., this hospital by mid-1970 had grown from a small roadside dispensary into a fully equipped, modern 120-bed pediatric facility. The hospital even had a dental clinic, the equipment for which had been donated by dentists in the United States. "The personnel were mostly young native women who had been trained by Navy dentists for several years," recalled Captain Meredith H. Mead, USN, commander of the 1st Dental Company. "An oral surgeon from the 1st Dental Company went out there one day per week to perform cleft palate and hare lip operations."[37] The World Relief Commission would operate the hospital until its eventual transfer to South Vietnamese management, and Force Logistic Command would provide limited support as long as it remained in-country.[38]

The story of a second major Marine hospital project, the 3d Marine Division Memorial Children's Hospital in Quang Tri, ended less happily. Early in 1969, the 3d Marine Division had developed plans for

this hospital, a 10-building, 120-bed facility which would meet a significant need in northern I Corps and stand as a memorial to Marines and sailors who had died in Vietnam. Through friends and organizations in the United States, the Marines had begun collecting funds for the hospital. The 3d Engineer Battalion and Naval Mobile Construction (Seabee) Battalion 128 were supposed to do the actual building, aided by the government of Quang Tri Province, which would provide bricks and much of the labor.

Evaluating the failure of the project years later, Colonel Peabody said, "Here was a project conceived in the loftiest humanitarian ideals but in violation of all rules for effective civic action. The end speaks for itself." According to Peabody, the GVN opposed the project and recommended that the money collected be invested, as the Vietnamese desired, to upgrade or add to the present province hospital. Peabody added that the "3d Marine Division committed the Marine Corps to this project knowing, as a minimum, that the Vietnamese were less than enthusiastic and that the more knowledgeable advisory personnel recommended against it. FMFPac recommended that it not be undertaken until positive arrangements had been made for staffing."[39]

When the 3d Marine Division withdrew late in 1969, it left responsibility for completing the project to III MAF. Colonel Peabody soon found that with the departure of the Marine division, support for the hospital had disappeared. The U.S. forces left in northern I Corps lacked resources to complete it. The Quang Tri Province Government informed III MAF that it would not be able to staff or maintain a children's hospital and would like to use the six partially completed buildings for other purposes. Only $135,000 of the estimated $470,000 needed to complete the project as a children's hospital had been collected in the U.S. In June, because of the hospital's uncertain future, the Commandant of the Marine Corps prohibited any solicitation of additional funds for it.

On 20 August, Colonel Peabody met at Quang Tri with the G-5 officers of XXIV Corps and the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division, the Quang Tri Province Chief, and representatives of the provincial health service, the Red Cross, and the Buddhist social services in an effort to salvage as much of the project as possible. The American and Vietnamese officials agreed that the existing structures should be finished for use as a combination orphanage, maternity clinic, and dormitory for secondary school students. During the rest of the year, III MAF used the money in the children's hospital fund to prepare and equip the buildings for these purposes and to improve the pediatric wing of the existing Quang Tri Province hospital. III MAF used an additional $3,500 per month of its dwindling civic action funds to pay the salaries of Vietnamese doctors and nurses at a temporary children's hospital in Quang Tri, also started by the 3d Division and now being partially supported by elements of the 67th U.S. Army Medical Group. XXIV Corps provided Army engineers to help finish the buildings at the former children's hospital, and U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang allowed III MAF to purchase the necessary lumber. By early 1971, the orphanage/clinic/dormitory was nearing completion. While III MAF thus had been able to salvage something beneficial from the 3d Division's aborted plans, Colonel Peabody justifiably concluded that "a project which was outstanding in its humanitarian idea of providing help . . . has proved to be a real albatross in the long run."[40]

In spite of the emphasis on reducing civic action commitments, Marine units continued helping the Vietnamese who lived in their TAORs or near their camps and bases. Typical of the efforts, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, during April, began turning surplus lumber over to the Dai Loc District Chief, who distributed it to villages and hamlets for self-help projects. Companies of the battalion stationed at Hills 65, 25, and 52 gave empty ammunition boxes to the people of Loc Quang village to construct desks for their new school and furnished school supply kits and a blackboard. The Marines also helped the villagers of Loc Quang build a culvert to carry irrigation water under Route 4. Three times a week, members of the battalion taught English at Dai Loc District High School. The battalion sponsored an interscholastic volley ball game and gave 250 books to a Catholic priest, Father Huong, who planned to open a public library in Dai Loc. The battalion aid station routinely conducted two MedCaps a week, each usually attracting about 50 patients, most of them children.[41]

Civic action was not confined to infantry units. Besides sponsoring the Hoa Khanh Children's Hospital, the Force Logistic Command at various times aided 32 hamlets and helped support 11 schools, 6 orphanages, and 3 churches. The 1st MAW maintained a demonstration chicken farm with a flock of White Leghorns that by September 1970 had grown to 225 hens and 40 roosters. The Marines sold hatched chicks to Vietnamese farmers at half the going local price in

the hope of encouraging more villagers to raise poultry. Each of the air wing's aircraft groups had its own education, health, and construction projects in hamlets around the fields at Marble Mountain and Da Nang.[42]

Just before the Keystone Robin Alpha redeployments began, the 1st Marine Division joined the Quang Nam Province Government in an effort to resettle Go Noi Island. Located about 15 miles south of Da Nang and the channels through which the Thu Bon River (there known as the Ky Lam) meandered toward the sea, Go Noi, before the war, had been a fertile rice, cotton, and silk producing area inhabited by some 27,000 Vietnamese. As the war expanded, the Viet Cong honeycombed the area with caves and tunnels and used it as a base of operations against Da Nang. VC depredations, allied sweeps, and a series of floods soon drove most of the residents of Go Noi into Quang Nam's growing refugee camps. Between May and November of 1969, in Operation Pipestone Canyon, the 1st Marines, assisted by elements of the 51st ARVN Regiment and the 2d ROKMC Brigade, expelled most of the NVA and VC from Go Noi Island. Then the allies brought in heavy earthmoving equipment which swept 6,700 acres clean of underbrush and crushed or buried the Communists' network of tunnels and fortification.

During Operation Pipestone Canyon, the 1st Marine Division proposed a plan for resettling Go Noi Island after it had been cleared of the enemy. The plan had obvious advantages. Repopulation of the area with pro-GVN civilians protected by adequate territorial forces would make Communist reinfiltration more difficult. The area could provide homes and livelihoods for thousands of refugees, and resumption of agriculture there would contribute to economic revival in Quang Nam. CORDS at regional and national levels took an interest in the Marine plan and further studied and refined it. The concerned GVN ministries indicated interest. Then, as so often happened in Vietnam, activity on the project temporarily ceased.

In the spring of 1970, Colonel Tin, the Quang Nam Province Chief, revised the idea. He began a small resettlement project with assistance from the 1st Marine Division and the Korean Brigade. Late in May, Colonel Tin abruptly decided to expand this modest effort into the full-scale resettlement campaign originally contemplated. He proposed to move 17,000 people into three new villages on Go Noi Island before the end of the summer and asked XXIV Corps for aid. Even though most of Go Noi Island lay within the Korean Marines' TAOR, Lieutenant General Zais, then the XXIV Corps commander, directed the 1st Marine Division, as the major allied ground command in Quang Nam, to coordinate American assistance for

An aerial view of the new refugee resettlement village on Go Noi Island. Go Noi, a former bastion of the Viet Cong, was one of the most fought-over areas south of Da Nang. This was an attempt to bring new residents into the area loyal to the government.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

the project. Major General Widdecke in turn placed his assistant division commander, Brigadier General William F. Doehler, in charge. Making much use of the Quang Da Special Zone weekly conferences, the 1st Marine Division quickly worked out with the Korean Marines, the ARVN, and the province government detailed plans for a large-scale civil and military effort.[43]

Construction of the new villages began in May, with most of the available Marine engineer units and Navy construction battalions committed to the task. By the time the Marine engineers were withdrawn for redeployment on 21 July, they had ploughed 800 acres of farm land and wholly or partially constructed 8,000 meters of road and two fortified village compounds. To improve the settlers' access to markets, the Marine engineers installed a 346-foot pontoon bridge connecting the island to the main highways, and the Seabees improvised a 440-foot permanent bridge from salvaged materials. III MAF contributed an assortment of building supplies to the project including 351 3,000-foot rolls of barbed wire, 16,000 engineering stakes, 30,000 sandbags, a 55-foot aluminum watchtower, 26 tons of gravel, and two flagpoles. To help the settlers construct their own houses, the Marines salvaged over 400,000 board feet of dunnage* lumber and set up a mobile sawmill to cut it into usable sizes. From this wood, each family purchased enough for their home from the village council, which retained the money for use in local projects.[44]

To defend the settlers against the Viet Cong, the 2d CAG organized a new oversized CAP (22 Marines and a PF platoon) to work with a three-company RF group and elements of the Korean brigade. Plans called for the CAP, formed with Marines from deactivated units of the 1st CAG, to conduct mobile operations on the edges of the inhabited areas while the RF units provided close in protection and the Koreans continued their usual patrols and ambushes.[45]

By the end of August, the Go Noi settlements appeared to be well established, although the results had fallen far short of the ambitious goals of the original plan. Phu Loc, the first of the three villages to be founded, had over 1,500 inhabitants (most of them prewar residents of Go Noi) and 300 homes. Nine wells were producing "excellent" water, and the inhabitants had begun building their community hall, school, dispensary, and market place. The second village, Phu Phong, had almost 200 houses under construction and 40 families in permanent residence. The October floods slowed work on these two villages and prevented establishment of the third, but by the end of the year about 2,000 people were living on Go Noi Island. They had begun farming and were planning to organize a cooperative to build an irrigation system. Encouraged by the results of the Go Noi project, the province government had begun resettling more refugees in new communities along Route 4. Neither of these projects by itself came near solving Quang Nam's refugee problem, but they did indicate what could be done by a determined, unified allied effort. Unfortunately, the 1st Marine Division, which had provided much of the impetus and coordination, did not have long to remain in Vietnam.[46]

As the Marines came to the end of their last full year of civic action, many problems remained unsolved and questions unanswered.[47] In spite of the emphasis in plans and directives on helping the Vietnamese do what the Vietnamese wanted done, many Marines, with their American aggressiveness and desire for accomplishment, still tried to impose their own projects on the villagers. Even the CAPs sometimes erred in this manner. In July, the 2d CAG reported that:

> Efforts such as building bulletin boards . . . and programs for trash collection and general police of hamlet areas continue, but [meet] with limited success at best due to no real interest by local populace. Herein lies a major problem . . . that continues to plague civic action projects. CAP Marines with limited assets continue to push projects through without thorough integration (via the Village/Hamlet Officials) with the immediate needs and desires of the people they serve. 2d CAG efforts to educate and improve continue.[48]

Overeager Marines sometimes committed themselves to projects which they and their Vietnamese hosts lacked the resources to finish. In the 3d CAG, for example, members of a CAP squad in a coastal hamlet near Hue decided their hamlet should have a dispensary. Colonel Peabody described the results of their effort:

> . . . They've written to their friends back in the States and their friends had started donating money, and they hired Vietnamese labor and they started building a dispensary . . . about three times larger than was needed, but they were going to go first class, and the people back in the States were donating hospital beds and end tables and so forth . . . . Well, . . . the hamlet got upgraded [on the HES] to an A or a B hamlet, and the CAP was pulled out, and so when we finally sent somebody up there to find out what had happened to this thing, here was four more or less incomplete walls, and that was it. And the local people wanted to know, "Well, whatever happened to our dispensary?"[49]

*Dunnage is scrap lumber used in bracing cargo in ships' holds.

Colonel Peabody's office, after consultations with the Vietnamese province and district authorities, the CORDS advisors, and the XXIV Corps staff, developed a plan under which the Vietnamese would finish building the dispensary.

> . . . But they asked us for . . . basically $1,000 worth of gear to finish it up, primarily lumber . . . . So everything was all laid on and we bought the supplies and got them shipped up there, and that's been about three months ago. And the supplies are in the warehouse and nothing has moved since . . . .[50]

Beyond the practical problems, the question remained of how effective civic action had been in winning civilian support for the South Vietnamese government and acceptance for the Marines. Limited benefits could be observed. Frequently, after a MedCap or other project that had helped them immediately and personally, villagers would point out boobytraps to the Marines or warn them of impending enemy attacks. Major Grinalds, S-2 of the 1st Marines, for example, found MedCaps* "very effective" in producing intelligence. "We always had an intelligence man sitting by the dentist or the doctor when he was working on somebody," Grinalds recalled, "and in gratitude for a tooth pulled . . . or something like that, sometimes they'd give some information about VCI or VC in their area."[51]

But had five years of civic action really overcome the inevitable hostility of the peasants to foreign troops in their midst or won their loyalty for a government that still often seemed less concerned for their welfare than were the Marines. Knowledgeable Marines could give no definitive answer to this question. Some, including Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, the assistant division commander of the 1st Marine Division during its last months in Vietnam,** expressed "serious doubts" whether civic action had won many "hearts and minds" for the government and regarded such activities as "a poor substitute for more positive forms of civil affairs/military government."[52]

*The dental officers and technicians of the 1st Dental Company, which operated 12 clinics throughout the Da Nang TAOR, supported Marine civic action efforts. Even the dental officers who were assigned to the 1st Marine Division command post went to the field on occasion. "All dental officers and techs operated from time to time in MedCAP or DentCAP endeavors. These were carried out in orphanages, schools or small villages. We always took a translator and armed guard, " recalled Captain Meredith H. Mead, Commanding Officer, 1st Dental Company. "I personally went on several of these expeditions . . . . One trip I remember well: we set up our chair in the small village square and the chief (village chief) climbed a tree and announced with a big megaphone that the tooth doctor had arrived. Our treatments were mostly for relief of pain." Capt Meredith H. Mead, USN, Comments on draft ms, 8Jun73 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Simmons replaced Brigadier General Doehler as assistant division commander on 16 June 1970.

Communist Counter-Pacification Efforts

While large-unit combat diminished during 1970, the Communists, in keeping with their renewed emphasis on guerrilla warfare, continued without let-up their effort to disrupt pacification by terrorism. This small-scale but often vicious campaign took three main forms: direct attacks on CAPs, CUPPs, and RF or PF units; kidnapping and assassination of GVN officials, PSDF members, national policemen, RD cadre members, and other pacification functionaries; and general attacks on the people and their property in GVN-controlled areas.

Especially during the first half of the year, detachments of VC and NVA repeatedly attacked CAP units. On 1 February, for example, 30-40 NVA and VC trapped and overran a patrol from CAP 1-1-3 in Quang Tin Province, killing four Marines and one PF and capturing a radio, a M60 machine gun, a grenade launcher, and five M16's. The enemy also took losses. A sweep of the scene of the fight by elements of CAP 1-1-2 disclosed five enemy dead, three abandoned AK-47s, and a Chinese Communist machine gun.[53] During March, the 2d CAG in Quang Nam reported "constant" small attacks by fire on its units. On one occasion, the enemy disguised themselves in captured ARVN uniforms, 48 of which were found after the engagement, the Communists having stripped them off and discarded them as they fled.[54]

Periodically, enemy infantry or sappers tried to overrun a CAP patrol base. Almost invariably, they failed with substantial losses. On 27 May, in a typical contact, 30-50 NVA attacked the night partrol base of CAP 4-2-1 near the Quang Tri-Thua Thien border with small arms, grenades, and RPGs. The CAP Marines and PFs, supported by 81mm mortar fire, helicopter gunships, and flareships, held off the enemy with small arms, grenades, and Claymore mines. Sporadic fighting continued from 0125 until daylight, when the NVA withdrew. They left behind two dead, an AK-47, and five blood trails. The CAP suffered one Marine seriously wounded and one PF dead of wounds. During the last half of the year, the enemy launched fewer such attacks and relied increasingly on mines and boobytraps to inflict casualties on the CAPs.[55]

Enemy pressure on CUPP units intensified late in the spring as the combined units began improving

their effectiveness. On 10 May, for instance, the Communists attacked two separate 7th Marines CUPP teams near FSB Baldy, mortaring one and assaulting the compound of the other. In the ground attack, Marines and PFs drove back about 60 sappers who temporarily broke into their perimeter. This day's action cost the enemy 12 dead; The two CUPP units lost between them one PF killed and 20 wounded.[56]

On 13 June, the enemy inflicted a major setback on the 5th Marines' CUPP platoon. At 0200, about 60 NVA and VC attacked two ambushes set up by this unit near Route 4 about a mile southwest of Hill 25. Concentrating first on the westernmost position, the Communists assaulted with small arms and machine gun fire, RPGs, grenades, and thrown satchel charges. All the RFs in the ambush, members of a platoon from the 759th RF Company, fled at the first shots, leaving six Marines to fight alone until they were overrun. Three of the Marines were killed and another wounded; the survivors made their way to safety.

The enemy then moved eastward and attacked the second ambush. Here, all but five of the RFs fled, but here the Marines and the RFs who stayed, supported by 81mm mortar and artillery fire, stopped the Communists. The enemy disengaged and withdrew around 0430.

For the 5th Marines' CUPP platoon, it had been a costly action. Besides a total of three Marines and one RF soldier killed and five Marines and one RF wounded, the unit had lost in the overrun position a PRC-25 radio, an M60 machine gun, two M14 and two M16 rifles, and a .45-caliber pistol. A patrol from Company I, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines searched the area the next morning and found two blood trails but no other sign of enemy casualties. The most important casualty of the engagement was the relationship between the CUPP Marines and their RF counterparts. As the official report of the fight put it: "The rapport between RFs and Marines was impaired by the performance of the RFs during these contacts." Nevertheless, the 5th Marines at once set to work rebuilding the unit and improving its training.[57]

Throughout the year, Communist terrorists took a steady toll of GVN officials and ordinary civilians. In May, one of the periodic high points of guerrilla activity, the VC in Quang Nam, according to a CORDS report, killed 129 civilians, wounded 247, and kidnapped 73.[58] Many such kidnappings in fact were forceable recruiting. The VC took the victims into the hills and by persuasion or coercion induced them to join their ranks. The GVN, as it did with the number of refugees, understated its casualties from terrorism. Major Grinalds reported that "government officials get a target number of harassing or terrorist incidents that are allowed in their province each year, [it] might be 75, might be 85. When they reach that number they stop reporting the excess, because it looks bad."[59]

District and village officials lived under constant danger of abduction or death. On the night of 20-21 March, for instance, a band of VC kidnapped a hamlet chief in the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines TAOR. They took him up onto Charlie Ridge about 1,500 meters north of his hamlet, told him "to quit his job or he would be killed," then released him and retreated further into the mountains.[60]

On other occasions, the enemy struck to kill. On 19 September, in a type of incident which occurred again and again during the year, two Regional Force soldiers died less than half a mile from the headquarters compound of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines when "an unknown number of VC/VNA detonated one Claymore type mine and then shot them in the head." Eight days later, also in the 2d Battalion's TAOR, Viet Cong grenades killed two Revolutionary Development team members in a refugee hamlet and wounded four civilians. In the Que Son Valley on 14 November, two or three VC with AK-47s ambushed and killed the hamlet chief and hamlet security chief of Lanh Thuong (5), a community close to FSB Ross. Higher ranking officials also fell victim. On 18 December, in midafternoon, the assistant chief of Dai Loc District was killed on Route 4 by two Vietnamese boys who threw a grenade into his jeep.[61]

The enemy reinforced his terrorist campaign with continuous propaganda to further intimidate the Vietnamese population, and occasionally he leveled his propaganda at the American forces. A typical propaganda leaflet said, "GIs, unite! Oppose the dirty American war of aggression in Vietnam! The American people are waging an active struggle to support your anti-var (sic) activities and demand that the American government end immediately its war of aggression in Vietnam and take you out of South Vietnam immediately." Further on in the leaflet it appealed for racial dissidence against the war: "Black GIs, refuse to fight against the South Vietnamese people struggling for their independence and freedom. For black GIs, the battlefield is right on American soil, where they must fight against poverty, hunger and barbarous racial discrimination." While the propaganda

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373320

South Vietnamese troops from the 101st Regional Force Battalion deploy from an American helicopter in an operation south of Da Nang. As the Marine forces began to withdraw from Vietnam, they turned over their tactical areas to the South Vietnamese.

had little or no impact on Americans, the enemy's propaganda and terrorism often stifled the Vietnamese.[62]

Any Vietnamese who supported the government or associated with Americans in any way was a potential victim of Communist terror. Early in 1970, a CAP from the 1st CAG, while on a routine patrol, found a dead man on the trail they were following. According to the patrol report:

> The dead VN was the father of a young boy who frequently performed small chores to assist the CAP Marines. A note in Vietnamese attached to the body read, "If you support the Americans, this will happen to you."[63]

To the north, in Quang Nam, a group of school children learned the same lesson. On 19 January, while Marines from CAP 2-3-7 were playing volleyball with the children in their schoolyard, a Vietnamese youth threw two grenades into their midst. The grenades killed four of the children and wounded four others and six Marines. The youth who threw the grenades escaped. These and innumerable other such small tragedies conveyed the same message: it is dangerous to aid and associate with Americans.[64]

During the spring and summer, the VC escalated their terrorism from acts of violence against individuals to full-scale attacks on progovernment villages. The most severe of these attacks occurred on 11 June at Phu Thanh. This village, a complex of several hamlets, straddled Route 1 about three miles north of FSB Baldy. Just to the north of the village, the highway crossed the Ba Ren Bridge, one of the vital links on the land lines of communication between Baldy and Da Nang.[65]

Phu Thanh had a reputation among the Marines as a friendly village. It contained the homes of many RF and PF soldiers and GVN officials, and its people were a reliable source of information about the VC in their area. Because of its nearness to the important bridge, Phu Thanh had strong security forces in and around it. CUPP Team 9—a squad from the 1st Platoon of Company A, 7th Marines—was stationed in the village with PF Platoons 144 and 171. Phu Thanh

also contained a 22-man Revolutionary Development team and a PSDF unit of 31 members, eight of whom had weapons. Near the south end of the bridge lay the compound of the 323d RF Company, which had as its main mission protection of the span. The CP of the 1st Platoon of Company A, which had charge of several CUPPs along the highway north of LZ Baldy, was located near the RF compound.

For several weeks, rumors had circulated in the village that the Viet Cong were planning to attack the Ba Ren Bridge, but neither Marines nor Vietnamese saw any reason to expect an assault on the hamlets themselves. On the night of 10-11 June, the CUPP unit had taken up a night position within the village. The RF troops, following their usual practice, remained in their fortified compound watching the bridge.

At 0200 on the 11th, the enemy, later identified as elements of the *V-25th Main Force Battalion* and the *T-89th Sapper Battalion*, launched a thoroughly planned and coordinated attack. It began with a barrage of 60mm and 82mm mortar fire. The mortars, located north and south of Phu Thanh, dropped a total of 200-250 high explosive and white phosphorus rounds on the village. They concentrated on CUPP 9, the bridge, the 1st Platoon CP, and the RF compound. Simultaneous with this barrage, the enemy attacked two other CUPP teams in hamlets south of Phu Thanh on Route 1, engaging them with small arms, RPGs, grenades, and mortars and preventing them from maneuvering to reinforce Phu Thanh.

Under cover of the mortar fire, two groups of sappers entered the village, one from the east and one from the west. Armed with grenades and satchel charges, a few rushed the RF compound and the 1st Platoon CP and were cut down by the defenders' fire. Most began burning houses and hurling their grenades and satchel charges into family bomb shelters filled with civilians who had fled to them for protection from the shelling. A Marine recalled:

> The enemy ran through the village, ordering people out of their bunkers. When they did [come out], they were shot, or else [the enemy threw] chicoms [grenades] into the bunker, killing the men, women, and children in them. . . . Very many civilians [were] killed just inside their bunkers, if it wasn't from shrapnel wounds it was from fire where they were burned to death from the satchel charges used . . . .[66]

The defenders fought back as best they could, but the continuous mortar barrage prevented them from counterattacking to save the village. At the bridge, the RF company beat back a minor probe of its compound. CUPP 9 had 10 Marines wounded in the initial shelling, including the squad leader, the assistant squad leader, the radioman, and the corpsman. Nevertheless, the Marines and PFs managed to form a perimeter in the blazing village and hold their position. When it became evident that the enemy were concentrating their attack on the civilians and bypassing the CUPP, the PF *trung si* let most of his men go home to try to protect their families, but he himself stayed with the Marines, as did the PF radioman and mortar team.

At the 1st Platoon CP, Marines and PFs repelled a rush by a few of the sappers and answered the mortar barrage with their own 81mm and 60mm mortars. The platoon commander, First Lieutenant Thomas S. Miller, kept the 7th Marines Headquarters informed by radio of the progress of the battle and called for artillery and air support. The first rounds of friendly artillery began falling on suspected Communist positions 20 minutes after the attack started.

At about 0315, the enemy mortar fire temporarily slackened as the sappers began to withdraw from the village. Lieutenant Miller took advantage of the lull to send a squad from his CP into Phu Thanh to find and assist CUPP 9. To reach the CUPP, the squad had to work its way through a part of the village already devastated by the sappers. One of the Marines, Corporal Robert M. Mutchler, reported that "It was mostly on fire, the wounded were all over the area, screamin' and hollerin'."[67] The squad reached the CUPP team and in two trips brought the wounded Marines and PFs to the bridge to be picked up by helicopters. Then, accompanied by the platoon's Vietnamese interpreter, the squad plunged back into the burning hamlets and began urging the people to bring their wounded to the bridge. At the bridge, the interpreter and the Marines, "working very hard," separated the more severely injured and made the people understand that the more seriously hurt would be taken out first. By this time, the enemy mortars had resumed firing slowly to cover the retreat of the sappers.

The first medical evacuation helicopter from MAG-16 landed on the bridge around 0330 and lifted out all the Marines, PFs, and RFs wounded in the attack. Thereafter, a steady stream of helicopters came in, covered by two Cobra gunships, to take out the civilian wounded. According to Corporal Mutchler, "we medevaced some 60 to 70 civilians, and . . . more than half of them was emergency medevacs, amputees and half burnt to death." Lieutenant Miller said that:

> The pilots who came in to do the medevacing did the most outstanding job of any Marine pilots I've seen yet. They were coming in, some pilots came in, picked up part of a load and started to leave. When more came they sat back down, even when the zone was still relatively hot. . . . As one would pick up and leave another one would land . . . . I'm sure that they saved many lives that night.[68]

The mortar bombardment ended at about 0400, and by daylight all the severely wounded civilians had been evacuated and a team of doctors and corpsmen from LZ Baldy had reached Phu Thanh and had begun treating the minor casualties, over 100 in all. Colonel Derning, the 7th Marines commander, arrived at 0810 to assess the damage, followed at 1020 by Major General Widdecke. Within hours, the 1st Marine Division and the province government had emergency relief and reconstruction under way. The GVN, aided by the Marines, distributed food and supplies to meet the survivors' immediate needs and later provided tons of lumber and tin to rebuild the village.

There was much rebuilding to be done. The VC had destroyed 156 houses and damaged 35 more, most of them in Thanh My, the hardest hit of the village's hamlets. The attack had cost the Marines 10 men wounded, one of whom later died. Four Regional Force and two Popular Force soldiers had been wounded. Civilian casualties totalled 74 dead, many of them women and children; 60 severely injured; and over 100 lightly wounded. After the fight, the defenders found four dead VC in the wire around the RF compound and the 1st Platoon CP, and they rounded up one prisoner and one *Hoi Chanh.*

Soon after the attack, the Communists began spreading the report that their objective really had been the Ba Ren Bridge and that Phu Thanh and its people merely had been caught in the crossfire. Marines who had been there, however, had no doubt that the enemy deliberately had attacked the village. Lieutenant Miller summed up:

> There was no military objective involved in this attack. I say this because first of all there was only light enemy contact directly at the compound. The mortars were fired in such a manner as to restrain any military contact. The VC stayed pretty much out of the area CUPP 9 was operating in. . . . Also, the Ba Ren Bridge, which is a major line of communications on Route 1 was not hit; there was not even an attempt to blow this bridge up.[69]

On 30 August, the enemy launched a similar attack on a Buddhist orphanage and German hospital south of An Hoa. Again, the attack began with a mortar barrage. Then an estimated 30 NVA sappers "in full uniform" swept through the grounds hurling grenades and satchel charges and withdrawing before allied troops could arrive. They left behind 15 Vietnamese dead, many of them children, and 51 wounded.[70] The enemy, however, as their attempts to disavow the massacre at Phu Thanh indicated, evidently found such attacks politically embarrassing. During the autumn and winter they reverted to smaller scale and more selective terrorism.

Marines found Vietnamese civilian reaction to this violence varied and difficult to measure. At Phu Thanh, for instance, members of the CUPP felt that the attack of 11 June merely strengthened the villagers' loyalty to the GVN and friendship for the Marines. " They always gave us good intel [intelligence] before," one Marine observed, "and they're still giving us good intel now that it's over. . . . I just feel they [the enemy] turned the villagers against them, a lot more than they were before."[71] On the other hand, Major Grinalds concluded that the civilians in the 1st Marines' TAOR "have a high limit of tolerance to terror because, from what I've seen, they aren't ready yet to acknowledge that the threshold of pain had been reached and now they're ready to get rid of the VC."[72]

Vietnamization

"Vietnamization" entered the official vocabulary of U.S. military planning in November 1969, but the policy it denoted had been put into effect about a year before that. Essentially, Vietnamization involved enlargement of the size and improvement of the equipment, leadership, and training of the Vietnamese armed forces (RVNAF) to the point where they could defend their country with minimal U.S. support. This effort went forward under a series of RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Plans prepared by MACV and the JGS and approved by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and Department of Defense. The initial plans in 1968-1969 emphasized expansion of ground force manpower, with training and equipment receiving secondary priority, while the plans in effect during 1970 stressed improvement of Vietnamese air, naval, artillery, and supply capabilities so as to produce balanced regular and Regional or Popular Forces of 1,100,000 men by the end of Fiscal Year 1973.[73]

Beyond development of the RVNAF, the definition of Vietnamization often included the whole range of efforts to turn more of the war over to the Vietnamese. The 1st Marine Division, for example, defined Vietnamization as "the process by which the United States assists the GVN in strengthening its government, econ-

omy, and military and internal security forces in order to permit the United States to reduce its military and civilian involvement." The division included in Vietnamization most military and pacification activities, and it enjoined every unit and staff section to pay continual attention to the Vietnamization aspects of their missions.[74]

In Quang Nam, the military Vietnamization effort during 1970 centered on expansion and improvement of the RFs and PFs and on transfer of the defense of bridges, cantonments, and other vital installations from the Marines to the RVN, RF, and PF. The Marines also tried to persuade the ARVN to take over a TAOR of their own, replacing one of the redeploying Marine regiments.

No increase in regular forces was scheduled in Quang Nam for 1970, but by June the JGS had authorized recruitment in the province of 16 additional PF platoons and four more RF companies. By the end of the year, most of these units had been raised and were completing their training. Besides organizing these new units, QDSZ and Quang Nam Province authorities throughout 1970 tried to enlarge the military capabilities of the RFs and PFs so that they could defend populated areas largely independently of support from the regular army. The ARVN then could replace the redeploying American units in offensive operations. Accordingly, the province instituted classes for RF and PF artillery forward observers and began training one of the Regional Force battalions, the 101st, in battalion-size operations so that it could act as a mobile reserve for the Quang Nam Regional and Popular Forces.

III MAF took a major part in this training effort. The CAPs and CUPPs provided continuous instruction, both formal and informal, for their counterpart PF platoons. Between January and June, 75 PF NCOs graduated from the 1st Marine Division's NCO school. The division conducted quick-fire marksmanship courses for RF and PF soldiers and trained others, as well as men from the 51st ARVN Regiment, in minesweeping and electric generator operation (important in bridge and cantonment security to maintain power to searchlights and other defense devices). The Marines also began instructing ARVN and RFs and PFs in reconnaissance operations and the use of sensors.[75]

Throughout the year, the 1st Marine Division continually pressed Quang Da Special Zone and Quang Nam Province to take full charge of the protection of bridges, cantonments, and other vital installations guarded wholly or partially by Marines. The division also tried to transfer to the Vietnamese responsibility for the daily minesweeping patrols designed to keep the major highways safe for traffic. These negotiations, largely conducted in the QDSZ/1st Marine Division/2d ROKMC Brigade weekly conferences, proved slow and frustrating. The Vietnamese repeatedly urged postponements of their assumption of responsibility, pleading lack of men, equipment, and training. They often forced delay in removal of Marines from defense positions, and they fell weeks behind the schedule to which they had agreed for taking over the minesweeps.[76]

Marine Corps Historical Collection

ARVN soldiers with their young mascot participate in an operation near Da Nang. The Vietnamese, however, are reluctant to take over the Marine areas.

The transfer of defensive tasks to the Vietnamese went forward inexorably nevertheless, kept in motion by the steady diminution of U.S. Marine manpower as regiments redeployed. In February, Quang Nam Province forces replaced elements of the 1st Marines guarding four bridges south of Da Nang. During March, elements of the 51st ARVN Regiment assumed formal responsibility for the security of Hills 37 and 55, although Marine units continued to operate from both. On 21 June, the 1/25 RF Group took over defense of the Esso oil depot on the coast north of Da

Nang, replacing a company of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines. The Vietnamese assumed responsibility for the Cobb and Cau Do Bridges; major spans on the highways south of Da Nang, on 15 and 20 July, and on 1 August, the Regional Forces took full charge of the defense of Hai Van Pass. In September, RFs and PFs relieved elements of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines at Nam O Bridge, where Highway 1 crosses the Cu De River north of Da Nang. After long negotiations and many delays, a battalion of the 51st ARVN occupied what was left of An Hoa combat base in mid-October while Quang Nam RFs and PFs assumed security of Liberty Bridge.[77]

The Marines had less success in persuading the ARVN to assume an independent TAOR in Quang Nam. As a result of the divided command of the ARVN units in the province, III MAF had to deal with I Corps on this issue. Lieutenant General McCutcheon repeatedly pressed Lieutenant General Lam, the I Corps commander, to establish an all ARVN TAOR. In response, the I Corps staff late in July proposed that the corps reserve units in Quang Nam, the 1st Ranger Group and the 1st Armored Brigade, assume the 7th Marines' TAOR when that regiment redeployed. The same ARVN units were to replace the Marines at FSBs Ross and Ryder and LZ Baldy. McCutcheon welcomed this suggestion as a "big step forward in the Vietnamization process" and expressed the hope that it would lead to the 51st ARVN taking over the 5th Marines' TAOR as that regiment withdrew. The Vietnamese, however, in the end backed away from this drastic expansion of their responsibility. They preferred to keep the 51st in its area of operations with the 5th Marines and to maintain the freedom of action of the Rangers and the armored brigade. Eventually, the 5th Marines had to take over the TAOR of the 7th while the 51st ARVN would accept only a portion of An Hoa and a small area around it.[78]

The year ended with encouraging indications of progress in Vietnamization, but with the process far from complete. From Lieutenant General McCutcheon on down, most Marines and other Americans who worked closely with the ARVN agreed that the units in Quang Nam—the 51st Regiment, the 1st Ranger Group, and the 1st Armored Brigade—"were aggressive and competent." MACV, in its nationwide rating of the effectiveness of Vietnamese units, placed the 51st Regiment third in the country in number of enemy killed per battalion and second in weapons captured per battalion. The rangers and armored troops, although rarely committed in Quang Nam, fought well when they were.

The Regional and Popular Forces continued to vary in quality from unit to unit, but overall appeared to be improving. Continuous emphasis on aiding the RFs and PFs by III MAF and to a lesser extent by I Corps and XXIV Corps at last seemed to be producing results. In Quang Nam, the Regional and Popular Forces had become more aggressive during the year. Now, they frequently left their fortified compounds at night to patrol and ambush. By December, according to the province senior advisor, they were conducting almost 300 activities every night and averaging four to five contacts.[79]

Nevertheless, crucial deficiencies remained, most of which were representative of problems plaguing the RVNAF throughout South Vietnam. Quang Da Special Zone, like other Vietnamese higher commands, still was short of competent high-ranking officers. This problem became critical in August, when the able QDSZ commander, Colonel Nguyen Van Thien, died in a plane crash while flying to Saigon to receive a long-overdue promotion to brigadier general. Vietnamese military politics and bureaucratic inefficiency kept Thien's post unfilled for weeks, leaving no officer in the province able to deal authoritatively with III MAF and the 1st Marine Division.[80]

The ARVN division- and corps-level staffs left much to be desired. General McCutcheon complained in August that they had "little appreciation for the time and space factors involved in an operation, nor of the logistic effort required to support one."[81] Shortages of specialized equipment and people trained to operate it prevented Vietnamese assumption of road minesweeping and other tasks now performed by Americans. Quang Da Special Zone possessed no supply organization of its own, and logistic support at corps level suffered from division of authority between Lieutenant General Lam and the various staffs in Saigon. Most serious, the ARVN throughout I Corps, indeed throughout the country, lacked sufficient fixed-wing and helicopter squadrons to furnish their own air support.* MACV planners expected this deficiency to persist, even with accelerated expansion of the Vietnamese Air Force, until mid-1972.

The Regional and Popular Forces also had persistent weaknesses. Particularly at district and company

*As of 1 January 1971, the RVNAF possessed only five operationally ready helicopter squadrons, four equipped with UH-1s and one with H-34s. MACV ComdHist70, III, ch. 7, p.13.

level, they still lacked enough first-rate leaders. Further, in spite of their increased aggressiveness, they had yet fully to grasp the American concept of maintaining continuous pressure on the enemy.[82] Their efforts too often were sporadic. Their aggressive forays were interspersed with long periods of relative quiescence. Major Grinalds said that RFs and PFs:

> . . . .sometimes . . . like medieval forces, . . . stay in their compounds . . . for weeks at a time. Then suddenly their ramparts go up and they all go sallying forth on an operation and run out and get 15 VC on the basis of some good tip . . . . And then they go back into their fort and stay there for another six months.[83]

As 1970 ended, Vietnamization clearly was working, but it was working very slowly. With additional major Marine redeployments scheduled for early 1971, Americans and South Vietnamese alike were running out of time to finish the job.

Results, 1970

Throughout South Vietnam, pacification progress during 1970 failed to match the dramatic gains of the previous year. American advisors attributed this slowdown to South Vietnamese complacency over past successes, to diversion of GVN attention and resources to the operations in Cambodia, and to increased Viet Cong and North Vietnamese antipacification activities during spring and early summer.

To revive the lagging effort, President Thieu on 1 July promulgated a Special Pacification and Development Campaign to run until 31 October. He followed that with a Supplementary Pacification and Development Campaign, announced on 23 October, which was to begin on 1 November and continue through 28 February 1971. In theory, this fall and winter renewal of effort would establish momentum for the 1971 Pacification and Development Program, which would start on 1 March. The plans for these supplementary campaigns for the most part restated the goals of the 1970 Pacification and Development Plan, with emphasis on improving security and intensifying the attack on the VCI.[84]

By the end of the year, in spite of these plans and exhortations, the allies had fallen short of their goals on most of the Eight Objectives. Plans had called for bringing hamlets containing 100 percent of the population to at least the C level of security. According to the HES, 95.1 percent of the people lived in such hamlets in late 1970, while 84.6 percent, as opposed to the objective of 90 percent, enjoyed A- or B-level security. The allies had exceeded their goal of VCI neutralized (22,341 vs 21,600), but efforts to expand the national police had failed, leaving the force still 30,000 men under its planned strength. The arming and training of the PSDF combat force had gone according to schedule, but formation of the support force had lagged. Development of local government had gone well; as planned, about 3,000 villages and 14,000 hamlets had elected or reelected their officials. The *Chieu Hoi* program, on the other hand, had fallen 8,000 short of its target of 40,000 Communist defectors. Over 139,000 refugees, 70,000 fewer than planned, had received resettlement payments, and 388,000, which was 15,000 more than the goal, had received return-to-village assistance; but most of these in fact remained refugees and would require additional aid. Social and economic progress, as always, was slow. Only 50,900 hectares of land had been redistributed under the Land-to-the-Tiller Law, as against a goal of 200,000, and rice cultivation and expansion of rural banks had not met planned quotas.[85]

Pacification results in Quang Nam closely paralleled the national trends. With 68.2 percent of its population living in A- or B-rated hamlets, Quang Nam in December was one of the 10 lowest provinces in the nation in security.* On the positive side, it led all other provinces in VCI eliminated during the year, with 2,437 (III MAF figure) or 2,675 (the CORDS figure) dead, sentenced, or defected. This accounted for about 40 percent of the estimated VCI members in the province at the beginning of the year, but the enemy were believed to have replaced some of these losses by recruiting. How many of these enemy casualties could be credited to Phoenix/Phung Hoang remained questionable.[86] The conclusion of a MACV review committee on the nationwide anti-VCI program applied as well in Quang Nam:

> The reduction of overall VCI strength has been a result of the entire GVN and allied war effort. This had included the military success against the VC/NVA, the pacification program as a whole, the constitutional political structure and the economic revival in the countryside of Vietnam. Phoenix had to date contributed little to this reduction, although it has been an element of the overall program and during the past year had substantially increased its role against the VCI target.[87]

*Of the other provinces in I Corps, Quang Tri (93.5 percent) and Thua Thien (98.1 percent) were in the top 10 for security, while Quang Ngai was in the bottom 10 with 66.5 percent of its people in A or B hamlets. Quang Tin was in the middle group.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373322

Men of the 7th Marines in the Combined Unit Pacification Program escort a Vietnamese Chieu Hoi to their platoon command post in a village 22 miles south of Da Nang.

Elections for province, village, and hamlet governments during the year had produced real political contests for many posts and a large voter turnout, but fewer officials than planned had taken advantage of GVN training programs to improve their administrative skills. According to the province senior advisor, rapid turnover in the post of province training director, inadequate stipends for individuals travelling to the principal GVN training center at Vung Tau near Saigon, and the lack of either rewards for officials who took courses or demotions for those who did not had hindered instruction.[88]

During 1970, a total of 411 Viet Cong guerrillas, 45 North Vietnamese soldiers, and 600 nonmilitary Communist functionaries surrendered in Quang Nam under the Chieu Hoi program. This number represented a marked decline from the 2,000 defections reported in 1969. The reduced intensity of military contact during the year accounted for much of the drop, and, according to Colonel Hixson of the I Corps CORDS staff, "We're starting to get down to the hard core people now. . . . We've gotten all those that were easily swayed."[89]

The refugee situation showed little improvement during the year. In July, CORDS reported that 95,000 refugees in Quang Nam still had not received their basic benefit payments, and in September, the Ministry of Resettlement in Saigon, which had overspent its budget, cut off further funds to Quang Nam. In spite of the promising beginnings on Go Noi Island, actual return of refugees to their villages continued to be a slow, difficult process. Many areas still were not militarily secure enough for their people to return home, and some allied military forces, notably the Korean Marine brigade, actually discouraged refugees from resettling in their TAORs which complicated their defense problems. Even if security could be provided and they were permitted to go home, many of the people who had moved into the environs of Da Nang showed little desire to return to their original communities.[90]

In spite of these continuing frustrations, the allies in Quang Nam and throughout I Corps had made progress in pacification, but qualified observers disagreed on how much had been achieved. As early as May 1970, Lieutenant General Nickerson, recently returned from his tour in command of III MAF, told a briefing at HQMC:

> . . . [the Viet Cong] had lost the people war, as far as I'm concerned. People's war, the war of liberation, by definition and practice, is . . . where they can make a pass at a hamlet and the people inside in the infrastructure uprise and cause a change—boot out the good guys and take over with the bad guys. Well, in the north [of I Corps] that . . . infrastructure is mostly in the hills, in the two northern provinces. In the three southern, there's a little more present every day, but it has to be very careful when it surfaces because of the increase in territorials and confidence of the people that they're going to win. . . . In short I'm confident that we've . . . got 'em right where you want 'em . . . .[91]

Later in the year, Sir Robert Thompson, one of the architects of the successful British counterinsurgency campaign in Malaya, and long a critic of American conduct of the war in Vietnam, visited many parts of the country including Quang Nam. He concluded from what he observed that "it was quite clear that continued progress had been made in both the Pacification and Vietnamization programmes during the year, so that the 1969 gains were expanded and consolidated."[92]

Lieutenant General McCutcheon took a more cautious view, particularly on the question of whether the allies were winning the people's loyalty for the GVN. In a report to Lieutenant General Sutherland, he evaluated conditions in Quang Nam:

> Despite election turn-out and improved ratings in the Hamlet Evaluation System, we must accept the fact that a large portion of the Quang Nam people are apathetic toward the GVN. For that matter they would be equally apathetic toward any government, free or Communist. Their lives are simply devoted to existing. I doubt that many people, not directly involved in government or military business at a relatively high level, are aware of Vietnamization. Those who are aware of it almost certainly consider it a euphemism for U.S. withdrawal.[93]

After five years of large-scale American involvement in the war, by the end of 1970 the allies had put into effect a broad pacification strategy that appeared to be succeeding, but with painful slowness in difficult areas like Quang Nam. Security efforts had reduced Communist control of the villages and hamlets and with it the enemy's ability to draw support from the people. The South Vietnamese, at national, province, and local levels, had begun to establish a stable, elected non-Communist regime. Yet for the Marines and South Vietnamese in Quang Nam, as for allied forces all over the country, time was running out. Redeployments during 1970 had diminished American ability to assist in pacification as in other aspects of the war effort. These redeployments would continue and accelerate during 1971, and the South Vietnamese, ready or not, would soon have to assume a much larger share of both combat and pacification.

PART IV
WINDING UP AND WINDING DOWN

CHAPTER 10

Allied Strategic and Redeployment Plans for 1971

Military and Pacification Plans for 1971—Final Plans for Redeployment and the MAB
A New Commander for III MAF—Military Situation in Quang Nam and Military Region 1, Early 1971

Military and Pacification Plans for 1971

Late in 1970, as U.S. and South Vietnamese staffs prepared their plans for the following year, the Southeast Asian war gave evidence of simultaneous de-escalation and escalation. Within South Vietnam itself, the level of combat was declining as the allies concentrated on pacification, the Americans withdrew, and the Communists reverted to guerrilla warfare. On the other hand, the U.S. and ARVN sweep of the enemy's Cambodian bases, continuing ARVN operations and growing internal war in Cambodia, and increasingly heavy American air attacks on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos pointed toward an expanded allied effort to wreck the Communists' cross-border bases, thereby reducing the enemy's ability to reintensify the war in South Vietnam.

The allied Combined Campaign Plan for 1971, promulgated on 31 October 1970 by the South Vietnamese, American, and allied commanders, reflected the changing trends of the war. Generally, the plan restated the allied strategy of the previous year, with increased emphasis on the RVNAF's assuming the tasks hitherto performed by the redeploying Americans, who would continue and accelerate their withdrawal. Under the plan, the ARVN and allied regular units were to operate primarily against main forces and base areas, and the ARVN in addition were to attack Communist forces in "authorized areas," i.e. Cambodia and Laos. The plan restated the established mission of the Regional and Popular Forces, People's Self Defense Force, and national police, assigning them to protect populated areas and support pacification.

Allied forces were to measure their progress during the year in terms of nine objectives: participation in the 1971 pacification campaign; improvement of the RVNAF "to achieve a maximum state of combat effectiveness"; employment of the RVNAF according to its assigned missions and capabilities; the infliction of "more losses on the enemy than he can replace"; denial to the enemy of the use of base areas and logistic systems within South Vietnam and adjacent countries; restoration and protection of roads and railways in South Vietnam; keeping food and other resources out of Communist hands; increasing intelligence and counterintelligence efforts; and neutralization of the Viet Cong Infrastructure "to the maximum extent possible."[1]

The XXIV Corps/MR 1 Combined Campaign Plan, promulgated on 29 December 1970, closely followed the national plan. It placed great emphasis on continuing U.S. redeployments and on improvement and modernization of the South Vietnamese forces so that they could "become self sufficient and capable of assuming the entire responsibility for the conduct of the war." The plan called for increased allied efforts to protect the people and control resources, "particularly at night"; continued training of ARVN, RFs, and PFs; and the provision of "responsive" support to province chiefs in their struggle to wipe out the VCI. Having experienced considerable success during 1970 in eliminating the VCI in Quang Nam, the plan called for the allies to intensify this effort while anticipating the enemy's increased attempts to reestablish his depleted military and political infrastructure at the hamlet and village level. The local plan also reiterated the assignment of missions to regulars, RFs, and PFs made in the national plan. In a variant on earlier plans, the XXIV Corps/MR 1 plan declared that the Regional Forces were to be employed under direction of the province chiefs in offensive operations against enemy provincial or local units. Only in the "most compelling cases" were RFs to be given static defense assignments. The 1971 plan also restated the Area Security Concept of the 1970 plan, under which each province was divided into heavily populated and relatively peaceful Secure Areas and Consolidation Zones controlled by the province chief, and more thinly populated and enemy-infested Clearing Zones and Border Surveillance Zones under ARVN or allied tactical unit commanders.[2]

The most significant new element in both national and regional military plans was a change in the definition of the role of U.S. units from conducting operations on their own to supporting and assisting South Vietnamese forces. This change was closely related to the Area Security Concept. On 1 January 1971, allied units ceased to have Tactical Areas of Responsibility

(TAORs). Instead, they received Tactical Areas of Interest (TAOIs), which normally encompassed about the same terrain as their old TAORs. Only ARVN commands now would have TAORs, and they would be responsible for assigning Areas of Operation (AOs) to allied units, usually in Clearing or Border Surveillance Zones.

This meant that in I Corps/MR 1, the TAOR commander became Lieutenant General Lam, while XXIV Corps had a TAOI which included all of the military region. Each subordinate command under XXIV Corps received a TAOI consisting of its former TAOR. III MAF's TAOI, for example, continued to be Quang Nam Province. Marine units would defend and patrol more or less where they had defended and patrolled before, but now within AOs granted by Quang Da Special Zone. This change involved more of an alteration of terminology and staff procedures than of day-to-day field operations, thus giving expression to the primacy of South Vietnamese responsibility for the conduct of the war. The change also forced ARVN headquarters to assume more of the burden of planning and directing operations.[3]

Soon after the issuance of the military plans, the South Vietnamese government, on 7 January 1971, issued its pacification and development plan for the new year. Breaking with past practice, the government called the document its "Community Defense and Local Development Plan" for 1971. This change of name was intended to dramatize the government's contention that, since most of the South Vietnamese people now lived under government control, "pacification" had been largely completed and the country now should emphasize development.

Instead of the Eight Objectives of the 1970 plan, the 1971 plan had only three: Self-Defense, Self-Government, and Self-Development. Each title, as in past plans, embraced a number of continuing programs. Self-Defense included efforts to improve village security, with the goal of having 95 percent of the people living in A or B hamlets by the end of the year. This goal also continued attempts to improve the national police and embraced the Chieu Hoi Program and the Phoenix/Phung Hoang effort, which in 1970 neutralized 2,437 VCI in Quang Nam, representing an estimated 40 percent of the enemy agents in the province. Self-Government covered training programs for local officials, encouragement of popular self-help organizations, and a campaign to instill in the South Vietnamese people an "increased awareness of the meaning of democracy." Under Self-Development were grouped such programs as land reform, aid to refugees and war victims, and activities to improve agriculture and fisheries and help villages develop their own economies, all aimed "at committing all the people to the effort of developing the economy and the society so that progress toward self-sufficiency could be obtained." MACV endorsed the new pacification plan, instructing subordinate U.S. commanders to give "full support" to its implementation.[4]

Final Plans for Redeployment and the MAB

During the last months of 1970, the staffs of III MAF and its subordinate commands continued to be preoccupied with planning for additional redeployments and for the organization and activation of the 3d Marine Amphibious Brigade. The two problems continued to be closely linked. Removal of all Marines from redeployment Increment V (Keystone Robin Bravo) had forced postponement of the activation of the MAB, initially scheduled for early fall. Instead, activation now was to occur after completion of Increment VI (Keystone Robin Charlie), which was to begin on 1 January 1971 and include the 12,400 Marines originally slated for Robin Bravo. III MAF now expected the MAB, which would consist of the Marines remaining after Robin Charlie, to begin operations in late April 1971.

Both the organization and the overall mission of the MAB had taken shape by autumn 1970, after almost a year of discussion, although there were still unresolved problems concerning exact composition. The brigade, with a total strength of about 12,600 Marines, was to have a ground component built around the 1st Marines and an air element consisting of an as yet undetermined mixture of aircraft types. III MAF planners were working on the assumption that the brigade, when activated, would have the general mission of protecting the Da Nang area. They were uncertain, however, how large the MAB TAOR* was to be. XXIV Corps had not yet stated definitely whether American or other allied units would be sent to Quang Nam to augment the dwindling Marine forces. The MAF and division staffs, accordingly, had to base their plans for MAB ground operations on the assumption that the brigade might have to defend the entire 1st Marine Division TAOR.[5]

*The change in terminology from TAOR to TAOI had not yet been made, and until January 1971, Americans continued to talk about TAORs.

In Washington during the autumn, the Marine Corps came under pressure in the Joint Chiefs of Staff to keep the 3d MAB in Vietnam longer than originally planned. The question of the length of the brigade's stay in the country arose in connection with plans for the Transitional Support Force (TSF), which would remain in Vietnam after most U.S. troops had withdrawn. This force was to provide combat and combat service support to the South Vietnamese until they achieved complete military self-sufficiency, or until the war ended, whichever happened first. The TSF would consist of about 255,000 U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force personnel, including nine Army infantry brigades. As had happened during the planning for Keystone Robin Alpha, the Army reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in late October that shortages of men and money might prevent it from furnishing those nine brigades without reducing its forces elsewhere. The Joint Chiefs, in an effort to relieve the Army without reducing the TSF, then suggested to the Services, and to MACV and CinCPac, substitution of the 3d MAB for one of the Army brigades and its supporting units. This substitution, if made, could keep the Marine brigade in Vietnam until the end of Fiscal Year 1972, 30 June 1972, as much as a year beyond its intended departure date of 30 June 1971.

The proposal met strong objections from the Marine Corps, which pointed out that its budgets and manpower planning were based on continuing the previously established rate of redeployment. Keeping the MAB in Vietnam for an extra year would force reduction of other Marine Corps capabilities. Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., CinCPac, also objected. He stated that retention of the MAB in Vietnam would delay reestablishment of the projected Pacific reserve of two full Marine division-wing teams, one based in Okinawa, Japan, and Hawaii and the other in California.[6]

General Abrams passed the proposal on to Lieutenant General Sutherland, the XXIV Corps commander. On 9 November, Sutherland urged that the MAB not be included in the Transitional Support Force. While expressing his "complete confidence and professional admiration" for the Marines, he pointed out that communications and command problems would result from retaining a Marine Service component command that late in the redeployment process and that, if retained, the MAB would require additional Army logistic support. Sutherland also noted that a Marine brigade was larger by about 4,000 men than a typical Army brigade and included an air as well as a ground element. Keeping the MAB would force additional reductions in the other Service components to compensate for the Marine aviation personnel.[7] In spite of all these objections, the possibility of adding the MAB to the TSF remained open until the last days of 1970, because MACV and CinCPac, while reluctant to have the Marine brigade, would accept it rather than reduce the total strength of the transitional force.[8]

With the issue of retaining the MAB and the question of the size of the MAB TAOR still unresolved, General Abrams on 3 November directed III MAF, with the other U.S. Service commands, to submit its list of units to be withdrawn in Increment VI. Of the 60,000 Americans to be withdrawn in this increment, III MAF, as planned earlier, was to furnish 12,400, one regimental landing team with aviation and support units.[9]

The MACV request for a definitive troop list for Increment VI forced III MAF to make an immediate and final decision on the composition of the 3d MAB, since by process of elimination the redeployment troop list would consist of the units not wanted in the brigade. Accordingly, on 5 November, Lieutenant General McCutcheon held a conference of commanders and staff officers of the wing, division, and Force Logistic Command. He informed the assembled officers that, with the MACV demand for a troop list in hand, "the time had come for a decision on the structure of the MAB." By this time, the III MAF staff had developed seven different possible organizations for the MAB. Most of these included varying reductions of the fixed-wing aviation element, to allow retention of all or a portion of a fourth infantry battalion. Two of the alternatives called for an increase in total MAB strength to 13,600 to make room for both a fixed-wing air group and the additional infantry.[10]

At the 5 November conference, McCutcheon announced his selection of Alternative Six. As originally drafted, this plan increased the brigade to 13,600 men to permit retention of two jet squadrons and the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. McCutcheon, however, decided to eliminate the jet squadrons and their air group, MAG-11, leaving a MAB of 12,600 with four full infantry battalions, a military police battalion, and a strong helicopter group, but no fixed-wing aviation except a detachment of OV-10s. The III MAF commander explained that he expected the operating life of the MAB to be short and believed, as he had since

late July, that the brigade would need extra infantry to defend Da Nang more than it would need the jet squadrons and their controlling MAG. Many of the missions flown by the jets, he pointed out, would be in support of non-Marine forces, and the administrative and support units required by the squadrons would absorb too much of the brigade's authorized manpower.

Major General Armstrong, the 1st MAW commander, and Major General Widdecke, the 1st Division commander, both concurred in McCutcheon's decision to eliminate the fixed-wing air units. Armstrong said that "MAG-11 [fixed wing] would be a real problem to redeploy concurrently with MAG-16 [helicopters] in a 60-day period [the expected length of time the MAB would be operating]." General Widdecke observed that McCutcheon's proposed organization would be sufficient for 60 days, but thought that if the brigade remained in Vietnam longer than that, it should have its own fixed-wing support. Both Widdecke and his assistant division commander, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, also expressed concern for the "political" and doctrinal implications of forming a MAB that was not a fully balanced air-ground command.[11]

McCutcheon transmitted his proposed MAB organization to Lieutenant General Jones, commander of FMFPac, on the 5th, with a Keystone Robin Charlie troop list derived from it. The list included only two battalions of the 5th Marines, but all the remaining jet squadrons, with the headquarters and support units of MAG-11. McCutcheon repeated to Jones his belief in keeping the MAB strong in infantry while getting rid of aircraft that would impose a heavy logistic and administrative burden and, given the expected mission of the brigade, were not likely to be required for support. McCutcheon stated that artillery and helicopter gunships could provide adequate firepower for most probable contingencies and that in the unlikely event fixed-wing assistance were needed, the U.S. Air Force could furnish it.[12]

On 7 November, Lieutenant General Jones sent McCutcheon's proposal on to HQMC. Jones endorsed the III MAF commander's plan to eliminate the fixed-wing component of the MAB, with the qualification that if the brigade were included in the Transitional Support Force it would need its own jets. The Commandant, General Chapman, rejected the III MAF plan. Chapman informed FMFPac that the MAB should be organized so that it could remain operational for a long period, since the Joint Chiefs of Staff still were considering inclusion of the MAB in the TSF. Also, Chapman pointed out, combat could intensify between the first of the year and the departure of the last Marines. Hence, the Commandant ordered that at least two jet squadrons be included in the MAB, so that it would constitute a complete air-ground team prepared for all contingencies.

Accordingly, McCutcheon then adopted another of the alternative brigade organizations developed by his staff. Under this plan, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines was dropped from the MAB, and MAG-11, with one squadron of A-4s and one of A-6s, put back in. On 8 November, McCutcheon sent MACV his troop list for Increment VI, reflecting this revision of his plan for the MAB. The list included all of the 5th Marines; the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines; four helicopter squadrons; one jet squadron; and a proportional assortment of supporting units. The major air and ground units were to begin standing down from combat in mid-February.[13]

While the composition of the MAB was being determined, the 1st Marine Division staff, under the direction of General Simmons, was completing a proposed concept of operations for the brigade. General Simmons, a combat veteran of World War II and Korea, had been G-3 of III MAF and then commander of the 9th Marines during 1965 and 1966. After a tour at Headquarters as Deputy Fiscal Director of the Marine Corps, he returned to Vietnam in July 1970, with the dual role of assistant division commander and commander-designate of the 3d MAB. For MAB planning, Simmons acted as an advisor to General McCutcheon on overall brigade matters and also advised General Widdecke on 1st Marine Division plans for the ground element of the MAB.[14]

On 11 November, Simmons submitted his proposed plan to General Widdecke. The concept of operations was based on the assumption that the brigade would have to defend the entire 1st Marine Division TAOR and that a decision would not be made "until the eleventh hour" on whether the MAB would be included in the TSF. The division planners also assumed that no major new ARVN or allied units would be sent to Quang Nam to replace the Marines.

Under the proposed concept of operations, the brigade was to keep one infantry battalion in the Que Sons, probably based at Baldy. Of the remaining two battalions of the 1st Marines, one would operate west of Da Nang and the other south of the city and air-

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800156

LtGen Donn J. Robertson visits Combined Action Marines. Gen Robertson relieved the ailing LtGen Keith B. McCutheon as Commanding General, III MAF.

field. In order to cover the area with fewer Marines, the battalions would have to operate in what the plan called "a highly mobile expeditionary mode." Ideally, each battalion would have only one permanent base to be defended and would keep two of its companies continually in the field while a third acted as a helicopter-borne quick reaction force and the fourth, resting after a period in the field, would protect the battalion base. The battalions would use tactics similar to those already being employed by the 5th Marines, combining reconnaissance and infantry patrols with heliborne QRFs, artillery, and air strikes. In the Rocket Belt, increased reconnaissance activity and use of aerial observers would have to replace much of the saturation infantry patrolling done by Marines, but in view of the apparent weakness of the enemy and of the improvement of the Regional and Popular Forces, the division planners considered this an acceptable risk. The whole plan was designed:

> . . . to optimize the performance of the ground element of the MAB in the event of an extended stay and continued responsibility for the present area of operations, in other words, the extreme case. However, the concept is adaptable to a smaller AO and will, by lightening the logistic load, expedite the early departure of the brigade if such eventuates.[15]

The success of the operating concept for the MAB would be greatly influenced by the ability of the South Vietnamese to compensate for reduced Marine presence and patrolling with intensified operations of their own. During 1970 the CAPs had focused on training their Vietnamese counterparts to operate independently and aggressively.[16]

Major General Widdecke approved the plan and on 14 November passed it on to Lieutenant General McCutcheon. McCutcheon delayed his response while he tried to obtain from XXIV Corps a firm statement of the Army's intentions on reinforcing Quang Nam. By late November, he had received definite information from XXIV Corps that the MAB would be relieved of responsibility for the 5th Marines' area of operation when that regiment redeployed and that another American or allied force would move into the Que Sons. With this assurance finally in hand, McCutcheon, on 28 November, approved the division's proposed MAB concept of operation. He directed, however, that "planning should be based on [the] assumption [that the] MAB AO will be the current 1st Mar[ine] Div[ision] AO, less 5th Mar[ines] AO . . . . [17]

Late in December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff removed the second uncertainty clouding plans for the MAB by deciding that it would not require the brigade for the Transitional Support Force. This permitted the Marines to plan on redeploying the brigade by 30 June 1971. By the end of the year, the MAF, division, and wing staffs were well into the complicated process of working out stand-down and redeployment schedules for both Increment VI and Increment VII. They also were establishing detailed procedures for activating the MAB headquarters by transferring key members of the MAF, division, and wing staffs.[18]

The decision to have the last Marines out of Vietnam by the end of June 1971 meant that the 3d MAB really would never function as an operational command. Its principal task would be redeploying its subordinate units, some of which were scheduled to stand down almost as soon as the MAB was activated. This fact, and the administrative problems likely to attend the last phase of redeployment, raised a question in the mind of Major General Armstrong, the 1st MAW commander, about the desirability of establishing a MAB at all.

On 15 December, Armstrong, in temporary command of III MAF after McCutcheon's unexpected early departure for health reasons, sent a message to Lieutenant General Jones. Armstrong pointed out to the commander of FMFPac that if the MAB were to leave Vietnam by 30 June, "Increment Seven stand-down will, in fact, merge with and overlap Increment Six, with two air groups to be redeployed in the final increment, aviation problems would predominate during the MAB's short lifespan." Armstrong declared that solution of many of these problems would require dealings with the Seventh Air Force, which had partial control of Marine fixed-wing squadrons under the single-management system. He also questioned whether a brigade headquarters under a one-star general could effectively represent Marine interests in these circumstances. He suggested, therefore, that instead of the MAB, a reduced III MAF Headquarters under a major general, or preferably a lieutenant general, remain until 30 June.

Lieutenant General Jones adopted Armstrong's proposal. Jones suggested on 22 December that a small III MAF (Rear) stay in Vietnam instead of the brigade, with a major general in command. By the end of the year, III MAF had developed a table of organization for such a headquarters, to be staffed by 112 Marine and 6 Navy officers and 195 Marine and 5 Navy enlisted men.[19]

In mid-January 1971, General Chapman brought this planning to an abrupt end. On a visit to the Pacific which included stops at FMFPac and III MAF, the Commandant directed that the original program be adhered to and that 3d MAB be activated after the MAF, wing, and division redeployed. With Chapman's decision, the much-planned and often-postponed brigade was at last assured at least a short period of existence.[20]

A New Commander for III MAF

In late October 1970, General Chapman announced plans to replace Lieutenant General McCutcheon as commander of III MAF with Major General Donn J. Robertson, then serving at Headquarters as Director of the Marine Corps Reserve. The change of command was to take place around 1 January 1971, after the Senate had confirmed Robertson's promotion to lieutenat general. In mid-November, General McCutcheon, after consultation with MACV, XXIV Corps, and FMFPac, set 2 January as the date for the transfer, after which McCutcheon would leave immediately for Washington. There, he was to be promoted to general and succeed General Lewis W. Walt as Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps.[21]

McCutcheon's failing health disrupted these plans and forced an earlier change of command. Before coming out to III MAF the year before, McCutcheon had undergone extensive surgery for cancer. Seemingly recovered, he had been able to assume command in Vietnam and carry out his duties. But, as McCutcheon's predecessor at III MAF, Lieutenant General Nickerson, later put it, "Sooner or later it wasn't all gone and it got him."[22]

During November, McCutcheon came down with a persistent mild fever. "It doesn't amount to a whale of a lot," he wrote to a friend, "but it keeps me pretty well locked up in the quarters and prevents me from getting around the countryside, which is really what I love to do." McCutcheon finally went on board the hospital ship USS *Sanctuary* (AH 17) for tests. The results indicated that his cancer might be flaring up again. On 11 December, after returning from the *Sanctuary*, McCutcheon called together his general officers and told them that, on the doctors' recommendation, he would be leaving on the 13th for Washington to enter Bethesda Naval Hospital for additional tests. General Simmons recalled the departure:

> His plane left at 0755 on Sunday the 13th. It was a fine bright morning with a fresh breeze blowing. General McCutcheon had asked that there be no departure ceremony, but there was no preventing a spontaneous, sincere send-off. Always slight, he looked gaunt and tired as he shook hands and said goodbye.*[23]

After General McCutcheon's departure, Major General Alan J. Armstrong, commander of the 1st MAW, took over temporarily as acting commander of III MAF. Lieutenant General Robertson, following hasty Senate confirmation of his new rank, hurried his move to Vietnam and reached Da Nang on 23 December. He took command on the 24th. Robertson, a North Dakotan who had earned the Navy Cross on Iwo Jima, was already familiar with the III MAF TAOR, having commanded the 1st Marine Division in the same area from June 1967 through June 1968. This experience, combined with a close acquaintanceship with General Abrams, which had developed during his earlier Vietnam tour, allowed Robertson to take

*The new tests indicated that the cancer had revived. Too ill to assume his post as Assistant Commandant, McCutcheon was placed on the retired list on 1 July 1971 with the rank of general. He died of cancer on 13 July 1971.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373799

Troops from the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines wait for helicopters to take them from their old base in the Que Son Mountains to Hill 34 near Da Nang; as the battalion began standing down for redeployment. Part of the old defenses can be seen in the background.

charge easily in spite of his rushed assumption of command.[24]

Military Situation in Quang Nam and Military Region 1, Early 1971

Lieutenant General Robertson assumed command of a force less than half the size of the III MAF McCutcheon had taken over 10 months earlier. III MAF, which had contained almost 60,000 men in early 1970, in January 1971 included about 24,700 Marines and about 1,000 Navy personnel. Major General Widdecke's 1st Marine Division had only two of its infantry regiments, the 1st and 5th Marines, and roughly two-thirds of its artillery regiment, the 11th Marines, about 12,000 troops in all, with which to protect Da Nang and scour the Que Son Mountains. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, under Major General Armstrong, consisted of one fixed-wing group, Colonel Albert C. Pommerenk's MAG-11, based at Da Nang, and one helicopter group, MAG-16 under Colonel Lewis C. Street III, operating from Marble Mountain. The 6,100 Marines of the wing flew and maintained a total of 74 fixed-wing aircraft and 111 helicopters. Force Logistic Command, under Brigadier General James R. Jones, had shrunk to some 3,800 officers and men, most of them engaged in preparing for the redeployment of additional troops and equipment. Lieutenant Colonel John J. Tolnay's 2d Combined Action Group, with about 600 Marines, continued its hamlet defense activities throughout much of Quang Nam, operating with 34 combined action platoons in January and February.[25]

As their numbers decreased, the Marines were turning more and more of the responsibility for defending Quang Nam over to the province's South Vietnamese RFs and PFs. On 1 January 1971, the Viet-

namese Joint General Staff redesignated Quang Da Special Zone, the controlling ARVN headquarters in Quang Nam, as the 1st Mobile Brigade Task Force and gave the task force operational control of the 51st Infantry Regiment, the three-battalion 1st Ranger Group, a squadron from the 1st Armored Brigade, and the 78th and 79th Border Ranger Defense Battalions. The latter were the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups at Nong Son and Thuong Duc, redesignated and incorporated into the regular army. The 1st Task Force also received a new commander, Colonel Nguyen Trong Luat, former assistant division commander of the 2d ARVN Division.* This redesignation of QDSZ represented another step in the effort, long sponsored and aided by III MAF, to develop an effective tactical headquarters for all the ARVN troops in Quang Nam. As 1971 began, the 51st Regiment, the principal ground unit of the 1st Task Force, had its battalions in the field around An Hoa and Hills 37 and 55. The Rangers and the armored squadron, still regarded as part of the I Corps reserve, continued to spend most of their time in camp around Da Nang.[26]

Like Quang Da Special Zone, the 1st Task Force had operational control of the RFs and PFs in Quang Nam, control which it exercised through the province and Da Nang city authorities. The Regional Forces in early 1971 numbered about 7,800 effectives in 54 operational companies, and the Popular Forces about 6,400 men in 202 separate platoons. This was about the maximum militia strength which the province could maintain. Hence, the South Vietnamese authorities planned no additional units for the coming year. They would concentrate instead on bringing the existing ones to full strength.** The RFs and PFs were now acquiring their own artillery, under a nationwide program begun during 1970. By 6 January 1971, three RF platoons of 105mm howitzers, with their own sector headquarters and fire direction center, had deployed in Quang Nam. The province PSDF continued to display much promise and some real strength, with about 13,500 armed members in the field at the beginning of the year. To improve the training of the militia and for better coordination of village defense, Quang Nam Province and the 1st Task Force were planning to subdivide each district into several areas of operation, each under a RF company commander. The company commander would be responsible for training the PFs and PSDF within his AO and would have operational control of them "on a mission required basis."[27]

Lieutenant General Robertson, as he took over his new command, found Quang Nam seemingly much more peaceful and secure than it had been during his earlier tour with the 1st Marine Division. He observed:

> I really was going right back home. I was going back to the same area that I was familiar with . . . . I recognized progress in the war, favorable progress . . . . Not as many enemy forces around. They really had pulled away from that area considerably. More work being done in the fields . . . . It just seemed to me to be a feeling of more security in the hamlets and villages around that area . . . . Security wise the people were cooperating . . . .[28]

While the relative quiescence of the enemy in Quang Nam was a fact, Marines differed in their assessments of what it meant. The more optimistic observers argued that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, short of men and supplies, and suffering from declining discipline and morale, simply were not capable of much beyond occasional terrorism and hit-and-run attacks. Some Marines also assumed another cause of declining activity was the flood in October-November which temporarily disrupted VC/NVA command and control networks and lines of communication, much as it had done with the allies in Quang Nam. Others, including Major John S. Grinalds, S-2 of the 1st Marines, felt that the Communists were following a calculated strategy. Grinalds believed that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese wanted the U.S. withdrawal to proceed on schedule. The enemy would engage in enough military activity, for example firing rockets at Da Nang, to keep both Vietnamese civilians and the American public aware that the war was still going on; but they would not make attacks of sufficient strength to constitute a serious threat to allied forces and justify slowing down the removal of American troops. Grinalds expected the enemy to bide their time, building up their supply stockpiles, and recruit

*Colonel Nguyen Van Thien, who had done much to build QDSZ into an effective tactical headquarters, had been killed in a plane crash in August 1970, and was finally replaced by Colonel Phan Hoa Hiep. On 1 January 1971, Hiep went to Saigon to command the Armor Corps and Luat succeeded him as commander, 1st Task Force.

**The actual strength of the RFs and PFs in the field often was much below their authorized strength. In Quang Nam in March 1971, for instance, these were the authorized and actual numbers:

	Authorized	Present for Duty
RF	8,644	7,820
PF	7,070	6,417

—CG XXIV Corps msg to PSAs of Quang Nam and Quang Ngai, dtd 4May71, Box 25, Fldr 26, RG 319 (72A6443), FRC, Suitland, Md.

more guerrillas and VCI members, while they weakened civilian confidence in the South Vietnamese Government by continued terrorism and propaganda. Then, as Grinalds put it, "in July, when we finally stepped out, they could come in with their main force units and either act politically or militarily to . . . control the area."[29]

The enemy throughout I Corps appeared to be committed to low-intensity warfare through terrorism and small hit-and-run attacks. Early in 1971, Lieutenant General Sutherland, the XXIV Corps commander, described the situation for the new commanding general of the 101st Airborne Division:

> There has been a marked change in the enemy's strategy and tactics during the past year. Logistical problems and allied firepower, among other things, have made maneuvering of large enemy troop units impractical, if not impossible, and have caused emphasis to be shifted in the main to small unit and guerrilla tactics. Enemy units generally seek to avoid contact, . . . until they perceive a condition wherein a FWMAF [Free World Military Armed Forces] unit or installation becomes careless and vulnerable. Then they strike quickly and fade away again. Rarely will an enemy unit stand and fight, even against a small opposing force . . . .[30]

As always, the Demilitarized Zone seemed to allied commanders to be the one area where the enemy could most easily shift suddenly from guerrilla tactics to large-unit warfare. As 1971 began, reports from a variety of intelligence sources indicated that the North Vietnamese might be planning to do just that. The enemy was moving more troops, weapons, and supplies into their Laotian base areas north and west of the DMZ, in easy reach of Quang Tri and Thua Thien, the two vulnerable northern provinces of MR 1. In response to these indications of a possible enemy offensive, by the start of the new year, MACV and XXIV Corps had begun planning a preemptive attack on the Laotian base areas. These plans, about which III MAF as yet knew nothing, were to culminate in one of the largest, most controversial allied offensives of the war.[31]

CHAPTER 11

Marines in Operation Lam Son 719

The Preemptive Strike: Lam Son 719—Marine Fixed Wing Air Support and the ASRT
Marine Helicopters Over Laos—Marine Trucks on Route 9—Diversion Off Vinh—Results of Lam Son 719

The Preemptive Strike: Lam Son 719

During late 1970, the evidence that the North Vietnamese were preparing for a major offensive in northern Military Region 1 became increasingly persuasive. U.S. aerial reconnaissance recorded a growing movement of men and vehicles down the Ho Chi Minh Trail network into the Laotian base areas north and west of the Demilitarized Zone. Pilots flying bombing missions over the trail encountered reinforced antiaircraft defenses. Reports from agents and prisoner interrogations contained frequent mention of a large-scale attack sometime between the beginning of the new year and the middle of the summer.[1]

These signs of a coming Communist offensive spurred MACV to revive plans made earlier in the war for an attack into Laos from northwest Quang Tri Province. Beginning in 1966, General William C. Westmoreland, then ComUSMACV, had had his staff develop a series of plans for an American and ARVN offensive, possibly in cooperation with Laotian or Thai forces, to block the Ho Chi Minh Trail where it skirted the western end of the DMZ. In spite of repeated requests Westmoreland never received permission to carry out these plans.[2]

Late in 1970, General Abrams, Westmoreland's former deputy and successor, proposed a raid into Laos, both to forestall the threatened North Vietnamese offensive and to disrupt the enemy's supply system while more U.S. troops redeployed. Precedent for cross-border operations had been set with the incursion into Cambodia and, early in January 1971, Washington agreed to a limited preemptive strike. On 7 January, under direction from MACV, small planning groups from I Corps and XXIV Corps, working in tight secrecy, began developing a detailed concept of operations. General Abrams approved this plan on 16 January.[3]

Following General Abram's approval, planning for the operation proceeded with continued secrecy. Colonel Verle E. Ludwig, whose boss at the time was Army Colonel Bob Leonard, the MACV Information Officer, recalled that Leonard sold Abrams on the idea that the "story should be embargoed for the press." To serve as another layer of deception as the planning continued, "the MACV staff (and others) devised code names for places in Laos, to make it appear that the operation was only going into the Khe Sanh and A Shau Valley areas." Ludwig himself was "never cut in on the fact that the operation actually was going over into Laos" despite his having to give "a daily briefing to the press at the press billet in downtown Saigon . . . ."[4]

The plan called for a four-phase operation, codenamed Lam Son 719. I Corps was to direct most of the ground campaign while XXIV Corps commanded all the U.S. forces involved and controlled the fixed-wing and helicopter air support on which the whole offensive would depend. In Phase One, to begin on 30 January and be completed by 7 February, elements of the American 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) and the 101st Airborne Division were to reopen and secure Route 9, the main east-west road through Quang Tri, from its junction with Route 1 at Dong Ha, west to the Laotian border. The XXIV Corps units would occupy the site of the former Marine base at Khe Sanh, unoccupied since 1968, as the forward supply base for the offensive.

In Phase Two, from 7 February to 6 March, elements of the 1st ARVN Division and 1st Armored Brigade, reinforced from the national strategic reserve by the 1st Airborne Division and the newly formed Vietnamese Marine Division, would move through the American units into Laos. The ARVN units were to drive westward to Tchepone, a major Ho Chi Minh Trail junction 30 miles inside Laos, destroying enemy troops and supply dumps as they advanced. The armored brigade would proceed along Route 9, while the airborne division and the 1st Division, by heliborne assaults, were to establish a series of fire bases on high ground to protect the road. In this and the later phases of the operation, the Americans would furnish air, artillery, and logistic support. In accord with general restrictions imposed by the U.S. Congress, however, no American advisors or other personnel were to accompany Vietnamese ground units into Laos, although Americans could fly support and rescue missions across the border. Additionally, American Marine advisors with the Vietnamese Marine Corps, who

were trained aerial observers, were on board command and control Hueys during daylight hours.

During Phase Three, which was to last from 7 to 9 March, the ARVN troops would sweep their areas of operation, thoroughly wrecking the trail system and supply caches. Then, in Phase Four, they were to withdraw eastward into South Vietnam, either directly down Route 9 or southeastward through the enemy's base areas in the Da Krong and A Shau Valleys. The choice of withdrawal route would depend on circumstances at that time. Whichever route was chosen, the operation would end on or about 6 April.

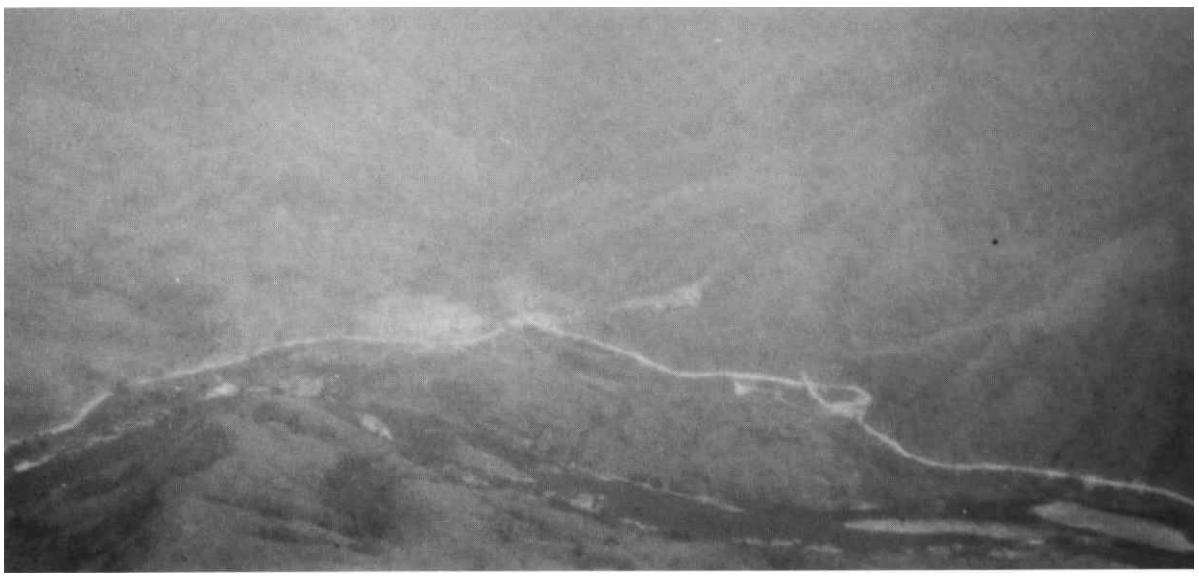
III MAF took no part in the planning for Lam Son 719 and received no information about it until a few days before D-Day. Between 25 and 30 January, Lieutenant General Sutherland personally briefed Lieutenant General Robertson on the impending offensive and outlined III MAF's part in it. Remembering the meeting years later, Robertson said that Sutherland "apologized for not briefing me during the early planning phase, but was not to tell anyone, other than his key staff officers, about the operation."[5] Sutherland directed Robertson to furnish Marine air support, both fixed-wing and helicopter, and to increase Marine patrols along Route 1 in Quang Nam, particularly where the highway, important for supply of the operation, crossed Hai Van Pass. Later, on 6 February, as transport difficulties hindered the offensive, Sutherland requested and received a reinforced Marine truck company to help move supplies from Dong Ha to the logistic support areas at FSB Vandegrift and at Khe Sanh.[6]

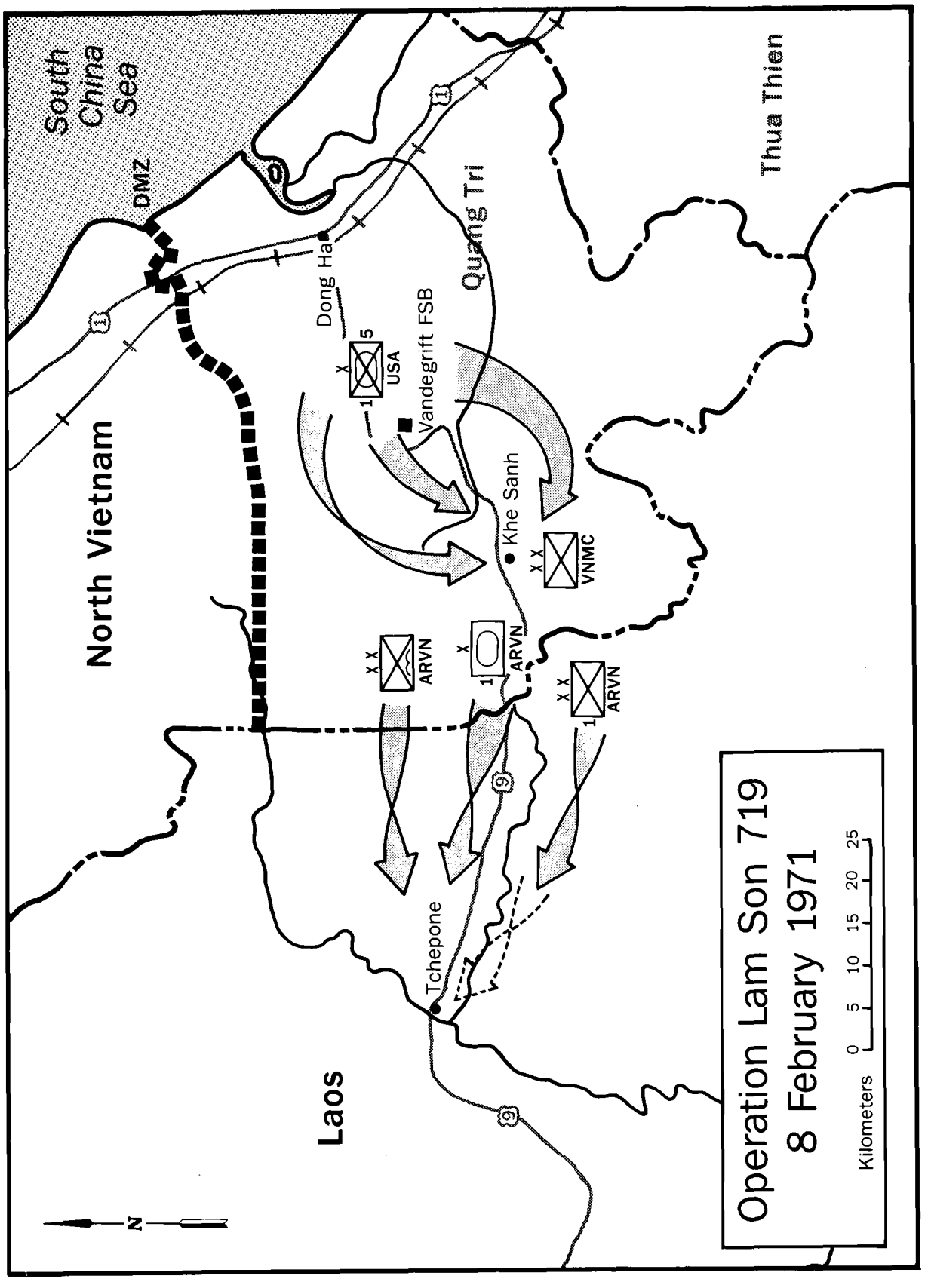
Phase One of Lam Son 719 began on schedule.[7] On 29 January, Lieutenant General Lam established his I Corps forward command post at Dong Ha and General Sutherland set up XXIV Corps Forward Headquarters at Quang Tri. The following day, in what the Americans called Operation Dewey Canyon II, elements of the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) advanced from FSB Vandegrift along Route 9 toward Khe Sanh and the Laotian border. The U.S. troops met only light, scattered resistance. Behind the combat units, U.S. Army engineers rebuilt bridges and culverts on Route 9 and prepared the long unused highway for truck traffic. Artillery and support units moved into Khe Sanh and began reestablishing an airstrip capable of receiving Air Force C-130 transports. The ARVN 1st Armored Brigade, 1st Airborne Division, and 1st Infantry Division moved up under cover of the American advance and concentrated around Khe Sanh for the move into Laos while U.S. helicopters and trucks brought in fuel, ammunition, and supplies.

Although the objectives of the operation in Laos were concealed for as long as possible, leaks of information did occur. South Vietnamese Major General

Aerial view of Route 9 near Khe Sanh. This narrow road meandered through the difficult mountain passages and provided excellent cover and concealment for enemy ambushes. Throughout the 1968 siege aerial resupply was the only means of reprovision.

Courtesy of Capt Chalmers R. Hood, Jr., USMC

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Operation Lam Son 719
8 February 1971
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Nguyen Duy Hinh said that press speculation was aroused when, during the preparatory period of the operation, reporters were not allowed into the Quang Tri area. He became convinced that press leaks eliminated the possible advantages of surprise. Looking back on the operation, Marine Major John G. Miller, an advisor with the Vietnamese Marines during Lam Son 719, related "Late in the operation we learned that there had been a direct leak out of [General] Lam's CP across the DMZ. An ARVN captain and his wife were caught passing plans . . . to the NVA."[8]

On 8 February, the ARVN 1st Armored Brigade advanced into Laos along Route 9 to begin Phase Two of the offensive. U.S. helicopters deployed six battalions of the 1st Airborne and 1st Infantry Divisions to set up firebases flanking the highway. The infantry went in south of Route 9 and the airborne, reinforced by a ranger group, took positions north of the road. Two more battalions landed by helicopter further west to link up with the advancing tanks. Meanwhile, the XXIV Corps units around Khe Sanh continued to build up their logistic base while patrolling to protect Route 9 within South Vietnam.

During their first few days in Laos, the South Vietnamese troops encountered only small groups of enemy as they pushed westward toward Tchepone. North Vietnamese reaction, however, soon strengthened. By 18 February, the South Vietnamese were in contact with NVA in company and battalion strength. Heavy fighting erupted as determined North Vietnamese, supported by mortars, artillery, and tanks, assaulted the firebases protecting the flanks of the advance. On the 19th, 400-500 North Vietnamese overran the 39th Ranger Battalion north of the highway, inflicting losses of 178 men killed or missing and 148 wounded. A week later, tank-led NVA troops stormed FSB Delta, an airborne position. Other South Vietnamese firebases held out, aided by U.S. helicopter gunships, jets, and B-52s. The American positions at Khe Sanh came under sporadic mortar and rocket attack.

The North Vietnamese, for once departing from their usual evasive tactics, had decided to defy U.S. and ARVN firepower and stand and fight for their vital supply line. Reinforcing more rapidly than allied planners had anticipated, the enemy committed elements of five divisions, including an estimated 12 infantry regiments, two artillery regiments, and at least one armored regiment during the battle along Route 9. The NVA used aggressive, well conceived tactics against the ARVN firebases. Their infantry moved in close to the defenders to prevent the use of American air support. From concealed positions, NVA mortars and artillery kept up steady bombardment, and at some places tanks fired point blank into ARVN positions. Machine gun and mortar fire met each helicopter attempting to bring in reinforcements and supplies or to evacuate wounded.*

Under increasing pressure, the South Vietnamese frontline troops, with some exceptions, defended their positions tenaciously. Their artillery, supplemented by U.S. artillery and air support, including dozens of B-52 strikes, inflicted severe losses on the North Vietnamese. In spite of pressure on their flanks, the South Vietnamese continued to push westward, both on the ground and by helicopter. South of Route 9, battalions of the Vietnamese Marine Division took over a portion of the 1st ARVN Infantry Division's sector, allowing elements of the latter unit to make a brief token occupation of Tchepone. By 6 March, the planned end of Phase Two, the South Vietnamese had temporarily blocked the main supply routes of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and had captured or destroyed large caches of arms, ammunition, and supplies.

While Operation Lam Son 719 had moved forward on schedule in the face of heavy opposition, the test of conducting a large-scale, contested invasion revealed a number of ARVN deficiencies. The 1st Armored Brigade had made a disappointing showing. It had failed to advance as speedily as planned, partly as a result of the poor condition of Route 9 in Laos and partly because of hesitant leadership. Several times, the armored brigade ignored requests for support from other hard-pressed South Vietnamese units. The I Corps and division commanders and staffs, inexperienced in directing an operation of this size and complexity, gradually lost control of the developing battle. For Vietnamese Marine units, control deteriorated at night when American Marine advisors were not airborne in command and control Hueys supporting their Vietnamese counterparts in Laos. Compounding command and control problems, the Airborne and Marine division commanders, who were only under General Lam's authority for Lam Son 719, were accused of frequently disregarding orders from

*Lieutenant Colonel Marshall N. Carter, an advisor with the Vietnamese Marine Corps at the time, recalled that in addition to heavy mortar and machine gun fire, "there was an abundance of sophisticated antiaircraft weapons—some apparently radar-directed." LtCol Marshall N. Carter, Comments on draft ms, 28Mar83 (Vietnam Comment File).

I Corps.* Inevitably, coordination of U.S. air and artillery support for South Vietnamese units proved difficult, especially since there were no American advisory or liaison personnel with the ARVN in Laos.[9]

Even with these developing problems, the allies decided to extend Phase Three from the planned two days to more than a week. From 7 to 16 March, the South Vietnamese battalions swept their operating areas north and south of Route 9 with the intention of capturing or destroying as much enemy material as possible. North Vietnamese resistance slackened temporarily; on the 14th, however, after two days of bad weather had limited allied air operations, the NVA renewed artillery and ground attacks on several key firebases, while at the same time increasing harassment of Khe Sanh and FSB Vandegrift.

On 17 March, the ARVN began Phase Four, the withdrawal phase of the operation. The armored brigade started pulling back eastward along Route 9, and the flanking divisions began evacuating their firebases by helicopter. At this point, the uncertain ARVN command system lost control of the operation. In spite of warnings and remonstrations from MACV and XXIV Corps, the South Vietnamese, foreshadowing the mistakes that were to contribute to their final debacle in 1975, attemped to withdraw too quickly with inadequate advance planning and coordination.[10] The result, for some units, was a near rout. The 1st Armored Brigade, its flank protection prematurely removed, ran into a series of NVA ambushes on Route 9 in which it lost or abandoned 60 percent of its tanks and half of its armored personnel carriers before straggling back into South Vietnam. The infantry, Airborne, and Marine divisions,* under continuous machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire, managed to extricate themselves from their positions, but they left behind many casualties and much equipment, including 96 artillery pieces. Recalling the withdrawal of Vietnamese Marine Corps units, Major John G. Miller noted that only the artillery units failed to perform well under pressure: "The VNMC artillery, which had grown lax under the benign shooting conditions of the Delta, was incapable of mastering the intricacies of computing map data, high-angle fire, etc. That is one reason the VNMC infantry commanders were often loath to bring it (artillery fire) closer than 1000 meters to friendlies . . . The infantry battalions were generally better led and gave a better account of themselves." U.S. aircraft had to attack many of the abandoned vehicles and guns to keep them out of enemy hands. By 6 April, the last South Vietnamese troops had left Laos.[11]

Marine Fixed Wing Air Support and the ASRT

Throughout Lam Son 719, Lieutenant General Robertson closely followed the progress of the battle. Robertson, who enjoyed a close working relationship with General Sutherland, regularly visited both XXIV Corps Forward and I Corps Headquarters, to confer with Sutherland and with Lieutenant General Lam on the offensive as a whole and on III MAF support of it. The III MAF commander explained that "it was certainly close enough that I had an interest in it and in turn, if I'm going to be number two [U.S.] commander [in MR 1], you never know what's going to happen . . . ."

Early in March, and again early in April, Robert-

*Brigadier General Alexander P. McMillan, who was acting Senior Marine Advisor (SMA) during two weeks of Lam Son 719, later disagreed with the contention that orders were frequently disobeyed, saying, "I can recall no specific instance of this . . . ." Alluding to the troubled politics of South Vietnam, where military commanders were often directly or indirectly enmeshed in politics, the SMA, Brigadier General Francis W. Tief, then a colonel, years later noted another reason for the apparent friction between the VNMC and General Lam: "General Lam constantly felt CMC [Commandant] VNMC was being groomed to relieve him as CG I Corps. Lieutenant General Khang was extremely careful not to enhance this feeling." Colonel John Miller, at the time a major, who advised the operations section of the VNMC in the combat operations center at Khe Sanh during the operation, said he saw one act of disobedience, the VNMC refusal to occupy Co Roc, an imposing mountain in Laos overlooking Khe Sanh: ". . . after Colonel Tief had returned to Khe Sanh and Colonel McMillan had gone back to Saigon . . . Colonel Lan had pulled all troops off Co Roc [occupied by less than a platoon], despite General Lam's direct order to defend that key terrain feature. Co Roc would have been a death trap for defending units about brigade strength." Miller added that "Lam was in a turbulent emotional state early on—after his chief of staff (and best friend) was killed in a helicopter crash." BGen Alexander P. McMillan, Comments on draft ms, 19Apr83; BGen Francis W. Tief, Comments on draft ms, 13Apr83; Col John G. Miller, Comments on draft ms, 19Apr83 (Vietnam Comment File).

*Colonel Miller, then at Khe Sanh, recalled the stress caused by the NVA counterattack: "One brigade commander, Col Thong (Brigade 147) cracked under the strain and was eased out of his command. During one 24-hour period, Colonel Lan (the division commander) went into virtual seclusion and Colonel Tief [the Senior Marine Advisor] was in effect calling the shots and keeping higher headquarters informed while trying to coax Lan out of his shell. We were all perplexed by this unexpected behavior from Lan." Col John G. Miller, Comments on draft ms, 19Apr83 (Vietnam Comment File). For more information on VNMC participation in Lam Son 719 see Chapter 21.

son temporarily commanded XXIV Corps during General Sutherland's absence. Robertson recalled:

> . . . I moved in as commander of that Corps and . . . learned in a hurry that people, they'll work together and if you're all a bunch of professionals things go well. We never had any snags when I was commanding. I got full support from that staff up there. I knew many of them because of my close relationship with XXIV Corps. There used to be some surprised looks when there'd be visitors come in . . . that . . . walked in and [found] a Marine commanding an Army corps.[12]

Beginning on 31 January, jets from the 1st MAW—A-4Es of VMA-311, A-6As of VMA(AW)-225, and F-4Bs of VMFA-115—flew repeated missions in support of the ARVN units in Laos. Like the Navy and Air Force planes engaged in the operation, the Marine jets received target assignments from the Seventh Air Force, which had overall charge of fixed-wing support for the offensive.* During February, 1st MAW aircraft flew a total of 509 sorties** in support of Lam Son 719, dropping over 1,180 tons of ordnance.[13]

Marine pilots flying in support of Lam Son 719 attacked targets rarely encountered up to this point in the war—enemy tanks. On 27 February, for example, a flight of A-4E Skyhawks from VMA-311 led by Colonel Albert C. Pommerenk, commander of MAG-11, and by the squadron commander, Lieutenant Colonel Jerome T. Hagen, was diverted from a preplanned bombing mission to aid the besieged South Vietnamese defenders of Fire Support Base 31, eight miles inside Laos. Arriving over the battle area, the Marine aviators spotted five North Vietnamese light tanks, Russian-built PT-76s, moving up to support infantry who were already attacking the firebase. One tank, on a hilltop, was engaging the defenders at close range, while four others were climbing the hill to join it. ARVN artillery silenced the firing tank, and the Marines dove on the other four PT-76s, which turned around and started downhill toward a road. On the road, two of the tanks turned northward and the other two turned southward. Colonel Pommerenk released his bombs just ahead of the two southbound tanks, cratering the road and halting them. Lieutenant Colonel Hagen then made a bomb run on the tanks. "They knew I was coming," he recalled later, "They raised their cannons and fired at my aircraft." Hagen's bombs wrecked both tanks. The Marines then turned their attention to the other two PT-76s and destroyed one. The sole survivor escaped by driving off the road into the jungle, where the Marines lost sight of it.[14]

During March and the first part of April, Marine aircraft continued their support of Lam Son 719. By the time the last South Vietnamese had left Laos, the 1st MAW jets had flown almost 950 sorties and expended over 2,600 tons of ordnance, with no loss of aircraft. They received credit for destroying 5 tanks, 16 trucks, 9 crew-served weapons, 87 bunkers, and 6 ammunition caches, killing 6 enemy soldiers, and touching off 248 secondary explosions. This Marine effort, significant though it was, represented only a small part of the massive allied air support given Lam Son 719. The U.S. Air Force, for instance, flew more than 9,000 tactical sorties during the operation and dropped over 14,000 tons of ordnance at a cost of seven aircraft destroyed. B-52s from Guam and Thailand conducted 615 strikes, and South Vietnamese and Australian aircraft also carried out missions in Laos.[15]

Besides contributing aircraft to support Lam Son 719, III MAF provided a vital air control facility. Lam Son 719 took place during the northeast monsoon, which brought frequent rain and fog to northern South Vietnam. On most days during the operation, low-lying fog persisted until noon, and by mid-afternoon, a mixture of clouds and dust and smoke from the fighting veiled the battlefield.[16] To conduct continuous air operations at night and during the bad weather, the allies relied on a mobile air support radar team (ASRT), specially developed by the Marine Corps for rapid deployment across the beach in an amphibious assault. Using the AN-TPQ-10 radar and a computer system, an ASRT could guide aircraft to an established target in fog, rain, or darkness.*

*The Seventh Air Force had a Direct Air Support Center (DASC) located with XXIV Corps Forward Headquarters at Quang Tri. This DASC received support requests from U.S. liaison officers at the ARVN division headquarters, which remained in South Vietnam, and from Air Force forward air controllers (FACs) in the skies over Laos. The FACs usually had English-speaking Vietnamese soldiers riding with them—a not always effective attempt to overcome the language barrier between the units on the ground and the American aircraft overhead. From the Quang Tri DASC, support requests went to Seventh Air Force Operations, which, under the single-management system then in effect, ordered missions by aircraft of all Services. A Seventh Air Force Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC), a specially equipped transport plane, orbited over the battlefield to direct strike aircraft when they reached the battle area. MACV *ComdHist 71*, II, Anx E, pp. 21-22

**A sortie is one mission flown by one aircraft; 1st MAW jets regularly had flown in raids against the Ho Chi Minh Trail before Lam Son 719. See Chapter 15.

*For more detail on the ASRT and its operations, see Chapter 16.

Courtesy of Col John G. Miller, Jr., USMC (Ret)

An aerial view of the Vietnamese Marine Corps base at Khe Sanh, an I Corps forward operating base looking towards Laos. Co Roc looms in the far background. As in 1968 enemy observers positioned on Co Roc directed artillery fire to disrupt troop concentrations.

As Lam Son 719 began, Marine Air Support Squadron (MASS) 3, a subordinate unit of the 1st MAW, had three air support radar teams deployed in MR 1, at Da Nang, FSB Birmingham near Hue, and at Quang Tri. On 18 February, the Quang Tri ASRT was directed to prepare for displacement to Khe Sanh, where it would help support Lam Son 719. The following day, a 1st MAW truck convoy left Da Nang for Quang Tri to help the team pack its equipment; other Marines at Khe Sanh selected a site for the ASRT installation about one-half mile west of the newly reopened airfield. From this position, the ASRT, which could control aircraft anywhere within a 50-mile radius, could direct strikes throughout the Laotian battlefield. Preparation of the site for the team's arrival began on the 20th.

The Quang Tri ASRT was commanded by Captain Golden C. Kirkland, Jr., and consisted of Marine radar technicians from MASS-3 reinforced with communications personnel and a security platoon from Headquarters and Headquarters Support Squadron (H&HS) 18. At 1800 on 22 February, the team received orders to cease operations and begin movement to Khe Sanh. The unit had its electronic equipment dismantled and packed by 0630 the next morning, when the first Marine CH-53s arrived to begin airlifting the unit 25 miles westward to its new position. At 1430 the last load of equipment touched down at Khe Sanh, and within an hour Captain Kirkland's Marines had the system assembled, checked, and functioning. By 1801, the ASRT was directing Air Force, Navy, and Marine air strikes. The entire movement, from the order to pack up at Quang Tri to resumption of operations at Khe Sanh, had taken less than a day.

From 23 February until 31 March, when it returned to Quang Tri, the Khe Sanh ASRT remained in constant operation except for a 10-minute shutdown caused by a power failure. The team directed 960 sorties by U.S., Vietnamese, and Australian planes. After 31 March, the team continued to control strikes in Lam Son 719* from Quang Tri until the operation ended.[17]

Marine OV-10As from VMO-2 were also active during Lam Son 719. At the beginning of the operation, XXIV Corps used these versatile observation craft to plant 25 strings of electronic sensors* on the approaches to Khe Sanh. The sensors were used, as others had been during the 1968 siege, to provide early warning of ground activity and spot targets for the artillery. On 1 March, the OV-10As planted 10 additional sensor strings to help protect Route 9 within South Vietnam. Air Force planes conducted all sensor drops inside Laos.[18]

*For additional detail on sensors and their use, see Chapter 15.

Marine Helicopters Over Laos

Of all the Marine aviators who participated in Lam Son 719, the helicopter pilots and crews of HMH-463 and HML-367 came under the heaviest enemy fire and played the most indispensable role. Operation Lam Son 719 was founded on the U.S.-developed tactics of leap-frogging troops and artillery into a series of fire support bases. Since the South Vietnamese Air Force could not begin to meet the helicopter requirements of an operation of this size, the U.S. Army was ordered to furnish almost all of the helicopter transport. The Army, however, possessed few helicopters powerful enough to lift very heavy loads, such as 14,000-pound 155mm howitzers and 17,000-pound D-4 bulldozers, into firebases many of which were up to 2,000 feet above sea level. Furthermore, when the offensive began, completion of the airfield at Khe Sanh was delayed, disrupting plans to stock the forward supply base by flying in cargoes on Air Force C-130s. This meant that vital supplies, in particular helicopter fuel, had to be brought in by truck and helicopter, creating an additional requirement for heavy rotary-wing freight carriers.[19]

While the Army lacked cargo helicopters suited to the requirements of Lam Son 719, the Marines had them: the 18 Sikorsky CH-53D Sea Stallions of Lieutenant Colonel Robert R. Leisy's HMH-463. The CH-53s, the largest helicopters in the Marine Corps, had been developed for ship-to-shore movement of the heaviest equipment. Able to lift external loads of as much as 18,000 pounds, they routinely moved 155mm howitzers and bulldozers, as well as massive quantities of supplies and downed smaller helicopters.

Late in January, as planning for Lam Son 719 was nearing completion, XXIV Corps directed III MAF to support the operation with aircraft from HMH-463. With Marine helicopters about to be committed, Lieutenant General Robertson and the wing commander, Major General Armstrong, suggested to Lieutenant General Sutherland that the Marines also furnish their own escorting gunships. Robertson later declared that "this is the way Marines functioned. If we're going to send a 53 out there where there's a lot of fire, we'll cover it with our own aircraft . . . ."[20] Sutherland readily agreed to this proposal. HML-367, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Clifford E. Reese and equipped with AH-1G Cobra gunships, received the escort assignment.

Lieutenant Colonel Leisy at once put his CH-53 pilots and crews to work preparing for the Laotian operation. He especially emphasized practice in lifting heavy loads into and out of high-altitude landing zones. During the last week of January, eight crews from HMH-463 spent part of each day picking up a 15,000-pound block of cement, flying it to the 2,000-foot peak of Monkey Mountain, the rugged peninsula northeast of Da Nang, landing it there, and then bringing it back to Marble Mountain. After they had mastered the basic technique, the Marine aviators practiced with 155mm howitzers, the artillery pieces they were to lift in Laos.[21]

Actual squadron operations began on 30 January, when four Sea Stallions hauled heavy equipment for the 101st Airborne Division to staging areas near Quang Tri. These flights continued on 31 January and on 3 and 5 February. On 6 February, as preparations for the assault into Laos neared completion, eight CH-53Ds escorted by six AH-1Gs made 34 lifts of Army guns, supplies, and fuel to Khe Sanh from Camp Carroll. The following day, the Marines established their own forward operating base at Landing Zone Kilo, two miles south of the Khe Sanh airfield. At Kilo, helicopters flown up daily from Marble Mountain would land to receive orders and take on cargo for missions into Laos. On 8 February, eight Sea Stallions made HMH-463's first out-of-country flight of the operation. They carried ARVN guns, ammunition, and engineering equipment from LZ Kilo to Fire Support Base Hotel, just across the Laotian border. From then on, the big helicopters ventured daily further and further into Laos with their loads of howitzers, artillery rounds, bulldozers, and supplies for new firebases.[22]

As the offensive continued through February and into March, Marine helicopter operations fell into a pattern. Each day at 0800, usually four CH-53Ds and four AH-1Gs took off from Marble Mountain and flew to LZ Kilo. There, the pilots were briefed on their assignments, picked up cargoes, and took off for Laos. After each mission, the CH-53Ds and gunships returned to LZ Kilo to refuel, rearm, and receive new orders.

The Marine aircraft, like the Army helicopters involved in Lam Son 719, were under the operational control of the 101st Airborne Division's organic aviation unit, the 101st Combat Aviation Group. The group headquarters received support requirements from XXIV Corps and issued mission orders to Army and Marine helicopters. At Landing Zone Kilo, Major Rocco F. Valluzzi, S-1 of HMH-463, was the Marine Air Coordination Officer. Valluzzi, a veteran of more

than 200 missions in CH-53s, briefed pilots, maintained communications with his helicopters, and directed Army crews in preparing loads for the CH-53s.[23]

Mission assignments became a matter of dispute between III MAF and XXIV Corps as the operation developed. Initially, the CH-53s had been brought in to carry unusually heavy pieces of artillery and equipment, but as the battle expanded, the Marines often found themselves flying in general support of the South Vietnamese, hauling all sorts of supplies and occasionally troops in the face of steadily increasing enemy antiaircraft fire. The Marines believed that many of these missions were not urgent enough to require endangering the valuable heavy helicopters, or could be carried out by smaller craft. At the request of Major General Armstrong, Lieutenant General Robertson, during one of his periods as acting commander of XXIV Corps, convinced the Army authorities to make more discriminating use of the CH-53s. According to Robertson:

> . . . When I straightened it out . . . I talked to my deputy [at XXIV Corps] who was an Army major general and a fine officer. I said, . . . "They have to start using these things properly. Let me just phrase it this way. [Would] you people in the Army use your helicopter crane for the mission that this heavy Marine helicopter was being used for knowing the amount of money you pay for it and what it's worth?" He said, "No, we wouldn't." I said, "That's the same way you have to look at the CH-53." . . . No problems. The thing changed immediately . . . .[24]

As the offensive moved westward into Laos, so did the Marine helicopters. By late March, the CH-53Ds and accompanying Cobras were flying as far as FSB Sophia II near Tchepone, over 30 miles from the South Vietnamese border. Working mostly in support of the ARVN 1st Division, the Sea Stallions armed, supplied, and reinforced a succession of South Vietnamese firebases. Often, as planned, they lifted bulldozers and 155mm howitzers.

Marine helicopter crews flying into Laos had to contend with inevitable poor visibility and North Vietnamese fire. As the fighting spread across the mountains between Tchepone and the South Vietnamese border, clouds of dust and smoke from the battle reduced visibility around the fire bases. Rotor wash from the helicopters further stirred up and mixed the man-made fog of battle, which thickened the monsoon overcast.[25]

North Vietnamese antiaircraft weapons were many and well-served. The advancing allied ground troops had overrun or forced removal of most of the heavier antiaircraft guns, but the NVA had an abundance of light antiaircraft guns and continually mortared firebases and landing zones. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas S. Reap, who succeeded Leisy in command of HMH-463 on 5 March, reported:

Courtesy of Col John G. Miller, USMC (Ret)

A U.S. Army Boeing Vertol CH-47 resupply helicopter hovers at Khe Sanh, while a U.S. Marine advisor is about to hook up the container to the aircraft.

> Helicopters were subject to constant . . . NVA small arms and .50-caliber machine gun fire. Tracers from 23mm antiaircraft guns were visible, and air bursts from 37mm and 57mm guns were a daily occurence. We even had reports from ground observers that the choppers were taking direct fire from tanks.[26]

Marines involved in Lam Son 719 found that the Army method of controlling helicopters, which was less centralized than that of the Marine Corps, increased the danger from enemy ground fire. The Army had no system for rapidly informing its helicopter units of the location of NVA antiaircraft positions as they

were spotted by aerial reconnaissance or by helicopters flying missions. This made it impossible to plan routes of approach to landing zones to avoid the heaviest enemy fire. According to Major General Armstrong:

> . . . Timely information was simply not available. They do not have the possibility or the mechanism to exchange information on what the situation is in a timely fashion. For example, somebody's integral helicopters go dashing over to a place and find it's hotter than hell and seven or eight of 'em get shot down. Fifteen minutes later, some other package comes dashing across the same area and the same thing happens to 'em. They do not have a command and control system for their helicopters . . . .[27]

In spite of the continuous fire encountered, only one HMH-463 aircraft was lost during the missions in Laos. This loss occurred late in the afternoon of 23 February as a flight of four CH-53Ds was lifting 155mm howitzers out of FSB Hotel II. The position, eight miles inside Laos and south of Route 9, was under heavy North Vietnamese attack, and the South Vietnamese had decided to evacuate it and establish another firebase nearby. Enemy machine guns and mortars were firing at the landing zone as the Marine helicopters came in. In the fading light, clouds and smoke restricted the pilots' view of the area.

While escorting Cobras strafed and rocketed enemy gun positions, the helicopters made several trips in and out of Hotel II, removing a number of howitzers. At dusk, as a CH-53D piloted by the flight leader, Major Michael J. Wasko, Jr., the squadron S-3, hovered to hook on another artillery piece, several mortar shells exploded nearby, damaging the helicopter and injuring Wasko's copilot. The crippled CH-53 settled to the ground inside the firebase. Another CH-53, flown by Captain Robert F. Wemheuer, hovered for several minutes, dangerously exposed in the fire-swept LZ, while three crew members from Wasko's helicopter attached themselves to its extraction ladder. Then Wemheuer's craft safely flew off with the rescued Marines. Major Wasko remained behind to assist the injured copilot, until both men were picked up by an Army UH-1.[28]

The damaged CH-53D remained in the firebase. Its size and weight prevented it from being lifted out by another helicopter. On the 25th, Captain Henry J. Cipolla, a maintenance officer with HMH-463, and Gunnery Sergeant Ronald S. Severson, a flight line chief, volunteered to go in and inspect the downed craft. Although the position was under enemy fire, the two Marines worked their way from a nearby landing zone to the CH-53D. They found that it could not be repaired where it was; it had 500-700 shrapnel holes in rotors, engines, and fuselage and major airframe damage. Cipolla and Severson stripped the hulk of weapons and coding equipment and made their way back to their landing zone, where they helped evacuate four wounded ARVN soldiers before boarding a helicopter themselves. Eventually, U.S. air strikes had to destroy the wreck to keep it out of enemy hands.[29]

Wasko's was the only Marine aircraft shot down during Lam Son 719,* although the squadron later counted a total of over 80 bullet and shrapnel holes in 18 CH-53s. Marines gave much credit for this low rate of loss to the gunships of HML-367. The AH-1G Cobras escorted every CH-53 flight into Laos. They led the transports into the landing zones, spotted friendly and enemy positions, and then attacked the NVA antiaircraft guns and mortars with machine guns, automatic grenade launchers, and 2.75-inch rockets. When the enemy were too close to ARVN firebases to permit actual attacks, the Cobra pilots often made dummy strafing runs to distract enemy gunners from the CH-53Ds, or maneuvered their gunships between the NVA positions and the transports. During the month of February alone, the Cobras expended 847 rockets, 5,605 40mm grenades, and 20,750 rounds of machine gun ammunition in support of Lam Son 719. In spite of the dangers of their mission, no Cobras were shot down during the offensive, although one suffered electrical system failure over Laos and just managed to limp back to a safe landing zone.[30]

Beginning on 2 March, the AH-1Gs of HML-367 were joined by four new Bell AH-1J "Sea Cobra" gunships. These twin-engined helicopters, armed with a three-barrelled 20mm cannon, as well as machine guns and rockets, had been sent to Vietnam for combat evaluation. Temporarily attached to HML-367, the Sea Cobras regularly escorted the CH-53Ds. Marine aviators welcomed their additional firepower and appreciated the greater safety provided by their two jet engines. As Major General Armstrong put it, "It made people feel a hell of a lot better to be flying a twin-engine Cobra into Laos than a single-engine Cobra . . . ."[31]

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*Earlier, on 18 February, another CH-53 exploded in the air and crashed northeast of Hue/Phu Bai while returning to Marble Mountain from support of Lam Son 719. The entire crew of five and two passengers were killed. CG III MAF msg to CG XXIV Corps, dtd 18 Feb 71; III MAF Spot Rpt, dtd 18Feb71, both in III MAF Jnl & Msg File, 19-28Feb71.

Besides the protection offered by the Cobras and Sea Cobras, the performance of the CH-53Ds themselves kept losses down. Major Myrddyn E. Edwards, executive officer of HMH-463, declared that "Our biggest advantage was the helicopter's power—we would get in and out fast."[32] The CH-53D demonstrated its capabilities on 11 March during a movement of 155mm howitzers from Fire Support Base Hotel to another ARVN FSB four miles away. An aircraft flown by First Lieutenant Larry J. Larson came in to drop off supplies and pick up one of the howitzers from the landing zone. Hotel was 1,500 feet above sea level and on this occasion wind was gusting to 40-50 miles per hour. Under enemy fire as usual, Larson hooked up the howitzer and lifted off. As he did so, a .50 caliber machine gun bullet hit one of his engines. Larson had to shut down the damaged engine, but he was still able to carry the howitzer to a landing zone 1,000 meters from Hotel, place the artillery piece safely on the ground, and fly back to Marble Mountain.[33]

During the last half of March, Marine helicopter activity in Lam Son 719 declined. The decline occurred partly because the offensive was nearly ended and because after 11 March General Robertson insisted that CH-53s be confined more strictly to heavy lifts. During most of February and the first half of March, four CH-53s normally made a total of 20-40 lifts per day from LZ Kilo. Between 11 and 18 March, the daily number of aircraft was reduced to three and then to two, making two to seven lifts. Activity increased again as HMH-463 assisted the ARVN withdrawal. On 23 March, three aircraft made 11 lifts and on 27 March, the last day of operations in Laos for HMH-463, four CH-53Ds made 10 lifts.[34]

A U.S. Army CH-47 helicopter is shown bringing back from Laos a disabled Huey helicopter, hit by North Vietnamese gunfire in Operation Lam Son 719.
Courtesy of Col John G. Miller, USMC (Ret)

The CH-53Ds of HMH-463 flew 2,992 sorties in support of Lam Son 719. They carried over 6,500 tons of cargo and 2,500 passengers. Demonstrating their great lift capabilities, the big helicopters placed 15 eight-ton loads, 22 seven-and-one-half-ton loads, 62 seven-ton loads, and 209 six-and-one-half-ton loads in landing zones above 2,000 feet in altitude. Escorting gunships completed 1,899 sorties. Compared to the Army's total of 45,828 helicopter sorties in Laos and 118,614 in South Vietnam in support of the offensive, with 601 helicopters damaged and 102 destroyed, the Marine contribution seemed modest; the Marine helicopters, nevertheless, had furnished a specialized capability which the other Services could not provide.[35]

Marine Trucks on Route 9

Within South Vietnam, Route 9 was the principal supply line for the over 40,000 troops involved in Lam Son 719. The U.S. Army Support Command (Da Nang) established a base support area for the offensive near Quang Tri and two forward support areas (FSAs): FSA-1 at FSB Vandegrift and FSA-2 at Khe Sanh. These forward bases were to be stocked by air and by supplies trucked via Route 9. The delay in opening the Khe Sanh airstrip, besides creating a need for more helicopters in the first days of the offensive, also led to a search for more trucks. Once again, XXIV Corps turned to III MAF for support.

On 6 February, XXIV Corps directed III MAF to furnish trucks and heavy-duty forklifts to support Lam Son 719 for about one week. Not wanting to send a piecemeal transportation element, Lieutenant General Robertson decided to send a complete transportation unit, a reinforced Marine truck company tailored to perform the mission required by XXIV Corps.[36] Robertson explained:

> . . . I said [to Lieutenant General Sutherland], "You tell me what your mission is and what you want me to help you with. I've got the drivers, I've got the organization and we'll do it for you." He said, "Great." So, we discussed the size of our elements and we ended up giving him a truck company reinforced. I provided all my people, the organization, commanding officer and the whole works and we merely chopped them over to their operation[al] control. . . . This is the way we functioned when we had elements go in. I don't believe in piecemealing and I wanted to make sure that we had Marines in command . . . .[37]

Late on the 6th, the 1st Marine Division, at the instruction of III MAF, selected Company C of the 11th

Motor Transport Battalion to support Lam Son 719. The truck company, commanded by First Lieutenant Michael A. Humm, was reinforced with Marines from other truck companies and from the 1st Engineer Battalion, the 1st Shore Party Battalion, Force Logistic Command, the 1st Marine Division Headquarters Battalion, and the 1st MAW. The company had an assortment of specialized vehicles attached to it, including low-bed tractor-trailors and 10 heavy-duty forklifts, each capable of carrying loads of up to 6,000 pounds over rough terrain.[38]

Company C left Da Nang for Quang Tri at 0500 on 7 February with 46 vehicles and four Marine officers and 79 enlisted men.[39] With aerial observers overhead, the convoy rolled up Route 1 in two segments, or "serials." At Phu Bai, halfway to Quang Tri, the convoy's Army military police escort diverted the Marine trucks to Tan My Ramp, a deep-water port east of Hue to which ships were bringing supplies for Lam Son 719. The Marines took on a load of northbound freight and then headed for Quang Tri, where they were to join an Army convoy to finish the trip to FSB Vandegrift, their base of operations.

Company C reached Quang Tri late on the afternoon of the 7th. There, Lieutenant Humm reported to the commander of the 39th U.S. Army Transportation Battalion, which had operational control of the Marine unit, and was briefed on his mission. The Army planned for the Marine truck company to use Vandegrift (FSA-1) as a freight transfer point. The heavy low-bed trailor trucks were to make daily runs from Vandegrift east over the paved portion of Route 9 to the junction with Route 1 at Dong Ha and then down to Tan My to pick up cargo from the ships and return. At Vandegrift, this freight would be loaded on the company's M54 medium five-ton trucks. These smaller, more maneuverable vehicles would make the haul out to Khe Sanh over the unpaved, hastily improved, section of Route 9. The forklifts initially were to be sent to Khe Sanh and Vandegrift.

As part of a large Army truck convoy, Company C left Quang Tri at 2330 and headed westward out Route 9. At 0100 on the 8th, just south of the Rockpile, the convoy was ambushed. The NVA opened fire, destroying two Army 5,000-gallon fuel trucks and a gun truck, killing one soldier, and wounding 10 others. The Marines, who suffered no losses in either men or vehicles, helped fight off the enemy, and the convoy continued on to Vandegrift. The trucks rolled into FSA-1 at 0730.

The same day they arrived at Vandegrift, the Marines of Company C sent out their first truck convoys, 17 vehicles to Khe Sanh and 12 low-bed tractor-trailers to Tan My. The company quickly established its command post, troop billets, maintenance area, and first aid station, all protected by prepared fighting positions and barbed wire entanglements. Soon after settling in at Vandegrift, the company was reinforced by two Marine 5,000-gallon fuel tankers, sent from Da Nang to replace the Army tankers destroyed in the ambush on Route 9. Recalling the speed with which the reinforced truck company was organized and dispatched from Da Nang to Vandegrift, General Robertson said, "you talk about Marines really turning to! But this is the way we functioned."[40]

From 9 to 14 February, Company C daily sent 14 to 20 trucks to Khe Sanh, and, on every day but the 11th, it dispatched 10-12 trucks to Tan My. Each contingent of Marine trucks bound for Khe Sanh travelled with an Army truck convoy, but in keeping with General Robertson's guidance, as a separate unit under a Marine commanding officer responsible to the Army convoy commander. On their round trips to Tan My, the tractor-trailers ran as independent Marine convoys.

The Marine truckers encountered frequent enemy sniping along Route 9 between Vandegrift and Khe Sanh, as well as rocket and mortar attacks at FSB Vandegrift. On 10 February, the North Vietnamese fired 15-20 122mm rockets at the firebase, which inflicted minor damage on several Marine trailers. Six more rockets exploded near a Khe Sanh-bound convoy the next day, killing four Army soldiers and wounding one soldier and one Marine. The Marine, only slightly injured, was Company C's only casualty of the operation. Enemy rockets landed near the company area again on the 13th but did no damage. On the roads, in spite of frequent sniper and mortar fire, Marine trucks suffered no combat losses; but two five-ton M54s were damaged in accidents. Both trucks were recovered and brought back to Da Nang.

On 14 February, Company C received orders to prepare for return to III MAF. An 11-vehicle relief convoy from the 11th Motor Transport Battalion left Da Nang for Vandegrift the same day to bring up additional heavy forklifts, as well as wreckers to recover the disabled trucks. This convoy reached Company C late on the 14th.[41] At 0930 on the 15th, the company departed FSB Vandegrift for Da Nang at 1730. During their short time in Lam Son 719, Company C's trucks drove

30,717 miles under combat conditions. They carried 1,050 tons of supplies and conducted 15 convoys in eight days.[42]

When the truck company left, a 13-man forklift detachment from Company C, 1st Shore Party Battalion, with Captain Merrill T. Morton as officer in charge, remained at Khe Sanh and Vandegrift. Morton's Marines, with 10 forklifts, were reinforced with two more forklifts and three Marines, brought up by the relieving convoy, on the 15th. With their powerful machines, especially designed to move freight over rough ground, the Marines helped the Army's 26th Support Group to unload trucks and aircraft at the two forward supply bases. Initially divided between Khe Sanh and Vandegrift, the entire detachment was concentrated at Khe Sanh on 21 February and worked there through the end of March. In 52 days of activity, the Marine forklift operators moved over 56,000 tons of supplies.[43]

Marine communicators also operated at Khe Sanh and Vandegrift during Lam Son 719. The Radio/Supporting Arms Platoon, Communications Company, Headquarters Battalion, 1st Marine Division had the mission of keeping both the truck company and wing elements in contact with their parent headquarters in Da Nang. Because Communications Company was standing down for redeployment, it was augmented by Marines of Communications Support Company. According to the platoon commander of Radio/Supporting Arms Platoon, First Lieutenant Ronald C. Hood III, III MAF "wanted a direct Marine-only link back to the rear . . . , to make sure that Marine commanders could talk with Marine commanders over Marine equipment," and to assure quick transmission of emergency requests for resupply or equipment replacement.

Throughout the operation, the platoon maintained a six-man team with two radio jeeps in northern Quang Tri. A Marine CH-53 flew the radio team and its equipment to Quang Tri City on 7 February to meet the Company C truck convoy. The Marines activated their long-distance radio on the 8th. They operated from Vandegrift initially, keeping the truck company in contact with the 11th Motor Transport Battalion CP and also supplementing the communications of the road convoys. After the trucks returned to Da Nang, the radio teams moved to Khe Sanh to better support 1st MAW elements at LZ Kilo. Lieutenant Hood rotated his men in the north periodically, to give all of them experience in this type of operation. The Marine communicators came under sporadic mortar fire at Vandegrift; in fact, the enemy mortar units appeared to be adjusting fire on the Marines' 50-foot high antennas. According to Lieutenant Hood, who spent much time with his troops along Route 9, "Every time there was some kind of bombardment, you could see the rounds coming in and out on the antennas"; but the Marine communicators suffered no casualties or major equipment damage during their nearly two months in Lam Son 719. On 21 March, they ceased operations at Khe Sanh and returned to Da Nang, where their parent battalion was standing down for redeployment.[44]

Courtesy of Capt Chalmers R. Hood, Jr., USMC

A member of the Radio/Supporting Arms Platoon, Communications Company reinstalls a radio antenna that was knocked down by enemy artillery fire.

Diversion Off Vinh

When allied commanders began planning for Lam Son 719 late in 1970, they considered the initiation of diversionary operations to distract North Vietnamese attention and, it was hoped, North Vietnamese forces from the actual objective area. Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., Commander in Chief, Pacific, took the initiative in this aspect of the planning. On 31 December, he sent General Abrams a detailed proposal for an amphibious feint against southern North Vietnam. McCain suggested that the U.S. set up a joint amphibious task force headquarters at Subic Bay in the Philippines and that U.S. and South Vietnamese forces conduct all the preliminary rehearsals, ship and troop movements, reconnaissance, and even air strikes and shore raids that would precede an actual invasion. McCain wanted to use both American and Vietnamese air and naval units for this purpose, as well as elements of the Vietnamese Marine Corps.[45]

On 7 January, General Abrams approved the diversion plan, in principle, but declared that he could spare neither U.S. nor RVNAF forces to carry it out. McCain, therefore, decided to use the amphibious ready group of the Seventh Fleet to conduct a more modest diversion, a simulated helicopter-borne raid on the North Vietnamese coast by a U.S. Marine battalion.*[48]

The task of conducting the diversion was assigned to the Seventh Fleet's Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) Alpha, Task Group (TG) 76.4, and to the 31st Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU). Until 1969, the MAU, which consisted of an infantry battalion landing team (BLT) and a composite helicopter squadron, had been known as the Special Landing Force (SLF) and regularly employed in operations in South Vietnam. With the redeployment to Okinawa of the 3d Marine Division, from which the BLT was drawn, the MAU, as it was now designated, could not reenter Vietnam without special permission from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but it could cruise anywhere on the high seas, including the seas off the coast of Vietnam.**

At the end of January 1971, the 31st MAU, commanded by Colonel Lawrence A. Marousek, consisted of Lieutenant Colonel Francis X. Frey's Battalion Landing Team 3/9*** and HMM-165, under Lieutenant Colonel Herbert M. Herther. The composite helicopter squadron contained UH-1Es and CH-53s as well as its usual CH-46s.[47]

On 1 February, the 31st MAU, then at Subic Bay in the Philippines, was ordered to embark on the amphibious ready group's ships**** and sail for Da Nang. The Marines finished loading at 0130 on the 2d and the ships steamed out of Subic Bay at 0800. While at sea, the task group received its instructions for the diversion off North Vietnam. The 31st MAU and the amphibious ready group staffs began joint detailed planning for the operation. The ARG arrived at the Southern Holding Area off Da Nang on the 4th.[48]

From 5-10 February, the task group remained at sea near Da Nang, preparing for its mission. By the 7th, the staffs of the 31st MAU and BLT 3/9 had completed plans for the diversion which was to be a helicopter-borne raid on the airfield at Vinh, about 150 miles north of the Demilitarized Zone. The Marines prepared a full operation plan for an attack by two companies of BLT 3/9. The companies were to go ashore by helicopter, seize and demolish the airfield, and withdraw to the ships within 24 hours. The operation order prepared jointly by the Marine and Navy staffs, included all the usual annexes for air and naval gunfire support, communications, logistics, and intelligence and provided elaborate procedures for withdrawing the raiding companies by boat, if helicopters could not extract them.[49]

After completing the plans, the MAU conducted a communications exercise in rehearsing the planned feint. It also landed 4,000 pounds of explosives and detonating equipment furnished by III MAF and arranged with the 1st MAW to furnish Cobra gunships to reinforce HMM-165 if necessary. The gunships were to remain on call at Da Nang, ready to fly on board the USS *Iwo Jima* (LPH 2) on short notice.[50]

On 11 February, Task Group 76.4 headed north from Da Nang into the Gulf of Tonkin. Few of the Marines on board knew the actual purpose of their mission. In HMM-165, for example, only the commanding officer and his executive and operations officers had been fully briefed on the plan, and even they were not told that it was a feint until long after sailing. Until then, Lieutenant Colonel Jon R. Robson, the executive officer, recalled, "we . . . firmly believed that we might have to go in and try and take Vinh with a battalion of Marines." Marines in both the squadron and the battalion realized that they were preparing for an amphibious raid of some sort, and as the ships steamed steadily northward hour after hour, they realized that the objective would be somewhere in North Vietnam. Both air and ground Marines, therefore, readied themselves for their parts of the mission "with all the fears and anxieties . . . of actually going in and performing the mission as briefed, as little as it was

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*On 3 February, Lieutenant General Sutherland, the XXIV Corps Commander, also proposed to MACV an elaborate diversion plan, again involving amphibious forces; this plan was set aside in favor of the CincPac plan, which then was already being implemented. Sutherland msg to Gen Abrams, dtd 3Feb71, and Abrams msg to Sutherland, dtd 4Feb71, copies in MCHC.

**For extended discussion of the organization and operations of the MAU in 1970-1971, see Chapter 21.

***BLT 3/9 was made up of the entire 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, with the following units attached: Battery F, 2d Battalion, 12th Marines; 1st Platoon, Company D, 3d Reconnaissance Battalion; 2d Platoon, Company B, 1st AmTrac Battalion; 1st Platoon, Company A, 3d Shore Party Battalion; 2d Platoon, Company A, 3d Motor Transport Battalion; 2d Platoon, Company B, 3d Tank Battalion; 3d Platoon, Company A, 3d Engineer Battalion; 2d Platoon, Company B, 3d Medical Battalion; and detachments from the 3d Service Battalion and 3d Dental Company.

****The vessels of the ARG were: USS *Tulare* (LKA 112), USS *Iwo Jima* (LPH-2), USS *Cleveland* (LPD-7), and USS *Westchester County* (LST 1167).

briefed." The BLT issued ammunition and organized the landing companies into helicopter teams.[51]

The amphibious task group arrived at a point 50 miles east of Vinh on the 12th. From then through 6 March, in cooperation with two carriers and their escort vessels, the 31st MAU conducted daily rehearsals for the raid while the ships conducted maneuvers and communications exercises.[52] Each day, HMM-165's helicopters went through the motions of loading troops, without actually emplaning them. Then they flew in toward the coast to a prearranged point just outside the 12-mile limit of North Vietnam's territorial waters where they often descended at the end of their shoreward run to make the enemy think that they were going in under the NVA radar screen. At a predetermined check point they reversed course and flew back to the carrier. Meanwhile, the BLT conducted communications exercises and shipboard drills, including familiarization firing.

According to Major William J. Sambito, squadron operations officer during the diversion:

> The actual launching itself was done by putting some of the [helicopters] on the *Cleveland* [LPD-7] and the remainder of them came off the LPH. And we had two launchings, or the deck was spotted twice, and we'd launch and rendezvous the first wave, and then . . . launch the second wave and join up with as many planes as we could get off in two launches and head in, and we'd be under HDC control, which would give us a time hack, and at the end of that time unless we'd received further word we'd make a . . . 180 [degree turn] and just come directly back to the ships. And we did that once in the morning about eight o'clock . . . and then . . . some days we did it in the afternoon also . . . . We'd try to break up the routine a little bit to create a little bit more confusion.[53]

Lieutenant Colonel Robson declared that if the North Vietnamese "had a Landing Force Manual out there, they could have seen exactly what we were doing." The ships engaged in the communications and electronics activity that would have accompanied an actual assault, and jets from the carriers continually flew missions as though providing cover for a raid. Throughout, "we tried everything in the world to make them think that we were really going to do something every day we launched."

The diversion attracted much enemy attention and caused some troop redeployments. The ships reported increasingly intense surveillance by enemy radar, and North Vietnamese reconnaissance aircraft frequently probed the task group's own radar screens. Toward the end of the operations, the 31st MAU received reports the NVA ground formations were moving northward toward Vinh from the DMZ.*

A trawler from the USSR continually shadowed the American ships. "During a routine man overboard drill," recalled Navy Captain Tracy H. Wilder, commander of the amphibious task group, "a dummy was thrown overboard from the *Iwo Jima*. As she circled to retrieve it, the trawler darted in ahead to investigate. Upon sighting the dummy, she cleared the area allowing *Iwo Jima* to complete the exercise." The trawler later approached the task group to send a "Happy Washington's Birthday" blinker message.[54]

Raid rehearsals continued until 7 March, with no casualties or unusual incidents. Indeed, Major Sambito remembered the operation as "very boring, very unexciting, except for the tension that a few of us had." BLT 3/9's Marines had been afloat for 54 days by the end of February, with only three days ashore at Subic. The battalion made special efforts to combat boredom through training activities, a shipboard newsletter, informal talk sessions, competitions, and talent contests. On the 7th, Task Group 76.4 sailed from the Gulf of Tonkin for Okinawa, bringing the diversion to an end.

Results of Lam Son 719

The effects of Lam Son 719 on the course of the war are difficult to assess, as was true of so many operations in Vietnam. Both sides suffered severely. South Vietnamese casualties amounted to 1,549 men killed, 5,483 wounded, and 651 missing. U.S. forces involved in the operation reported 215 killed, 1,149 wounded, and 38 missing. ARVN equipment losses included 298 vehicles, 54 tanks, 1,516 radios, and 31 bulldozers. Of the ARVN units most heavily engaged, U.S. advisors reported after the battle that the Airborne Division had lost 40 percent of its key officers and NCOs and that the 1st Armored Brigade was only "marginally combat effective due to personnel and equipment shortages." The American advisors rated the 1st Division and the Marine Division more favorably, declaring them still combat effective after withdrawal from Laos, although these formations, also, had taken severe casualties.

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*A propagandistic North Vietnamese history of Lam Son 719, published in 1971, took this diversion with apparent seriousness, declaring that "Mention should also be made of the direct participation of the 7th Fleet, which . . . kept North Vietnam under constant threat of invasion by several thousand Marines on board American ships cruising off the Vietnamese shore." *From Khe Sanh to Chepone* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1971), p. 22.

According to allied estimates, the North Vietnamese, who had massed their forces to attack in the face of superior supporting arms, had lost at least 13,000 soldiers killed. Allied troops claimed to have captured or destroyed 5,170 individual and 1,963 crew-served weapons, 2,001 trucks, 106 tanks, and more than 20,000 tons of ammunition, not counting ammunition the North Vietnamese had expended in the fighting. In addition, the enemy had lost about 90,000 gallons of fuel and lubricants and 1,250 tons of food.[55]

Allied commanders believed that Lam Son 719 had thrown the enemy off balance strategically. Temporarily, at least, the offensive disrupted the southward movement of North Vietnamese troops and supplies; it forced the Communists to commit men and material to the Laos compaign that otherwise would have gone to South Vietnam. Rebuilding and restocking of the base areas between Tchepone and the Vietnamese border would occupy the enemy for most of the 1971 dry season, thereby assuring postponement of any immediate major offensive, and causing a reduced level of enemy activity in MR 1 for most of the year. Prophetically, as it turned out, the MACV command history for 1971 stated that "Lam Son 719 might even have forestalled any major offensive until the spring of 1972."[56]

In Lam Son 719, for the first time, the South Vietnamese conducted a multi-division offensive without the assistance of U.S. advisors; most command and control responsibility fell upon the ARVN commanders and their staffs. While the ARVN performance had been uneven, most U.S. commanders insisted that the overall results gave encouraging evidence that the Vietnamese were learning how to fight their own war.

Lieutenant General Sutherland, the XXIV Corps commander, acknowledged some major ARVN shortcomings, including "a lack of effective long-range planning by higher level staffs, a serious disregard for communications security, a general lack of a sense of supply discipline, and a failure to delegate authority to subordinates." Nevertheless, he pointed out that "without U.S. advisors" and without the possibility of reinforcement or direct support by U.S. ground combat forces, the ARVN had "carried the war into an enemy controlled area, far removed from the familiar confines of their normal areas of operation . . . ." Sutherland concluded:

> The forces that participated in Lam Son 719 proved that the Republic of Vietnam possess[es] a viable military organization that is significantly more capable, cohesive and better led than the military organization that existed . . . only three years ago. The overall results of Lam Son 719 indicate that Vietnamization is progressing well in MR 1 . . . .[57]

Even in such optimistic assessments, nevertheless, U.S. commanders had to acknowledge one disturbing fact: the ARVN had depended heavily on American helicopter and fixed-wing air support at every stage of the Laotian offensive, both to launch the attack in the first place and then to rescue the South Vietnamese from the worst consequences of their own military deficiencies. The South Vietnamese Armed Forces had yet to prove that, by themselves, they could defeat the North Vietnamese Army in a major conventional battle. Vietnamization, whatever progress could be reported, remained an unequal contest between the slow pace of RVNAF improvement and the inexorably quickening pace of American withdrawal.