

FOR TITUDINE

BULLETIN OF THE MARINE CORPS HISTORICAL PROGRAM

HISTORICAL BULLETIN VOLUME XXVIII, NUMBER 2

1999

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CLASSIC MARINE OPERATION, VIETNAM WAR'S DEWEY CANYON, REVIEWED AFTER 30 YEARS . . . MARINE CORPS NAMES A NEW OFFICIAL HISTORIAN AND GUARDIAN OF ITS PATRIMONY . . . DETAILED ORAL HISTORIES RESULT FROM INTERVIEWS WITH CMCs MUNDY AND KRULAK . . . DIVISION MAKES TWO NEW HISTORIES AVAILABLE

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FORTITUDINE

Motto of the United States Marine Corps in the 1812 era.

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Notice for Readers, Subscribers, and Librarians

Fortitudine has ceased to identify its issues by season. The last-such dated issue was No. 4 of Vol. XXVII, Spring 1998. The bulletin will continue to appear four times annually, with each issue identified by its number within its volume, and its year of publication. This issue is the second of Vol. XXVIII, 1999. Paid subscribers will find the number of issues they expect to receive unaffected by this administrative change.

ABOUT THE COVER

In 1969 Sgt Richard L. Yaco recorded this view of Marines struggling to assist wounded fellow members of the 9th Marines down steep and slippery slopes of Vietnam's A Shau Valley in Operation Dewey Canyon of that year in the Vietnam War. Yaco, a Californian who served for more than a year in Vietnam as a Marine combat artist, was meritoriously promoted to sergeant and received the Bronze Star Medal with combat "V." His artwork from the war was twice included in traveling exhibits produced by the Smithsonian Institution. Since it is the 30th anniversary year of the much-studied and by-now classic Marine operation, Dewey Canyon is the topic chosen for this issue by both Chief Historian Charles D. Melson, beginning on page 3, and Reference Historian Robert V. Aquilina, author of the Marine Corps Chronology, on page 22. Melson also takes the opportunity to introduce readers to a new Director of Marine Corps History and Museums, retired Col John W. Ripley, himself well-known for his role in blowing the highway bridge at Dong Ha during the final months of the Vietnam War, an action which brought him the Navy Cross. In recent years, Ripley has served as head of the history department at the U.S. Naval Academy and as a college and military academy president. The story of his exploit at the bridge begins on page 10.

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Dewey Canyon, Thirty Years Later



Charles D. Melson

Thirty years ago this past January, a classic combined arms operation began in Vietnam: Operation Dewey Canyon. It is against more than a decade of war that this account should be read. An estimated 500,000 Marines served in Vietnam from 1962 through 1975. The Vietnam War, the longest in the history of the Corps, exacted a high cost, with more than 14,800 Marines killed and 88,000 wounded. It is a story about men in combat against the enemies of their country and tells about the 9th Marine Regiment during mobile operations in the western highlands on the border of Vietnam and Laos in early 1969.

The U.S. Marines operated mainly in I Corps, the northernmost of the South Vietnamese military zones, bordering Laos, North Vietnam, and the South China Sea. This was an area covering 10,700 square miles, includ-

ing the coastal enclaves of Phu Bai, Da Nang, and Chu Lai. It encompassed a population of 2,755,800 in 5 provinces, 6 cities, and 549 major villages. From the west, valleys and ridges served as infiltration routes for North Vietnamese attacking coastal populations and these same hinterlands served as enemy rear and staging areas.

The III Marine Amphibious Force, then commanded by LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr., was the senior Marine and American commander in I Corps. Assigned to it were elements of the 1st and 3d Marine Divisions, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, and the Force Logistic Command. Allied forces in I Corps had four tasks to accomplish: defend critical bases and airfields; destroy Communist combat forces; eliminate Communist subversive infra-

structure; and conduct civic action to support the government of South Vietnam.

Under MajGen Raymond G. Davis, the 3d Marine Division had carried out mobile operations against North Vietnamese units using superior firepower and helicopter mobility since the middle of the previous year. The division controlled three infantry regiments and support or service units of several kinds to make up a complete combined-arms team, including field artillery, armor, reconnaissance, engineers, communications, motor transport, medical, maintenance, and supply. Members of a Corps that stressed air-ground task forces and combined arms teams, the infantry bore the brunt of the daily burden of combat in conditions that placed them on a relatively equitable footing in firefights with a deadly enemy.

Bell UH1E "Hueys" of the 1st MAW land at Fire Support Base Cunningham in 1969. Dewey Canyon was fought in mountainous terrain overcome through the extensive use of helicopter transport and fire support bases throughout the area of operations. Marines firing howitzers duck and cover in the foreground.



Of Davis's regiments, the 9th Marines was one of the Marine Corps' "work-horse" regiments from World War I, through World War II, and the subsequent Cold War. The 9th Marines and its three battalions deployed to Vietnam in March 1965 and remained until 1969, "first in, first out." Along with a record of heavy combat, it had pioneered the "county fair" approach to civic action. Where the 9th Marines were, along the DMZ, found few civilians left to deal with anyway.

In January 1969, the III MAF and I Corps were concerned about expanded enemy activity in the Annamite Mountain Range where Communist forces from Laos moved along Routes 922 in Laos and 548 in South Vietnam, that led to Hue, Da Nang, and the populated coastal plain. Troop and supply concentrations were evident in Base Area 611 astride the internation-



The lack of level terrain, and dense foliage, meant that 3d Marine Division infantrymen received support from alternatives such as the Boeing CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter and hoist used to bring this casualty out for medical evacuation. Weather proved to be another hazard to be overcome just northwest of the A Shau Valley.

al border. Recent increases in anti-aircraft defenses indicated the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) had something to protect. This would be the origin of the operation codenamed "Dewey Canyon."

Signals, air, and ground reconnaissance tracked the Communist buildup in Base Area 611 and this information was expanded by other

agencies available to the 3d Marine Division. Gen Davis recalled that 40 percent of his area was secured by combat forces and the rest was "covered by reconnaissance" with patrols from 3d Force Reconnaissance Company and 3d Reconnaissance Battalion. These patrols were used to make contact with the enemy that was then exploited by a rapid buildup of infantry or air and artillery fire. This

was the type of attack called for to disrupt Base Area 611, using a force built around the 9th Marine Regiment led by Col Robert H. Barrow.

Opposing were elements of two NVA infantry regiments, an artillery regiment, and service-engineer-transportation troops. With these, the enemy was able to reinforce points under attack, counter-attack with small units making considerable use of crew-served weapons, and hit fire support bases. LtGen Herman Nickerson, Jr., later observed that in the North Viet-nameese, "we confront a dedicated foot soldier, but a soldier lacking in supporting arms . . . The test of a North Vietnamese commander then is to counter our overwhelming firepower. And he doesn't mind losing troops to gain his limited objectives." The 9th Marines commander felt the NVA was "well organized and formidable" and abundantly supplied and equipped in terrain that aided his defense. Barrow concluded, "He was strong and he fought hard."

To go after the North Vietnamese the Marines had to operate 20 to 30 air-miles beyond other allied bases—far from naval gunfire, resupply by road, and reinforcement. The battle area was in a remote corner of the mountain highlands, involving the converging valleys of the Da Krong and A Shau watersheds. Two large hill-masses dominated the apex of these valleys, Tam Boi and Co A Nong (Hills 1224 and 1228, respectively, from their altitudes on the map), through which Routes 922 and 548 curved. For the infantry, this meant fighting uphill from 600 feet to final objectives of over 3,600 feet covering an average horizontal distance of just four miles!

During the January to March monsoon season, temperatures were between 71 to 51 degrees—cool compared to the 100 degrees of the lowlands. No significant rainfall occurred, but there were overcast skies and drizzle with fog and clouds along the mountains and ravines. Barrow recalled they "experienced unfavorable weather over 50 percent of the

time,” and that it “stalled or slowed the momentum of our attack and robbed us of our options.”

Headquarters for 9th Marines was at Vandegrift Combat Base and its battalions assembled there prior to “D-Day” to rest, refit, and rearm. A logistics support area was located there with all classes of supplies moved by 3d Shore Party Battalion. The regiment was supported by LtCol Joseph R. Scoppa’s 2d Battalion, 12th Marines artillery, an engineer company, and aircraft from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and the U.S. Army 101st Airborne Division. Additional units from the 2d ARVN and 3d Marine Regiments were brought into the operation later.

Dewey Canyon kicked off on 18 January with the 9th and 12th Marines establishing fire support bases and blocking positions on three previously held hill-tops: Henderson, Tun Tavern, and Shiloh. “Built by engineers, defended by the infantry and manned by artillery, the fire support base” was an example of Marine flexibility according to 3d Engineer Battalion’s operations officer, Maj Robert V. Nicoli. Basically, fire support bases were rapidly built artillery positions allowing infantry to operate within a protective fan of fire that overlapped with other bases in order to fight in forests, jungles, and mountains where ground movement was limited. These moved forward in a classic “fire and maneuver” of forces, rapidly abandoning those bases no longer needed.

Enemy threats against these fixed positions were from “stand off” and sapper attacks. The latter were special NVA troops designed to conduct raids. The 3d Marine Division chief-of-staff related that they used unobserved approaches—such as through the trash dump, supported by mortar fire, backed at the last moment by “RPGs, Chicom grenades, satchel charges and bangalore torpedoes” to cover assaults made with utmost speed to keep the defenders in their bunkers, while the sappers hit ammunition stores, gun positions, fire



Cross-country movement and heavy fighting were required to dislodge entrenched North Vietnamese forces from their base “sanctuaries.” LCpl Guy S. Spencer of San Diego, California, examines a Communist heavy machine gun captured by his battalion in February 1969.

direction and communication centers.

On 22 January, LtCol George C. Fox’s 2d Battalion was flown forward to secure Fire Support Base Razor and Landing Zone Dallas to move closer to the enemy. Fire and air control agencies were established there and the 9th Marines was now fully committed. Two days later LtCol Elliot R. Laine’s 3d Battalion assaulted the ridge for Fire Support Base Cunningham, a further 6,500 yards beyond Razor. This was home for the forward regimental command post, field hospital, and logistics support group.

The fire support bases mounted 155mm howitzers, 105mm howitzers, and 4.2-inch mortars. The artillery fan now extended six miles south and

southwest to the limits of the operation area. From here close air support took 30-45 minutes to call in and helicopters some 45-60 minutes to arrive if the enemy and weather permitted. Because of the heavy enemy anti-aircraft defenses in Base Area 611, it was decided to attack cross-country rather than risk an airborne assault onto final Objectives 1, 2, and 3.

As initial gambits were being completed, the 2d and 3d Battalions cleared the areas around the fire support bases and then advanced to Phase Line Red along the Da Krong River. An outlying company position, Fire Support Base Erskine, was built and both battalions made “light con-

tact" with screening forces from units believed to be further south. By 2 February, an NVA field hospital had been overrun, a heavy company engagement was fought by 2d Battalion in rain and fog on Hill 1175, Fire Support Base Cunningham was shelled by 122mm guns, and the bad weather restricted air support. Company G was the most exposed and encountered a large enemy force as it pulled closer to friendly lines. Rain alternated with drizzle and fog. Visibility was reduced to yards and the ceiling to zero as hard red soil became mud.

Barrow decided to hold what ground the regiment had until things improved and units sat in defensive positions in the rain with resupply being conducted by parachute drops from radar-guided helicopters and Hercules C-130 transports. Nine days of poor weather cost impetus and permitted the enemy time to



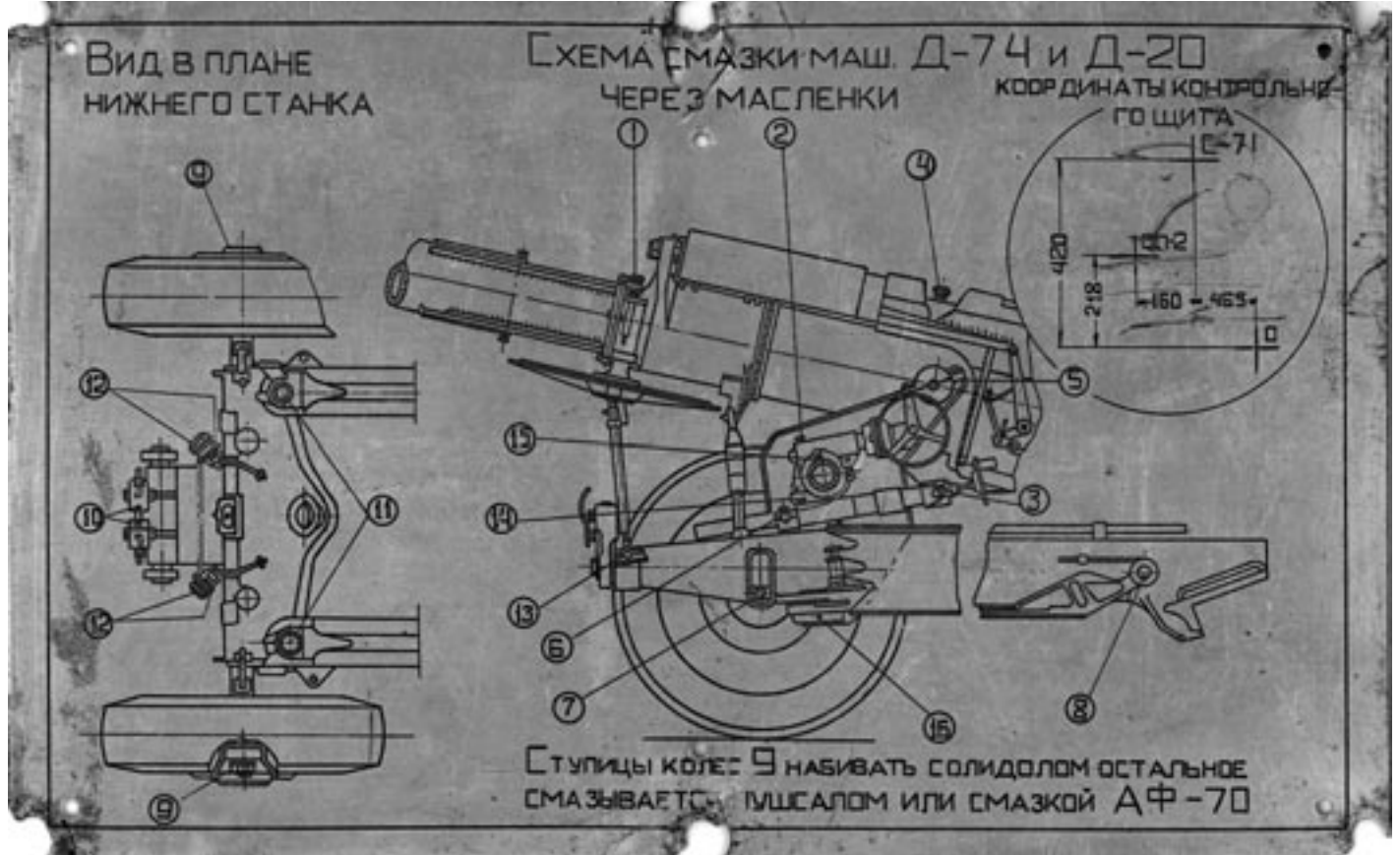
Marine Corps Historical Collection

Larger prizes were seized, such as this D-20 122mm howitzer prepared for helo-lift by 1st Battalion, 9th Marines. From left are 2dLt Jerry Jackson, 2dLt John Judeson, 1stLt Wes Fox, 2dLt Fritz Werner, and 2dLt John Harwood. Fox was awarded the Medal of Honor during this operation and the howitzer is now at Quantico, Virginia.

A data plate from a captured howitzer taken by then-LtCol Elliot R. Laine, Jr. commanding 3d Battalion, 9th Marines. The piece was captured by his battalion on 25 February at

Tam Boi on the border of Vietnam and Laos. Col Laine now is the History and Museums Division's part-time volunteer coordinator.

Marine Corps Historical Collection





Capt Thomas F. Hinkle of Wilmington, Delaware, and other Marines examine the Soviet-built howitzer from which the data plate was removed. North Vietnamese gunners blew the barrel when their efforts to stop Marines from overrunning their mountain stronghold failed.

prepare. On 10 February, weather cleared enough for LtCol George W. Smith's 1st Battalion to be helicoptered forward to Fire Support Base Erskine to take its place on Phase Line Red for the move from the Da Krong Valley up into Base Area 611. The 9th Marines was now on a line from west to east—2d, 1st, and 3d Battalions—each battalion with a zone of action three miles wide and assigned terrain objectives some four to five miles to the southwest.

On 12 February, 1st Battalion ran into a NVA force soon after leaving Erskine. Artillery fire and maneuver by three companies killed 25 enemy. The other battalions met with machine gun, mortar, and recoilless rifle firefights as they advanced. On the 17th, a sapper attack hit Cunningham defended by 2d

Battalion, 12th Marines, and Company M, leaving 37 bodies behind, 13 within the base itself; but four Marines died and another 46 were wounded.

Foot movement brought an all-encompassing cycle of demanding movement or rest, heat and damp, cold and damp, and exposure to the elements 24 hours a day. During the day, two companies advanced up the ridge lines alongside each other with another company following. The lead units would attack and the rear units would move to the flanks or establish a landing zone for mortar support, resupply, and medical evacuation. Companies rotated through these tasks as the situation permitted. At night the companies stopped and established defensive perimeters.

Heavy fighting occurred between 18 and 22 February, mostly in the 1st

Battalion's sector. Company A hit an entrenched platoon on a ridge three miles from Erskine and the NVA "appeared to want to hold their position at all costs." The position was overrun and 30 Communists killed. The next morning Company C moved through Company A and killed as many on an adjacent hill. Company C attacked and captured the two 122mm guns and prime movers and Company A then passed through to secure trucks and ammunition stockpiles. The 88 NVA killed were balanced against seven Marines dead and 44 wounded.

As the battalions neared the border with Laos, Barrow sought permission to cut Route 922, which was being used to move enemy units in and out of the battle area—despite artillery, fighter bomber, and B-52 Stratofortress attacks. It fell to 2d Battalion to cross the border and ambush traffic on this critical route with infantry, which it did on the 21st and 22d, a story in itself.

By now there was concern about "the general level of fatigue" on the ground after four weeks of operations. The rugged terrain, tension of combat, and lack of sleep was noted by corpsmen in high pulse rates and dehydration. Company and platoon commanders knew that tired riflemen were careless and likely to forget good movement and security techniques as a result.

On 22 February, Company A gained its commander the Medal of Honor (one of four reaped by 9th Marines during the fighting). As the company neared the border in the center of the regiment's advance, 1st Platoon pushed an enemy squad out of well-positioned bunkers. As things looked quiet, 1stLt Wesley L. Fox radioed battalion to send a detail down to the creek to get needed water for Headquarters Company and Company C. The 20 men sent for water came under mortar and machine fire, and 1st Platoon went to cover them, kicking off the last heavy engagement of Dewey Canyon.

On the regiment's left flank, 3d Battalion had advanced generally



The enemy also destroyed its prime movers while fleeing from the 9th Marines advance towards the A Shau Valley. PFC Bernardo A. Blazek of Viroqua, Wisconsin, stands atop a prime mover and examines the remains of its engine compartment. Road networks from Laos allowed the enemy to enter into South Vietnam with relative ease before the Marines arrived.

along Route 548, uncovering maintenance installations and fuel depots. The battalion cleared Hill 1228, called Tiger Mountain by the Marines, and by 23 February had seized 122mm guns, prime movers, ammunition, a hospital, and an underground headquarters complex. Fire Support Base Turnage was established on the Tiger Mountain hill complex to cover this phase of the fighting.

At the border, 1st Battalion reoriented its march along Route 548 towards Hill 1044, where on 26 February Company D found one of the largest supply depots captured during the war, with more than 100 tons of munitions and 737 weapons. The next several days were spent recovering this material and destroying the complex—a massive effort requiring two companies to complete.

On the regiment's right flank, 2d Battalion swung through Laos until 1 March, covering 5,500 yards in five days—killing 48 enemy, capturing 20 tons of food and ammunition, and two 122mm guns. This move blocked Route 922 at the time the 1st and 3d Battalions were pushing from the other side. This brought the operation to an end and began a phased withdrawal conducted through 18 March, returning units by helicopter to the

Vandegrift Combat Base. Communist forces up to company-size continued to attack in the Tiger Mountain area. The last unit out was 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, and its move was still under mortar and antiaircraft fire from Base Area 611's tenants.

Dewey Canyon engagements killed 1,617 North Vietnamese soldiers (more were estimated killed by supporting fires) and took only five prisoners. Marine casualties were 130 dead, 920 wounded, and 1 missing for the same period. The operation had been supported by 461 close air support missions delivering 2,000 tons of ordnance and some 134,000 rounds of artillery fire. Helicopters flew some 1,200 sorties to move 9,121 troops and 1,533,597 pounds of cargo with the loss of one aircraft. The captured base area yielded 1,223 small arms, 104 machine guns, 26 mortars, 73 antiaircraft guns, 16 artillery pieces, 92 trucks, and 14 bulldozers. Completing the haul were more than 800,000 rounds of ammunition—from small arms to artillery—2,920 land mines and 800 pounds of explosives, 110 tons of rice, and 2 tons of salt. For seven weeks enemy resupply and infiltration were blocked and preempted were major Communist attacks for the year, so tactical and operational success was achieved.

The 9th Marines earned a unit citation for the most successful independent regimental operation of the conflict and continued a tradition of hard fighting under rugged conditions as “a Marine regiment of extraordinary cohesion, skill in mountain warfare, and plain heart.” The regimental commander later said the battle was “regarded by many as the most unusual, challenging, and successful large-scale operation of the Vietnam War.” The credit for this success went to individual Marines, described by one of their battalion commanders as “hard corps—well trained and led, motivated to the highest degree, and undemanding of creature comforts.”

I first heard about Dewey Canyon from participants such as LtGen Raymond G. Davis at Quantico, Virginia, and from other Marines while overseas with the 9th Marines. Further information on this model regimental battle can be found in the sources this article was based upon, to include: MajGen Robert H. Barrow, “Operation Dewey Canyon,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (November 1981), pp. 84-89; Commandant of the Marine Corps, Dewey Canyon (Washington, D.C.: HQMC, n.d.); 1stLt Gordon M. Davis, “Dewey Canyon: All Weather Classic,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (September 1969), pp. 32-40; LtGen Herman Nickerson, *Leadership Lessons and Remembrances from Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: HQMC, 1988); and Charles R. Smith, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1969* (Washington, DC: HQMC, 1988). □1775□

MEDALS OF HONOR 9TH MARINES, OPERATION DEWEY CANYON

LCpl Thomas P. Noonan, Jr.

Company G, 5 February 1969*

1stLt Wesley L. Fox, Company

A, 22 February 1969

Cpl William D. Morgan,

Company H, 25 February 1969*

PFC Alfred M. Wilson, Company

M, 3 March 1969*

*Posthumous

'The Logistics War' Examined in Gulf War Series

by Charles R. Smith
Head, History Writing Unit

Combat Service Support in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the eighth preliminary monograph in the series *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991*, recently was published by the History and Museums Division. It is an account of the Marines and sailors of the 1st and 2d Force Service Support Groups, Marine Wing Support Group 37, and the 3d Naval Construction Regiment, whose combined logistical efforts gave the I Marine Expeditionary Force the ability to eject Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

Written by Maj Steven M. Zimmeck, USMC (Ret), a career logistician who served as a logistics watch officer in the Headquarters Marine Corps Crisis Response Cell and as the first logistics advisor to the Royal Saudi Marines during the Persian Gulf crisis, the monograph covers August 1990 through October 1991. It was the period when the Marine Corps quickly sent forces to the Persian Gulf, freed Kuwait, and rapidly reconstituted its capabilities to respond to other crises.

Maritime Prepositioning Ships and Marine forces afloat, the author points out, gave the Marine Corps the ability to respond rapidly, while the professionalism of its combat service support forces gave the Corps the capability to

accomplish its mission. The 1st and 2d Force Service Support Groups unloaded the ships and aircraft and pushed supplies and services to the ground and aviation combat elements. Gens James A. Brabham, Jr., and Charles C. Krulak welded together a general and direct supply system that extended from Bahrain to Kuwait in support of the ground attack. Gen Krulak's Marines and sailors moved with the ground attack, while Gen Brabham used every conceivable means of transport to push supplies to the front. The five squadrons of MWSG-37 provided direct support to the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing's helicopters and fixed-wing groups, and the Seabees of the 3d Naval Construction Regiment built facilities from Bahrain to Kuwait.

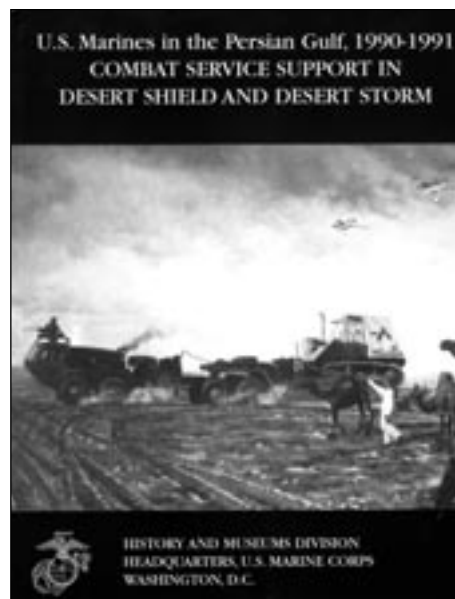
Once Kuwait was freed, the Marine Corps, the author notes, did not rest on its laurels, but rapidly reconstituted its logistics capabilities to respond to other immediate crises. The 2d Force Service Support Group recovered the Corps' ammunition capability and, together with the Blount Island Command, began reconstituting the Maritime Prepositioning Force. "When historians, strategists, and tacticians study the Gulf War," as Gen Krulak later pointed out, "what they will study most carefully will be logistics. This was a war of logistics."

The widely publicized German airborne attack into Northern Europe's Low Countries in May 1940, created an immediate reaction throughout the Marine Corps. Within days of the attack, the Commandant, MajGen Thomas Holcomb, ordered plans prepared for "the employment of parachute troops." The first small group of volunteers reported for training in October and graduated the following February. By the summer of 1941, the Marine Corps had a two-company parachute battalion that would eventually grow to a four-battalion regiment in 1943. *Silk Chutes*

and *Hard Fighting: U.S. Marine Corps Parachute Units in World War II*, by LtCol Jon T. Hoffman, USMCR, covers the Corps' brief flirtation with airborne operations, from the development and deployment to the eventual demise of Marine parachute units during the Second World War.

Although Marine parachutists made no combat jumps during the war, they took part in securing Gavutu and Guadalcanal, the Choiseul Island diversion, and the occupation and defense of Cape Torokina on Bougainville.

Considered a "luxury" the Marine Corps could not afford, the Commandant ordered the disbandment of all parachute units in late 1943. The 1st Parachute Regiment was assigned to the Fleet Marine Force where it staffed the then-forming 5th Marine Division. Barely a year later, the division, "leavened by the veterans" of the regiment, would land at Iwo Jima. There, three parachutists, Sgt Henry O. Hansen and Cpls Ira H. Hayes and Harlon H. Block, participated in the famed flag raisings on Mount Suribachi. Of the 81 Marines to earn the Medal of Honor in World War II, five were former paratroopers. □1775□



Ripley Widely Known for Exploit at Dong Ha Bridge

by Charles D. Melson
Chief Historian

There were few Americans in combat in Southeast Asia by 1972. The majority of U.S. Marines “in country” were fire support or communications specialists and the advisors with the South Vietnamese Marine Corps. The TQLC, or VNMC in English, was formed from former French commando units after the 1954 ceasefire that established North and South Vietnam. An elite unit by any standards and closely associated with the U.S. Marine Corps, the VNMC had been fighting the Communists for more than a decade. Those American Marines selected to serve with the VNMC were considered the “chosen few” for being the last Marines in combat and for the exotic nature of their assignment. As

advisors they wore the distinctive green beret and “tiger stripe” battle dress of the VNMC. As part of the South Vietnamese national reserve, two Marine brigades were deployed along the Demilitarized Zone with the 3d ARVN Division following the departure of American combat units from Military Region 1 in 1971. For them the war was not over yet and a major test of their efforts came during the Communist Spring Invasion that started on 30 March 1972.

Easter Sunday, 2 April, proved to be a fateful day for the 3rd ARVN Division defending northern Quang Tri Province. After three days of continuous artillery fire and tank-infantry

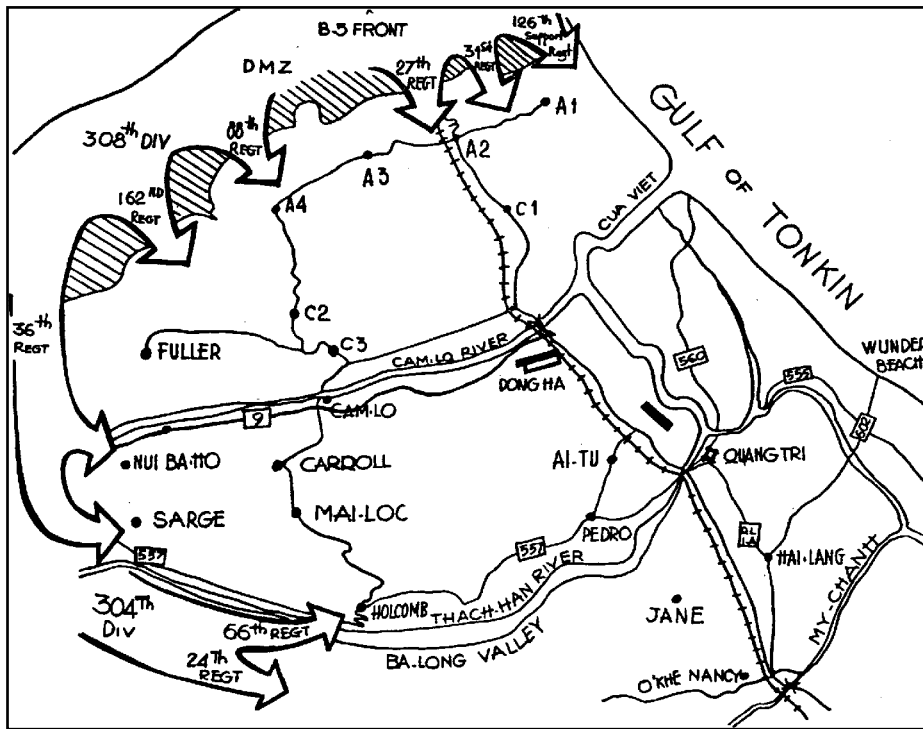
assaults, it appeared that the North Vietnamese were making their main attack along the axis of the national highway, QL-1. At this time Camp Carroll and Mai Loc fire support bases to the west were still in friendly hands, but all resistance to the north of the Cam Lo River had crumbled. The 308th NVA Division’s thrust from the DMZ to the south had gained momentum as each ARVN outpost and fire support base fell. Intelligence reports estimated that three NVA mechanized divisions were attacking with approximately 10,000 infantry, 150 T-54 and PT-76 tanks, 75 tracked anti-aircraft vehicles, an artillery regiment of 47 130mm guns, and anti-aircraft missile units.

At the 3d VNMC Battalion command post at Dong Ha, the American is then-Capt John W. Ripley. Bending over the map is the battalion commander, Maj Le Ba Binh. Note the

number of radios used to control the unit and the ARVN M113 armored personnel carrier.

David Burnett Contact Press Images





By mid-day Easter Sunday nothing was on the QL-1 axis between the enemy and the coveted Quang Tri City except a river, a bridge, and a battalion of Vietnamese Marines and tanks. With them on the ground in MR-1 were the advisors. The 3d VNMC

Battalion, with Capt John W. Ripley as its sole American advisor, was spread along Route 9 from Cam Lo to Dong Ha. Ripley was on his second tour in Vietnam, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate with experience from Force Recon and Royal Marine exchange

tours. He provided "advise" and fire support coordination to the 700-man unit on the south side of the river sent to gain enough time for the 3d ARVN Division to organize a new defense line south of the Thach Han River.

With the report of approaching tanks, Maj Le Ba Binh, the 3d VNMC Battalion commander, was ordered by his brigade commander to hold Dong Ha. The brigade commander sent four jeep-mounted 106mm recoilless rifles north for support. Also sent forward were 42 brand-new M48 main battle tanks of the 20th ARVN Tank Battalion. Binh was ordered to "hold Dong Ha at all costs." Ripley was told to expect the worst: a column of Communist PT-76 and T-54 tanks were approaching, refugees were clogging the roads out of Dong Ha, and no further units were available to help. A large red North Vietnamese flag was seen flying over the railroad bridge and NVA infantrymen were storming across both spans as the Marines and tanks arrived. Ripley recalled an "absolute fire storm" of Communist artillery fire hitting Dong Ha at this point. Enemy tanks

New Director Held Senior Academic Posts

John W. Ripley was appointed Director of Marine Corps History and Museums, the Marine Corps' historian and director of the History and Museums Division of Headquarters Marine Corps, on 12 July. A retired colonel with 35 years of service, when selected Ripley was president of Hargrave Military Academy of Chatham, Virginia. His previous positions included president and chancellor of Southern Virginia College in Buena Vista, Virginia.

A 1962 graduate of the U. S. Naval Academy, Col Ripley served two infantry tours in South Vietnam, one with the Vietnamese Marine Corps during the 1972 Easter Offensive. Other fleet service included the Marine Detachment, USS *Independence*; force reconnaissance, company, battalion, and regimental commands, and staff duty.



Col John W. Ripley, USMC (Ret)

Ripley also served with the Naval Reserve Officer Training units of Oregon State University and the Virginia Military Institute. He was the Senior Marine and Director of the Division of English and History at the U.S. Naval Academy. He left active duty in 1992.

Col Ripley replaced Col Michael F. Monigan, who had the unique experience of being both the acting and serving director of the division during a crucial transition period. Monigan is a career pilot with almost 35 years of service. His squadron service included Marine Helicopter Squadron 1 (HMX-1) and command of Training

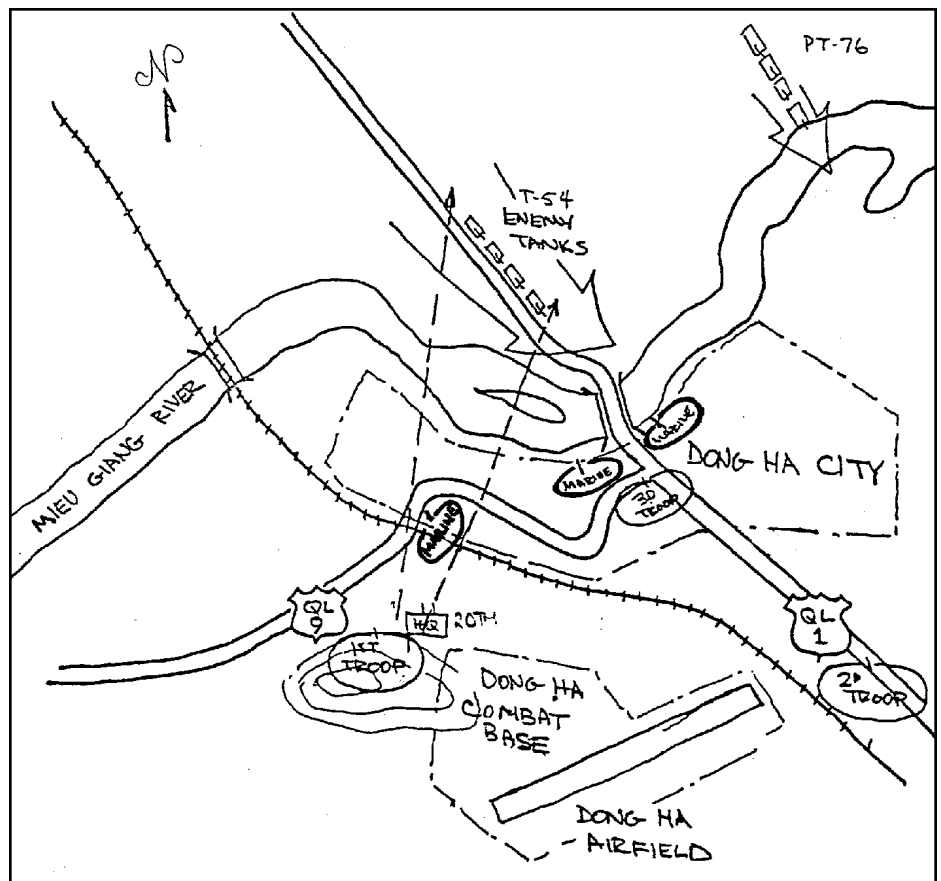
Squadron 3. Ripley is the third Director of Marine Corps History and Museums since the billet was created in 1971.

appeared on the horizon sending up rooster tails of dust as they barreled down QL-1. Naval gunfire from American destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf had some effect on the enemy advance as oily black columns of smoke rose over the north bank of the river. But this was not enough to stop them. At 1200 the ARVN M48s began firing at the NVA tank column, knocking out six Communist vehicles.

At about 1215, as the first NVA tank nosed out onto the north side of the highway bridge, Vietnamese Marine Sgt Huynh Van Luom, a veteran of many years fighting, took two M72 light antitank assault weapons (LAAW) and walked up to the south side of the bridge. Although he was a section leader, he moved forward alone. As he reached the bridge he took two ammunition boxes filled with dirt and a single roll of concertina wire and placed them in front of him. It was a ludicrous situation, the 90-pound Marine crouched in the firing position to battle a 40-ton behemoth bearing down on his meager fortification. Luom coolly extended both LAAWs as the NVA tank started across the bridge.

The tank jerked to a halt. Perhaps the tank commander could not believe his eyes. He stopped dead in his tracks as he watched the lone Marine take aim. Luom fired, the round went high and to the right. The tank started to ease forward. Luom picked up the second rocket, aimed, and fired. The round ricocheted off the bow, detonating on the turret-ring, jamming the turret. The enemy tank commander backed off the bridge, making the worst possible decision he could have. All at once the Marines along the river saw that enemy armor could be stopped.

The whole incident took only a few seconds. Sergeant Luom grinned and the whole front breathed easier. Capt Ripley gave Sgt Luom credit for "singlehandedly stopping the momentum of the entire enemy attack." At 1245, the ARVN division command post radioed Maj James E. Smock, U.S. Army advisor with the 20th ARVN



Tank Battalion, authorization to blow the Dong Ha bridge immediately. If necessary, additional demolitions would be sent up and that higher headquarters had been informed of the decision. When Ripley heard this he replied that "he had always wanted to blow a bridge." Although he was modest, almost shy, no man could have been better qualified to do the job, with demolition expertise from U.S. Army Ranger School and the Royal Marines' special boat squadron. As Ripley walked forward toward the bridge, Maj Smock on an ARVN tank called, "Hey Marine, climb aboard and let's go blow a bridge." The two Americans with two M48 tanks moved forward to within 100 meters of the bridge. Still in defilade, the tanks stopped at this point. Ripley and Smock dismounted, shielded from enemy view by an old bunker. From the bunker to the bridge was open space swept by enemy artillery and small-arms fire. The sun was bright, the weather had cleared, but there were no aircraft overhead or naval gunfire coming in to provide covering fire. The Marines in forward positions

fired at the north bank as the two advisors came forward.

The two men ran across the open space. They found ARVN engineers stacking 500 pounds of TNT and C-4 plastic explosive at the juncture of the bridge and the approach ramp. The ARVN engineers, however, had placed the explosives in such a position that upon detonation, the bridge would merely "flap" in place and not drop. Ripley, quickly surveying the situation, realized that the explosives would have to be placed along the girders under the bridge. A high chain-link fence topped by barbed wire prevented access to the underpinnings of the bridge. After a quick conference with Smock, it was agreed that once Ripley cleared the fence, Smock would lift the TNT over the fence and Ripley, in turn, would place it underneath the spans.

Swinging his body up and over the fence, Ripley barely cleared the concertina, shredding his uniform. Clearing this obstacle, and with a satchel charge and some blasting caps, the Marine started hand-over-hand



Photo courtesy of Col John W. Ripley, USMC (Ret)

A reconnaissance aircraft photographed the Dong Ha Bridge shortly after its destruction. To the left is "The Triangle" road junction of Highways 1 and 9 and to the right is the Dye Marker bunker and the bridge and its burning road bed. At far right are communist armored vehicles pulled off the road, exposed to air attack and unable to advance further

above the water along the first girder. About halfway out over the swiftly flowing water, he tried to swing himself up into the steel girders by hooking his heels on either side of the beam. It was then that he realized that he still had on his webbing and his rifle was slung over his shoulders. All at once the weight was oppressive. As he was hanging by his hands with explosives, web gear, and weapon, watched by NVA soldiers, Ripley made another effort to secure a foothold on the beam. His arms ached with pain, his finger grasp felt insecure, and he could not hang there indefinitely. After several attempts to swing his body, he lodged his heels on the beam. Working his way up into the steel of the bridge, he discovered that

the support girders were separated by practically the width of the ammunition crates in which the explosives had been packed.

Crawling back and forth between the beams, Ripley placed the demolitions in a staggered alignment among the six girders. Major Smock, remaining at the fence, muscled the 50-pound boxes near the five channels created by the six beams by climbing the fence each time and placing them within Ripley's reach. As each channel was mined, it was necessary for Ripley to drop down from one beam and swing over the next, very similar to a high wire act in a circus.

As the Marine laboriously dragged each crate of TNT down the chute

formed by the legs of each of the beams, Maj Smock became impatient with Ripley's meticulous manner and concerned about the small-arms fire from the north bank, 50 meters away. He called, "Hey, you dumb jarhead, that isn't necessary . . . What are you doing that for?" "You tankers don't know anything," Ripley assured Smock. The charges had to be placed diagonally in order to torque the span from its abutment. Smock insisted that there was enough power to blow that bridge and "three more like it." Nevertheless, despite the "interservice rivalry" the bridge had to be destroyed on the first try. There would be no time for a second attempt.

After lifting all the boxes of explosives to Ripley, Smock crouched down

and lit a cigarette while Ripley paused amidst the steel girders. Finally, the explosives in place, Ripley took the electric blasting caps from his pocket and crimped them to the communications wire being used to detonate the charge. Clearing the fence, he ran the wire to the burning wreckage of a nearby "Jeep." As a precaution he had cut 30 minutes of time fuze before attempting an electrical detonation using the vehicle's battery. Ripley touched the wire to either terminal, but the bridge did not blow. Now it seemed the fate of South Vietnam's northern provinces rested on a burning fuze sputtering its way toward 500 pounds of high explosive.

After what seemed an eternity, the time fuze neared its end. The tell-tale smoke trail was now out of view. Smock and Ripley "waited and hoped." Suddenly, the bridge blew! The span, curling in the predicted twisting manner, was severed from the berm "and settled into the river." The smoking open space between the north and south banks was a beautiful

sight for the two Americans. At 1630, Ripley reported to division headquarters that the bridge had been destroyed, and that Major Smock had demolished the railroad bridge upstream.

Airstrikes by South Vietnamese A-1 Skyraiders hit the armored column backed up north of the bridge. All firing stopped, there was a calm for a few moments, then, on the north side, noise was evident once more as NVA tanks shifted their positions to make room for PT-76 amphibious tanks to come forward to the river's edge. The enemy was determined to cross. Ripley saw four of them ready to cross and immediately called a naval gunfire mission. The gunfire support ship sailed within the five fathom curve and let go with a salvo. All four tanks were destroyed on the river bank. Ripley recalled that this destroyer probably was one of the few ships in the Navy that rated four enemy tanks painted on her stacks. Subsequently, a B-52 bombing strike, which had been scheduled for that area, silenced the remaining tank activity to the

north and east of Dong Ha, for the time being.

With their armored thrusts thwarted at the Dong Ha and Cua Viet areas, the determined Communists exerted pressure elsewhere. The Cam Lo bridge to the west was the only available crossing point and the NVA effort shifted in that direction. More naval gunfire was called for and the fire from the guns of the destroyers again squelched enemy movement as all night long hundreds of naval projectiles were called in upon the enemy. The battle for Dong Ha was still in doubt, but there was no question the Communist armored-assault had been halted by the efforts of "a few good men" on Easter Sunday. For their actions that day, Capt Ripley was awarded the Navy Cross—America's second highest award for valor—and Maj Smock the Silver Star Medal—the third highest award for valor. But John Ripley recalled VNMC Sgt Luom's action in stopping the first tank at the bridge as the "... bravest single act of heroism I've ever heard of, witnessed, or experienced." □1775□

Historical Quiz

Marine Corps Operations in the 1990s

*by Lena M. Kalijot,
Reference Historian*

Match the operation name with the appropriate location:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Assured Response | A. Florida Straits |
| 2. Sea Angel | B. Montana |
| 3. Fiery Vigil | C. Bosnia |
| 4. Desert Shield/Desert Storm | D. Somalia |
| 5. Garden Plot | E. Bangladesh |
| 6. Able Manner/Able Vigil | F. California |
| 7. Deliberate Force | G. Liberia |
| 8. Restore Hope | H. Iraq/Turkey |
| 9. Task Force Wildfire | I. Persian Gulf |
| 10. Northern Watch | J. Philippines |

(Answers on page 16)

Vietnamese Defense Staffers Research Marine Records

by Frederick J. Graboske
Marine Corps Archivist

On 26 August a delegation of five Vietnamese officials visited the Marine Corps Historical Center as part of their nation's attempt to locate its missing in action (MIA) from the Vietnam War. The visit was sponsored by the Department of Defense POW/MIA office. The delegation was led by a senior colonel from the Ministry of Defense. The Assistant Defense Attache at the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington is the local contact for this effort, and he also was part of the group.

The group met first with our Director, Col John W. Ripley, USMC (Ret). The Director recently had visited some of the battlefields in Vietnam where he had seen action. He and the Vietnamese colonel looked at photos of these areas and discussed the war. It happened that both men had been active in combat in the Con Thien region in 1967-1968. At one point, the Vietnamese pulled up his pants leg to show an old wound and he exclaimed, "You probably were the one who shot me!"

Director of Marine Corps History and Museums Col John W. Ripley, Ret, right, answers questions regarding Marine records of the Vietnam War for visiting officials of the Vietnamese Defense Ministry and that country's embassy staff in Washington. The delegation took away 42 compact disks containing nearly 400,000 pages of records from the war, to aid in resolving the fates of missing-in-action soldiers.



Col Ripley presented the group a complete set of the Marine Corps histories of the Vietnam War to be shipped back to Hanoi for use by their researchers. The group leader promised to reciprocate when their wartime series is complete. They also were presented a set of the CD-ROMs of the Vietnam records that we have digitized. These 42 CDs contain 389,000 pages of records. These, too, were to be shipped to Hanoi to permit researchers to search for map coordinates of actions noting enemy dead or identifying enemy grave sites.

The delegation then visited the Archives Section to see how the CD system works and to gain an understanding of the organization and contents of command chronologies. The CDs were demonstrated and paper records were brought out for their examination. The head of the Archives Section promised the Vietnamese his full cooperation in their research efforts and invited the attache to return whenever any ques-

tions arose. He also promised to send them a complete set of the CDs when our digitization of the Vietnam records (more than 1 million pages) is complete. We recognize the humanitarian imperative to assist Vietnamese families in locating the remains of loved ones, in addition to encouraging their government's cooperation with similar American efforts in Vietnam.

The head of the Archives Section questioned the delegation about the equivalent Vietnamese records of the war. He was told that no records were generated below the battalion echelon. Even at the battalion, some commanders made no records and many others made only cursory notes. In only a few cases were the commanders able to expand these notes to a more comprehensive narrative. Some records never reached Hanoi because they were captured or destroyed by American forces. After the war, implementation of a unified state and physical rebuilding took precedence over historical documentation. Now, as battalion and regimental histories are being written, the commanders are being interviewed by oral historians. However, the Vietnamese colonel noted, the accuracy of their recollections after more than 30 years leaves much to be desired.

The colonel had several questions about USMC casualties during the war. He particularly was interested in deaths from Agent Orange. He was told that, in the eyes of some Marines, the defoliant saved their lives by preventing the enemy from shooting them from thick jungle cover. The colonel agreed that, given a choice, most soldiers would choose to run a risk of delayed, rather than immediate, death. At the conclusion of the visit, their U.S. Air Force escort opined that their visit to the Historical Center had been the highlight of their visit to the United States. □1775□

Answers to the Historical Quiz

Marine Corps Operations in the 1990s

by Lena M. Kalijot, Reference Historian

(Questions on page 14)

- 1. G. During April-August 1996, Marines provided security of the U.S. Embassy... 2. E. During May-June 1991, a naval task force... 3. J. In June 1991, Marines provided humanitarian assistance... 4. I. From August 1990 to February 1991 U.S. forces... 5. F. In May 1992, Marines were deployed to assist local law enforcement... 6. A. During the period of January 1993 to October 1994... 7. C. During August-September 1995, Marine squadrons... 8. D. From December 1992 to May 1993, the missions of Operation Restore Hope... 9. B. In August 1994, 1,100 Marines provided fire-fighting assistance... 10. H. From June to December 1997, Marines provided no-fly zone enforcement...

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Corps Mourns Veteran Aviators and Marksmen

*by Robert V. Aquilina
Assistant Head, Reference Section*

MajGen Ralph H. "Smoke" Spanjer, USMC (Ret), veteran Marine aviator and fifth Superintendent of the Marine Military Academy, died 8 February in Delafield, Wisconsin, at the age of 78. Gen Spanjer was born 20 September 1920 in Hillside, New Jersey. He attended New York University and served a year in the U.S. Navy prior to entering the Marine Corps Reserve in January 1942. He was commissioned a Marine second lieutenant upon completing flight training in Miami, Florida, on 15 July 1942. During World War II, he was assigned to Marine Fighter Squadron 441 in the Central Pacific, where he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross and five Air Medals. Later in the war, flying night fighter aircraft, he took part in the Peleliu and Okinawa campaigns. Following several years of schools and assignments, Gen Spanjer was ordered to Korea in April 1952, where he flew attack missions in North Korea with Marine Fighter Squadron 115. He earned a second DFC, along with a Navy Commendation Ribbon, and his sixth through

MajGen Ralph H. Spanjer



ninth Air Medals. Returning to the U.S. following the July 1953 Korean Armistice, Gen Spanjer's career pattern consisted of a mix of schools and flight assignments. In May 1965, he participated as commander of Marine Aircraft Group 13 in the initial landing of Marine forces at Chu Lai, Vietnam, and later served as Assistant Commander, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. He was promoted to the rank of brigadier general in September 1967. During the final years of the Vietnam conflict, Gen Spanjer directed operations in the Pacific as Assistant Chief of Staff, J-3, Pacific Command in Hawaii. He was also instrumental in the planning and execution phases of the return of American POWs from captivity in Southeast Asia. Upon his return to the U.S., Gen Spanjer assumed command of the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing at MCAS Cherry Point in June 1974. His final assignment was as Deputy Commander, FMFLant, where he served from August 1976 until his retirement on 1 January 1978. Following his retirement, Gen Spanjer was active in a wide variety of civic activities, and served as Superintendent of the Marine Military Academy in Harlingen, Texas, from 1978-1983. At the time of his death, Gen Spanjer was serving as the Chancellor of St. John's Northwestern Military Academy in Delafield. Gen Spanjer's remains were placed in a columbarium at the Academy on 20 February.

MajGen Arthur H. Adams, USMC (Ret), Marine aviator and holder of five Distinguished Flying Crosses, died on 6 February in Pinehurst, North Carolina, at the age of 83. Gen Adams was born 16 April 1915 in Jasper, Minnesota, and completed high school there in 1933. While in college, he enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve in 1936 for the Aviation Cadet program. Upon graduation from the



MajGen Arthur H. Adams

University of Minnesota in 1938, he was assigned to active duty in December for flight instruction at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida. Upon graduation from flight school on 16 November 1939, he was designated a Naval Aviator and commissioned a Marine Reserve second lieutenant. During World War II, Gen Adams completed two tours of overseas duty with the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, earning three DFCs, 13 Air Medals, and the Bronze Star with Combat "V." Following the war, he served in a variety of aviation assignments, and completed the Junior Course at Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Virginia. During the Korean War, Gen Adams served as commander of Marine Fighter Squadron 311, and Combat Operations Officer of Marine Aircraft Group 33. He earned his fourth and fifth DFCs, 14th through 16th Air Medals, and a second Bronze Star Medal in Korea. On his return to the U.S., he again served in a variety of assignments, and was promoted to brigadier general in July 1964, while Director of Information at Headquar-

ters Marine Corps. He later became Commanding General of the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing, and was promoted to major general in November 1967. Gen Adams later saw duty as Commanding General, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, and from July 1969 - February 1970, he served as the Senior Member, United Nations Command Component, Military Armistice Commission in Korea. On 1 March 1970, Gen Adams became Deputy Commander, FMF, Pacific. His last assignment was as Deputy Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, Atlantic, until his retirement on 1 March 1975. He was buried with full military honors on 17 February at Arlington National Cemetery.

MajGen Norman W. Gourley, USMC (Ret), Marine aviator and holder of four Distinguished Flying Crosses, died 17 February at Hot Springs Village, Arkansas, at the age of 77. Born 9 May 1921 in Salem, Massachusetts, he attended high school there, and graduated in 1941 from Wentworth Institute in Boston. He joined the naval service as a Naval Aviation Cadet in June 1942. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps and designated a Naval Aviator in June 1943. Deploying overseas with Marine Fighter Squadron 115, Gen Gourley participated in combat operations in the South Pacific and Philippine Islands. Following his return to the U.S. at the end of World War II, he completed the Junior Course at Quantico, Virginia, and served at a number of Marine air facilities. In 1952, Gen Gourley deployed to Korea, where he served during the Korean War as a night fighter pilot in combat operations with Marine Night Fighter Squadron 513. Following the war, his career pattern included a wide variety of flight and staff assignments. During the Vietnam War, Gen Gourley served with the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, as the Commanding Officer of Marine Aircraft Group 13, and in several assignments with Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, in Hawaii. He served as the Deputy Director for Operations, Headquarters, U.S. European Com-



MajGen Norman W. Gourley

mand, Stuttgart, Germany, from September 1970 to September 1972. He assumed duty on 12 September 1972 as Director, Development Center, Marine Corps Development and Education Command, Quantico, Virginia. Gen Gourley later became Director, Plans Division at Headquarters, Marine Corps. He was promoted to major general on 1 July 1973, and assumed duty as Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, FMFPac. His last assignment was as Director of Operations, J-3, Pacific Command, Hawaii, in March 1977, and he served in this capacity

Then-LtCol Woodrow M. Kessler



until his retirement on 1 April 1978. MajGen Gourley was buried on 4 March at Arlington National Cemetery.

BGen Woodrow M. Kessler, USMC (Ret), a decorated veteran of the defense of Wake Island in World War II, and subsequent prisoner of war for nearly four years, died 21 January in his home at Greenwich, Connecticut. He was 85. A native of Peru, Indiana, he grew up in Athol, Massachusetts, and enlisted in the Navy at the age of 17. He was subsequently selected to enter the U.S. Naval Academy class of 1937. Gen Kessler was commissioned a Marine officer, and at the outbreak of World War II, was stationed as a battery commander on Wake Island. He participated in the defense of the beleaguered island as a battery commander with the 1st Defense Battalion, and was a prisoner of war, along with his men, for 44 months. Following his release from captivity at the conclusion of the war, Gen Kessler remained in the Marine Corps. He served in Korea during 1951-1952, where he received his second Legion of Merit for outstanding service. His final Marine Corps duty station was at Little Creek, Virginia, where he served at the Amphibious Training Command. Following his retirement in 1955, Gen Kessler devoted time to developing his interest and skills in art. In 1992, he presented six paintings depicting his captivity to the Marine Corps Art Collection at the Marine Corps Historical Center. Gen Kessler was buried at the George Washington Memorial Chapel churchyard in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania

Col William A. "Ironman" Lee, USMC (Ret), a legendary marksman, warrior, and leader of Marines, died 27 December 1998 in Fredericksburg, Virginia, at the age of 98. Born 12 December 1900 at Ward Hill, Massachusetts, Lee enlisted in the Marine Corps in May 1918 and served in France near the end of World War I. His greatest fame, perhaps, was achieved during the late 1920s and 1930s in fighting rebel forces in Nicaragua, where his inspiring courage under fire and leadership



Then GySgt William A. Lee

qualities earned him three Navy Crosses. It was during this period that the name "Ironman" was bestowed upon him by no less a Marine legend than Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller.

Renowned as a distinguished marksman, Lee excelled in rifle and pistol competitions, and was twice winner of the Elliott Trophy Match Cup. Lee was appointed a Chief Marine Gunner in August 1941, and was stationed at that time at Chinwangtao, China (northeast of Tientsin), where he served as Officer in Charge of the Small Bore Gallery. Captured by Japanese forces along with his men on 8 December 1941, Lee spent the next 44 months in Japanese prisoner of war camps. His toughness and self-discipline during these years of hardships earned him the respect of his fellow Marines. His grade was changed during this period to Warrant Officer, and following his repatriation, he was successively promoted through regular officer ranks. In September 1946, he was appointed as the Commanding Officer of the Rifle Range Detachment at Quantico. He retired in 1950 from the Marine Corps with the rank of colonel. Col Lee was buried at the Quantico Marine Base Cemetery.

GySgt Carlos Hathcock, USMC (Ret), a renowned Marine sniper from the Vietnam War died 22

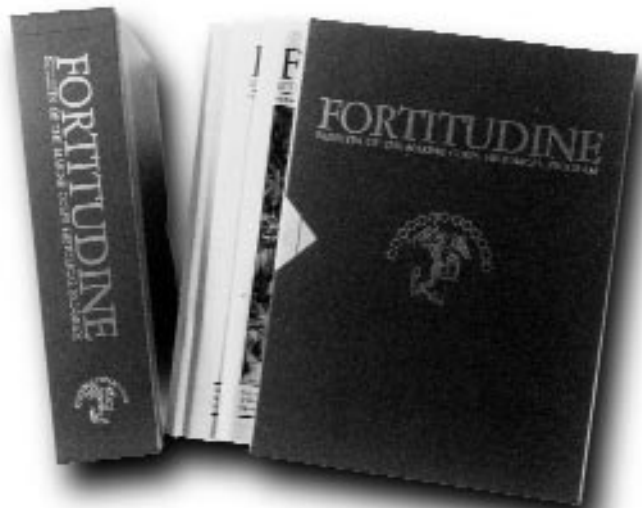
February in Norfolk, Virginia, after a long battle with multiple sclerosis. He was 57. A native of Arkansas, Hathcock joined the Marine Corps at age 17, and soon after boot camp, demonstrated his aptitude in marksmanship, winning competitive shooting events, and specializing in Service rifle competition. In 1965, he won the Wimbledon Cup, a competition that was widely considered to be the premier American 1,000-yard shooting championship. It was in Vietnam, however, that he began to gain recognition for his skill as a sniper. Ironically, his award of the Silver Star came not from his sniper skills, but for rescuing several Marines from a burning armored personnel carrier. Hathcock was himself badly burned in the explosion and resulting fire. Following his return to the U.S., he continued to work on new methods of instruction and weapons for Marine snipers, before his medical discharge from the Corps in April 1979. In retirement, Hathcock consulted for law enforcement agencies on sniping techniques. GySgt Hathcock was buried at Woodlawn Memorial Gardens in Norfolk. □1775□

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Oral Histories Document Marine Leaders of the 90s

by Dr. David B. Crist
Historian

Over the past few years, the Marine Corps oral history program has documented the careers of three prominent Marines, providing considerable new insights into the Marine Corps leadership of the last 30 years. Oral histories of the 30th and 31st Commandants, Gens Carl E. Mundy, Jr., and Charles C. Krulak, respectively, and an Assistant Commandant, Gen Richard I. Neal, are all due to be completed this year, pending security and privacy reviews. With over half of each interview devoted to the individual's last assignment, these interviews provide an unparalleled perspective on the role of the Commandant and the Assistant Commandant in the post-Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense. These three interviews mark the first, full career-length interviews conducted in nearly 10 years.

Since its inception in 1966, the focus of the Marine Corps' oral history program has been on the career-length interview with the Service's senior leadership. Biographical in nature, these lengthy, multi-session interviews cover the entire span of the interviewee's career, from The Basic School to retirement. Currently, the collection contains more than 350 such interviews. Virtually all the significant figures in Marine Corps history over the past 80 years, from Robert H. Barrow to David M. Shoup, have been interviewed, forming a truly unique collection. No other Department of Defense historical program has made a similar attempt at documenting its senior leaders.

Beginning in 1995, the current Director Emeritus, BGen Edwin H. Simmons, began interviewing the 30th Commandant, Gen Carl E. Mundy, for his career oral history. After two years and 30 separate sessions, the interview is the longest and most comprehensive of the entire collection. Just less than half the interview covers Gen Mundy's Commandancy. It provides a wealth of information on the downsizing of the U.S. military in the years



Carl Mundy, right, wears the Marine Corps uniform homemade by his mother when he was seven years old.

immediately following the Cold War as both the Marine Corps and the Department of Defense grappled with maintaining end-strength amid budgetary pressures. Further, Mundy provides useful information for future historians and military students on diverse topics ranging from the Tailhook scandal to the workings of the Joint Resources Oversight Council (JROC).

One of the interesting aspects to this interview was the one session done with Mrs. Mundy. For the first time in the Marine Corps oral history program, the Commandant's wife was included in the interview process. Her observations of the Marine Corps, over nearly 40 years, provide a unique perspective on the Service. It offers a more humanistic view of service life. This detail is one of the strengths of Mundy's interview. The amount of information on Mundy's life is almost overwhelming. One of the greatest benefactors of his career interview will be the social historian. Everything

from where he went on leave to where he purchased his dog is covered. The reader is left with an excellent sense of the life of a Marine Corps officer in the second half of the 20th century.

In contrast, Gen Richard I. Neal's interview is more circumscribed and lacks much of the personal detail of Gen Mundy's. While covering his entire career, the interview focuses on three main areas of his career: Vietnam; U.S. Central Command; and his last position as Assistant Commandant. Gen Neal served two tours in Vietnam—in 1967 and 1970. His first was as an artillery forward observer with 2d Battalion, 12th Marines. During his second tour, he served as an adviser to a South Vietnamese Marine battalion. One of the most dramatic accounts in his oral history covers his first tour while attached to 3d Battalion, 9th Marines. On the evening of 30 March 1967, the battalion was operating just a few miles south of the DMZ. While setting up platoon ambush positions, Company I's command group was suddenly attacked and overrun by a company of North Vietnamese. Within minutes most had been killed or wounded. 1stLt John P. Bobo, the weapons platoon commander, organized a hasty defense to cover the survivors' withdrawal. An enemy mortar round severed Lieutenant Bobo's right leg below the knee, but he refused evacuation. As his Medal of Honor citation would later read, "With a web belt around his leg serving as tourniquet and with his leg jammed into the dirt to curtail the bleeding, he remained in this position and delivered devastating fire into the ranks of the enemy attempting to overrun the Marines." For this action Bobo was presented the Medal of Honor, while two others received Navy Crosses, all posthumously. By happenstance, Neal, who normally traveled with the command groups as the company forward observer, had



Gen Mundy, center, and Gen Krulak, right, "troop the line" during the change of command on 30 June 1995. Col John B. Sollis, left, the Commanding Officer, Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C., accompanies the 30th and 31st Commandants.

been with the lead platoon acting as the company's navigator. With the enemy's attack, he took charge of the company and organized a counterattack which drove back the North Vietnamese and recovered the remnants of the company command group.

Another important aspect of Gen Neal's interview has little to do with the Marine Corps proper. Between 1985-1996, he served three tours at Tampa, Florida, in U.S. Central Command, whose area of responsibility focuses on the Middle East and eastern Africa. Few generals within the military have as much knowledge of the area or Central Command as does Gen Neal. Initially, he worked in the J-5, Plans, but spent much of his time working on highly sensitive negotiations with the Persian Gulf states at the behest of the then-Commander in Chief, Gen George B. Crist. His next assignment garnered him world-wide recognition when he served as the defacto operations officer during Desert Storm. In addition to press briefings, he had a vital role in the planning and execution of the war while working directly for Gen H. Norman Schwarzkopf. His last assignment in Tampa was that of deputy commander, which he held just prior to becoming the Assistant Commandant in 1996.

No commandant has approached his oral history with the degree of preparedness as the 31st Commandant, Gen Charles C. Krulak. Six months before his change of command, his staff was working with the History and Museums Division on the outline of his interview, and shortly thereafter, all his personal papers were made available to me in preparation for the interview. Gen Krulak grasped the importance of oral history from the outset, as not only a primary source for researchers examining his Commandancy, but also as a lasting forum to impart his views and ideas before historical revisionists could alter the meaning or intent.

While it remains a work in progress, the interview covers, in-depth, the nearly 50 major initiatives that came out of his Commandant's Planning Guidance (CPG), which affected nearly every aspect of the Marine Corps. The CPG provided a clear goal and plan, in place from Krulak's first day in office, all of which focused on two concepts, "making Marines and winning battles." His goal was to prepare the Marine Corps for the unique challenges of the next century along these two parallel themes, which he was quick to point out, was in step with the way the Corps had successfully done business since 1775.

If the slogan was deliberately simplistic, the execution of his ideas was anything but. They entailed a complex series of interrelated initiatives, from the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab to the Crucible, all of which were linked together in a movement designed to enhance the quality and ability of the small unit leader to deal with the changes imposed by the chaos of future conflicts. What has resulted is an outpouring of initiatives which has placed the Marine Corps at the forefront of innovation within the Defense Department. From reinstilling values and ethics in basic training, countering the threat of biological terrorism, to developing new tactics and techniques and hardware for urban warfare, the smallest of the Services has proven the most innovative.

Each of these interviews differs in methodology yet without a dramatic difference in utility. Gen Mundy's, for example, follows a strict chronology. It begins with his childhood, and ends with his present position as head of the USO. Gen Krulak's interview is more thematic in its organization. Such issues as Sea Dragon are covered from their initial concept at MCCDC, through the Commandant's Planning Guidance, and into the execution stage over his four years as Commandant, all covered in a single session. Despite these differences in style, they all are invaluable sources of information. The College of Continuing Education, Marine Corps University, is already looking at portions of Gen Mundy's interview which could be included in its Command and Staff reading package. The U.S. Central Command's historical office and the Joint History Office have expressed a strong interest in obtaining copies of Gen Neal's interview due to his joint assignments. And Gen Krulak's interview, when completed, will have considerable professional educational uses for the active-duty Marine Corps, while offering future historians an un-matched view of the 31st Commandant's thought process during an important transitional period of Marine Corps history. □1775□

Operation Dewey Canyon, 22 January-18 March 1969

by Robert V. Aquilina
Assistant Head, Reference Section

Regular readers of *Fortitudine* will recall that the chronology feature of the bulletin has often featured Marine Corps historical anniversaries. In recent issues, the chronology has looked at the 100th anniversary of Marine Corps operations during the Spanish-American War; the 80th anniversary of Marines in World War I; the 40th anniversary of the Marine landing in Lebanon; and the 30th anniversary of the Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War. The chronology will now look at another significant event from the Vietnam War: the 30th anniversary of Operation Dewey Canyon, 22 January - 18 March 1969.

On 18 March 1969, the 9th Marines officially terminated Operation Dewey Canyon, one of the most successful blows to enemy supply lines conducted during the Vietnam War. Launched on 22 January into Communist strongholds north of the A Shau Valley in the western mountains of Quang Tri Province, the multi-battalion operation unearthed one of the largest enemy munitions and arms caches of the Vietnam War. Some 525 tons of enemy weapons and ammunition were seized by U.S. Marines in this mountainous area near the Laotian border.

In January 1969, intelligence reports indicated the formation of a large enemy troop buildup in the A Shau Valley south of Vandegrift Combat Base. The 9th Marines, under the energetic command of Col Robert H. Barrow, was given

In February 1969, Marines of Company D, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, examine mortars and 12.7mm guns captured from North Vietnamese military forces during Operation

the assignment of denying access to the valley to North Vietnamese forces. Col Barrow's 9th Marines drove into the upper A Shau Valley complex with relative ease during the initial stages of the operation in late January. Several fire support bases were established in close proximity to the Laotian border to support infantry operations in the area. Shortly after the Marines deployed into the jungle, however, operations were temporarily curtailed by a nine-day period of bad weather. Consequently, most initial contact with the enemy took place in small, squad-sized actions.

To offset the effects of the inclement weather, Marine air planners developed special flying techniques prior to the opening phases of Operation Dewey Canyon. These tactics proved invaluable during periods of heavy fighting, when weather conditions made close air support hazardous. Using a radar-controlled system, Marine helicopters and fixed-wing transport used parachutes to drop supplies to Marines during the worst weather. The ability to keep the Marines resupplied was a major factor in the success of the operation. Marine helicopters continued medical evacuation as well throughout the operation.

The 9th Marines picked up the tempo of the operation as it entered its fourth week during February 1969. Driving towards the Laotian border, the Marines pushed out from their fire support bases in a classic regimental envelopment,

Dewey Canyon. Altogether, some 525 tons of weapons and ammunition were seized by Marines in the operation near the Laotian border.





Pitted against the landscape and the weather as well as the enemy, members of 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, mount a steep slope on the side of what they dubbed Tiger Mountain, in the operation to deny delivery of military supplies to North Vietnamese troops in the mountainous western portion of Quang Tri province.

a move reminiscent of tactics used during the Korean War. North Vietnamese forces fought hard for their previously untouched supply sanctuary, and made several desperate attempts to halt the Marines' drive. On two occasions, the enemy initiated attacks on Marine fire support bases Razor and Cunningham, but were soundly defeated. On 23 February, an estimated North Vietnamese battalion entrenched in an extensive bunker complex sought to

In a photograph which, because of the landing CH-53 helicopter, is highly reminiscent of the Vietnam War, supplies are brought to 9th Marines units and wounded men evacu-



engage the Marines. Two companies of Marines and a combination of artillery and air strikes dislodged the determined enemy force, which resulted in more than 100 enemy dead.

The bulk of the combat action during March involved brief, but intense, clashes with holdout North Vietnamese units, and included the discovery of additional caches of weapons and supplies. The major problem encountered during the final days of Operation Dewey Canyon was, again, weather related, the same factor which had plagued the Marines throughout the operation. Heavy rains, overcast skies, and ground fog conspired to delay the phase-down of the operation for several days. With the final extraction of the last Marine unit on 19 March 1969, however, the campaign concluded on a successful note. Enemy losses were counted as more than 1,600 NVA killed and 1,462 weapons and hundreds of tons of enemy munitions, supplies, and equipment captured.

As always, victory was not achieved without cost, and Operation Dewey Canyon was no exception. During the two-month campaign, 130 Marines gave their lives, and another 920 were wounded seriously enough to require evacuation. In evaluating the operation's success, LtGen R. G. Stilwell, USA, Commanding General, XXIV Corps, noted that victory in Operation Dewey Canyon was due to a Marine regiment of extraordinary cohesion, skill in mountain warfare, and plain heart. It was an evaluation in which all Marines who participated in Dewey Canyon could take pride. □1775□

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Digitization Strides Made by Corps' Archives

*by Frederick J. Graboske
Marine Corps Archivist*

The Archives Section has completed the digitization of the Special Action Reports and Command Diaries of the units serving in Korea during the war, 1950-1953. The 211,000 pages of records have been transferred to 25 CD-ROMs, one set of which is being reviewed now by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) for eventual loading onto our website. We have asked OSD to complete its review by 1 December.

A contractor also digitized 390,000 pages of Vietnam War records. These are only a portion of the whole body of records of the Vietnam War, which aggregate approximately 1.2 million pages. We hope to make arrangements to offer these CD-ROMs, and those of the Korean War, for sale to the public. We are trying to arrange with another federal agency to undertake this operation for us. When the arrangements are final, information about ordering copies of the CD-ROMs will be on our website. A few sets of CD-ROMs will be distributed to locations

where they will be put to good use, such as at the Marine Corps University Research Center in Quantico.

We are about to let a contract to digitize an additional 600,000 pages of Vietnam records. We hope that we can finish all of the command chronologies, after action reports, and mission reports in this segment. The anticipated completion date for this project is 1 July 2000. HD expects to make a few sets of these CD-ROMs available to institutions of military instruction and to have individual CDs available for sale to the public.

If funding is available, we intend to complete the digitization of the Vietnam records in FY 2001. The records to be done at that time will include the III MAF message traffic. The remaining classified records of the Vietnam War will be reviewed for declassification during the coming year. We hope to include them in the final batch to be digitized.