

MARINE ADVISORS

With the Vietnamese Provincial
Reconnaissance Units, 1966-1970



Colonel Andrew R. Finlayson
U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)

Occasional Paper

**HISTORY DIVISION
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
QUANTICO, VIRGINIA**

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: Approved for public release, distribution is unlimited.

PCN 10600001700

Front Cover: The Tay Ninh Provincial Reconnaissance Unit near Nui Ba Den Mountain in 1969. Then-Captain Andrew R. Finlayson, the author of this book, is on the bottom left.

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2009

Third Printing

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Preface

U.S. Marines as advisors have a long history, from Presley O'Bannon at Tripoli through Iraq and Afghanistan via Haiti, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, and Vietnam. While most Marines think of the Vietnamese Marine Corps as the primary advisory experience during that conflict, others served with various other advisory programs with the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Joint Special Operations, and U.S. Civil Operations and Rural Development Support. One of these is the subject of this study: Marine advisors with the Vietnamese Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs). This narrative is a combination of experience, research, and reflection. While other journalistic or academic accounts have been published, this is a narrative of participants.

Many historians consider the two most effective counterinsurgency organizations employed during the Vietnam War to have been the PRU and USMC Combined Action Platoons (CAP). In both cases, U.S. Marines played a significant role in the success of these innovative programs. It should be pointed out, however, that the number of U.S. Marines assigned to these programs was small and the bulk of the forces were locally recruited fighters. Both programs used a small cadre of Marines providing leadership, training, and combat support for large numbers of indigenous troops, and in so doing, capitalized on the inherent strengths of each.

The author believes that both of these programs have applicability in any counterinsurgency where U.S. forces are called upon to assist a host government. Obviously, adjustments to these programs would have to be made to take into account local conditions, but the core concept of providing U.S. Marines to command or advise local militia and special police units is one that has great promise for success. With a clear understanding of why the PRUs and CAPs worked, and with the necessary adjustments to take into account local conditions, similar units can be created to defeat future insurgencies. With this in mind, the author hopes that this work will provide U.S. military planners with insights into creating and managing units capable of defeating a well-organized and highly motivated insurgent political infrastructure.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank several people who were instrumental in the creation of this work and whose assistance allowed me to overcome many obstacles to acquiring firsthand accounts of U.S. Marines who served as advisors with the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) program. First, I would like to thank General James N. Mattis for suggesting that I write this work. General Mattis felt that this book would serve as a means of capturing important counterinsurgency “lessons learned” during the Vietnam War, and in so doing, provide valuable insights for present-day Marines as they fight other insurgencies in other lands.

Second, I wish to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Mark Moyar, the author of the most objective and accurate book concerning the Phoenix program, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey*. Dr. Moyar was the first historian of note to do the kind of thorough research into the Phoenix program needed to strip away the misunderstandings surrounding this counterinsurgency program. I am indebted to him for his support and insights during the creation of this work.

One individual, Lieutenant Colonel (Ret) George W.T. “Digger” O’Dell, provided invaluable assistance to me by putting me in touch with former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officers who had been involved with the PRU and could provide information on how the CIA viewed the contribution of the military assignees to the program. Lieutenant Colonel O’Dell served in the Marine Corps from 1965 to 1968, and then left the Marine Corps to join the CIA as a paramilitary officer in Laos and the Middle East from 1969 to 1975, before returning to the Marine Corps to finish his career in 1992 as one of the Corps’ few experts in the area of special warfare. He was tireless in his efforts to introduce me to his many friends in the CIA who had knowledge of the PRU Program.

I was ably assisted with the editing and formatting of this work by two longtime friends and colleagues, Hildegard Bachman and Mary Davisson. They provided many professional and valuable suggestions on how to improve the content and appearance.

I would like to thank several former CIA officers who provided valuable background material on the Phoenix program, the PRUs, and contact information on the Marines who served as advisors. They are Rudy Enders, Ray Lau, Hank Ryan, Warren H. Milberg, William Cervenak, and Charles O. Stainback. These patriots served their country in silence, often in extremely dangerous assignments, and I am both indebted to them for their assistance with this paper and for their unsung service to our nation.

At the History Division, Chief Historian Charles D. Melson provided project guidance, with editing by Kenneth H. Williams and layout and design by W. Stephen Hill.

I also thank *Studies in Intelligence* for permission to reprint the map of Tay Ninh from my 2007 article.

Introduction

During the latter stages of the Vietnam War, small teams of dedicated and courageous Vietnamese special police, led by American military and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) personnel, fought a largely unsung war against the political leadership of the Communist insurgency. These special police units were called Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs), and they conducted some of the most dangerous and difficult operations of the Vietnam War. Because these units were created, trained, equipped, and managed by the CIA, they worked in secret, a status that often led to myths and falsehoods about their activities. So pervasive are these myths and falsehoods that many historians often take them at face value without subjecting them to the same scrutiny as other historical aspects of the Vietnam War. This lack of understanding is further complicated because of the political divisiveness within the United States surrounding the Vietnam War, which led some opponents of U.S. involvement in that war to accept the most pernicious and false claims made against the entire pacification effort conducted by the American and South Vietnamese governments.

The passage of time and the work of some historians have helped to lift the shroud of secrecy around the PRU and their battle against the Viet Cong.¹ This book relates the story of how a small group of U.S. Marines assigned to this program contributed to the program's success and to identify, using official records, personal interviews, and other unclassified sources the factors that contributed to that success.² In so doing, I hope to inform the reader about why the PRU Program was so successful in destroying the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) despite many obstacles placed in its way by both the South Vietnamese and United States governments.



The Beginning

The Vietnam War was really two wars. One was the purely military war pursued by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) against the military forces of the government of South Vietnam (GVN) and the United States of America. The other war was the insurgency waged by the Viet Cong political apparatus, an extension of the Lao Dong Party in South Vietnam, using local political cadre and guerrillas. These two wars were part of an overall strategy of the North Vietnamese Lao Dong Party to overthrow the GVN and unite all of Indochina, including Laos and Cambodia, under their control. This dual-track strategy by the North Vietnamese Communists modulated between an emphasis on classic Maoist revolutionary war from 1956 to 1968 to a predominantly conventional war strategy from 1968 until the fall of Saigon in 1975.

The scope of this work does not allow for an analysis of the dual-track strategic approach by the North Vietnamese, but an understanding of it is necessary for the reader to comprehend how both sides fought the war. I leave it to the reader to refer to several excellent books on this subject, such as Mark Moyar's *Triumph Forsaken*, Lewis Sorley's *A Better War*, and Harry Summers's *On Strategy*, for analyses of how this strategy was applied during the war. The author's 1988 *Marine Corps Gazette* article may also prove helpful.³

This work examines one aspect of the counterinsurgency war waged in South Vietnam against the Communist political leadership (hereafter referred to as the Viet Cong Infrastructure, or VCI) of that insurgency. It deals with the primary instrument used by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to attack and defeat the VCI—the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) Program.

Rudy Enders, the legendary chief of operations for the CIA and one of the CIA's most original and effective organizers of paramilitary operations, explains below the origins of the Phoenix program in South Vietnam and the role the PRUs played in the early years of its existence. We pick up his story, in his own words, in 1966:

As Agency-supported programs matured, the volume of intelligence at province level became overwhelming. Some of it was tactical, but most pertained to the VCI. As one would expect, the collector seldom shared exploitable intelligence with anyone. With spies everywhere, who could be trusted? Why should you pass hot information and let others take credit for the operation? This could be said of the National Police, Special Branch, Rural Development Cadre, PRU, Military Security Service, and Sector and Subsector G-2s. In late 1966, they were all running operations against the VCI, but there was little coordination or cooperation. Besides, delays in reaching province often rendered information totally useless. Obviously, something had to be done. The answer was to design a mechanism to ensure cooperation amongst all existing South Vietnamese organizations operating against the VCI, and that this be done at the district as well as the province levels.

The CIA's Region One ROIC [Regional Officer in Charge] and his deputy grabbed the bull by the horns. They decided to run a pilot program in Quang Nam Province's five districts, starting with Dien Ban District. Visits to these districts revealed few had 1:50,000 scale maps of their area, a war room, or any files on VCI cadre. It was shocking. Most district compounds had barely enough room for the subsector staff and advisors. Accordingly, the ROIC asked General [Lewis W.] Walt, the commander of the Marines in I Corps, for supplies to build five A-frame-type wooden District Intelligence and Operation Coordinating Centers (DIOCC). The centers would be staffed by representatives from the CIA's Census Grievance, PRU, Rural Development, and Police Special Branch, along with the South Vietnamese National Police and Military Security Service. They would be run by the district chief's S-2 and advised by an American officer. The ROIC explained his initiative to John Hart, the CIA's Saigon station chief at the time, and he used the term Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation (ICEX) as a way to describe the concept.



Photo courtesy of CWO-4 Ronald J. Lauzon

Provincial Reconnaissance Unit operators in Thua Thien Province in 1967. In areas contested or controlled by the Vietnamese Communists, they would go on operations dressed to blend in with the Viet Cong (VC) or North Vietnamese Army (NVA). The weapon is a Communist bloc AK-47.

CIA felt ICEX was too much of a mouthful and began looking for a symbolic alternative by holding a region-wide contest to find a new name for the program. The word was passed to all I Corps POICs, and the RDC/P (Rural Development Cadre/Programs) officer in Quang Ngai suggested Phuong Hoang, Vietnamese for Phoenix, the mythical bird that emerges from ashes. He won the contest, and that is how the Phoenix program got its name.

Phoenix was nothing more than a coordination and exploitation program directed against terrorists and those supporting terrorists. Organizations which came under the Phoenix umbrella were already working against the VCI. The only difference involved sitting down at the table to coordinate and exploit relevant, usable intelligence. It was

not some devious, nefarious CIA plot to assassinate unarmed civilians. Those who risked their lives going after armed terrorists were not murderers. They were legitimate military, paramilitary, and lawful police forces facing terrorists, spies, and nonuniformed armed insurgents. Blaming Phoenix for VCI deaths is like calling the FBI murderers because armed terrorists preferred to fight rather than surrender to lawful authority. ...

After we established the DIOCCs in I Corps, the Phoenix program began to take on a life of its own. The clandestine VCI became our top priority. As long as it existed, pacification was impossible. VC terror tactics were far more effective in winning over the population than any "hearts and minds" program. ICEX/Phoenix soon came under the microscope of the Saigon Station staff and was eventually scrutinized by the ambassador and Robert "Blowtorch" Komer. It didn't take long for Komer to seize upon Phoenix as a way to make his mark in Vietnam. He had President [Lyndon B.] Johnson's ear and this made him politically powerful. Anyone standing in his way would be run over with a bulldozer.

If anyone could move the program forward, it was this overbearing, arrogant, mission-driven former CIA analyst. He acted as a ramrod to implement a "rifle shot" rather than a "shotgun" approach to the VCI. As the number-three man in Saigon, he vetoed various "concept" papers until a "missions and functions" paper finally appeared before him, which he accepted. "Anything else," he said, "would not be understood by the military."

Although Komer would be the Phoenix "Czar," he needed someone to actually run the program. Here he fingered CIA's Evan Parker Jr. of the Parker Pen Company. He couldn't have made a better choice. Evan Parker was a first-generation paramilitary officer, having served with OSS Detachment 101 during World War II as a liaison officer with Merrill's Marauders and the British. He was a GS-16 at the time, considered highly

intelligent, soft-spoken, well organized, enormously respected, and extremely capable. He also came from my parent Special Operations Division at CIA headquarters and later became its chief, an organization I would later head.

Essentially, those in Saigon institutionalized what we were already doing in I Corps. By the summer of 1967, MACV agreed to assign military intelligence officers to the DIOCCs and PIOCCs throughout the country. The name change to Phoenix (except in I Corps) was in transition; thus, all the early program guidance written by Parker's staff was circulated as ICEX memoranda. All of this meant nothing to us in I Corps except added focus and high-level attention to what we were doing. Indeed, many of the papers circulated were simply upgraded versions of what we already had drafted to explain ICEX to Saigon.⁴

As Enders stated, the Phoenix program was an effort to unify the disparate counterinsurgency programs of both the United States and the GVN so a more effective approach could be developed. This widely misunderstood program was a bureaucratic consolidation of the various ongoing intelligence-gathering efforts being employed in South Vietnam to fight the Communist political infrastructure. Because the Phoenix program included several CIA-sponsored activities, such as the PRUs, it was given an aura of secrecy that only served to arouse suspicion among many observers and later among some scholars that the program somehow involved “illegal” or “criminal” activities.⁵ In reality, the Phoenix program sought to organize the fight against the VCI in a more systematic and effective manner by requiring the various GVN and American agencies to cooperate and coordinate on a countrywide level.

The efficacy of this approach was not lost on the Communists, who recognized and acknowledged the serious threat Phoenix posed to their plans to subvert the GVN. In fact, there is no more cogent proof of the fear that Phoenix instilled in the Communists than the

comments of several North Vietnamese Communists who verified the program's effectiveness after winning the war. Perhaps the most telling of these are credited to Mai Chi Tho, who controlled the most famous Viet Cong spy of the war, Pham Xuan An, a strategically placed journalist in the *Time* magazine office in Saigon. He identified An's “most valuable contribution” over nearly 25 years of spying for the North Vietnamese as “everything on the pacification program . . . so we could develop an ‘anti’ plan to defeat them. . . . I consider this to be the most important because of its strategic scale.”⁶

Despite having the complete American and South Vietnamese pacification plans, the Communists never were able to defeat the GVN pacification program and, indeed, by early 1969, the Communists realized that their plan for a “general uprising” using local Viet Cong units in South Vietnam was doomed to failure and that a purely military solution involving Communist forces from North Vietnam invading South Vietnam was the proper strategy to pursue. Internal Communist documents and information provided by CIA spies within the VCI confirmed that the VCI and their VC guerilla forces were largely defeated by early 1970 leaving little option for the northern Communists but to pursue a conventional military strategy. For an insight into this changed strategy from the enemy's side, see Truong Nhu Tang's *Viet Cong Memoir*, which details the enemy's analysis of the military and political situation in South Vietnam during the crucial year of 1970.

To understand the PRU Program and how it was used to attack the VCI, it is helpful to understand how it fit into the overall Phoenix program, in theory and practice. Before 1967, the PRU teams were under the control of CIA officers in many of Vietnam's 44 provinces, but they had no real national-level coordination mechanism. It was in 1967 that the PRU finally became a national program under CIA officer Evan Parker and was given its national-level mission of defeating the political infrastructure of the Viet Cong.⁷ The ICEX Program evolved into the Phoenix program, but the PRU mis-

sion remained the same despite this organizational change.

The Phoenix program as it emerged at the end of 1967 had organizational structures at every level of administration in South Vietnam. At the national level, the Phoenix Committee was chaired by the minister of interior, with the director general of the National Police as the vice chairman. Other members of the national-level Phoenix Committee were the minister of defense, the J-2 and J-3 of the Joint General Staff, and representatives from the National Police Field Force (NPF), the Police Special Branch (PSB), the Revolutionary Development (RD) Ministry, and the Chieu Hoi Ministry.

At the national level, one of the key CIA assistants to the CIA's chief of station on the PRU Program was the legendary Tucker Gougemann, a former Marine who was severely wounded during the battle for Guadalcanal. He was medically discharged from the Marine Corps after World War II and joined the CIA. The author had several conversations with Mr. Gougemann in the Duc Hotel in Saigon in 1969 and found him to be a highly intelligent and engaging man who could best be described as a brilliant and profane curmudgeon who possessed an intense love for his job and the Vietnamese. He also had an almost pathological hatred of bureaucracy and bureaucrats, whom he felt had little understanding of Vietnam or how the war should be fought. Sadly, Gougemann was captured in Saigon after the Communist victory in 1975 and died undergoing interrogation by the North Vietnamese. His body was released to the American government two years after his capture and showed clear signs of torture.⁸

The senior U.S. Marine officer assigned to the PRU was then-Lieutenant Colonel Terence M. Allen, a combat veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars who spent nearly three years in Vietnam running the Department of Defense (DoD) side of the PRU program. He was tireless in his efforts to mold the PRU into an effective counter-VCI organization, a task that was often complicated and frustrated by what

he described as "the obstruction of the U.S. State Department and the naïve and false reporting of U.S. journalists who had no valid understanding of the PRU."⁹ Major, later Colonel, Nguyen Van Lang was the senior Vietnamese assigned to the PRU headquarters in Saigon. Later, Major Lang became the director of the PRU when control of the PRU passed from the CIA to the South Vietnamese National Police. From 1968 until 1970, Colonel Allen's job involved providing advice and assistance to Major Lang on the national administration of the program.

At the regional level, the Phoenix Committee was chaired by the region's military commander, and the deputy chair was the region's National Police commander. The remainder of the committee was made up of representatives from the same ministries found on the national committee.

The provincial Phoenix Committee differed from the national and regional Phoenix committees in one very significant way. The national and regional Phoenix committees were largely administrative entities that provided guidance and advice to the senior Vietnamese political leaders and set counterinsurgency policy. The provincial Phoenix committees were actively engaged in the collection of intelligence on, and the targeting of, the VCI. The provincial Phoenix committees were chaired by the province chief, normally an ARVN colonel or lieutenant colonel, with the provincial police chief as the deputy-chairman, although in some provinces the cochair was the provincial intelligence officer. Representatives of the G-2, the G-3, the Rural Development (RD) program, the Police Special Branch (PSB), Census Grievance (CG), the National Police Field Force (NPF), and the Chieu Hoi program made up the rest of the committee, along with intelligence officers from the military units in the province. The provincial Phoenix committees were required to meet at least once a week, but they often met far more frequently, sometimes daily. They operated 24 hours a day, every day, collecting and discussing intelligence on the VCI, maintaining extensive records on the progress of the anti-VCI effort

in their province, and issuing arrest orders for VCI suspects.

Below the provincial Phoenix committees were the DIOCCs. These were the district-level Phoenix Committees, and they served as the front-line units in the war on the VCI. The DIOCC was organized along the same lines as the Provincial Phoenix Committee, and like the Provincial Phoenix Committee, it operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In addition to its intelligence-gathering and VCI-targeting duties, it also provided intelligence for the American and Vietnamese military units stationed in the district. Each DIOCC had four sections: administrative, military intelligence, police intelligence, and operations. In many DIOCCs, the PRU was represented, but normally they had no representation on the DIOCC. Instead, the PRU provided its intelligence input to the police intelligence representative in the DIOCC and received missions directly from the district chief.¹⁰

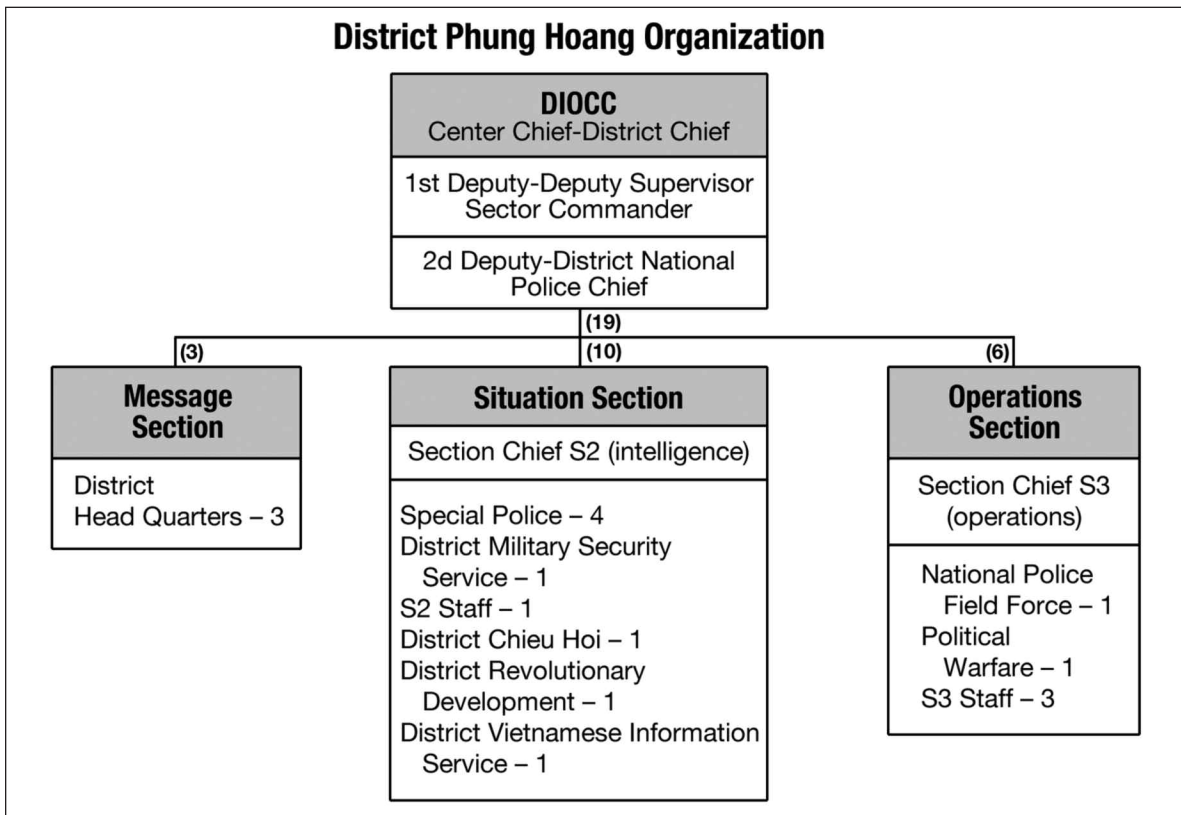
The DIOCCs created dossiers on VCI personnel and coordinated the efforts to arrest

VCI and bring them to justice. They also maintained a list of all VCI positions in the district and attempted to identify the individuals in these positions. While many organizations were given the mission of defeating the VCI, such as the National Police, the National Police Special Branch, and the armed forces of the United States and GVN, the principal action arm of the Phoenix committees was the CIA-organized, -funded, and -controlled PRU.

In theory, the DIOCC system provided the infrastructure needed to collect intelligence on the VCI and to coordinate operations against it. In practice, the DIOCC system did not always work as it was intended. According to the U.S. Marine PRU advisors interviewed by the author, the DIOCC system worked very well in the provinces where the representatives of the Vietnamese and American agencies on the various regional, provincial, and district Phoenix committees worked well together and cooperated in the generation of operational leads.

However, several of the Marine PRU advi-

Chart re-created from Andradé, *Asbes to Asbes*, p.291



sors interviewed for this paper stated that the system in their province did not meet the standards necessary to fully exploit the DIOCC system. They attributed this situation to several factors, but the primary one was bureaucratic jealousy on the part of the agencies represented on the provincial and district-level Phoenix committees. They also identified a reluctance to share operational leads since the agencies involved were afraid they would not receive the credit (and the budget allocations) they deserved if another agency acted on the intelligence they gathered. Petty personality conflicts also militated against the smooth functioning of many DIOCCs. They stressed that where the provincial and district chiefs had strong leadership skills and where American advisors to the representatives on the DIOCCs enjoyed the confidence and respect of their Vietnamese counterparts, the DIOCCs functioned effectively.

Once the Phoenix program became a nationwide program with an organizational structure that ran from Saigon to each district in the country, the CIA soon realized it did not possess the personnel needed to provide the required advisors for the PRU Program. Indeed, it was having great difficulty finding adequate numbers of CIA case officers for other tasks in South Vietnam, especially case officers with any experience in paramilitary activities such as were required to advise the PRU. Since every province in South Vietnam needed a PRU advisor and in some cases two, the CIA needed at least 44 American provincial PRU advisors and 30 regional and Saigon-based headquarters staff. With a very limited number of CIA paramilitary officers available worldwide, it was readily apparent that the CIA would not be able to provide these PRU advisors using their own personnel.

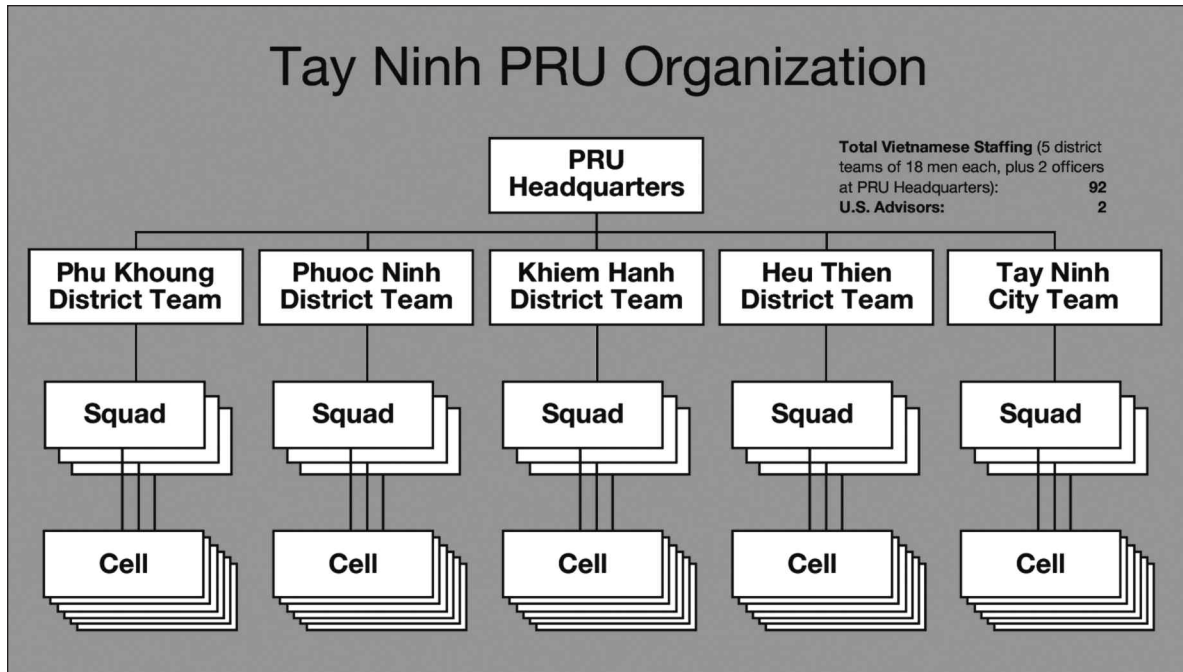
This serious shortcoming needed to be solved if effective control of the PRU was to be established and maintained by the CIA. The solution to this problem came in the form of assigning U.S. military personnel to the PRU Program using cover orders assigning them to the Combined Studies Division (CSD) of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

(MACV). Ideally, these DoD assignees were to be skilled in the special warfare tasks needed by a PRU advisor. With this in mind, the bulk of the PRU advisors came from the U.S. Army's Special Forces, the Navy's Seals, and the U.S. Marine Corps' Force Reconnaissance Companies.

Since it was envisioned that the PRU would have to coordinate closely with and support U.S. forces, it was decided to assign PRU advisors to the four military regions based upon service affiliation. For instance, since the bulk of U.S. forces in I Corps were U.S. Marines, the CIA tried to assign Marine PRU advisors to that military region. The U.S. Army was heavily represented in II Corps and III Corps, so the CIA assigned U.S. Army Special Forces and U.S. Army Military Intelligence PRU advisors to those two military regions. U.S. Navy Seals were assigned as PRU advisors to the southernmost military region, IV Corps. The first large contingent of U.S. military advisors was assigned to the PRU in 1967. However, some U.S. military personnel had been assigned to the PRU in very small numbers before 1967 when the PRU Program was not organized countrywide. Most of these early U.S. military PRU advisors were assigned to I Corps.¹¹

PRU Organization, Recruitment, Equipment, and Command and Control

Before 1967, the PRUs existed at the provincial level, and less than half of the provinces in South Vietnam had such units. They ranged in size from 30 to 300 men, depending on the size of the province and the need for their services by the provincial chiefs and the CIA. Many of the early PRU units were organized along strictly military lines since they were often employed in military operations against main force VC units. In 1967, when Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) took over operation of the PRU Program, the CIA decided to give the PRU a countrywide presence and a standard table of organization for a PRU team. For reasons that are not known, it was decided that each PRU team would consist of 18 men broken down



into three six-man squads. The senior squad leader in each team became the team leader. The idea was to assign an 18-man PRU team to each district so the team could react quickly to any targets identified by the DIOCC in that district. In theory, each province would be given enough PRU teams for one to be assigned to each DIOCC. This new organization went into effect in late 1967 and was maintained until the PRUs were integrated into the GVN National Police in 1973. This new national-level PRU organization resulted in most districts receiving an 18-man PRU team, which meant that small provinces with only a few districts or no districts had fewer than 50 PRU members assigned while larger, more populous provinces with many districts had as many as 300 PRU members assigned. In total, 4,000 to 6,000 Vietnamese PRU personnel were assigned countrywide to the program during the years 1967 to 1975.¹²

A typical post-1967 provincial PRU organization was the one found in Tay Ninh Province in South Vietnam's III Corps. In this organization, each of the four districts in Tay Ninh Province was assigned an 18-man PRU team and an additional 18-man team was assigned to the capital of the province as a "city team" that could mount operations in the densely

populated Tay Ninh City or be used to reinforce one or more of the district teams. A very small headquarters cell consisting of the South Vietnamese PRU commander; his deputy, who was also the leader of the Tay Ninh City PRU team; and an operations/intelligence officer provided the staff planning and interagency coordination for the province. According to the Marines assigned to the PRU, this form of organizational structure worked well despite the paucity of personnel assigned to staff duties.

The recruitment of PRU personnel varied from province to province. Many PRU members were former VC or former ARVN soldiers. Some were former South Vietnamese Special Forces soldiers or former members of a Citizen Irregular Defense Group (CIDG), while a few were simply local youths who did not want to join the regular ARVN forces and preferred to serve their country in their own home province. In a few provinces, some paroled criminals were allowed to join the PRU, but the number of such people was few and greatly reduced after 1968. Some had strong religious and community affiliations that made them natural enemies of the Communists, such as Catholics, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Montagnard tribesmen. Most PRU mem-

bers were strongly motivated by their hatred of the VCI.¹³ Since there were many people in every province who had a grudge against the VCI, there were many South Vietnamese who were eager to join the PRU. The fact that most PRU hated the VCI made them a very formidable force and one that made it very difficult for the Communists to infiltrate or proselytize.¹⁴ According to Colonel Terence M. Allen, the senior military advisor to the PRU Program in Saigon from 1968 to 1970, the most effective PRU teams were those who were recruited among the Cao Dai and Catholic religious communities and the Montagnard tribes since these groups had a visceral hatred of the Viet Cong and a vested interest in protecting their communities from the ravages inflicted on them by the VCI terrorist cells.

The Marine PRU advisors interviewed by the author expressed confidence in the recruiting methods used to obtain PRU members and felt the men assigned to their units were, on balance, extremely competent and experienced. However, there were some notable exceptions. This was especially true in the early phases of the PRU program when MACV first began to assign its personnel in I Corps. The senior CIA officer in Quang Tri Province in 1967, Warren H. Milberg, explained one province's recruiting problem this way:

Quang Tri was a relatively sparsely populated province. By mid-1967, the war was heating up at all levels. Young men of military age and qualification were either in the ARVN, the CIDG, or were engaged in farming in the districts. PRU recruitment became a problem of demographics: there was just not a large pool of physically and mentally qualified young men to choose from. It was pretty well known in the province what the PRU did and what their mission was so that even those who may have otherwise qualified were too risk-averse to want to join. The people we did manage to recruit all came with their own set of "issues." For the most part, this was not a problem, although we did have some exceptions here and there. In the end, they became a great group of brave fighters, but they were not unlike a pack of

*pit bulls: training, discipline, leadership and focus were needed all the time.*¹⁵

The experience of PRU advisor Sergeant Rodney H. Pupuhi in 1968 illustrates the recruiting challenges faced by the PRU in I Corps. When he reported to his PRU unit in Hoi An, Quang Nam Province, in March 1968 shortly after the Tet Offensive, he was not encouraged by what he found. The Quang Nam PRU was in the midst of being disbanded, and only seven PRU members remained out of the original pre-Tet force of more than 100 men. Like any good Marine noncommissioned officer, Sergeant Pupuhi immediately took charge of the situation, held a formation of his remaining seven-man PRU force, made them squad leaders, and sent them to their home villages to recruit replacements for each squad. As he put it, "I gave these men strict guidelines on recruiting and a deadline of two weeks to return with enough recruits to fill the seven squads. Slowly, these men came back with 'family within family' recruits—that is, brothers recruited other brothers and nephews recruited cousins until we had the necessary numbers to fill the squads."

Pupuhi arranged with the CIA to give the recruits' families advance pay and to have Air America fly the recruits to Hoi An. In short order, Pupuhi had resurrected the Hoi An PRU with reliable men and had embarked on a rigorous training program to prepare his new recruits for their demanding and dangerous missions. Within six weeks of his arrival in Hoi An, he had recruited, trained, and equipped his new unit and began conducting counter-VCI operations.¹⁶

PRU teams were equipped with an assortment of uniforms, weapons, and equipment. Most PRU members dressed in the black pajamas worn by Vietnam's peasants or tiger-striped camouflage uniforms when they went to the field, but some units actually used VC/NVA grey or light green uniforms when such uniforms gave them a tactical advantage. In garrison, most PRU members wore either civilian clothes or the standard PRU tiger-striped camouflage uniform. This wide variety



Photo courtesy of GySgt Rodney H. Pupuhi

A more typical Provincial Reconnaissance Unit operation showing uniforms and equipment as worn by the Vietnamese and Americans. This was more characteristic than the VC or NVA uniforms shown before.

of uniforms made it difficult for both the enemy and friendly units to identify them. Therefore, it was essential that the U.S. PRU advisors coordinate closely with friendly units if the PRU were to operate in areas where U.S. and ARVN units were located. The Marine PRU advisors normally wore black pajamas or tiger-striped camouflage uniforms in the field and civilian clothes while in garrison. Some advisors even wore civilian clothes on PRU operations but this was rare.

Weapons consisted primarily of M-16 rifles, 45-caliber pistols, M-79 grenade launchers, and M-60 machine guns. However, many PRU units maintained extensive armories of captured

weapons, and they often used these in operations against the VCI. The PRUs found it convenient to equip some of their men with Communist-made AK-47 rifles and RPG grenade launchers, so any VCI encountered during an operation in enemy territory would initially think they were fellow VC. This gave the PRUs a distinct tactical advantage in any engagement.¹⁷

This ploy of using enemy weapons became dangerous after late 1967 when the CIA began planting doctored AK-47 and other enemy ammunition in enemy stockpiles. These doctored rounds would explode when fired, causing serious, often fatal, wounds to those firing

them.¹⁸ Still, despite this serious risk, many PRUs continued to use enemy weapons and ammunition after 1967 when they thought the risk was worth it. Other weapons that were employed by PRU members and their advisors were Browning 9-mm automatic pistols, 38-caliber Colt Cobra revolvers, Browning automatic rifles (BAR), M-2 carbines, Swedish K submachine guns, and British Bren guns. This wide assortment of weapons posed a logistical challenge to some PRU teams, but in most cases there were never any serious shortages of ammunition. Captured enemy ammunition was readily available, and the CIA supply system worked wonders in obtaining just about any ammunition required for operational use. Ammunition for the PRU was often stored in ConEx boxes within the CIA "embassy house" compounds or in the various PRU armories throughout the provinces so it could be rapidly issued.

For communications, the PRUs were equipped with the PRC-25 FM radio and its ancillary equipment. A few PRU units maintained some high frequency radios for long-range communications, but such radios were not standard issue, and most PRUs needed to establish temporary radio relay sites on mountaintops to support their long-range missions. This was especially true in the mountainous areas of I Corps. The PRUs were given their own frequencies for tactical communications. They were wary of the enemy intercepting their radio communications, so they seldom used their radios for the transmission of operational details while they were in garrison, choosing instead to use their radios sparingly and primarily during field operations. The PRUs had neither encrypted communications equipment nor code pads, so communications security was often nonexistent, ad hoc, or rudimentary. One of many valuable assets an American PRU advisor brought with him whenever he accompanied a PRU team to the field was the ability to encode communications; however, the use of encoding materials was not frequently employed during most PRU operations, even those that were accompanied by U.S. PRU advisors. Some PRUs did not use

radios on their operations, preferring to maintain complete silence until the mission was completed.

PRU forces were equipped with ground transport in the form of commercial light trucks and motorcycles, which were purchased by the CIA. These trucks and motorcycles were typical of the trucks and motorcycles used by Vietnamese civilians, so their use did not arouse suspicion or draw unwanted attention to them when they were employed by the PRU. It also made repair of these transport assets easy since parts, automotive supplies, and repairs could be readily obtained locally. When major repairs were needed, PRU vehicles were taken to the CIA's automotive repair facility in Saigon.

Unfortunately, the trucks and motorcycles were never provided in the numbers needed by the PRU. Often, only two to three trucks were given to each province, thus they had to be shared by each district team or kept at province level for use as needed. Most PRU teams suffered because of the lack of organic transport. As a result, the PRUs also used public transportation, such as cyclos and buses, or privately owned motorcycles or bicycles to insert themselves into operational areas. Dressed in civilian clothes and posing as civilian travelers, they were able to blend in with the locals using these modes of transportation until they were near their operational area and ready to engage their targets.¹⁹

Although most PRU operations did not require U.S. military or ARVN transportation assets, the PRUs did avail themselves of such transport when it was provided to them, usually through the good offices of the Vietnamese province chief, a district U.S. military advisor, or the U.S. PRU advisor. For operations over long distances and in mountainous terrain, the PRUs would rely primarily on U.S. helicopters for insertion and extraction. Most U.S. PRU advisors felt the PRUs would have been even more effective had they possessed additional organic transportation assets, such as three-quarter-ton trucks and motorcycles, and a dedicated helicopter package in each mili-

tary region. The U.S. PRU advisors stated that they often lost valuable time trying to obtain nonorganic transportation for deep or difficult PRU operations, and these delays often had an adverse impact on the success rate of such operations. Since most PRU targets were fleeting in nature, a timely response, often within 24 hours, was needed to achieve success. The lack of organic or rapidly available transportation assets often meant that the target was gone by the time the transportation had been arranged.

As stated earlier, the PRUs were under the operational control of the CIA. However, under an agreement between the GVN and the CIA, the Vietnamese province chiefs were given some control over how and when the PRUs could be used. In some instances, this dual-command relationship caused friction between the local CIA leadership in the province and the province chiefs. The relationship was certainly a violation of the unity of command principle. Theoretically, all PRU operations in a province required both the approval of the provincial officer in charge (POIC), who was the senior CIA officer in the province, and the province chief. In many provinces, the PRUs followed this arrangement, but in some provinces, the CIA disregarded it.

In the case of the author, he followed the dual command relationship procedures and encountered little problem with it in his province. He had few problems obtaining dual authorization for a mission, usually obtaining the approval of both his POIC and province chief in a matter of a few hours. He did this by having his Vietnamese PRU operations officer use a standard-form arrest order for each VCI suspect identified, then he would hand carry the arrest order to the province chief after the POIC had initialed his concurrence. In some cases, the author was also required to obtain the signature of the provincial judicial representative on the Provincial Intelligence Operations Coordination Committee to ensure that the arrest order was issued properly and with the necessary legal safeguards.²⁰

Some PRU advisors simply obtained the per-

mission of the POIC and assumed the POIC would get the province chief's approval. As the program matured, the necessity to fully coordinate PRU arrest orders and operations with the province chiefs became institutionalized. One positive aspect of this dual approval system was the increased cooperation it generated between the Vietnamese and American agencies assigned counter-VCI duties. It also helped to break down suspicion among the Vietnamese Phoenix agencies that the CIA was acting alone and without consideration of the sovereignty of the Vietnamese government.

The PRU command and control authority on the Vietnamese side came down from the president through the minister of interior to the province chiefs and finally down to the district chiefs, but this was more administrative than operational since day-to-day operations of the PRUs were planned and executed under the direct supervision of the CIA. In a practical sense, the CIA POICs controlled the PRUs and used the American PRU advisors to ensure the PRU teams were properly employed on counter-VCI operations.

A great deal of authority and independence of action was given to the PRU advisors, often amounting to outright autonomy. Since many POICs were busy with their primary duties, not the least of which was the collection of political and strategic intelligence on the enemy's Central Office South Vietnam (COSVN) and the North Vietnamese government, they simply did not have the time to micromanage the PRU advisor. Also, many POICs lacked military experience or their military experience was dated. This meant that they did not feel they had the technical expertise to plan and control the types of operations the PRUs were conducting and preferred to leave the operational details to the initiative of the American PRU advisors.

Because the PRU advisors had a great deal of control over how and when their PRU teams were employed, the job required a level of maturity and sophistication not commonly found among the normal special operations soldier, sailor, or Marine. The American PRU advisors

were unanimous in their recommendation that the best men for assignment to this form of duty should be in the age range of 25 to 30 years old and should have obtained at least the equivalent rank of sergeant (E-5) for enlisted and first lieutenant (O-2) for officers. Ideally, they felt the enlisted advisors should be the equivalent of gunnery sergeants (E-7) and the officers should be captains (O-3). Command and control of PRU-type units required objectivity, maturity, and sound judgment—all traits that can only be developed with time and experience. The American PRU advisors were unanimous in their belief that immaturity and emotionalism were two of the most destructive and corrosive characteristics a PRU advisor could possess and, along with a lack of cultural sensitivity, the root causes of most serious problems.

The number of U.S. military PRU advisors was small; perhaps no more than 400 were assigned to the program from 1967 to 1971. Of that number, the author has been able to identify 51 Marines who served with PRUs as advisors. See the Appendix for a list of these Marine PRU advisors.

The experiences of the PRU advisors varied with their respective units and the provinces in which they served. As the Phoenix program matured and the PRU developed into a truly nationwide organization, the Marine PRU advisors helped mold and shape this development. The following firsthand accounts will give the reader an idea of how the advisory effort progressed from its inception until the last U.S. military advisors were removed.

Sergeant Paul C. Whitlock: One of the First and Best, 1966-1967

Sergeant Whitlock's outstanding performance in Quang Tri led the CIA to ask for more such fine men to assist the CIA's PRU advisory effort. His input is extremely valuable in explaining how he easily fit in and contributed positively to Agency paramilitary field programs.

Rudy Enders ²¹

Paul C. Whitlock was a young staff sergeant serving as a reconnaissance team leader in the 3d Force Reconnaissance Company in October 1966 when he was called into the office of his commanding officer, Captain Kenneth Jordan, and told he was to report to work in Quang Tri City and “form a reconnaissance unit there” for special police operations. Staff Sergeant Whitlock asked Captain Jordan why he had been selected for this assignment, and Jordan simply replied, “because you are a Marine.”

Whitlock knew better than to ask any more questions, and besides, he trusted Jordan and knew there must be a good reason why he wanted him to go to Quang Tri City. Whitlock was one of the first Marines assigned to the PRU Program and he remained with the Quang Tri PRU from October 1966 until May 1967. The CIA officers who knew Whitlock spoke highly of him and stated that as one of the first Marines assigned to the PRU in I Corps, he set the standard for every Marine who followed.

When Whitlock reported to his CIA boss in Quang Tri, he found a recently organized PRU, one that had been staffed with former members of the Counter Terrorist Team (CTT) for Quang Tri. His unit consisted of 200 men, led by a very capable PRU chief and already conducting operations against the VCI. He immediately struck up a strong professional relationship with the PRU chief, and this relationship remained healthy throughout the eight months that Whitlock was the Quang Tri PRU advisor. Whitlock considered the PRU chief to be a strong leader who enjoyed the respect of his men and the Americans who worked with him.

Whitlock also had an excellent relationship with the province chief. He stated that he and the province chief “worked well together,” noting that “he helped out when and where he could.” It was evident from Whitlock’s comments to the author that having both a capable and strong PRU chief and a reliable and cooperative province chief made his job easier and his work more effective than it would have been without these two key men assisting him. Whitlock also had high praise for his boss, the

POIC, Thomas D. Harlan. Harlan worked in what was labeled the Office of Civil Operations for Quang Tri Province. According to Whitlock, Harlan helped him whenever he needed help, provided him with many excellent operational leads, and backed him up “100 percent.”

The Quang Tri PRU had two types of operations. They were based upon the geography of the province. “Deep” missions were those that were conducted in the western mountains of the province in such areas as the Bei Lon Valley, Khe Sanh, and the Quang Tri and Bei Lon rivers. These missions were assigned by the 3d Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) headquarters and could best be described as long-range reconnaissance missions since their main purpose was to determine what the NVA units in those areas were doing. As such, they were not the classic counter-VCI mission normally assigned to a PRU. These operations were coordinated with III MAF by the POIC, Tom Harlan, and employed “handpicked teams” of PRU members. The teams were normally inserted and extracted by Marine helicopters. Prior to insertion on these “deep” missions, the PRU team, which normally consisted of five to seven men, was isolated and only briefed on the location of the mission just prior to departure. This was done to ensure operational security. Some of these “deep” missions required Whitlock to establish radio relay stations on prominent terrain features so the teams would have continuous FM radio contact with PRU headquarters.

The second type of mission the Quang Tri PRU conducted was the “coastal” mission. This entailed operating in the eastern section of the province in the populated coastal plain. These operations involved teams of 10 to 15 men. The means of insertion and extraction varied from Marine helicopters to commercial boats and other forms of transportation readily available. The focus of the “coastal” missions was the capture of VCI, not reconnaissance. As such, they were equipped, dressed, and armed for raid operations against known or suspected VCI targets.

The Quang Tri PRU dressed in tiger-striped camouflage uniforms, black pajamas, and NVA light green uniforms, depending on the conditions and the mission. The only civilian clothes they wore were the ubiquitous black pajamas worn by peasants in the countryside. The unit employed PRC-25 radios for communications, and they carried an assortment of weapons, which were issued depending on the mission. For instance, “deep” mission teams normally were armed with M-16 rifles, while “coastal” missions used M-1 and M-14 rifles and M-2 carbines.

Whitlock described his PRU as “very well trained.” This was so because Whitlock made it so. Like most PRU advisors, he spent a lot of time in garrison training his troops. Most of his training “involved land navigation, radio procedures, reconnaissance techniques, weapons training and small unit tactics.” He possessed well-developed organizational skills and was able to increase the strength of his unit from 200 to 300 men, all while maintaining a professional force, well trained and well equipped for their mission.

Whitlock identified the main strength of his PRU as “the ability to move around when and where others could not. . . . They knew the terrain and the people.” The one serious problem he had with his unit was the lack of reliability of some of the PRU members to carry out their mission properly. Specifically, he often could not be sure they went where they were instructed to go or carried out their mission as he wanted them to unless he went along on the mission. Later on, he developed a means for checking on their veracity when he did not accompany them on an operation. He did this by assigning a different insert and extraction location for each mission. By doing this, the PRU team had to travel from its insertion location through the area Whitlock wanted covered in order to reach its extraction location.

The best source of intelligence on the VCI in Quang Tri Province was the intelligence generated by the PRU using local people. The Quang Tri PRU members “had their own system for gathering intelligence,” according to

Whitlock, and it proved to be accurate where most other sources were not. Whitlock would send his PRU members and their families out into their home villages to develop operational leads. "They were to pay attention to their surroundings and report back. . . . Once the PRU and their family members developed enough information on the local VCI, the PRU would launch an operation." Whitlock also identified prisoner interrogation by the PRU as a valuable source of exploitable intelligence.

Whitlock offered this advice for future Marines involved in a counterinsurgency like the one he fought in during the Vietnam War: "Find an in-country leader who you can trust and communicate with effectively. Also, if you can't speak the local language, find a good interpreter who will follow your instructions completely and will translate exactly what you have said without embellishment."²²

CIA officer Rudy Enders, who was the chief of operations in I Corps when Whitlock was first assigned to the PRU, thought Whitlock possessed in abundance the qualities needed for a PRU advisor. He wrote:

There are many qualifications associated with being an effective PRU advisor. Let's take Whitlock as an example. First of all, he was an experienced, brave combat leader who could assess the capabilities and shortcomings of the men he advised. If necessary, he could train them in every aspect of small unit tactics starting with basic shooting, fire and maneuver, scouting and patrolling, map and compass, etc. . . . I understand he did this. Furthermore, he singled out his PRU commander, Do Bach, as a heroic, competent warrior. To gain PRU confidence, he accompanied Bach on dangerous missions proving he was willing to lay his life on the line while fighting alongside his men. This is what leadership is all about.

Secondly, Whitlock was mature. He was not some wide-eyed kid looking for adventure. Instead, he understood the seriousness of his position and behaved accordingly. I can't overstate the importance of this attribute. PRU advisors performed their jobs with

very little oversight and supervision. This requires a high degree of self-discipline and commitment common to most Marines.

Finally, Whitlock was aggressive. He sifted through mountains of intelligence reports to find the most promising. His PRUs didn't sit around in camp waiting for things to happen, they made things happen. They sought out the enemy, enough so that the North Vietnamese sent a special sapper unit to destroy the PRU camp. The point is, a single Marine, Whitlock, with CIA help, produced an effective and aggressive South Vietnamese counterinsurgency force of over 300 men.²³

Staff Sergeant Whitlock was one of the first and best U.S. military PRU advisors and, as such, he became a model for the advisors that followed. His POIC, Thomas Harlan, summed up the contributions of Whitlock in a letter he wrote to the commanding general, 3d Marine Division, on 3 April 1967 thanking the general for sending such a highly trained and capable NCO to the PRU Program. Harlan wrote that Whitlock "displayed unique dedication, imagination, and knowledge of his job. . . . [T]he PRUs under his guidance have distinguished themselves in long range reconnaissance patrols and unconventional warfare operations. . . . [H]is methods are being adapted throughout I Corps with all Provincial Reconnaissance Units being patterned after the one in Quang Tri Province."

Whitlock retired from the Marine Corps as a gunnery sergeant in 1974 and then worked four years with a high school Junior ROTC program before embarking on a 20-year career as a project manager for a major commercial contracting firm.

Sergeant Ronald J. Lauzon: Hue City, 1967

Sergeant Ronald J. (Ron) Lauzon had 12 years of military experience—six with the Air Force and six with the Marines—when he was assigned to the PRU on 8 March 1967. His assignment took him to Hue City in Thua Thien Province, and he remained with the PRU in Hue City until he was reassigned to the Marine



Photo courtesy of CWO-4 Ronald J. Lauzon

Sergeant Ronald J. Lauzon on operations with the Thua Thien Provincial Reconnaissance Unit in 1967. Marine advisors wore utility, tiger-stripe, or even black "pajama" uniforms while in the field. Note the lack of distinguishing rank or other insignia.

Corps on 8 October 1967. He described the time he spent as a PRU advisor as "a great experience for an E-5/E-6 during the peak of the program," and one he considered the most rewarding of his Marine Corps career. He retired from the Marine Corps as a chief warrant officer (CWO-4). Lauzon provided the following selected comments in a paper he submitted to the author:

I relieved Sergeant Robert B. Bright III as the PRU advisor for Thua Thien Province. He had done an outstanding job of organizing, training, equipping, and establishing coordination for the unit. I inherited a PRU unit of 137 soldiers, but I paired it down to 117, and I lost seven killed in combat during the seven months I was their advisor.

I did not have much bush time with the unit; most of the 100 or so operations I sponsored were small-unit actions aimed at gaining or supporting intelligence requested by

the Regional Officer in Charge (ROIC) and, as such, participation on them was restricted to indigenous personnel. On most of our operations, a Caucasian would not have fit in, and the CIA was paranoid about having someone captured by the enemy who possessed internal knowledge of how the CIA operated.

I did go on major military operations which were requested by MACV, USMC, or ARVN units, but these operations were all ultimate disasters for the PRU since they were employed as regular ground forces, and they were not trained or equipped for such employment. Many times these large-scale missions were misrepresented to CORDS as missions appropriate for the PRU, but in every case they turned into standard military type operations against main force VC or NVA units.

I principally served out of Hue City and

stayed in the PRU compound, which was Madame Nhu's summer home. This compound sat on the northwest corner of the Hue perimeter overlooking the Royal Tombs. My area of operations was the entire province with the exception of Hue City. The city was solely reserved for the CORDS intelligence section, which had a number of USMC counterintelligence personnel assigned to it. They worked out of the National Police Intelligence Center, and they relied heavily on the province's Police Special Branch (PSB), which gathered most of its intelligence from the province's interrogation center (PIC).*

I did not live in an "embassy house," like many other PRU advisors. Instead, I lived in a leased house in southern Hue across from a large Roman Catholic cathedral close to the Phu Can Canal along Nguyen Hue Street. This house was where my replacement was killed and where Ray Lau spent a couple of days in a pigsty hiding from the VC during the Tet Offensive when the enemy controlled the city. I rotated where I slept almost nightly during my PRU tour, spending some nights at my house, some at the PRU barracks, some at Ray Lau's, some at the POIC's house, and some at other trusted locations. We were often on alert for an attack, and we kept arms and ammunition stored in our house in case we came under attack.

PRU operations varied from province to province based upon the enemy situation in each province and the priorities of the CIA and the province chiefs. In our case, the POIC and his assistant strictly wanted the PRU to generate intelligence and not lose any assets. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that assassinations were strictly forbidden. This was stressed by both Colonel Redel,²⁴ who briefed me in Saigon during my indoctrination, and by my training instructors at the CIA PRU training base at Vung Tau in III Corps. My PRU teams were strictly focused

*Madame Nhu was the flamboyant wife of Ngo Dinh Nhu, the younger brother and chief advisor of Ngo Dinh Diem, who was president of South Vietnam until he and his brother were assassinated in 1963.

on obtaining intelligence about the VCI in my province and ensuring this intelligence was put to good use by the various Vietnamese and American units in the province.

Since I had access to all the intelligence resources in I Corps, I could pick up the latest reports from the MACV compound, the Special Forces SOG Headquarters, the 3d Marine Division G-2, the 8th Radio Relay Unit (RRU), the Army Side Looking Radar and Infrared Assessments, and the PIC. I would read through these reports each night looking for any information about the latest movements of the National Liberation Front (NLF) committee members. This included the VC paymasters, recruiters, party organizers, armed propaganda teams, and assassination squads. Once I picked a couple of targets, I would go to the PRU compound early in the morning and brief the PRU Commander, Mr. Mau. We would agree on one or two missions and assign the missions to the platoon leader on duty, who would select the men, uniforms, and equipment for the missions. We had two 30-man rifle platoons; a 30-man weapons platoon equipped with 60mm mortars, RPGs, and crew-served machine guns; and a headquarters section, which included intelligence, logistics, armory, and first-aid personnel.

Once the teams were identified for the mission, they were put into isolation. The PRU intelligence section would brief them on the mission and any pertinent information they had on the target(s), the supply section would issue them their special equipment (cameras, binoculars, sensors, radios, etc.), and the armory would issue them their ammunition and special weapons (sniper rifles, claymore mines, satchel charges, pistols, etc.).

The majority of the 117 PRU I ultimately ended up with were holdovers from the previous Counter Terrorist Team (CTT) program in the province. We also had 13 active PRU intelligence agents in the field. We had very little turnover, and we were very selective in whom we chose to join our ranks. A few of our men were former VC, and some were for-

mer ARVN Rangers and Marines who had completed their military service but wanted to join the PRU in their home province. All of my PRU were local people, and they came from all eight districts, which meant they had firsthand knowledge of the terrain and people where they were operating. Most had served in the military, either VC or ARVN, and they had been trained at the PRU training center in Vung Tau and at the Reconnaissance Indoctrination Program (RIP) school at the 1st Marine Division at Da Nang. They were, in my opinion, well trained and highly experienced soldiers. I liked the PRU I worked with and had complete confidence in the team leaders and the PRU Commander, Mr. Mau.

All operations in the province were centrally planned and controlled out of the PRU compound in Hue City. To my knowledge, we did not have active DIOCCs in the eight districts in our province and, if we did, I had no contact with them. To be honest, I only trusted our own intelligence system, which was operated by the RD/PRU/CG/CI intelligence center in Hue City.

The operational PRU teams were usually small, four or five men, with one of the men familiar with the area of operations and the people living there. They would dress either in civilian clothes or VC uniforms and be equipped with AK-47 rifles, French pistols, M-1 carbines, and hand grenades. They would be inserted late in the day but before curfew at a neutral point as close to the target area as possible, either by public transportation or taxicab. Sometimes they went by bicycle or used U.S. Navy swift boats for insertion. We often used U.S. Marine Combined Action Platoon (CAP) compounds in the countryside to launch operations, and we considered these CAP areas ideal for the insertion of our teams since they could provide coordination with higher headquarters in the 3d Marine Division and a safe haven once an operation was completed.

After a team was inserted, I went to the MACV compound and reported the opera-

tional plan. I reported the operation after insertion because I did not want any enemy agents in the MACV compound to reveal the operation to the NLF.

While I was a PRU advisor, I read literally hundreds of intelligence reports from the U.S. and South Vietnamese military, and not a single one was either timely or totally accurate. The military intelligence reports were written with specific times and dates with specific map coordinates and numbers, but I found out from dozens of interrogations that the VCI did not read or use map coordinates—they just used place names such as Cam Lo Bridge or Phouc Ly Village—and they measured time by “after a specific event, soon, pretty soon, or now.” The unit descriptions used in the military reports meant nothing to me since a “VC squad” could number between 1 and 50 men and a “VC company” could number between a dozen and several hundred men.

We mounted over 100 operations during my tour with the PRU, and 11 of these were Sergeant Lauzon in garrison with a member of the Thua Thein Provincial Reconnaissance Unit in 1967. In these circumstances, civilian clothes were usually worn.

Photo courtesy of CWO-4 Ronald J. Lauzon



successful in capturing or killing VCI. There were only two sources for these 11 successful missions: the PRU's organic intelligence system and Ray Lau's RD Census Grievance element, which gathered information from the RD team's travels in the province. We never got any operational leads that resulted in a successful operation from any other source, including the PIC and the PSB.

These successful missions were either an ambush or a raid on a specific house or area that we knew had VCI in it. When a mission was completed, which normally lasted only 24 hours, the PRU team would call in by telephone, and they would be picked up by a PRU vehicle or an RD vehicle at the nearest highway. Captured prisoners were brought back to the PRU compound and interrogated by Mr. Mau and his PRU intelligence team. After we had them for 24 hours, we were supposed to turn them over to the PIC and the military interrogation center with the USMC CI representative, but after a visit to these facilities, I never turned any more prisoners over to them. If the prisoners were high value (Category A or B), we shipped them to Da Nang City for interrogation by the CIA, but if they were low-level cadre, such as a nurse or paymaster, we often simply interrogated them and sent them home, or in the case of two individuals, we allowed them to join the PRU.

The only serious trouble we had was the result of conflicts between U.S. and Vietnamese officials concerning who controlled the PRU. CORDS paid the bills and ran the operation, but the province chief believed the PRU was his to use as he saw fit. This conflict often resulted in the misuse of the PRU and placed me in the middle of these bureaucratic and political battles. Cooperation and coordination were sometimes a problem in my province because of this ambiguous command relationship.

My boss was the CIA's POIC. I had two bosses during my tour, one of whom left shortly after I was assigned. The second POIC was a "CIA paramilitary type" who prohib-

ited me from participating in any PRU operations. He preferred to have only Vietnamese participate in PRU operations. His rationale for this was his conviction that "native ingenuity" would find innovative ways for the PRU to accomplish their missions, and "since it was going to be a long war, they needed assets with experience operating on their own." My POIC was supportive and gave me a great deal of latitude in how I should do my job. I left the PRU just before the 1968 Tet Offensive, and my POIC was in Da Nang City when the VC/NVA struck. He was in the process of turning his job over to his replacement, who had just settled into his quarters in Hue City. The new POIC was captured by the NVA when they invaded Hue City. He spent the rest of the war as a POW.

My replacement as PRU advisor, Sergeant Howard Vaughn, reported for duty a few weeks after I left and was killed defending the embassy house during the 1968 Tet Offensive.²⁵

Staff Sergeant Wayne W. Thompson: Leadership Challenges and Spies, 1967–68

Staff Sergeant Wayne Thompson was a reconnaissance team leader with the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company in July 1967 when he was told by his commanding officer, Captain King Dixon, that he was to be reassigned to "a classified special project" that needed someone with his skills. A few days later, he was driven to a large villa in Da Nang and introduced to a civilian who told him he was going to work with a program run by the CIA in Quang Tin Province. He was briefed on the PRU Program and its mission, but he received no training for his new job. After in-processing, he reported to his new job in Quang Tin. He lived in the embassy house in Tam Ky, the provincial capital, with three other Americans who were also assigned to the CIA, men he knew as "Richard," an Army sergeant major; "Harry"; and "Jim." Together, the four men ran the CIA operations for Quang Tin Province.

Thompson was a gifted and highly experienced

Marine staff noncommissioned officer. He had extensive experience with reconnaissance operations having served in both the 2d and 1st Force Reconnaissance Companies, including several long-range reconnaissance patrols in combat in Vietnam. He possessed the maturity and the skills needed to succeed in his new demanding job. As it would turn out, he would need those skills and then some.

Thompson's first major problem was a very serious one. His PRU Chief, a Nung and not a native Vietnamese, was "incompetent and lazy" and considered "a thief" by everyone, according to Thompson. His PRU of approximately 50 men did not venture outside of the compound, which was located on the perimeter of the provincial compound. His PRU chief contended that he was not allowed to leave the compound because the province chief, an ARVN lieutenant colonel, did not want to weaken the provincial compound's security.

Thompson knew that he would never be able to accomplish his mission of defeating the VCI if this situation persisted. He fired the PRU chief 10 days after his arrival in Quang Tin, then he went to the province chief to work out the security arrangement that was preventing his PRU teams from conducting their proper mission. The province chief told him that the PRUs were the only fighters he could really rely on to protect the provincial compound and that he could not allow them to relinquish this essential security mission. Thompson worked out a deal with the province chief. In return for using 50 men to guard the provincial compound's perimeter, he promised to increase the size of the PRU until he had enough additional men to conduct counter-VCI missions. With the CIA's permission, he began recruiting the additional men until he had 145 to 155 men on the PRU roles. Some of his best new recruits were VC prisoners held in the provincial prison who were carefully vetted before they were allowed to join the ranks of the PRU.

Next, Thompson addressed the issue of who would be the replacement for the PRU chief he had just fired. The province chief recom-

mended an elderly gentleman who was a political ally of the province chief but clearly a man who lacked the military or leadership skills needed to command a PRU. Thompson got around this sensitive problem by convincing the province chief that he would put the elderly gentleman recommended by the province chief in charge of the PRU security force of 50 men guarding the provincial compound and put a more competent and aggressive young former ARVN soldier in charge of the counter-VCI mission, appointing him as the "Deputy PRU Chief for Operations." The province chief found this solution perfectly suitable since he did not lose face by having his choice for PRU chief rejected, he would have someone he trusted in charge of local security around the provincial compound, and Thompson would have the combat leader he needed to root out the VCI. Using tact, good judgment, and an innovative approach, Thompson was able to overcome daunting problems early in his assignment with the Quang Tin PRU and to win the respect, cooperation, and support of the province chief at the same time.

During his eight months with the Quang Tin PRU, Thompson's PRU racked up a commendable record by killing or capturing more than 300 VC, NVA, and VCI while losing only nine PRU killed in action. Much of this success was due to the intelligence system that Thompson helped to develop for the PRU. He knew that he could not rely on external sources for intelligence on the VCI, although he did occasionally receive actionable intelligence from the Census Grievance and Special Branch advisors who lived with him in the embassy house. He decided that he had to form his own intelligence organization for Quang Tin Province if he wanted his PRU to be truly effective. He did this by recruiting six to ten agents distributed geographically throughout the areas either controlled or contested by the enemy. His agents were nominally paid for their information but only received payments for information that was proven to be true or resulted in the capture of VCI.

Late in his tour with the PRU, Thompson's

intelligence system generated accurate intelligence concerning a high-ranking VCI living in a house in a contested area west of Tam Ky. This information resulted in a combined force of 50 PRU soldiers and a battalion of the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division making a mechanized assault into the village where the VCI cadre was hiding. This operation not only bagged the VCI target but also resulted in the defeat of an NVA battalion defending the village.

Thompson left the Quang Tin PRU in March 1968, but he returned to Vietnam in 1969, serving again with the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company in Quang Nam Province. He was seriously injured during an emergency helicopter extraction using a STABO (Short Tactical Airborne Operation) rig, which resulted in his hospitalization for a year and eventual medical discharge from the Marine Corps in 1970. He left the Corps with the rank of gunnery sergeant.²⁶

First Lieutenant Joel R. Gardner: A Marine in II Corps, 1967-68

First Lieutenant Joel R. Gardner was bored with his job of teaching French to officers enrolled in the Marine Corps' Command and Staff College at Quantico, Virginia. So one morning in February 1967 when he saw a message posted on the school's bulletin board that sought volunteers for a special assignment, he saw a chance to escape from that billet. The message was rather cryptic. It simply solicited "volunteers with Vietnam experience for detached duty." Although the message contained no additional details, Lieutenant Gardner suspected this duty had something to do with the Central Intelligence Agency, and this appealed to his sense of adventure and his desire to return to where the action was—in Vietnam.

Gardner came from a distinguished military family. He was the son of a retired U.S. Navy admiral, and he had followed in his father's footsteps by graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy in the class of 1963. After the Basic School, he had served as a platoon commander in A/1/4 before volunteering for duty as a platoon commander with Company B, 3d Recon-

naissance Battalion. While with 3d Recon Battalion, he had made the initial landings at Chu Lai and had distinguished himself in combat, earning three Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts before his tour ended in March 1966.

With his Vietnam experience and his desire to return to the fight, Gardner willingly volunteered for the "detached duty" without having any more knowledge of what was expected of him. He only knew that if he was accepted for this new and potentially exciting work, he would no longer have to teach French. He felt confident that any new assignment would be more exciting than his present one. He was not disappointed.

Lieutenant Gardner drove to Headquarters Marine Corps in the Navy Annex in Arlington, Virginia, to formally apply for the new job. He was interviewed Colonel Noble Beck in the personnel department and, evidently, the interview went well because one week later, Gardner received orders "to such place in Washington, D.C., as would be designated in separate correspondence." Thus began a two-year sojourn with the Central Intelligence Agency on independent orders.

What follows is the tale of Lieutenant Gardner's experience in his own words as one of only a very few Marines assigned to duty as a PRU advisor in the II Corps of Vietnam:

We started our training/orientation in Washington, D.C., with a group of over 50 military officers, mostly U.S. Army officers and only seven Marine officers. The CIA was in a hurry for us to get to Vietnam since many of their career case officers were up for reassignment from Vietnam to jobs for which they were more appropriately trained; that is, working against the Soviet Union and its satellites. These CIA career officers were needed for operations against the main enemy, not for operations in some "side show" like Vietnam. This meant we would receive a shortened case-officer training program so we could rapidly replace them.

After an initial briefing and psychological and "lifestyle" testing, we began our formal

training program. Part of the training was at a "remote or southern training facility" where we were introduced to the arcane tradecraft of intelligence. I would return later in my Marine Corps career in 1980 to this CIA training facility for additional training prior to my assignment as a naval attaché in Paris. We also went through a comprehensive area and language training course at the State Department's Foreign Service Institute Vietnam Training Center in Rosslyn, Virginia, where we achieved a 3/3 language proficiency rating upon graduation. At the completion of our training, which took approximately five months, we were given our official passports and other credentials identifying us as "USAID Rural Development Officers." I later told people that I was actually an agricultural expert on grasshoppers, but they seemed incredulous since I carried a Swedish K submachine gun all the time! I assured them that the Swedish K was needed because there were a lot of grasshoppers that needed to be exterminated, and we classified these grasshoppers as "Vermin, Communist Infestators," or VCI.

After relocating my wife and two children in Bangkok, Thailand, where they would stay until my 18-month tour of duty in Vietnam with the CIA ended, I flew to Saigon, arriving there in August 1967. After checking into the Duc Hotel, I went to the U.S. Embassy for a briefing on the situation in Vietnam and what my future duties might entail. I also checked in with USAID since they provided my cover and they handled my pay. My military records were maintained by the CSD/MACV unit at Tan Son Nhut Airport. This dual administrative arrangement resulted in receiving active-duty time for my military career while receiving civilian pay. It was all very confusing, but with three "masters" in charge of me (CIA, USAID, and DoD), I thought I would be able to fool all of them most of the time. Like most CIA personnel, my home while in Saigon was the Duc Hotel. It was my temporary abode during my initial orientation in Saigon and during subsequent visits to the capital city.

At the U.S. Embassy, I met Marine Colonel William Redel, who handled all PRU matters. He informed me that despite the Commandant's request to have all Marines assigned to I Corps, he was going to assign me to the coastal city of Nha Trang in Khanh Hoa province in II Corps. His rationale for this assignment was my recent combat experience with 3d Recon Battalion, which he felt would best benefit the program if applied in Khanh Hoa province working with the PRU there.

Nha Trang is the largest city in II Corps. I flew up to my new assignment aboard an Air America plane and reported to my new boss, Ernie Sparks, who was the ROIC for II Corps. Ernie's initial briefing to me was short and sweet since he was a man of few words, but his guidance was specific, and he made me feel welcome and appreciated at our first session together.

Being close to the ROIC HQ was both a problem and a blessing. The ROIC staff officers were always looking over my shoulder. However, having the regional supply facility and access to Air America helicopters and daily Volpar flights more than compensated for this inconvenient meddling. There was also the problem of visitors who came to the ROIC HQ for briefings, like Daniel Ellsberg, who managed to stay with us for three days! I showed him our "A" hamlets where we had RD cadre teams but kept him well away from the PRU and their operations. These visitors and the time it took to brief them often took me away from my "real work."

My time in Nha Trang started out with my being placed in charge of the province's 110-man PRU. The unit seemed well equipped and, supposedly, fully trained at the Vung Tau training facility operated by the CIA. However, I quickly found out that my PRU chief considered me a useless adjunct to his life. He would do the traditional Vietnamese thing of listening to my questions and giving me the answers he thought I wanted to hear, not what I needed to hear. He was distant, hard to find at times, and not prone to keep me informed. He was resentful when I said

I would be present at payday and I wanted to see everyone on the roles who was receiving pay. Needless to say, we did not get off to a good start.

When I arrived in Nba Trang, two other military officers arrived with me. They were both U.S. Army officers. We were to replace two CIA officers who were extremely anxious to leave, so our turnover briefing with them was rather short, and they were gone before we knew it. During this turnover, we were acutely aware of the difference between the CIA officers and us. It was pretty obvious that they did not think we were in the same league as they were.

One of these departing CIA officers had been in charge of the PRU, the CG, and the RD cadre programs. The other was responsible for the Police Special Branch and the PIC. We found that there were 25 59-man RD teams in the province and about 30 CG personnel conducting census surveys. One of us, an Army captain, took over the RD Program, and my other colleague, an Army major, took over the PSB and the PIC. I was given the PRU and Census Grievance Programs. Unfortunately, around Thanksgiving 1967, they were seriously wounded by a claymore mine and had to be evacuated from the country. For a time, I was the only man at the gate until an additional CIA officer, a Korean-American named Han Lee, came in and took the PSB and PIC off my hands. Still, trying to manage the PRU and RD Programs at the same time was a very heavy burden to bear, and I found it difficult to manage both large programs effectively. Fortunately, an Army Special Forces NCO, Staff Sergeant Joe Garza, joined us later, and he was placed in charge of the PRU under my immediate supervision.

After taking over the PRU, I tried to determine how they obtained intelligence for PRU operations. I was told that some operations were the result of information obtained from the RD cadre who reported on various people in certain families that were suspected of Communist sympathies. When they reported that these people were "out of town" for un-

known reasons, it often meant they were probably with the VC.

We also got information from the RD cadre on VCI tax collectors and armed propaganda teams, but I also knew the results of most of our PRU operations were pitiful. Staff Sergeant Garza and I at first thought we might have a "mole" in the unit giving away our operational plans to the enemy. We decided that we needed to find this mole as quickly as possible, so we devised a plan to give the entire PRU a polygraph examination in less than 24 hours. One night we secured the PRU armory and transferred all the weapons to the region's storage hanger at the Nba Trang airfield, and then the next day we had a polygraph team fly in from Saigon to administer the tests. The PRU members were apprehensive about taking a polygraph until we explained that they would not be hurt—unless they lied, and then they would be electrocuted!

The polygraph tests told us that we had not been infiltrated by a "mole," but the PRU chief and about half the PRU members were in collusion to fake operations. This entailed simply taking a team out on an "operation" to the edge of town, hiding for a few days, and then returning to base empty-handed. Needless to say, I fired the PRU chief and half the PRU immediately and began the process of finding honest replacements.

I found a new PRU chief who was highly recommended by the province chief and the province intelligence chief, which gave him both access to, and support from, these two important political leaders in the province. Staff Sergeant Garza and I got along very well with the new PRU chief, and with his help, we began recruiting local men for the PRU and sending them to the PRU training facility at Vung Tau. By Christmas 1967, we were back to full strength and conducting "real" operations against the VCI.

We concentrated our efforts against the VCI tax collectors since we knew that if we cut off the source of funds for the VC, we would seriously hurt the VC's ability to fi-

nance both their combat operations and political activities. Armed propaganda teams were also high on our list of targets, but as the term “armed” indicates, we often had more serious engagements with these VCI than with tax collectors. These two groups, the tax collectors and the armed propaganda teams, were the most visible to the local villagers, and their neutralization had the greatest impact on the villagers’ perception of the efficiency of the PRU.

When I served in I Corps with a reconnaissance battalion, I had seen how special troops, like recon Marines, were inappropriately employed in operations they were neither trained nor equipped for, such as flank security for infantry sweeps, command post security, and assaults against fortified hamlets and villages. Using lightly armed, specially trained troops for missions they are not trained or equipped for is a foolish waste of valuable assets. The PRU teams were never meant to be used as infantry, but many U.S. and Vietnamese commanders did not understand the mission or capabilities of the PRU and, as a result, they often tried to use them on missions they were not suited for, often with disastrous results.

My PRU had an incredible inventory of weapons and equipment in its armory. The basic weapon for a PRU soldier was the Swedish K submachine gun, a heavy, rugged, and very reliable individual weapon. We also had sniper rifles (M-1s and Springfield 03s), carbines, LAWs, M-60 machine guns, silenced 22 caliber rifles, some British weapons, and enemy AK-47s for “black” operations.

The PRU was a direct support asset controlled completely at the provincial level. We did not have functioning DIOCCs in our province while I was there; that came much later on in the war. Since most of our province was covered in mountainous jungle and sparsely populated outside of a few areas, it made much more sense to use the PRU as a provincial level asset than to have it dispersed throughout the province. Nha Trang City and Ninh Hoa District north of

the city, along the lines of communication connecting the coastal plain with the highland cities of Dalat and Ben Me Thout, were where the population—and the VCI—were concentrated, and these areas were the focus of PRU operations.

I did not get along well with the U.S. province senior advisor, a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel, because he had some weird idea that I worked for him and thought I should keep him informed about what I was doing. I did, however, get along well with the district senior advisor in Ninh Hoa District, an Army major, who was very forward-looking and supportive of our capabilities.

As is so often in combat, great plans are driven by personalities, and this can make the difference between success and failure. An example of this involved an operation generated by cooperation between this supportive U.S. district advisor and our PRU. One day, he briefed me about a VCI tax team that was brazenly stopping traffic on the road between Ban Me Thout and Ninh Hoa on the coast. We met with the advisor’s Vietnamese counterparts, and they briefed us on the modus operandi of this tax team. It seems the tax team would establish roadblocks at several points along the road to collect taxes from passing vehicles, and they tended to use some of these roadblocks regularly. They did not establish these roadblocks for long, just long enough to stop enough vehicles so they could meet their tax quotas for that day and then disappear back into the thick jungle.

Working with the U.S. advisor and the Vietnamese military, we worked on a plan to neutralize this VCI tax team. Staff Sergeant Garza, the PRU chief, and 15 PRU team members would be used to target one of the frequently used locations by the tax team. I hired a covered, civilian truck to transport this team to its ambush site, and then I joined up with the advisory team to the Korean Capitol Division near Ninh Hoa to set up a radio relay site five miles away. This was the first operation I allowed Staff Sergeant Garza to go on, and I did not want to

lose this valuable advisor: I gave him his own PRC-25 for communications. I also arranged for pre-planned artillery concentrations and a reaction force made up of a Vietnamese Ranger Company in case they were needed by the ambush team. As a rule, the Khanh Hoa PRU operated close to the densely populated areas of the province near the coast so this operation constituted a “deep” operation for us.

The PRU ambush team set up on a hillside overlooking one of the favorite spots on the road that the VCI tax team used. Around noon on the second day, the PRU team observed the enemy tax team set up a collection point on the road 300 meters away. The PRU chief told the team to do nothing, only observe. He told Staff Sergeant Garza to wait until tomorrow when the tax team would return and the team would be in a better position to attack it. Staff Sergeant Garza explained to me the strict discipline of the PRU members as they remained motionless in their observation position for the next 24 hours, not even moving to make a head call. The next day, the VCI tax team returned to the road and set up their collection point directly under the PRU team’s location. The PRU opened fire and killed the entire tax team. I do not think a U.S. unit would have waited 24 hours to initiate an ambush—Americans like instant gratification—but one cannot argue with the results.

Most of our operations were on a small scale, generally ambushes or interdictions based upon low-level intelligence and set up for specific targets moving into or between hamlets which had minimal or no GVN security forces (PF or RD cadre) in them. Generally, these targets were developed from leads generated at the local level and fed back through the Census Grievance representatives or RD Cadre teams working in the hamlets and villages. We also received leads from informants working for the Vietnamese military S-2s. I do not remember ever generating a plan or an operation from intelligence from a higher echelon, but the Vietnamese did this on occasion, as it should be.

I do not think it is accurate to say that the Americans were in command of the PRU in my province while I was there. We provided support: logistical, financial, and training. I ran interference for the PRU when people tried to misuse them or tried to take them over from us, but I considered the PRU to be under the command of the PRU chief and his team leaders, not me. They were, however, definitely under my operational control. I passed on intelligence gained by the PRU to the American side, primarily to First Field Force Vietnam Headquarters, the U.S. Air Force, and the Special Forces Headquarters at the Nha Trang air base.

We had one extraordinary operation in early January 1968. We received reports from either a CG or RD cadre that a person in one of the hamlets outside the city was providing food and other logistical support to an unknown enemy unit. Our suspect was a female who would carry “parcels” out of the hamlet almost daily and return empty-handed. We set up a series of surveillance operations over a period of several days, each one picking up where the previous one lost sight of her on her travels. They had her pretty well triangulated in an area of deep brush, scraggy trees, and rocky outcroppings. We wanted to use a PRU team to go into the area, but it was part of the Korean Logistical Command’s TAOR, so we held off on the operation until we had their permission. Finally after some negotiating, we met with all the key players at the Korean Field Force HQ in Nha Trang and worked out the necessary coordination to make our operation possible.

Our operation was delayed a day because a Korean unit was in the area. That unit reported the area as empty and that our operation there would be a waste of our time. We went anyway, and in less than three hours, we found an occupied cave. The two occupants of the cave were killed in a short firefight, but the body count was not important. Inside the cave, we found records for the Nha Trang City Party Committee. It was a real intelligence bonanza and included a complete

organizational chart for the party, 110 names of party members (AKA's to be sure), and other valuable documents. After Tet, which was only a few weeks after the operation, we captured enough prisoners so the Vietnamese could begin to put real names against the AKA's on the captured muster rolls. As a result, we were able to roll up almost the entire city party committee and deal a blow to the VCI that would set them back years.

This type of operation was the kind the PRU were designed for, and it demonstrates that one single piece of accurate intelligence provided by a local source, and properly exploited by a well-trained special police unit, can cause an entire insurgency infrastructure in a major city to be neutralized.

After my CIA assignment, I was assigned to the FSI Vietnam Training Center to train district and province senior advisors (civilian and military). I made regular trips back to South Vietnam during the period 1969-72 and would eventually visit nearly every district and province where we had advisory teams. During this time, I witnessed the maturation of the DIOCCs and the Phung Hoang Program and saw how Phung Hoang had become very effective in nearly all areas, inflicting serious losses on the VCI. Ho Chi Minh was quoted as saying that he was far more worried about our success against the VCI than against his regular forces.²⁷

Lieutenant Colonel Terence M. Allen: The Perspective from Saigon, 1968-1970

When then-Lieutenant Colonel Terence M. (Terry) Allen reported for duty with the PRU as the chief advisor for military operations to the PRU commander in 1968, he brought with him a high degree of professional expertise and experience in special warfare. As the senior U.S. military advisor to the PRU in Saigon, he reported directly to the CIA's Tucker Gougemann. Along with his able executive officer, Marine Major Kenneth D. Hyslop, they made up a formidable senior-level advisory team that

managed the U.S. side of the PRU Program during its most effective years from 1968 until 1970.

Prior to his assignment to the Combined Studies Division of MACV as the chief PRU advisor, Colonel Allen had been both the executive officer and commanding officer of the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion and the inspector and instructor for the 5th Force Reconnaissance Company. This experience gave him extensive firsthand knowledge about, and training in, the conduct of missions similar to those the PRU would routinely perform. His combat experience in Korea and his participation in operations in Lebanon in 1958 gave him a keen insight into unconventional warfare as well as a deep appreciation for the constraints often imposed on U.S. forces by geopolitical considerations. In short, he was an ideal choice for the military-political advisory role in which he found himself.

Living in an apartment in Saigon and working out of the PRU headquarters in Saigon, Allen ranged across the length and breadth of South Vietnam planning, organizing, and conducting various missions for the PRU. Not adverse to danger, he routinely accompanied PRU teams on missions in the provinces, including several parachute missions. He was also responsible for maintaining and analyzing the monthly reports that came into PRU headquarters from the U.S. advisors in the 44 provinces of South Vietnam and conducting inspections of the PRU teams operating throughout the country. As such, he had a unique perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the PRU Program and its overall effectiveness in fighting the VCI. His near-daily interface with Nguyen Van Lang, the national commander of the PRU, allowed him to influence as well as assist the South Vietnamese PRU leadership in a way that no other American could.

Colonel Allen reinforced the widely held belief of most U.S. Marine PRU advisors that each PRU was unique based upon such factors as the province in which it was deployed, the ethnic and religious composition of the teams, the

family and social connections, the military experience, the leadership, and the relationship with the CIA POICs and the South Vietnamese province chiefs. He also pointed out that geography often played a role in how the PRUs were employed and how their missions changed over time as the war progressed. For instance, he said that in the mountainous areas of South Vietnam where VCI were scarce, the PRUs often focused on collecting tactical intelligence rather than counter-VCI operations. In the coastal plains and the Mekong Delta where the population was dense, the PRUs were used in a wider array of missions depending on the level of pacification in their province.

As the pacification programs associated with Phoenix began to succeed after the 1968 Tet Offensive, and more and more hamlets were freed from VC control, the mission of the PRU evolved away from tactical intelligence and quasi-military operations to strictly counter-VCI, police-type operations. Colonel Allen also said that PRU teams even conducted several classified operations into the border areas of Cambodia against VCI known to be hiding there. These operations, because of their sensitivity, were planned and executed by the PRU directorate in Saigon.

In several interviews with the author, Colonel Allen mentioned two serious impediments to the PRU Program in particular and the Phoenix program in general. The first was the "obstruction and lack of cooperation by the U.S. State Department" when it came to PRU missions. He stated that he found the attitude of the State Department difficult to comprehend at times since their officials seemed to hold "the belief that as long as they were in control of events, the ambassador was second only to the President of the United States," an attitude that caused them to impose "controls on PRU employment that were both unnecessary and counterproductive." Many times the State Department representatives in South Vietnam dictated to Allen where Phoenix operations should be conducted, forcing him often to agree to these demands in principle but then to disregard them in practice. This

lack of U.S. State Department cooperation and understanding for the PRU mission was a constant source of frustration for Allen as he worked diligently to coordinate PRU operations with other U.S. and South Vietnamese agencies.

While the State Department caused Colonel Allen the most concern, he also had difficulties with South Vietnamese province chiefs who misunderstood the proper role of the PRU or sought to use their local PRU for missions not related to the elimination of the VCI. He spent a considerable amount of time traveling around South Vietnam talking to province chiefs about this tendency to misuse the PRUs. His own MACV and Pacific Command intelligence analysts were also a problem at times since despite incontrovertible evidence, in the form of captured NVA or VC prisoners and enemy documents, they refused to believe the intelligence reports generated by the PRUs.

The second concern Colonel Allen had was the problems caused by what he described as inaccurate and false reporting by civilian journalists assigned to the Vietnam War. Allen's cover assignment was that of MACV deputy for public information. Although his title had nothing to do with his real job, it did give him access to considerable information on the press corps in South Vietnam. He soon found out that of the 565 reporters working in South Vietnam, few had either the background or the expertise to cover the kind of war being fought in South Vietnam, and many were openly sympathetic to the enemy cause. He also found that the North Vietnamese Intelligence Service, the Cuc Nghien Cuu, had thoroughly infiltrated the foreign press offices and were receiving classified information regularly from naïve and careless foreign reporters.

In addition to this classified information being used by the enemy to thwart the pacification effort, it was also being used by the enemy's agents within the foreign press corps to spread disinformation about Phoenix and other programs that were proving to be successful in hurting the enemy. So much inac-

curate information about the PRU and the Special Operations Group (SOG) was being reported in the U.S. and foreign press in 1968 that Allen found it necessary to go the South Vietnamese minister for indigenous people, Paul Nur, and secure a promise from him to no longer refer to the Phoenix program or the PRU in any South Vietnamese press releases and to use the Vietnamese title of Phung Hoang instead. Allen considered the false and inaccurate reporting by journalists in the Saigon press corps to be far more damaging than anything the enemy did to hurt the PRU because these stories caused both the Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon administrations to overreact and impose restrictions on the PRU and their advisors that only served to help the enemy.

The author asked Colonel Allen several times about the claim that the PRUs engaged in assassinations and deliberately killed innocent civilians. He was adamant that the PRUs never received orders to assassinate anyone while he was the senior U.S. advisor to the PRU Program, and he knew of no instances prior to his assignment where such an order had been issued. He stated, just as the U.S. Marine advisors interviewed for this book did, that the PRU were given mission-type orders that directed them to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance operations, night ambushes, and raids on known or suspected VCI targets. He never issued an order to assassinate a VCI, only to capture one. As he stated, "the whole purpose of our operations was to capture VCI so we could interrogate them and benefit from the intelligence they provided. We did not benefit from killing a VCI since a dead VCI was of no intelligence value."²⁸

Death at the Embassy House, Tet 1968

The PRU advisors' job was a very dangerous one. They lived with their CIA colleagues in villas that were often vulnerable to enemy attack, and in many instances they were the only Americans accompanying the PRU teams when they went on operations in areas controlled by the VC or NVA. The enemy feared

the PRU and considered them and their advisors prime targets for elimination. The following account, written by Raymond R. Lau, who was a U.S. Marine captain assigned as a Rural Development advisor in Hue City at the time of the 1968 Tet Offensive, clearly illustrates how dangerous living in an embassy house could be. In his account, he tells the story of the death of Sergeant Howard G. Vaughn, the PRU advisor for Thua Thien Province.

Lau's commentary begins on the day before the Tet Offensive was launched, shortly after he had returned to Vietnam from extension leave. He had volunteered to spend an additional six months in Vietnam over his initial 13-month tour so he could continue to work with the Rural Development Program. His account is taken from an outline of events he wrote on 7 February 1968, the day he ended his harrowing seven days behind enemy lines.

After the short half-hour flight from Da Nang air base aboard an Air America flight, we landed at the small dirt airfield located in the northwest corner of the Citadel and I was met there by Jim Harris, a young former Special Forces, now with the embassy. We had become good friends in the short time we had known each other. We rode back into town in the jeep chatting about what happened during the past month, and we stopped at the Embassy Provincial Headquarters before going to the house where we were both staying. At the American compound, I met Tom Gompertz, a young FSO (Foreign Service Officer) assigned to Hue. He was the quintessential all-American boy, clean cut, good looking, with a ready smile that seemed to say that he was in on some joke. I'd known Tom since coming to Hue. We played soccer against the Nung guards and talked together often. Tom welcomed me back and said something about getting together soon, now that I was back. That was the last time I saw Tom until I identified his body some 10 days later. I visited his gravesite in 2002, finally "getting together" 35 years later.

That night after dinner, Jim and I chatted in the living room of our house while we



Photo courtesy of Mr. Rudy Enders

The Embassy House in Hue City after the Tet 1968 attack. At right is the Military Region 1 regional officer-in-charge (ROIC), Mr. Harry Mustakos.

loaded the magazines of the Swedish K sub-machine guns that we had just gotten. Jim had gotten them that day and had grabbed one for me. It was like a new toy. We admired the weapons because of their simple uncluttered design, the green metal body with its folding stock, its wooden pistol grip, and the leather carrying case for the 20-round magazines. The Swedish-Ks were different from the M-2 carbines, M-3 "grease guns," or AK-47s that we usually carried. I remember thinking that the Swedish Ks were a bit too "pretty" for combat, but hell, we hadn't seen much combat during the last year.

Anyway, Jim and I figured there was not much sense having the weapons around if the magazines weren't loaded, so we stayed up late that night loading the magazines. When we finally went to bed, boxes of 9mm ammunition and tear gas grenades were still sitting on the living room table. Other than that, it was pretty much a normal night. I

felt good being back in Hue. I was back home.

The next morning, 31 January 1968, the first day of Tet, the Year of the Monkey, we were awakened at about 4:00 a.m. to the sound of gunfire and explosions in the distance. The three of us who shared the house at No. 6 Nguyen Hue (Jim, Bob Ennis, and myself) gathered to find out what was happening. According to our Nung guards outside, the guard camp across the canal at Nam Giao was coming under attack, and they were noticeably concerned. To us, it wasn't that unusual because we'd had probing attacks every few night in the previous months as the Viet Cong probed outlying ARVN and Marine outposts. A couple months previously, the Viet Cong had attacked and overrun a Marine CAP (Combined Action Platoon) post just south of Hue. They killed the young Marine CAP unit leader, a corporal, whom I had just met a couple weeks before.

While it wasn't particularly alarming, the sustained firefight indicated that it was something bigger than a probe. We continued to listen to the surreal pop-pop-popping of small arms fire. I thought how almost harmless it sounded, like firecrackers, not at all like gunfire as portrayed in the movies. We continued to monitor our radios, as we could hear the sounds of the firefight move west toward the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) camp, located at a stately old French colonial compound called "Gerard."

We were cautiously monitoring the fighting, but not unduly alarmed. There were conflicting reports about whether "Gerard" was under attack up until then, but soon we got confirmation that it was coming under heavy attack. We continued to hear the sounds of small-arms fire and the "crump" of grenades and exploding mortar rounds coming from the two locations. The fighting was intensifying rapidly.

At about 7:00 a.m., Bob Hubbard, a Marine detailed to the embassy, and Howard Vaughn, a Marine sergeant advisor to the PRU, arrived by jeep at our house. They, too, had been monitoring the fighting and preparing to evacuate to the MACV compound about a mile away. Hubbard first wanted to go to the house of the Police Special Branch (PSB) advisor, located at No. 9 Phan Dinh Phung, to check on several people living there. Hubbard said they had not had any radio contact with them that morning. Hubbard and Jim departed through our backyard toward the Phu Cam Canal where the other house was located.

The sky was brightening, but the day was gray and overcast. A light mist shrouded the streets, and there was a slight chill in the air. Sergeant Vaughn and I went out to the front of the house to see if we could detect any activity. We did not have to wait long. We were standing by our gateposts when Sergeant Vaughn said he could see enemy soldiers running down Lam Son Street toward the provincial headquarters about 70 yards away. The soldiers were dressed in green uni-

forms, trousers rolled up above the knee, with each carrying a rucksack and a weapon. I looked out and could see small figures, crouched over, moving across my front about 100 yards away. It seemed like an endless stream of people running down the street.

Sergeant Vaughn said he was going to mark them with fire and let loose a short burst of fire from his M-16. Almost immediately, it was answered with automatic fire. Chips of stone flew off the gatepost, and Vaughn wheeled away from the post and fell to the ground. He spit up some blood, but otherwise there wasn't a lot of bleeding, so I could not tell how seriously he was wounded. He said he had taken one bullet below his left arm. He was coughing up blood, meaning the bullet had punctured a lung. I bent over Vaughn, but still did not know the seriousness of his wounds.

At that moment, a couple of mortar rounds struck the roof of our house and showered us with shards of broken tile. I asked Sergeant Vaughn if he could move into the house. He pushed himself up and stumbled, hunched over, into the house and fell, sprawling on the living room floor. I stayed outside a couple more minutes watching the NVA stream down the street, watching to see if they turned up the street toward our house. Things were getting more serious by the minute, yet how serious it was to become would not be known until later. Bob Ennis, who had been inside the house, went out to one of the jeeps to monitor radio transmissions. The radios we had in our jeeps were squawking with a steady stream of English. This was a dead giveaway that there were Americans nearby.

A few minutes later, about 7:30 a.m., Bob Hubbard and Jim Harris returned. They asked if I thought we could make a run for the MACV compound. I told them that a lot of enemy troops had already moved down toward the MACV compound and I did not think we could make it. Besides, I said, Sergeant Vaughn was seriously wounded. Harris

and Hubbard entered the house and went into one bedroom to check the condition of Vaughn and to try to establish radio contact with the MACV compound. I was across the living room in the other bedroom, watching the front door and a window on my side of the house. A few minutes later, I could see about a half dozen Viet Cong come from the adjacent house, No. 4 Nguyen Hue, cross in front of our house, and walk off out of sight...

About 8:30 a.m., I saw a grenade coming from somewhere to my right, out of my line of sight, and land on the seat of one of the jeeps parked outside our door. A second later there was an explosion and the jeep was engulfed in flames as the grenade touched off the gas tank. The second jeep soon followed the same fate. So much for using the jeeps to escape.

I don't know what happened to Bob Ennis. Frankly, in the confusion of the moment, I did not even think of him, as my attention was focused on the rapidly deteriorating situation. Several minutes went by, and I saw four VC parade a group of prisoners past our house, their hands above their heads in surrender. I recognized a couple of people as members of the IVS (International Volunteer Service), although I did not know their names. Also among the group were two of our Nung guards.

Around 9:30 a.m., one enemy soldier entered the house. He walked slowly toward the right side bedroom where Bob Hubbard and Jim Harris were. I was squatting down, pressed up against the door jam, hidden somewhat by a couch, watching the scene unfold. I looked over at Hubbard, who was watching the enemy approach. When the VC was about 10 feet from Bob, Bob stood up, and they both started firing on full automatic. It was like the gangster movies of the 1930s. Chips of wood were flying off the door around Hubbard, but Hubbard's bullets found their mark, and the VC wheeled, staggered a couple feet, and collapsed at our front door entrance. Somehow during this violent exchange, one of the French doors to

the bedroom where Hubbard was standing swung away from the wall, obscuring his view of the front door from that room. This was to have an impact on who engaged the next VC intruders. Bob came away without a scratch. Engaging the enemy at a distance is one thing, but a shootout at 10 feet was another thing. My adrenaline was pumping.

About 30 minutes passed before two other NVA would approach. I was surprised that our little firefight had not attracted more attention right after it happened—not that I was eager. The lead NVA glanced down at the body at the door but continued to enter the house slowly. The second NVA knelt down to examine the body more carefully. You could see that the NVA were used to jungle fighting, and their training did not prepare them for urban combat. I don't think either side was trained for urban warfare... The defender—in this case us—always has the advantage of surprise. This was certainly the case here, for I was crouched at the entry way to the left side bedroom watching the enemy enter. When he was about 10-12 feet away, I stood up, braced my back against the doorway, and opened fire on full automatic. I was so nervous that my first rounds hit the floor, and I remember walking the bullets up the enemy's leg to his body. He turned and collapsed. I raised my Swedish-K a bit and shot the other NVA soldier kneeling at the main doorway, and he went down right there. ... [Notes that this is the first man he has killed.]

Another ten minutes or so went by, and the front doorway was rocked by an explosion from a RPG rocket, fired from across the street. The blast blew a hole in the wall, to the left of the front doorway. All I could remember was this cloud of red brick dust, and the blast picking me up and throwing me about 10 feet back into the bedroom. I was a bit shaken but unscathed as I quickly got up and crawled back into position at the doorway to the bedroom. I could now look out to the street through the open doorway and the hole blown through the wall, but I was feeling very vulnerable having to divide my attention between the front door and the

windows of the left side bedroom, which had been blown open by the explosion. I assessed my position as being too untenable, so I scurried across the living room to join the others. Bob Hubbard was crouched near the window opening out to the street. Jim Harris was just inside the doorway I had just come through. Howard Vaughn was lying in the center of the room, fading in and out of consciousness. It looked very serious. I took up a position at the doorway, on the opposite side from Jim Harris.

I looked into the living room at the three bodies of the VC. I could see that a piece of the wall above where the RPG rocket had hit had come down and crashed on top of one of the bodies. If the fellow was not dead before, the piece of the wall surely finished him.

Hubbard continued to try to establish radio contact on the PRC-25—"Waverly Waver . . . Waverly Waver." . . . At one point, we could hear communications between some unidentified units. I thought it was the Air Cav because they referred to someone as "pony soldier," but we could not raise anyone. Unknown to us at the time, MACV had been under attack since 4:00 a.m., and they had changed frequencies and call signs.

It was about this time, about 10:00 a.m., that the NVA made a concerted effort to dislodge us. Several NVA ran and took cover just outside our front gate. I thought I saw one carrying a satchel charge and could only think of the death and destruction such charges made to the Marine CAP unit outside of Hue. A blast rocked the other side of the building. I could see one NVA soldier hiding behind the gatepost—the very same post that Vaughn was leaning against when he was wounded. I could see only a part of his head, so I aimed my Swedish-K at him and let loose a burst of fire. He screamed and went running down the street holding his head.

We looked out again and could see an NVA soldier scurry across the street with an RPG, and a couple seconds later, a second NVA followed carrying two rockets. I think the same



Photo courtesy of Mr. Rudy Enders
The Embassy House in Hue City after the Tet 1968 attack.

thought ran through each of our minds then, "Oh shit, here it comes." I think it was then that Bob Hubbard grabbed the bottle of Drambuie off the fireplace mantel, took a swig, and passed it around. Hell, it could be our last drink, so we each took a swallow. We quickly made a pact not to surrender, that we would fight to the death. I was not sure I liked that last promise, but we had to remain united.

A couple moments later, our house was rocked by the explosion as another RPG rocket hit our house. They had aimed at the other side of the house and again we were safe. I recall looking over at the windows and noticing that the plastic sheets we had used in the windows instead of glass was shredded, but that probably saved us from the injuries by flying glass. . . .

Just as suddenly as the attack began, things went quiet. We could hear the sound of helicopters outside, and I saw a Huey at treetop level, firing into the tree line. We were certain that this was the counterattack that we were waiting for and that the battle would soon be over. For the next half hour, things were deathly quiet. Suddenly, just outside our door, we could hear one of the

wounded NVA, moan and cry. We were concerned that his cries would bring others, so Jim Harris grabbed a gun, crawled outside, and fired a couple rounds into him. Jim returned and said that he had taken care of him, but it wasn't more than a couple minutes later that the wounded man began moaning and crying again. We looked at each other, and Jim again went outside and rolled two grenades outside the front door—KRUMP, KRUMP. We were sure we had heard the last of him, but soon, the cries began again. Jim said, "Forget it, he's not real."

It had been a long, quiet period, and with the sight of the Hueys earlier, we were certain that things were drawing to a close. This seemed to match the enemy's M.O. [method of operations] of attacking during the night and early morning, then withdrawing during daylight. I don't think any of us thought that the NVA would hold Hue through daylight. However, we would wait until friendly troops could mop up and move through our area before we came out. Around 11:00 a.m., I saw a group of soldiers walking down the street. I thought they were friendly forces,

probably ARVN because they had on green uniforms like what the ARVN wore and the lead individual was wearing a steel helmet.

Right about then, we took another rocket on our house. I thought it was a case of mistaken identity and told the others in the room, that I would try to identify us to these people. I called out "Hoa ky, Hoa ky," meaning "American, American." Almost immediately, it was answered by a burst of automatic fire. I dropped to the floor, hugging the tile, as bullets ripped through the wall. Bullets were coming through the brick wall not more than eight inches above my head, and I could see splinters of wood fly off the headboard of the bed.

Jim Harris, who had been squatting against the wall on the other side of the doorway, whispered "I'm hit!" I thought he meant a superficial wound and did not give it much thought until I saw him lean away from the wall, and it was covered in blood. Still, Jim seemed all right and not seriously wounded. We were to find out later that two rounds had gone through his right upper arm and

Another view of the Embassy House in Hue City after the Tet 1968 attack.

Photo courtesy of Mr. Rudy Enders



penetrated his back and lodged inside his right lung. Still thinking that it was mistaken identity, I called out again, "Hoa ky, Hoa Ky," which was answered by grenades and more small-arms fire.

It seemed as if the NVA were now in the other bedroom, as one grenade rolled into our room. Bob Hubbard dived for it and threw it back outside into the living room, where it exploded. A second grenade rolled and stopped at the door frame, about three feet from me. I plastered myself against the wall as the grenade exploded with a deafening blast. Except for a single small fragment of shrapnel on my left arm, I was not injured. I could smell a familiar odor, for a minute uncertain what it was, but soon realized it was tear gas from the stash of tear gas grenades we had left on the dining room table. Apparently, the explosions had ruptured some of those grenades, and the smoke was wafting into our room.

Reminiscent of the movie Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Jim whispered, "Any more good ideas?" He quickly added, "friendly or not, we're not going to take this" and produced two fragmentation grenades. Jim pulled the pins and nodded to me. I did not need further direction; I extended my Swedish-K into the doorway and sprayed a full magazine of bullets into the other room. As soon as I emptied the magazine, I pulled back and motioned to Jim, who rolled the two grenades into the other room. Two loud explosions in the next room seemed to silence things, and the house became quiet again.

By now, it was obvious that we could not stay in the house. I was closest to the back door and nervously I pushed it open, fully expecting the NVA to be on the other side. I was "scared shitless," but I couldn't ask someone else to do this since I was there, closest to the door. I thought of the case of fragmentation grenades, just on the other side of the door. As I inched the door open, I was surprised to find that there was no one there and the coast was clear. I went to the back bathroom and came back to motion everyone to escape

through the rear window. Bob Hubbard helped Sergeant Howard through the window and hobble to one of the back houses. I think these were old servants' quarters, but they were empty now.

We took the last room in the row. Here we joined up with Bob Ennis and four of our Nung guards. Hubbard hid Vaughn under a concrete table, affording him good protection. The rest of us took up positions to cover the windows and doorways. We listened as the enemy moved through the main building and systematically blew up the house.

We stayed in this room for about an hour. We had no illusions that we could hold this position, but we had no idea where to move without stumbling into more NVA, so we stayed put. At about 12 noon, a rifle muzzle appeared outside our door. A shot came through the door, with the bullet striking Vaughn, this time blowing off his pinkie finger and breaking his leg. Hubbard yanked the door open and fired, killing three NVA. Hubbard pulled back, yelling that he was out of ammunition. I went to the door, ready to fire, but noticed the three NVA lying outside the room and no one else. I spied a grenade and extra magazines for an AK-47 on one of the bodies, and I stooped to take them. The grenade was knotted to his belt and I was trying to undo the knot.

Looking up, back at the main house, I made eye contact with a NVA soldier standing there in the bathroom window we had come through not that long ago. I think he was an NVA officer because he was wearing a tan pith helmet and seem to be in authority. We looked at each other for several seconds, and then I got up and casually walked around to the back of the building. I am convinced that he took me for a local VC because I was in civilian clothes and carrying an AK-47.

At the back of the building, I linked up with Hubbard and Vaughn. I motioned that I was going over the wall to check out the next compound. I rolled over the wall and ran to the nearest cover, which turned out to

be a watershed. As I entered, I saw a body in the water trough. No sooner that I had gotten over that shock than the body rose up. It scared the pants off me, but I motioned him to be quiet, pushing him back down toward the water, and stepped out of the shed.

The only other place was a closet-like room with a small water trough. I went over to it, and it looked like a way to climb up to the attic crawl space, where I thought we could hide. I waved to Hubbard to follow, and the two of us hoisted Vaughn up the wall and pushed him up. He let out a muffled scream, and then we heard a thud and moan. It soon became apparent that what I thought was an attic was only the other side of the wall, and we had just dropped Vaughn over the wall. Hubbard climbed over and I quickly followed. On the other side, there was another water trough, and I kneeled on the rim, facing a window and door. Vaughn was lying on the floor. Bob had taken up a position looking out another window.

This was the first chance that we had to regroup. During the last skirmish, everyone scattered, and now only Hubbard, Vaughn, and I were together. We did not know where Jim Harris and Bob Ennis had gone, nor did we know where our Nung guards went. I do not remember how long we stayed there. We could hear some activity going on around us, but we did not see anything. Sometime later that afternoon, I saw a Vietnamese outside our building. He wandered about for a while and then came to the door and peered through the crack, straight at me. I was still squatting on the water trough, with a weapon cradled in my arms. I stared back, but otherwise did not move. I was certain he saw me, but I wasn't certain whether he would report our presence. Luck was with us, and nothing came of this incident.

As night fell, I moved into the small room with Hubbard. He had already moved Vaughn and slid him under the bed in the room. Hubbard faced out the small openings to the back, while I sat in the doorway looking out the window. We had made it through

day one. It seemed like forever:

Some time during that first night, I suddenly heard voices coming from directly in front of me, and in the faint light coming in the window I could see two figures. I think they were a man and a woman. I do not know how or when they came into our building, but they were suddenly there, not more than four feet away. I called to them in my limited Vietnamese, saying that I was a friend and not to be afraid, all the while slowly moving toward them, hand over hand. By the time I reached the window, they were gone. I never found out who they were or how they got in and out without us hearing anything. The rest of the night and the next day were uneventful, and Bob and I kept our same positions. Vaughn continued to fade in and out of consciousness, and we did not know how long he would last.

On the second night, 1 February 1968, Bob noticed two figures moving outside. By their movements, we could tell they were Jim Harris and Bob Ennis. We called to them in a whisper and guided them into our building through a back door. They soon joined us and told us of their story of taking refuge in the main building of this compound. They said that they hid in a closet, while just outside their door less than five feet away, NVA soldiers gathered and chatted in the dark. This night, they decided to sneak past the NVA soldiers and try to escape, when we called to them. They joined us in our small room. Bob Hubbard, Jim Harris and Bob Ennis sat on the bed, Sergeant Vaughn was lying under the bed, and I sat across from them on a bag of rice. Vaughn was still alive but getting weaker, slipping in and out of consciousness. We shared a bar of brown sugar and an apple that we had taken from the worship altar and water from our water source.

Jim Harris had lost quite a bit of blood and was weak. Bob Hubbard rolled Jim on his wounded side to drain the blood from his good lung into the bad lung and gave Jim water. By the next day, Jim had recuperated