

recommended for an administrative discharge. The administrative discharge would come into ever-increasing use during the early 1970s, not only to rid the Service of drug users, but those that did not meet the Marine Corps' performance and disciplinary standards.

In spite of drug use, racial tension and violence, and

occasional fraggings, III MAF and its subordinate commands remained unaffected in the accomplishment of its varied combat missions during 1969. Nevertheless, these problems did draw the command attention necessary to deal effectively with a number of social and personnel issues that previously had been ignored.

## CHAPTER 10

# 'A Difficult Phase'

*Maintaining a Protective Barrier—“You Shouldered Us”—The Brigade Takes Over*

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### *Maintaining a Protective Barrier*

The last regiment to be redeployed as part of the incremental withdrawal of the 3d Marine Division was the 4th Marines. Its final months of combat before standing down, like those of the 3d, were characterized by the launching of numerous company sweeps and patrols aimed at blunting the introduction of enemy personnel and equipment.

The first day of July found Colonel William F. Goggin's regiment engaged in the last phases of Operation Herkimer Mountain in an area of operations generally extending from the Demilitarized Zone south to Route 9, and from Vandegrift Combat Base west to the Khe Sanh Plateau. Lieutenant Colonel Clair E. Willcox's 1st Battalion, with three companies of the 3d Battalion under its operational control, had responsibility for securing Vandegrift and patrolling the rocket belt to the west. Assigned the mission of securing Fire Support Base Russell and the surrounding terrain, a 60-square-kilometer area northwest of Elliott Combat Base, was the 2d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel William C. Britt. Lieutenant Colonel James W. Wood's 3d Battalion, with the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines attached for a short period, secured a portion of Vandegrift, Elliott Combat Base, Fire Support Base Cates, and a number of other Marine outposts stretching west along Route 9.

On the 3d, Wood's battalion, less the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, which began the process of standing down for redeployment, ended its participation in Herkimer Mountain and simultaneously began Operation Arlington Canyon. Its new area of operations centered on Nui Tia Pong and the contiguous valleys, nine kilometers northwest of Vandegrift. With a dual mission of locating and destroying enemy caches and rocket sites in the area, Company I conducted a heliborne assault into LZ Uranus on the 3d; followed by the battalion command group on the 7th; Company M's assault into LZ Cougar, six kilometers to the northwest, on the 8th; and the helilift of Company K into LZ Scotch on the 10th. Company L and Company D, 1st Battalion, walked into the area of operations from Vandegrift.

Enemy activity in the area proved to be “disappoint-

ingly slow”; sightings and any resultant engagements were light, being limited to small NVA patrols and reconnaissance teams of two to four soldiers. During extensive search operations centered on Uranus, Wood's five companies did discover a multitude of enemy bunker complexes and small ammunition caches, all of which indicated a lack of recent enemy activity.

With the area around Nui Tia Pong well-patrolled, Colonel Goggin ordered the 2d Battalion to replace the 3d, which he then directed to move south. Wood's command group had already displaced to Fire Support Base Cates, and Company D, 1st Battalion to Cua Viet, when the remaining four companies moved out of the Arlington Canyon area of operations and into that of Georgia Tar on the 23d. Previously occupied by the soon-to-be-redeployed 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, the new area of operations included Fire Support Base Cates, Hill 950, and a majority of Rocket Valley, east of Vandegrift. Once the battalion joined the new operation, Company K was assigned to the defense and improvement of Cates and Hill 950, while Companies I, L, and M moved north into the rocket belt and began an extensive sweep to the south.

Meanwhile, Colonel Goggin alerted Lieutenant Colonel Willcox's 1st Battalion on the 8th to be prepared to move to the Cua Viet In-Country R&R Center the following day. The move of Company D from the Arlington Canyon area of operation and the remainder of the battalion from Vandegrift to Cua Viet went without incident. There the battalion enjoyed two days of rest and rehabilitation before joining elements of the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Brigade in Operation William's Glade. The joint Army and Marine operation, designed to “sweep the backyard,” was to take place in an area generally south of Dong Ha, west of Quang Tri, and east of Mai Loc.

On 12 July, Willcox's battalion began a sweep south from Dong Ha Combat Base, while elements of Task Force 1-61 (1st Battalion, 61st Infantry) established blocking positions east of Fire Support Base Angel and conducted reconnaissance-in-force operations to the west of the fire base. At the same time, Task Force 1-11 (1st Battalion, 11th Infantry) set up a second blocking position southwest of Dong Ha Combat Base, while

Troop A, 4th Squadron, 12th Cavalry completed the circle by establishing positions near LZ Pedro, west of Quang Tri.<sup>1</sup> Four days later, Willcox's battalion swept through the lines of Task Force 1-61, swinging southwest, searching the high ground between the Song Thach Han and Route 557. The terrain, consisting of small rolling hills and valleys, bisected by dry streambeds and covered with six-foot-high savannah grass proved to be no obstacle, but the hot and humid weather did, resulting in a large number of heat casualties. Although a couple of NVA were sighted and one caught in a daylight ambush, enemy activity was all but nonexistent.

Once Willcox's Marines completed their southward sweep, company-size patrols were organized for operations in the hills, north of the Ba Long Valley and south of FSB Angel. The battalion patrolled the area, with no sightings or contact, until the 22d when it returned to Vandegrift and joined Operation Georgia Tar. Elements of Task Force 1-61 continued William's Glade until the 26th, when the operation was merged with that of the brigade's primary operation, Iroquois Grove.

*Men of Company D, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines prepare to fire an 81mm mortar in support of company-sized patrols operating in the vicinity of Vandegrift Combat Base.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800622



reaction force. The following day, Lieutenant Colonel Wood's 3d Battalion, 4th Marines joined the operation, securing Cates and Hill 950 with one company, sending two companies on patrol into the rocket belt, and one across Route 9, to the south.

Although both battalions made use of extensive patrol operations, ambushes, and hunter-killer teams, Colonel Goggin instituted a number of precautions in response to the violent enemy attacks experienced by elements of Colonel Simlik's 3d Marines. These precautions required that all companies move at least 1,000 meters a day; that all move into night defensive positions under the cover of darkness; that all platoons be located at the company patrol base during hours of darkness; and, that there be no independent platoon operations.

Enemy activity throughout the large area of operations, however, proved to be very light during the remainder of July and into August, as reported by the battalion's operations officer, Captain Henry W. Buse III:

The enemy employed small groups of recon-type forces to simply harass us in our movement. We found out that whenever we left, pulled a company out of the rocket belt, which lay west of VCB [Vandegrift Combat Base], the enemy would rocket VCB, so consequently we tried to keep a rifle company maneuvering in that area at all times. The majority of contacts that we made, the sightings that were made, were made by reconnaissance units rather than by the infantry companies working on the ground.<sup>2</sup>

This lack of significant enemy activity and the dramatic decrease in the number of rocket attacks and mining incidents suggested to Captain Buse and others that the enemy was avoiding the area by moving south along the Khe Sanh Valley and then east through the lower Da Krong.

On 26 August, the two battalions switched primary missions and area of operations. During the day, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph A. MacInnis' 1st Battalion command group moved from Vandegrift to Cates.\* The following morning, three companies of the battalion conducted a vertical assault onto the high ground, three kilometers north of Hill 950 and began a sweep of the rocket belt. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Wood's 3d Battalion assumed control of Vandegrift, Ca Lu, and that portion of the Georgia Tar area of operations contiguous to the installations. In addition to the defense and improvement of the two facilities, the battalion was to provide security for road sweeps

\*On 5 August, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph A. MacInnis relieved Lieutenant Colonel Willcox as Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines.

and Seabee road repair crews, while maintaining one rifle company as a reaction force and another as a reserve for the operations of "Project Delta" being conducted within the division's reconnaissance zone to the west.\*\*

Enemy activity throughout the Georgia Tar area of operations continued at the same low level into the month of September. Although there were signs of heavy trail use and a number of bunker sites discovered indicating recent occupation, the NVA limited themselves to small-unit patrols, instead of massing for a direct confrontation with sweep elements of MacInnis' or Wood's battalions.

Towards the middle of the month, another major shift in regimental units took place. On the 11th, Lieutenant Colonel Wood's battalion, minus one rifle company, returned to the Arlington Canyon area of operations, west of the Rockpile and south of the DMZ. At the same time, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Donald J. Garrett, who had replaced Lieutenant Colonel Britt on the 5th, helilifted out of Arlington Canyon and was given the responsibility of securing Vandegrift and Ca Lu, and of providing rifle companies for the regimental reaction and reserve forces, in addition to the search and destroy operations conducted around both installations. To accomplish these varied missions, rifle companies of both the 1st and 3d Battalions were assigned for varying lengths of time to the battalion.

With the standdown of the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines on the 21st, Colonel Goggin ordered Garrett's Marines pulled out of Georgia Tar after only 10 days, and directed them to secure Elliott Combat Base, Khe Ghia Bridge, Fire Support Base Fuller, and conduct sweeps of a truncated area of operations, north of Elliott. As Garrett's battalion moved east, the 1st Battalion assumed control of the entire Georgia Tar area of operations, and with it the varying security missions.

As the division prepared for Phase II redeployment in late September, continued occupation of the

\*\*"Project Delta," composed of Detachment B-52, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 81st Airborne Ranger Battalion (-), two platoons, 281st Army Helicopter Company, and attached Air Force liaison and Army air relay personnel, was under the operational control of the 3d Marine Division from 4 August to 1 October. Assigned to the division's reconnaissance zone during this period, the 19 reconnaissance and 17 road runner teams, 6 Ranger companies, and 4 bomb damage assessment platoons were directed to locate and destroy enemy forces, caches, infiltration routes, and lines of communication in western Quang Tri Province. (Det B-52, 5th SpForGp, 1stSpFor AAR 3-69 [Operation Trojan Horse], n.d., in 3dMarDiv ComdC, Aug69)



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 192539

*With full packs, infantrymen of Company B, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines cross a stream while on search operations in the mountainous jungles west of Elliott Combat Base.*

western fire support bases appeared infeasible, and Goggin directed MacInnis' Marines to destroy and then close Cates, Shepherd, and the observation post atop Hill 950. In addition, they were to prepare for the future evacuation of Vandegrift and Ca Lu.

The slow and deliberate shift east of the 4th Marines brought with it the termination of Operation Georgia Tar on the 25th. During two months of sweeping the rocket belt and securing major western outposts, the regiment only accounted for 40 enemy dead and 15 weapons captured, while losing one killed and 23 wounded. "Overall," as Captain Buse later summarized, "Georgia Tar was relatively successful, in that it was designed to keep the enemy away from VCB, and to keep him, of course, out of that area of operations. And, he did stay away, for the most part, from the Cates area, and he very rarely bothered VCB."<sup>3</sup> With the close of Georgia Tar, the 4th Marines continued Operation Idaho Canyon and Arlington Canyon.

While participants and reports alike characterized enemy activity within the Georgia Tar area of operations as insignificant, the same term could not be applied to the actions of NVA troops operating within the area of Arlington Canyon, to the north. Captured documents, agent reports, and strategically placed sensor strings indicated that elements of four enemy battalions, the *3d Battalion, 246th Independent*

*Regiment; 3d Battalion, 9th NVA Regiment; 1st Battalion, 84th Artillery (Rocket) Regiment; and an unnumbered battalion of the 24th Independent Regiment,* were using the area's extensive trail network to move men and supplies further south in order to support a buildup in the central portion of the province. While avoiding a massive, direct attack, screening and reconnaissance elements of these four battalions did not hesitate to protect their parent units, installations, or infiltration routes by employing indirect fire attacks and small unit probes against advancing 4th Marines patrols.<sup>4</sup>

The original task assigned Marines involved in Arlington Canyon was to halt the enemy's numerous rocket attacks against fire support bases and other major allied installations throughout the central and western portions of the division's area of responsibility. But, as the operation progressed, this mission was expanded by the need to locate and destroy enemy units known to be operating in, or moving through, the area to the southeast. To accomplish these two missions, Lieutenant Colonel Britt's 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, which had replaced Lieutenant Colonel Wood's 3d Battalion in the area on 24 July, employed extensive patrols and ambushes. With one company assigned to secure and improve the defensive works of Fire Support Base Russell, Britt's remaining three companies moved out into the surrounding, heavily-

jungled, mountainous terrain. Division orders, however, prohibited offensive patrols within three kilometers of the DMZ, thus limiting operations of the three companies to the upper Cam Lo River Valley, immediately north of Russell. A second limitation imposed by division was that each rifle company move its command post and all platoons the standard one kilometer per day. This forced movement in mountainous terrain not only taxed the companies, reported the battalion's operation officer, Major James J. O'Meara, but "in order to make that click [1,000 meters] they would not effectively search any area. It became sort of a road race; you must make your click."<sup>5</sup>

Despite these limitations, the overburdened companies established a total of 360 ambushes and ran 270 patrols during the month of August. Contact was made on 12 different occasions, most of which resulted from sighting small groups of four to six NVA soldiers. Two, involving larger units, were significant. The first took place as Captain Harry C. Baxter, Jr.'s Company E secured its night defensive position atop Hill 715, five kilometers west of Russell, on 12 August. Shortly after midnight, two NVA sapper squads attacked that portion of the perimeter manned by Baxter's 3d Platoon. Firing AK47s and throwing satchel charges, the sappers killed two and wounded five Marines before withdrawing. Later, as a CH-46 helicopter attempted to land and evacuate the casualties, it came under heavy small arms fire, and the sappers again attempted to penetrate the perimeter. Baxter called for mortar fire and adjusted it on the enemy's position, forcing the sappers to withdraw a second time. After the completion of a second medical evacuation, "Spooky" gunships circled the perimeter, pounding the remnants of the enemy sapper squads. Baxter's Marines made a complete search of the area at first light, finding three NVA bodies and a large cache of hand grenades and satchel charges.

A week later, as Captain Francis Zavacki's Company H advanced from Dong Tiou, four kilometers northeast of Russell, towards LZ Sierra, his 1st Platoon walked into an "L"-shaped enemy ambush, initiated by claymores, grenades, and followed with small arms fire. The enemy killed three Marines outright and seriously wounded eight more. The platoon returned fire with small arms and called upon artillery and 81mm mortars for additional support. Zavacki's 3d Platoon then maneuvered toward the 1st to render assistance and evacuate the casualties to a nearby landing zone, secured by the 2d Platoon. Under pressure, the NVA

withdrew and began a mortar attack which artillery fire and fixed-wing strikes quickly suppressed. In a subsequent search of the area, the Marines found three enemy bodies.

Lieutenant Colonel Britt's, later Lieutenant Colonel Garrett's, Marines continued search and destroy operations in the 60-square-kilometer Arlington Canyon area, conducting numerous day and night squad- and platoon-size patrols and ambushes, with mixed results until 12 September, when replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Wood's 3d Battalion. On that date, Wood's command group and one rifle company displaced to Russell as two companies helilifted into the surrounding terrain: Company M into the northwest quadrant and Company K into the southern half, west of Elliott. During the next 10 days, the rifle companies, operating from patrol bases, showed little result. Offensive operations in the Arlington Canyon area of operations ceased on the 20th, when Wood directed the command group and Companies K and M to return to Vandegrift. The company on Russell remained one more day in order to begin the destruction of the fire support base, but an accidental fire, which later spread to exposed artillery ordnance, forced the premature evacuation of the hill before the mission could be completed.

The battalion command group, following its move to Vandegrift, immediately lifted to Cam Lo village, where it established a command post at the district headquarters. Companies I and K then trucked into a new, unnamed area of operations astride Route 9, which stretched from the Vinh Dai Rock Crusher to the Khe Gio Bridge, where Company K was to provide security for the command group, Cam Lo District Headquarters, and the tactically important Charlie-3 Bridge at Cam Lo; Company I was to conduct search and destroy operations north of Route 9 and west of the village. On the 22d, however, Lieutenant Colonel Wood ordered Company I temporarily into the Arlington Canyon area of operations in order to examine the damage to Russell, recover missing equipment, and complete the destruction of the fire support base, a mission which the company accomplished the following day by the blowing of all remaining structures and much of the excess ammunition. With the leveling of Fire Support Base Russell, Operation Arlington Canyon came to an end. During nearly three months of searching the rough mountainous terrain northwest of Elliott, the 2d and 3d Battalions, 4th Marines gained meager results, accounting for only 23 enemy

killed and eight weapons captured, while sustaining 10 killed and 28 wounded. The operation, according to Major James J. O'Meara, was a success, "in that the area we were assigned, . . . was thoroughly covered by 2/4, even though the rifle companies had to make that magic click a day."<sup>6</sup>

During the last week of September, the 4th Marines assumed control of the 3d Marines' tactical area of responsibility (Idaho Canyon), as the last elements of Colonel Simlik's regiment moved to Dong Ha in preparation for redeployment to the United States. In doing so, the 4th Marines took the responsibility of securing major installations while closing others. It was, as Colonel Gilbert R. Hershey, who had replaced Colonel Goggin on 10 August, later remembered, "one of the most difficult phases that a regiment can go through . . . picking up the brass and policing everything else that people had left for five years while you were trying to maintain a tactical posture."<sup>7</sup>

Tactically, Colonel Hershey positioned his three battalions strategically throughout the now diminished regimental area of operations. Lieutenant Colonel MacInnis' 1st Battalion, earlier responsible for an area of operations west of Vandegrift, on 20 September, was directed to defend the combat base and dismantle Cates, Shepherd, and the outpost atop Hill 950. The 3d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel James W. Wood, after closing Operation Arlington Canyon, relieved the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines of its responsibilities at Cam Lo, and was also given the task of leveling Fire Support Base Russell. On the 28th, the battalion again transferred its command post and two rifle companies, this time from Cam Lo to Dong Ha. Company M provided security for a portion of the combat base's perimeter, while Company I secured the northern bank of the Cua Viet River. The battalion's vacated area near Cam Lo later passed to the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division. Lieutenant Colonel Garrett's 2d Battalion moved, following the announced plan for the withdrawal of the 3d Marines from Vietnam, to Elliott Combat Base, where it assumed responsibility for 3d Battalion, 3d Marines area and a portion of the 1st Battalion's, including Fire Support Base Fuller and Khe Gio Bridge.

At the close of the month, enemy activity throughout the regiment's new area of operations again centered on Landing Zones Sierra and Mack, near Mutter's Ridge. There were indications that the *9th NVA Regiment*, which had engaged the 3d Marines over the past several months, was continuing to infiltrate person-

nel and equipment along the Song Cam Lo in an effort to cut Route 9. Elements of Lieutenant Colonel Garrett's battalion sighted units of the elusive enemy regiment on nine different occasions, but made contact only once.

On 20 September, First Lieutenant William H. Stubblefield's Company G and a sister company helilifted into an area just north of the Song Cam Lo, near LZ Pete, in order to secure the northern approaches to Elliott Combat Base and at the same time bar enemy infiltrators from moving toward the southeast. Six days later, while the companies occupied a night defensive position on LZ Dixie Pete, 1,000 meters north of Pete, four sensor devices registered movement outside the companies' perimeter. An ambush, not far away, then reported sighting three figures moving across their front and tossed several hand grenades in the direction of the movement, which soon ceased. "I figured," noted Lieutenant Stubblefield, "OK, it stopped; whatever was causing it was gone or maybe the [sensor] batteries wore out or something. I wasn't sure how these things operated or if they were reliable at all. At that time, I said, OK, if anything desperate happens, wake me up."<sup>8</sup>

Two hours later, Stubblefield awoke to the crackle of enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire, followed by a heavy 60mm and 82mm mortar barrage. He called for artillery on a series of preplanned targets, but batteries delayed firing for over an hour due to the loss of original grid coordinates. Meanwhile, Stubblefield's Marines countered with heavy fire of their own, finally halting the attack and forcing the enemy sappers to withdraw. Shortly after sunrise, fixed-wing aircraft came on station and pummelled the enemy's escape routes, subsequently spotting over 11 bodies beyond the wire. A later ground search of the surrounding area revealed numerous grenades, spent shell casings, and fresh blood trails, but no bodies.<sup>9</sup>

The attack on Company G, in which two Marines lost their lives and 59 received wounds, proved to be one of the last enemy-initiated assaults on elements of the 3d Marine Division prior to the implementation of the final phase of Keystone Cardinal. Division intelligence analysts suspected that the enemy intended to pull his major forces back into North Vietnam in order to exploit and then fill the vacuum which he thought might occur with the division's departure and its replacement by the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) and elements of the 1st ARVN Division. Statistics kept of enemy activity during October



and November would partially support this assumption, for enemy attacks of all kinds carried out within the division's area of operations during the redeployment of the 4th Marines fell by more than 50 percent in comparison to previous months. The enemy had indeed withdrawn, but whether he was preparing for a future offensive or allowing the last elements of the 3d Marine Division to withdraw undisturbed, was not then known.

*"You Shouldered Us"*

The beginning of its final month in Vietnam found Colonel Hershey's 4th Marines fully operational with three battalions positioned in the north central portion, south of the Demilitarized Zone, of Quang Tri Province. But as the month progressed, each battalion would be withdrawn from combat, moved to Quang Tri Combat Base where each was to assemble with the remaining support elements of the battalion landing team, and then embark on board amphibious shipping for Okinawa. Lieutenant Colonel MacInnis' 1st Battalion, which had been assigned the task of defending Vandegrift and Ca Lu, and securing Route 9 from the combat base north 3,000 meters to the boundary between the 1st and 2d Battalions, was the first to stand down.

On 5 October, MacInnis' battalion disengaged from combat, stood down from its tactical commitments,

and displaced to Quang Tri Combat Base in order to prepare for redeployment to Okinawa. Company D, however, remained behind. Assigned to the operational control of the 2d Battalion, the company was to provide security for the 2d Battalion, 2d ARVN Regiment so that the ARVN battalion could devote all of its time to the dismantling and salvaging of material from Vandegrift to be used in the construction of a new combat base at Camp Carroll. The company secured Vandegrift until relieved by a platoon from Company G on the 10th, and then it rejoined the battalion at Quang Tri. On 22 October, MacInnis' battalion boarded the *Dubuque* (LPD 8) and *Vancouver* (LPD 2) at Cua Viet, while the remainder of the battalion landing team, made up of elements of the 3d Engineer Battalion; 3d Tank Battalion; 3d Battalion, 12th Marines; 3d Bridge Company; 3d Motor Transport Battalion; and detachments of Headquarters Battalion, 3d Marine Division, and Headquarters Battery, 12th Marines, embarked on board six landing ships. By the end of the month, the landing team had arrived in Okinawa and settled into garrison duty.

The 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Donald J. Garrett, continued its primary missions of defending Elliott Combat Base, Fire Support Base Fuller, Khe Gio Bridge on Route 9, and conducting offensive operations north to the

*A CH-46 helicopter inserts the men of Company G, 2d Battalion, 4th Marines at Pete in preparation for a two-company search and block of the ridges north of the landing zone.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A193489





DMZ. In order to assist Garrett's battalion in accomplishing these missions, Colonel Hershey assigned Companies L and K, 3d Battalion, and Company D, 1st Battalion to the battalion for short periods of time. With these three additional companies, the 2d Battalion continued to conduct aggressive operations to within 1,000 meters of the Demilitarized Zone's southern boundary, uncovering numerous North Vietnamese graves and a large number of small weapons and ammunition caches. It was during this period that the regiment experienced its last engagement.

On the night of 9 October, Second Lieutenant Danny G. Dennison's 3d Platoon, Company L, stationed atop a hill three kilometers northeast of Elliott overlooking the Song Cam Lo, received a heavy barrage of 82mm mortars followed by a surprise ground attack by two reinforced platoons of NVA infantry and sappers. As Lieutenant Dennison later recalled:

The enemy at first seemed to have moved up with two two-man [teams] using AKs, to set up more or less a security force. Three men moved up to the main part of the wire throwing Chicoms and satchel charges, and then to the left of the CP [command post], a 10-man engineer team moved up also employing satchel charges and Chicoms. By watching the way the enemy was moving it seemed apparent that they had been more or less spotting our position for a week or so because they hit every key position we had.<sup>10</sup>

Soon after the first bursts of enemy grenades and satchel charges, a number of Dennison's machine gun and "blooper" (M79 grenade launcher) positions were put out of action, the wire penetrated, and the platoon's ammunition dump destroyed. With the help of a reaction force from Khe Gio Bridge, two kilometers away, "the men began moving up to set up a defensive perimeter, and grenades were used to force the enemy from the defensive wire, back out into the bush where we could get small arms fire on them." The enemy broke contact at sunrise after taking an hour of heavy artillery, mortar, and "Spooky" gunship fire on their position. A head count revealed that Dennison lost eight men killed and 17 wounded, and a search of the battlefield disclosed 10 enemy bodies.<sup>11</sup>

On 22 October, Garrett's battalion disengaged from combat and displaced to Quang Tri Combat Base to prepare for embarkation to Okinawa. Company G, reinforced with a platoon from Company H, remained at Elliott Combat Base under the operational control of the 3d Marine Division in order to police and then destroy the base's fortifications, a task completed on the 25th. Company G then moved to Quang Tri, rejoined the battalion, and prepared for embarkation.

Company K, under the operational control of the 2d Battalion, returned to its parent unit, but Company L remained on Fire Support Base Fuller, under 3d Marine Division's control, until relieved by elements of the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division on 5 November. Garrett's battalion, following two weeks of training, inspections, and cleaning equipment, joined the remainder of the battalion landing team and sailed for Okinawa on 6 November.

The first days of October found Lieutenant Colonel Wood's 3d Battalion, the last slated to leave, conducting offensive operations out of Dong Ha Combat Base. Company I occupied and defended a sector of the base's perimeter, while Company M operated in a separate area north of the Song Cua Viet. Company M's area of operations, established by the division, and its aggressive small-unit patrol activities and company-size search and destroy operations proved vital in keeping the river free from enemy activity. The Cua Viet was of primary interest to the regiment and division for two reasons: first, the river was the main supply route for all logistical materiel supporting the division, and second, it provided an avenue of departure for half the Marines redeploying to Okinawa. The remainder of the battalion, Companies K and L, were under the operational control of the 2d Battalion as the month began.

On 5 October, the battalion assumed complete responsibility for the defense of Dong Ha Combat Base, while at the same time continuing its security mission along the north bank of the Cua Viet. The battalion maintained this tactical posture through 22 October when Company K rejoined the battalion, and its operational control transferred from the 4th Marines to the 3d Marine Division. A month later, Wood's Marines disengaged from combat operations and began preparations for redeployment. At the same time, Company L, which had secured Fuller, under the operational control of the division since 22 October, rejoined the battalion.

Two days after terminating combat operations, Lieutenant Colonel Wood and his command group flew to Da Nang in order to participate in departure ceremonies for the division. Gathering before the Da Nang City Hall on the banks of the Song Han, a large number of dignitaries spoke of the 3d Marine Division's contributions to the war effort and the people of I Corps, principal among them Lieutenant General Hoang Xuan Lam, Commanding General, I Corps Tactical Zone. During his speech, General Lam recalled:

I still remember that memorable date of the 8th March 1965, at which I had the honor to welcome the forward elements of the 3d Marine Division landing on the beaches of Da Nang and marking the arrival of the first large scale ground combat units of U.S. Armed Forces to South Vietnam. Today, five years and more than 120 operations later, the 3d Marine Division is completing its process of redeployment, and in a few moments its last elements will embark for a journey back to the U.S., leaving behind in the memory of the South Vietnamese people the resounding echoes of a splendid combat record, with glorious names of successful operations such as Starlite, Khe Sanh, Golden Fleece, Scotland, Lancaster, Napoleon Saline, Dewey Canyon and countless others.

Concluding his remarks, General Lam noted that while gallant Marines had fallen, they had not died in vain:

You have shouldered us at the critical moment we needed you most, and now we are entirely capable of assuming the burden of this war and nothing can deter us from achieving all our cherished goals; that of defeating the Communists and bringing peace to South Vietnam. You will depart from South Vietnam, but you will leave behind a strong and prosperous nation.<sup>12</sup>

Among the other speakers were Lieutenant General Herman Nickerson, Jr., Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force; Major General William K.

Jones, Commanding General, 3d Marine Division, who delivered his remarks in Vietnamese; General William B. Rosson, Deputy Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam; and Mr. Nguyen Xuan, Chairman of the Citizens Council of Da Nang. Following the presentation of traditional Vietnamese leis, made of yellow and red cloth, the ceremony concluded, and Major General Jones and his principal staff officers left. At Da Nang Airfield, Jones and his staff boarded awaiting aircraft; the last to board was Division Sergeant Major Clyde M. Long, carrying the division colors. The 3d Division was on its way to Okinawa and new headquarters at Camp Courtney.<sup>13</sup>

On 20 November, the final division battalion landing team, the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, along with the remaining elements of the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion; 3d Medical Battalion; 11th Engineer Battalion; 3d Dental Company; 4th Battalion, 12th Marines; Company C, 9th Motor Transport Battalion; and Headquarters Battalion, 3d Marine Division; moved by truck to Quang Tri Combat Base from where they flew to Da Nang and then embarked on board the *Tripoli* (LPH 10). Four days later, the battalion landing team arrived on Okinawa, after more than four years of combat service in South Vietnam.

### The MACV List: Composition of Keystone Cardinal

| Unit                  | Strength | Departure |             | Unit                    | Strength | Departure |             |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|-------------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
|                       |          | Date      | Destination |                         |          | Date      | Destination |
| 1st Bn, 3d Mar        | 1,166    | 6 Oct     | CONUS       | Det, 7 Comm Bn          | 193      | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| Co B, 3d Engr Bn      | 159      | 2 Oct     | CONUS       | Co B, 9th MT Bn         | 91       | 2 Oct     | CONUS       |
| Co C, 3d Med Bn       | 24       | 2 Oct     | CONUS       |                         |          |           |             |
| 1st Bn, 12th Mar      | 662      | 2 Oct     | CONUS       | Det 1st Bn, 4th Mar     | 118      | 7 Oct     | CONUS       |
| 3d Bridge Co (-)      | 102      | 4 Oct     | CONUS       | Det 2d Bn, 4th Mar      | 118      | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
|                       |          |           |             | Det 3d Bn, 4th Mar      | 118      | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| 2d Bn, 3d Mar         | 1,166    | 6 Oct     | CONUS       | Det Hq Co, 4th Mar      | 100      | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| Hq Co (-), 3d Mar     | 230      | 7 Oct     | CONUS       | Det, 1st SSCT           | 4        | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| Det 3d Bn, 12th Mar   | 91       | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |                         |          |           |             |
| Det Hq Btry, 12th Mar | 61       | 6 Oct     | CONUS       | Det, Hq III MAF         | 70       | 30 Sep    | CONUS       |
| Det Hq Bn, 3d Mar Div | 436      | 6 Oct     | CONUS       | OOONE                   | 724      | 30 Sep    | CONUS       |
|                       |          |           |             | OOONE                   | 14       | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| Det, 11th Engr Bn     | 622      | 4 Oct     | CONUS       | 1st Bn, 4th Mar         | 1,048    | 22 Oct    | Okinawa     |
| 3d Bn, 3d Mar         | 1,166    | 7 Oct     | CONUS       | Det Hq Bn, 3d Mar Div   | 200      | 22 Oct    | Okinawa     |
| Det 4th Bn, 12th Mar  | 150      | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |                         |          |           |             |
| Det Hq Co, 3d Mar     | 24       | 6 Oct     | CONUS       | 7th Comm Bn (-)         | 190      | 20 Oct    | Okinawa     |
| Co B, 3d MT Bn        | 68       | 4 Oct     | CONUS       | Btry G, 3d Bn, 12th Mar | 133      | 23 Oct    | Okinawa     |
|                       |          |           |             | 3d Engr Bn (-)          | 341      | 23 Oct    | Okinawa     |
| Co B, 3d SP Bn        | 84       | 2 Oct     | CONUS       | 3d MT Bn (-)            | 41       | 20 Oct    | Okinawa     |
| Det, FLC              | 400      | 6 Oct     | CONUS       | 3d Tk Bn (-)            | 345      | 23 Oct    | Okinawa     |
| Co A, 3d Recon Bn     | 143      | 4 Oct     | CONUS       |                         |          |           |             |

| Unit                   | Strength | Departure |             | Unit                    | Strength | Departure |             |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|-------------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
|                        |          | Date      | Destination |                         |          | Date      | Destination |
| Plt, 3d Bridge Co      | 21       | 20 Oct    | Okinawa     | H Btry, 3d Bn, 12th Mar | 110      | 27 Nov    | Okinawa     |
| Hq Btry (-), 12th Mar  | 100      | 20 Oct    | Okinawa     | 7th ITT                 | 11       | 24 Nov    | Okinawa     |
| 2d Bn, 4th Mar (-)     | 1,048    | 9 Nov     | Okinawa     | HMM-265                 | 249      | 7 Oct     | CONUS       |
| Hq Bn (-), 3d Mar Div  | 308      | 9 Nov     | Okinawa     | OOCNE                   | 123      | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| Hq Co (-), 4th Mar     | 130      | 6 Nov     | Okinawa     | Det, VMO-6              | 8        | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| 3d Bn, 12th Mar (-)    | 328      | 5 Nov     | Okinawa     | Det, HMM-164            | 8        | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| K Btry, 4th Bn, 12 Mar | 100      | 10 Nov    | Okinawa     | Det, MABS-36            | 89       | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| 17th ITT               | 11       | 5 Nov     | Okinawa     | Det, H&MS-36            | 164      | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| 11th IT                | 6        | 5 Nov     | Okinawa     | Det, MABS-11            | 20       | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| 9th IT                 | 6        | 5 Nov     | Okinawa     | Det, MABS-12            | 20       | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| Det Hq Btry, 12th Mar  | 83       | 9 Nov     | Okinawa     | Det, MABS-13            | 20       | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| 9th MT Bn              | 88       | 4 Nov     | Okinawa     | Det, MABS-16            | 22       | 6 Oct     | CONUS       |
| Co B, 3d Tk Bn         | 140      | 6 Nov     | Okinawa     | VMA-533                 | 304      | 7 Oct     | CONUS       |
| 3d SP Bn (-)           | 228      | 10 Nov    | Okinawa     | Det, H&MS-12            | 69       | 7 Oct     | Japan       |
| 1st SSCT (-)           | 6        | 8 Nov     | Okinawa     | HMM-164                 | 258      | 20 Oct    | Okinawa     |
| 15th CIT               | 16       | 3 Nov     | Okinawa     | VMO-6 (-)               | 234      | 22 Oct    | Okinawa     |
| 3d Bn, 4th Mar         | 1,048    | 20 Nov    | Okinawa     | Det, VMO-6              | 32       | 22 Oct    | Okinawa     |
| Det Hq Bn, 3d Mar Div  | 200      | 24 Nov    | Okinawa     | HMH-462                 | 233      | 20 Oct    | Okinawa     |
| Det Hq Co, 4th Mar     | 24       | 20 Nov    | Okinawa     | 1st MAW Hq (Rear)       | 353      | 3 Nov     | Japan       |
| 3d Recon Bn            | 309      | 24 Nov    | Okinawa     | H&MS-36 (-)             | 324      | 7 Nov     | Okinawa     |
| 3d Med Bn (-)          | 86       | 24 Nov    | Okinawa     | MABS-36 (-)             | 318      | 23 Nov    | Okinawa     |
| 11th Engr Bn (-)       | 103      | 21 Nov    | Okinawa     | MASS-2 (-)              | 123      | 23 Nov    | Japan       |
| 3d Dental Co           | 3        | 24 Nov    | Okinawa     | Det, H&HS-18            | 18       | 3 Nov     | Japan       |
| 4th Bn, 12th Mar (-)   | 152      | 19 Nov    | Okinawa     | Det, MASS-2             | 39       | 8 Nov     | Okinawa     |
| Co C, 9th MT Bn        | 83       | 22 Nov    | Okinawa     | Det, MABS-36            | 87       | 23 Nov    | Japan       |

Note: All CONUS destinations refer to Camp Pendleton, California.

The departure of the 3d Marine Division brought with it a shift in Marine air assets committed to Quang Tri Province. As the division's area of operations shrank and the 3d and 4th Marines pulled back and then stood down, Colonel Owen V. Gallentine's Provisional Marine Aircraft Group 39 did the same. On 23 September, the wing directed the air group to shift its units from Quang Tri Combat Base to Phu Bai. Four days later, Major Richard W. Carr's Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161 began its move, followed on the 30th by Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262, commanded by Major Donald J. Meskan. Both helicopter squadrons continued to support 3d Marine Division units through 15 October, when operational control of both passed to Marine Aircraft Group 36 at Phu Bai.

Marine Observation Squadron 6, under Lieutenant Colonel Albert K. Charlton, stood down on 2 October

in preparation for redeployment to Okinawa. On the 8th, the squadron's 18 OV-10A aircraft left Quang Tri on a four-leg trip to Marine Corps Air Facility, Fute-ma, while the squadron's remaining aircraft, 11 UH-1E helicopters, and pilots moved to Phu Bai to await amphibious shipping and at the same time assist HML-367. Twelve days later, the squadron loaded its personnel and helicopters on board the *Cleveland* (LPD 7), and departed for Okinawa the following day. Of the remaining two air group units, Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 39, commanded by Major Joseph F. Golden, was reduced to cadre strength and moved to Phu Bai, and Marine Air Traffic Control Unit 62 transferred to Marine Aircraft Group 13 at Chu Lai.\*

Phase II withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam proceeded without interruption. Joining the

\*For redeployment of other 1st Marine Aircraft Wing units during Phase II of Keystone Cardinal, see Chapter 13.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A1933636

*Marine engineers using heavy bulldozers level and then bury accumulated debris at Vandegrift Combat Base during the standdown and withdrawal of the 4th Marines.*

18,500 Marines of the 3d Division and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing were 14,000 Army personnel, including the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, and 2,600 members of the Air Force and 5,400 Navy personnel. By mid-December, American strength in Vietnam stood at 472,442—well below the goal of 484,000.

On the evening of 3 November, President Nixon reported to the American people on his administration's efforts to end the Vietnam war. Recapitulating the unsuccessful American peace initiatives and noting that 60,000 troops would be withdrawn by mid-December, the President turned to future U.S. action:

We have adopted a plan which we have worked out in cooperation with the South Vietnamese for the complete withdrawal of all U.S. combat ground forces on an orderly scheduled timetable. This withdrawal will be made from strength and not from weakness. As South Vietnamese forces become stronger, the rate of American withdrawal can become greater.

A specific timetable was not mentioned, as it would remove any incentive for the enemy to negotiate: "They would simply wait until our forces had withdrawn and then move in." The timing, he said, was flexible and would depend on the three factors previously mentioned—progress at the Paris talks, the level of enemy activity, and the improvement of the RVNAF.

He warned the North Vietnamese not to misinterpret American intentions:

Hanoi could make no greater mistake than to assume that an increase in violence will be to its advantage. If I conclude that increased enemy action jeopardizes our remaining forces in Vietnam, I shall not hesitate to take strong and effective measures to deal with the situation.

Concluding his remarks, the President said the United States had two choices in ending the war: "an immediate, precipitate withdrawal of all Americans from Vietnam without regard to the effects of that action"; or, persistence in the search for "a just peace through a negotiated settlement if possible," and continued implementation of the Vietnamization plan. Because of his belief that an immediate withdrawal would widen the war, he stated that he would proceed on the path of negotiation and orderly withdrawal.<sup>14</sup>

During November the President's chief military advisers undertook a review of the military situation in Vietnam and consideration of a number of redeployment plans in preparation for the presidential decision on further troop reductions expected to come in mid-December. At the end of the month, they submitted their conclusions to the Secretary of Defense. Recognizing that the enemy retained the capability of launching a significant, yet unsustainable, offen-

sive, especially against III Corps and northern I Corps, they noted that continued progress was being made in pacification and Vietnamization, albeit at varying rates. Informing the Secretary that they had considered two alternatives—a 50,000 reduction by mid-March or April 1970, or a reduction of 100,000 by mid-July—they counseled against any decision at that time, based on military grounds. They believed that a troop reduction during the first months of 1970 would burden allied capabilities in meeting the enemy threat, especially during the *Tết* holiday period. Nevertheless, they recognized that “other considerations” might necessitate a withdrawal, and therefore recommended a reduction of 35,000. However, should the enemy escalate military operations, they strongly suggested that any announced troop withdrawal be cancelled or, if necessary, reversed, and that a prompt air and naval campaign against North Vietnam be launched.

With other than military considerations apparently influencing his decision, President Nixon, on 15 December, announced that 50,000 more troops would be withdrawn by 15 April 1970. Although acknowledging that enemy infiltration had increased substantially, he noted that it had not reached a point where “our military leaders believe the enemy has developed the capability to mount a major offensive.” There would be risks, but they would be risks taken in search of peace. The President again cautioned Hanoi against misinterpreting U.S. actions by repeating his November warning that he would not hesitate to take strong and effective measures against any increased enemy activity that threatened the remaining American forces in Vietnam.<sup>15</sup> With the President’s announced withdrawal of an additional 50,000 troops, planning began as to the composition of the force to be withdrawn.\*

#### *The Brigade Takes Over*

At 1500 on 22 October, operational control of the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) passed from the 3d Marine Division to XXIV Corps at Phu Bai. With the departure of the division, the brigade became the senior allied combat unit in the northernmost region of I Corps Tactical Zone. In assuming this role, the brigade took on the responsibilities of defending Quang Tri Combat Base, and in conjunc-

tion with elements of the 1st ARVN Division, Dong Ha Combat Base, and of securing a limited tactical area composed of the eastern and central portions of Quang Tri Province. Should the brigade prove incapable of accomplishing its assigned mission in the face of a major enemy offensive, it, like the division before it, could call upon an infantry regiment of the 1st Marine Division, a two-battalion brigade of the Americal Division, an infantry or airborne brigade of the Army’s I Field Force, or elements of the special landing force for reinforcement, depending on the severity of the situation.<sup>16</sup>

The 1st Brigade, since the end of June, had concentrated a majority of its efforts in the eastern portion of the province, an area extending east from Dong Ha and Quang Tri to the Gulf of Tonkin, and south from the 2d ARVN Regiment’s area of operations on the DMZ to the provincial boundary. Organized into three task forces, Task Force 1/11 Infantry, Task Force 1/61 Infantry (Mechanized), and Task Force 1/77 Armor, the brigade began Operation Iroquois Grove on 19 June. Conducted within the brigade’s normal area of operations, Iroquois Grove was designed to protect the civilian population and the rice crop, and also to assist the South Vietnamese in their Accelerated Pacification Program. While a majority of the brigade conducted search and clear operations, saturation ambushes, and patrols in conjunction and coordination with provincial and district forces, individual task forces were spun-off to assist or work with Marine units in two separate operations, Utah Mesa and William’s Glade. Iroquois Grove ended on 25 September with enemy losses put at 134 killed, while the brigade lost 13 dead and 130 wounded.

During the month between the end of Iroquois Grove and the beginning of Fulton Square on 22 October, the 1st Brigade conducted a series of search and clear, reconnaissance-in-force, pacification, and rice denial operations in the eastern portion of the province. In addition, it conducted defensive operations to cover the withdrawal of the 3d Marine Division and progressively absorbed portions of the vacated Marine areas of operations.

On the 22d, the brigade launched its first combat operation under the control of XXIV Corps into an area composed of Trieu Phong, Hai Lang, Gio Linh, Cam Lo, and Mai Linh Districts in the lowlands. Operation Fulton Square was highlighted by heavy contact with elements of the *27th NVA Regiment* in the vicinity of LZ Sparrow during November, and as a result, the 101st Airborne Division and ARVN deployed units

\*For a detailed discussion of the 15 April 1970 reduction see Graham A. Cosmas and LtCol Terrence P. Murray, USMC, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Vietnamization and Redeployment, 1970-1971*, (Washington: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, USMC, 1986).

to assist. Enemy activity soon subsided, changing from frequent mortar and heavy ground attacks to sporadic engagements, and the operation terminated on 18 January 1970 with 384 enemy killed.

To the south, in Thua Thien Province, the 101st Airborne Division, which was also to take over a portion of the vacated 3d Marine Division area of operations, continued combined actions with the 1st ARVN Division to defeat NVA and VC main forces and infrastructure, interdict the A Shau Valley, and assist Vietnamese forces in assuming greater responsibility for combat and pacification operations within the province. On 17 August, the division launched the umbrella operation, Richland Square, a continuation of Kentucky Jumper with the 3d Brigade conducting reconnaissance-in-force in the A Shau Valley (Operation Louisiana Lee). The division's 2d Brigade continued local patrol and security missions along Route 1 (Operation Clairborne Chute), and on 18 August,

the 1st Brigade began Operation Cumberland Thunder in conjunction with the 3d Regiment, 1st ARVN Division, to locate and destroy elements of the 5th NVA Regiment, known to be operating in the southern portion of the Province.

During the last week of September, XXIV Corps issued plans for the repositioning of forces due to the deployment of the 3d Marine Division. By the 21st, 101st Airborne Division Operation Plan 10-69 (Republic Square) was approved, calling for the withdrawal of all forces from the A Shau Valley; the positioning of a control headquarters and two maneuver battalions to screen the final move of the Marine division; and the concentration of division forces in the coastal and piedmont areas of the province. In order to implement Republic Square, Operations Richland Square, Cumberland Thunder, Clairborne Chute, and Louisiana Lee were brought to an end and work began of the back-hauling of personnel, supplies, and

*Greeting MajGen William K. Jones, right, shortly after the division's arrival on Okinawa were, from left, BGen Robert H. Barrow, Commanding General, MCB, Camp Butler; MajGen Robert B. Smith, Deputy Commanding General, U.S. Army, Ryukyu Islands; and BGen Robert B. Carney, Jr., Commanding General, 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade.*

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equipment from the westernmost portion of the division area of operations. In addition, a number of boundary modifications among the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division; 1st ARVN Division; and 101st Airborne Division were made. These changes included larger areas of responsibility for the 2d ARVN Regiment and reconnaissance elements of the 101st Airborne Division in Quang Tri Province.

Operation Republic Square, begun on 29 September, was characterized by extensive airmobile, reconnaissance-in-force, and search and ambush operations to destroy enemy forces within the division's area of operations; interdiction of enemy infiltration routes and base camps; the capture or elimination of the local Viet Cong Infrastructure; disruption of enemy supply routes from the rice producing lowlands to mountain base camps; and support for the Accelerated Pacification Program within the province. During the operation, which ended on 6 December, the 1st and 2d Brigades concentrated on the coastal and piedmont areas near Hue, while the 3d Brigade deployed

to Quang Tri Province, northwest of the now closed Vandegrift Combat Base, initiating operations (Norton Falls) to screen the withdrawal of the 4th Marines.

As the year drew to a close in northern I Corps Tactical Zone, the enemy generally avoided major contact with allied forces, concentrating his efforts instead on rice collection and undermining government pacification efforts in the heavily populated lowlands near the old imperial city of Hue. In the western portions of both Thua Thien and Quang Tri Provinces, now devoid of all but reconnaissance forces, he slowly began to rebuild the large base areas along the Vietnamese-Laotian border, destroyed earlier in the year. The year, however, had witnessed the defeat of NVA and VC forces at every turn, frustrating their attempts to terrorize and victimize the inhabitants of the two provinces, and denying the rice, supplies, and personnel so vital to their survival. The redeployment of the 3d Marine Division was testimony not only to this defeat, but to the great strides made in the pacification and Vietnamization of northern I Corps.



PART IV  
QUANG NAM: THE YEAR'S  
FINAL BATTLES

## CHAPTER 11

# Go Noi and the Arizona

*Vital Area Security—Pipestone Canyon: The Destruction of Go Noi Island  
1st Marines: Protecting the Southern Flank—The Arizona*

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### *Vital Area Security*

In conformity with III MAF's corps-wide strategy for 1969, the 1st Marine Division, during the last six months of the year, continued to concentrate its efforts on keeping the enemy away from the city of Da Nang and its heavily populated environs. Its infantry units and supporting arms were disposed to provide maximum security for the Da Nang Vital Area and other important political and economic sites, military installations, and lines of communication. Simultaneously, the division directed its offensive operations against enemy forces and base areas which posed the most immediate threat to these centers or to allied military installations.

At midyear, Major General Ormond R. Simpson continued the general scheme, adopted earlier, for deploying his four infantry regiments. Supported and reinforced by artillery batteries of the 11th Marines, the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Tank Battalion, and strong contingents of engineers, transportation, and service troops, the 1st, 5th, 7th, and 26th Marines were positioned in a series of concentric circles centered on Da Nang. Although not directly involved in the defense of the city itself, the division's responsibility began just outside the Da Nang Vital Area and radiated in all directions. To the north and northwest the 26th Marines patrolled the rocket belt, and spread out to the west and southwest was the 7th Marines. Elements of the 1st Marines were deployed to the southwest, south, and southeast of the city, while further to the southwest, the 5th Marines operated in a TAOR encompassing An Hoa Combat Base and major enemy infiltration routes along the Song Thu Bon and Song Vu Gia, and throughout the region between the two rivers, the Arizona.

From the outskirts of Da Nang to the remote mountain valleys, small detachments of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong regulars and guerrillas continued to move throughout the division's TAOR, despite the series of successful major allied operations and constant counter guerrilla patrols conducted during the first half of the year. Likewise, enemy rocket, mortar, and ground assault teams persisted in attacks against al-

lied installations and population centers, while planting mines and boobytraps, gathering food and tribute, and maintaining an unrelenting campaign of terrorism against the civilian population. Division military operations, from the squad ambush and platoon patrol to multi-battalion sweeps, during the latter half of 1969, aimed at the complete destruction of this endless cycle of harassment by elements of 21 enemy infantry and support battalions known to infest Quang Nam Province.

### *Pipestone Canyon: The Destruction of Go Noi Island*

For a number of years, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army had used the Dodge City and Go Noi Island areas, south of Da Nang, as haven sites and staging areas for attacks into the coastal lowlands between Hoi An and Vietnam's second largest city. In response, the allies conducted a series of operations to rid both areas of enemy troops; the last two were Operation Allen Brook in May and Operation Meade River in December 1968. A classic example of a deliberately executed cordon and search, the 1st Marines' Meade River and its ARVN counterpart, accounted for over 1,200 enemy killed or captured, 72 of whom were identified as members of the local Viet Cong Infrastructure.

Although previous operations in the area produced significant results, the enemy stuck to the accepted technique of withdrawing his forces when pressed and then reintroducing them into their original operating areas once friendly forces shifted to a new zone of action. During the first five months of 1969, the 1st Marines saturated the fringes of the region with company-size and small-unit patrols with notable success, but these maneuvers, while effective in curtailing the enemy's free passage northward, lacked the scope necessary to produce a lasting effect on enemy forces using the area. Ridding the area of enemy troops was to become the major task of the 1st Marines during the final six months of 1969.

The contiguous areas of Dodge City and Go Noi Island, located approximately 10 to 20 kilometers south of Da Nang and 6 to 20 kilometers west of Hoi

An, constituted the western portion of Dien Ban and the eastern half of Dai Loc Districts, and included 19 villages or portions thereof. The combined area was bordered on the west by the south fork of the Song Vu Gia; on the north by the Song Ai Nghia, Song Lo Tho, and Song Thanh Quit; on the east by Route 1; and on the south by the Song Thu Bon, Song Ba Ren, and Song Chiem Son. Although bisected by the one- to two-meter-high, north-south railroad berm, the area consisted of semi-open, flat terrain, covered by numerous rice fields and grave mounds bounded by hedgerows, brush, and expanses of elephant grass.

Intelligence agencies estimated that Dodge City and Go Noi Island harbored seven to nine enemy battalions with a maximum strength of 2,500 troops, in addition to 200 to 500 local force Viet Cong and hamlet guerrillas. The enemy's main battle units were tentatively identified as the *36th NVA Regiment*, consisting of three battalions, and *District II Da Nang* forces made up of the *T-89th Sapper*, *D-3 Sapper*, *T-3 Sapper*, and *R-20th Battalions*, and elements of the disbanded *38th NVA Regiment*. Although battered, these enemy units still were considered capable of sniping, harassing, and attacking in mass, and then retreating to well-constructed camouflaged defensive positions in Dodge City, Go Noi Island, and the Que Son Mountains beyond. The time had come to rid, once and for all, Dodge City and Go Noi Island of enemy forces.

In mid-May, General Simpson called Colonel Charles S. Robertson, Commanding Officer, 1st Marines, and his operations officer, Major James K. Reilly, to Headquarters, 1st Marine Division for a briefing on the concept, mission, and forces of a planned operation in Dodge City and Go Noi Island. The operation, codenamed Pipestone Canyon, explained Colonel James B. Ord, Jr., Division Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, was designed primarily to deny the North Vietnamese and main force Viet Cong safe haven in the two areas and to open Route 4 from Dai Loc to Dien Ban, closed to civilian and military traffic for several years. It was, he noted, the "natural sequel" to Operations Taylor Common and Oklahoma Hills. To accomplish the mission would require a sizeable amount of infantry, heavily reinforced with artillery, naval gunfire, and air. It would also require a land-clearing effort, which "we had never really been able to do." Specifically, as Colonel Ord pointed out, a combined Marine, Korean, and ARVN force amounting to 10 infantry battalions supported by a large artillery,

naval gunfire, and armor force and including a Provisional Land-Clearing Company, composed of personnel and equipment from the 7th and 9th Marine Engineer Battalions and the Army's 687th Land-Clearing Company, would be task organized and placed under the control of the 1st Marines. This would ensure enough troop density and supporting arms, he noted, "to really clear it out."<sup>1</sup>

On the 16th, General Simpson and his staff presented the concept of operations to Lieutenant General Herman Nickerson, Commanding General, III MAF, who approved the mission and forces, authorized direct liaison with Korean and ARVN units involved, and ordered execution on or about 27 May. Following approval, detailed and coordinate planning began.<sup>2</sup>

During the month, 1st Marine staff planning progressed in secret. As the operation was to be multiphased, only those with a need to know were informed, and then only concerning the phase in which they would participate. When it came time to inform the Korean forces, Colonel Robertson and his staff visited the 2d Brigade, Republic of Korea Marine Corps Headquarters at Hoi An and briefed Brigadier General Dong Ho Lee, initiating a period of coordinated planning between the two Marine staffs. The ARVN forces, to be led by Colonel Thien, commanding officer of the Quang Da Special Zone (QDSZ), a loosely formed, division-level organization tasked to defend Da Nang, were not to be brought into the planning until 48 hours prior to their participation so as to forestall disclosure.

On 24 May, Colonel Robertson approved and directed publication of 1st Marines Operation Order 001-69 (Pipestone Canyon), selecting the 26th as D-Day. Beginning at 0600, two battalions would attack eastward: Special Landing Force Alpha (1st Battalion, 26th Marines) from Hill 37 toward Dodge City, and, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines from Liberty Bridge toward western Go Noi Island. The attack, aimed at forcing the enemy into both areas and at the same time deceiving him as to allied intentions, would conclude with the establishment of blocking positions on the western edge of the area of operations. During the second phase, scheduled to begin five days later, five battalions (1st and 2d Battalions, 1st Marines; 37th ARVN Ranger Battalion; and the 1st and 4th Battalions, 51st ARVN Regiment) were to attack southward through Dodge City, coordinating with the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Korean Marine Corps Brigade, occupying positions on the area of operation's eastern flank. When



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*Company B, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, supported by tanks, sweeps and countersweeps scrub-covered Dodge City in preparation for the attack on Go Noi Island to the south.*

the battalions reached the Song Ky Lam, engineering work would begin on upgrading and then eventually opening Route 4 from the railroad berm east to Route 1. At the same time, the Provisional Land-Clearing Company would be formed and staged at Liberty Bridge and one battalion would be lifted from the area of operation to provide security for the attack east across the island. In phase III, while blocks were maintained along the north bank of the Song Ky Lam, the railroad berm on Go Noi, and engineering efforts continued on Route 4, three battalions were to attack across the eastern portion of the island, followed by land-clearing operations, denying the enemy access and use of the area for staging and infiltration. Should circumstances warrant, Colonel Robertson retained the option of ordering additional phases.<sup>3</sup>

On Monday the 26th, Lieutenant Colonel George C. Kliefoth's 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, under the operational control of the 7th Marines, and Lieutenant Colonel Harry E. Atkinson's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines launched eastward, moving over ground pummeled by artillery fires of the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines and 8-inch guns of the *Newport News* (CA 148). Except for surprise firing devices, the Marines discovering fewer than were tripped, the two battalions generally met

very light resistance during the advance. But as they drew closer to Dodge City and Go Noi Island, enemy activity picked up, the companies reporting an ever-increasing number of engagements, enemy killed, and weapons and equipment discovered or captured. By 30 May, both battalions had reached their blocking positions just west of the railroad berm and begun to dig-in in preparation for phase II. To this point, Kliefoth's and Atkinson's Marines had killed a total of 16 enemy troops, but the price was high: 10 dead and more than 100 wounded, all as a result of mines and boobytraps.

Following a 24-hour ceasefire in honor of Buddha's birthday, control of Operation Pipestone Canyon was passed to the 1st Marines and the five attacking battalions began to move toward the line of departure, the Song La Tho, on the morning of the 31st. South of the river, artillery and naval gunfire, designed to detonate expected heavy concentrations of surprise firing devices as well as prevent enemy interference with the attack, began. With the forward shift of the 1st Marines' command post to Phong Luc (3), and the exchange of liaison personnel among U.S., ARVN, and Korean units, all five battalions crossed the Song La Tho in rapid succession. Sandwiched between the

ARVN Ranger battalion in the west and two battalions of the 51st ARVN Regiment in the east, Lieutenant Colonel Wendell P. Morgenthaler's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and Lieutenant Colonel Harold G. Glasgow's 2d Battalion moved cautiously into Dodge City. Soon after crossing the river, both battalions reported locating numerous recently occupied, well-constructed bunker and tunnel complexes, and areas peppered with mines and boobytraps; devices which would become all too familiar as the Marines moved further south. Activity, however, was light, as enemy troops fled south and west into the sights of the blocking forces. Meanwhile, the 1st and 4th Battalions, 51st Regiment, on the eastern flank in companion Operation Vu Ninh 05, busied themselves screening civilians with the help of teams composed of Quang Nam Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), National Police Field Forces, and counterintelligence personnel assigned to the 1st Marines. The Korean Marine battalions, south of Go Noi, experienced no initial enemy activity.

Sweeping south toward the island, the battalions generally moved out in the early morning, taking advantage of the coolest part of the day. As Lieutenant Colonel Morgenthaler explained: "at times it would

reach temperatures of approximately 115 degrees and with the gear we were carrying, we figured that by moving out early in the morning, we would negate any heat casualties, and at that time the troops would be extremely fresh and more observant."<sup>4</sup> The pace was slow as every bunker and tunnel complex was searched, and every hedgerow, paddy dike, grave mound, and riverbank probed for surprise firing devices and caches. As each battalion closed on the first of several successive phase lines, a small force would be positioned along the line while the remainder began a detailed and deliberate countersearch of the area just covered and naval gunfire pounded deeper targets. In addition to the forward attack and countersweep tactics, a large number of independent patrols and ambushes were deployed every evening.

Movement became more difficult as the advancing battalions neared the second phase line. Not only did both ARVN and Marines encounter a large band of mines set across their paths, but enemy activity picked up. On 2 June, as Company G moved south in mid-morning, it received a number of 60mm mortar rounds followed by bursts of AK47 fire from a group of enemy troops occupying a small bunker complex. Supported by a section of tanks, elements of the com-

*Three artillerymen of the 11th Marines provide 105mm howitzer support for the joint Marine, ARVN, and Korean search of enemy-infested Dodge City and Go Noi Island.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection



pany maneuvered forward, pounding the enemy position. Sweeping through the complex, the Marines discovered seven killed and one wounded, in addition to a number of weapons and propaganda leaflets. Later that same day, both the ARVN Ranger battalion and western blocking forces reported increasing activity in their zones of action as enemy troops tried to escape west, but were forced instead to move south across the Song Ky Lam onto Go Noi.

Two days later, after an early morning artillery preparation by the tubes of 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, Morgenthaler's and Glasgow's battalions again moved south. Meanwhile, the two battalions of the 51st ARVN Regiment remained in their initial positions and continued civic action and screening operations in order to identify members of the local Viet Cong Infrastructure. The Korean Marines, having yet to engage any enemy troops, initiated several local company-size search and block operations south of Go Noi. By 5 June, elements of the 1st Marines reached the Song Ky Lam, separating Dodge City and the island. During the next three days, the remaining attack forces closed on the river and then counterswept, while observing wing aircraft dropped 1,000- and 2,000-pound bombs on eastern Go Noi Island. Before the air bombardment ceased, nearly 750,000 pounds of ordnance had been dropped.

With the sweep through Dodge City complete, Company A, 1st Engineer Battalion, with security provided by the 39th ARVN Ranger Battalion, began upgrading Route 4. Simultaneously, the advancing forces began repositioning themselves for the third phase. The 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, which had occupied blocking positions west of Dodge City, withdrew from the operation and helilifted to its amphibious shipping in the South China Sea. In addition, Morgenthaler's battalion, less Company D, moved by air to Liberty Bridge where it took command of tanks and tracked vehicles and began an advance overland toward Go Noi Island.

On 10 June, the third phase of Operation Pipestone Canyon began. General Simpson, Colonel Charles E. Walker, interim commander of the 1st Marines in the absence of Colonel Robertson, who was on emergency leave, and their tactical command group staffs were atop Hill 119, just south of Go Noi. Observation was excellent. Morgenthaler's battalion could be seen advancing from Liberty Bridge. Colonel Atkinson's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines could be seen occupying blocking positions along the railroad berm, and the posi-

tions of the Korean Marines, south of eastern Go Noi, were also in view. Although they were dug in and could not be observed from 119, the ARVN forces were in position north of the island. As the command groups watched, wing attack and fighter aircraft strafed selected landing zones and surrounding areas. Finally, the fighter aircraft moved out and the attack aircraft, flying 200 feet above ground, laid down a thick stream of smoke, dividing the island. As scheduled, 22 troop-loaded CH-46s appeared and headed for two landing zones on the southern banks of eastern Go Noi. Minutes later, the combined force of Glasgow's men and Korean Marines alighted from the helicopters, formed up, and began a sweep to the north. That afternoon, Morgenthaler's armored column passed through Atkinson's lines on the railroad berm, picked up Company D, and joined in the coordinated attack.

Again advancing by numbered phase lines, the three battalions reached phase line II on 11 June. At this line, the 1st Korean Marine Battalion encountered several bunker complexes and a large number of rice and equipment caches. The brigade's liaison officer informed Colonel Walker that the battalion wished to search the area, and it was agreed that Morgenthaler's and Glasgow's battalions would continue north while the Koreans carried out the search. The decision proved to be correct, for in each of the numerous tunnels and bunkers searched, the Koreans discovered enemy troops or substantial caches of rice, weapons, and equipment. The 1st and 2d Battalions, 1st Marines also added to these totals, uncovering many discarded weapons, large rice caches, and an increasing number of dead enemy troops, killed by the heavy air and artillery bombardment.

Squeezed between the blocking forces and the advancing Marines, the enemy scattered, breaking into smaller and smaller groups, hoping to be bypassed and thus able to make their escape south into the Que Son Mountains. Some did escape, but many were found and either captured or destroyed, if they resisted. Those captured were troops unable to move—the wounded and the starving. Ironically, a number of these undernourished North Vietnamese soldiers were discovered within a short distance of substantial caches; all were unaware of the existence of the concealed food.

On 13 June, the Provisional Land-Clearing Company assembled at Liberty Bridge. An armored column was dispatched with a platoon from Company M, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines to provide security for the 10 Marine Eimco (M64) tractors and nine Army D7E





Marine Corps Historical Collection

*Col Charles E. Walker, acting Commanding Officer, 1st Marines, discusses tactics with his battalion commanders in preparation for crossing one of the many phase lines that marked the advance southward.*

Caterpillars. At midday, as the column moved out across country toward Go Noi Island, one of the tanks hit a mine, resulting in the wounding of two Marines and causing a temporary halt in the column's pace. After resuming the advance, a second mine disabled yet another tank and the column halted. Additional security was requested and the combined infantry, tank, and tractor column dug in for the night to make repairs. The following morning, the land-clearing unit resumed its eastward march.<sup>5</sup>

On Go Noi Island, the two battalions of the 1st Marines reached the Song Ky Lam and turned, beginning countersweep operations. At the same time, the Korean Marine battalion established company-size areas and began a series of detailed searches. Colonel Walker notified Lieutenant Colonel Atkinson that his battalion, then in blocking positions along the railroad berm, would no longer be needed and that the participation of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines would terminate on 15 June, as land-clearing operations would soon get underway. Just north of the island, the 1st and 4th ARVN battalions moved from their blocking positions along the Song Ky Lam and initiated countersearch operations in Dodge City and areas west of Route 1.

Twenty days into the operation, Atkinson's battalion ceased its participation in Pipestone Canyon; Morgenthaler's battalion, in turn, assumed responsibility for the railroad berm and an area 500 meters west,

while at the same time continuing to provide security for the land-clearing company, which was beginning the complete destruction of all vegetation and the filling and leveling of all enemy installations on eastern Go Noi. Clearing 250 acres at a time to a depth of six inches, the blades of the combined company eventually would leave behind over 8,000 dirt-brown and flat acres. The enemy, as a result, lost a long-used, major elephant grass- and bamboo-covered, bunker-saturated haven and staging area.<sup>6</sup>

With the clearing effort well underway, the countersweep of eastern Go Noi and adjacent islands nearly complete, and enemy activity decreasing by the day, Colonel Robertson, having reassumed command on the 14th, decided to begin company-size search and clear operations in the western portion of the island. At first light on the 19th, Morgenthaler's Company C, later joined by Company B, moved out from the railroad berm, searching in a westerly direction toward Bao An Dong. A homemade mine was tripped, then another, and another; western Go Noi was saturated with surprise firing devices. Evidence of this was borne out over the next several days as Morgenthaler's Marines continued the search from Bao An Tay to An Quyen, in the northwest corner, taking additional casualties. Solutions to the recurring problem of mines and boobytraps consisted of bombarding the areas with artillery fire, peppering with bombs and napalm, conducting all movement mounted on tanks or tracked vehicles, and continually stressing the threat, ensuring that the troops maintained maximum dispersion while moving. These solutions, however, did not eliminate the threat and casualties continued to mount. The only way to avoid the surprise firing devices, Colonel Morgenthaler later noted, was to "avoid the area which meant avoiding the mission . . . . We did *not* stay inside our compounds like the Korean Marines in order to avoid casualties."<sup>7</sup>

The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines' sweep of western Go Noi continued until the 21st, when the battalion returned to its base at Dong Son (2). With the departure of Morgenthaler's Marines, the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines assumed security for the land-clearing company and responsibility for most of the island, except for the area assigned the Korean Marines. Now it was Glasgow's battalion's turn to work western Go Noi.

Operating with three companies, Lieutenant Colonel Glasgow was determined to find and destroy the remaining enemy hiding on Go Noi. Conducting search and clear operations day after day, Marines of





the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines encountered numerous surprise firing devices, but flushed out few troops. The continuing problem of boobytraps and mines not only took its toll in casualties, but also on the morale of those left behind. Company G's Commanding Officer, Captain Frank H. Adams, observed the effects. Losing 59 men killed and wounded to boobytraps out of a casualty total of 70, his company neared the breaking point during its sweep of western Go Noi, as he later recounted:

When you do encounter boobytraps and you continue to trip them, it gets to the point where each individual within that unit—regardless of the leadership that you have—it gets to the point where the troops say: "They put them out there, we have got to sweep it, ultimately I'm going to hit that son-of-a-bitch that they put out there. I don't know who is going to hit it tomorrow, but one of these days I'm going to hit one myself." When you get to that point as a troop leader, as a squad leader, as a platoon leader, as a platoon sergeant, and a company commander . . . you're lost . . . . When a trooper feels he is going to get it, you have had the weenie.

So we went back in [after taking several boobytrap casualties], . . . sat down, got the company together, put the security out, and we got together for about a 15-minute talk. That is what I had planned, but I kind of choked up on them, so I only made it three and a half to four minutes. After talking to them, explaining to them, that these are the things of war that we have to encounter—that we will

encounter—the things we have to take—you don't enjoy it, you don't like it, but these are the things you do encounter. Then we said the Lord's Prayer, prayed for those that we had lost, and passed the word . . . that all of us are going back, . . . that we have the same sweeps tomorrow that we had today, and we are going to find every boobytrap out there without tripping it. Troop morale raised, . . . we jumped off into the operation the next day and continued to march, and continued to sweep.<sup>8</sup>

While Glasgow's Marines swept western Go Noi, elements of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines were reintroduced into the Pipestone Canyon area of operations on the 27th. Conducting a short search and clear operation in northern Dodge City, they turned up additional enemy equipment and dead, killed by air and artillery, but encountered only those few enemy troops who had remained behind. The ARVN forces, adjacent to Morgenthaler's Marines, made no contact and continued the process of screening the civilian population in search of infrastructure members as they moved south.

By the end of June, the entire tempo of the operation slowed. Few enemy troops were found, and those who were were either the wounded or those missed in the initial sweeps. As the land-clearing effort on eastern Go Noi neared completion, security for the unit passed from Glasgow's battalion to the Korean

*Several Marines help a wounded comrade to a waiting medical evacuation helicopter. Surprise firing devices accounted for a number of casualties during Operation Pipestone.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection



Marines for a short period. In addition, elements of the 1st Engineer Battalion officially opened Route 4 from the railroad berm to Dien Ban, meeting a major goal of the province's yearly pacification plan and of the operation. During the month-long effort, the engineers had not only constructed a road capable of accommodating two-way traffic, but a series of large culverts also, and cleared an average of 500 meters on either side of the thoroughfare, totaling more than 6,000,000 square meters.

As a result of a number of coordinating meetings held earlier in the month, General Simpson determined that eastern Go Noi would be permanently occupied. With the help of the land-clearing company, work began on two combat bases—the first to be occupied by the 3d Battalion, 51st ARVN Regiment, and the second by the Korean Brigade's 1st Battalion. He also decided that once the bases' initial defenses were completed, western Go Noi would be cleared and at least one U.S. Marine company would be tasked to patrol the area. He hoped, as a consequence, that the island would never again be returned to enemy hands, unless the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were willing to commit the major forces required and accept the heavy casualties that would result from such an attempt.

The opening days of July saw the operation enter its second month with the third phase still in progress. In the Dodge City area, elements of the 51st ARVN Regiment continued to patrol and screen. Morgenthaler's Marines, having completed their search and clear operation, returned to the regiment's western area where they secured the Cau Do and Ha Dong railroad bridges. On Go Noi, Glasgow's battalion pursued search operations in the western portion of the island, while again providing security for the land-clearing effort. Across the railroad berm, the 3d Battalion, 51st ARVN Regiment and the Korean Marines continued building their combat bases and conducting company-size clearing operations.

On the 6th, Colonel Robertson decided to reduce the effort on western Go Noi to a rifle company, which was to provide security for the Provisional Land-Clearing Company, and, as a consequence, the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, less one company, withdrew and returned to its permanent base at Phong Luc (2) for rehabilitation. Company E, which had spent several days at "Stack Arms," the division's in-country rest and recreation center south of Da Nang, returned to Go

Noi, and resumed patrol and ambush activities. Two days later, another realignment took place; the 4th Battalion replaced the 1st Battalion, 51st ARVN Regiment in southwestern Dodge City, and the 37th Rangers withdrew. With a reduction in size of the operation, Colonel Robertson decided to close his forward headquarters and return the command group to Duong Son (2).

Weather reports received on the 8th indicated that Typhoon Tess would come ashore near Da Nang on the 10th. Go Noi Island, especially the western portion, had been inundated during a similar storm in October 1968, and it was decided to withdraw the land-clearing company and its security force from the island until the typhoon passed. The move took place the following day. Just prior to reaching the high ground along Route 1, where the forces would wait out the storm, the rear of the column came under heavy small arms fire. Two Marine engineers were killed and an equal number wounded before the fighting ended.

Activity throughout the Pipestone Canyon area of operation ground to a halt as Typhoon Tess brought heavy rains to Quang Nam Province for the next two days. By the 12th, the weather cleared and Company E, with tracked vehicles and tanks attached, moved from Route 1 back across Go Noi to await the bulldozers. During the move, one of the tanks accompanying Company E detonated a land mine which resulted in a ruptured gas tank and the severe burning of 12 Marines. The 7th Engineers, instead of following, decided it would place the tractors on low-bed trucks and drive them around to Liberty Bridge to conserve the dozers' engines and tracks. That afternoon, the forces to continue the land-clearing were back on western Go Noi and operations began the following morning.

Meanwhile, an increasing number of intelligence reports concerning enemy presence in eastern Dodge City, east of the Song Suoi Co Ca, convinced Colonel Robertson that the area required additional attention. Arrangements were made on 14 July for a battalion-size heliborne assault into four landing zones surrounding the former village of Tay Bang An, the area suspected of harboring a company-size sapper unit. In preparation for the assault, assisted later by armor, Colonel Glasgow requested that Company H relieve Company E as security for the land-clearing operation, and that Company D, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines join



Marine Corps Historical Collection

*A Marine engineer levels enemy fortifications on Go Noi Island in preparation for the reintroduction of a stable population and the return of the land to rice production.*

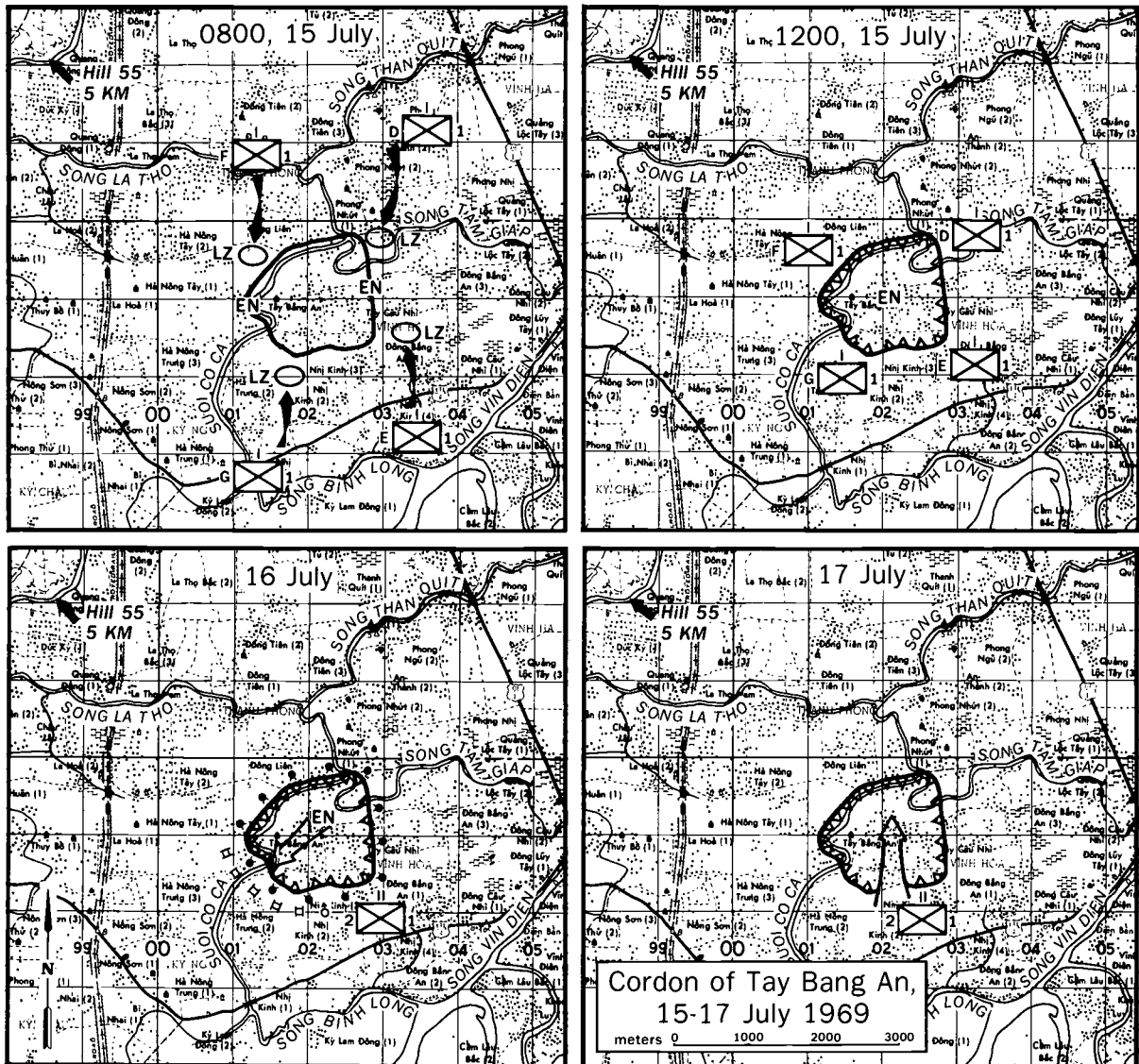
his battalion in order to provide a four-rifle-company operation.

Early on the morning of the 15th, the lift went off as planned, but as troop-laden CH-46s approached the four landing zones, all began receiving enemy small arms fire. Seven of the helicopters were hit and one eventually forced to land near a Korean Marine compound on Route 1. Although all zones were hot, two insertions were carried out as planned, but two others were shifted to alternate sites, forcing an hour's delay in closing the cordon around the abandoned village. Once on the ground, aerial observers circling above reported sighting 30 to 50 enemy troops inside the area to which Glasgow's Marines were moving from all directions. By 0830, Company D had captured one Viet Cong and was engaging a small pocket of enemy troops in its sector; Company G had detained a male who later was classified as a Viet Cong; and Company E had detonated a boobytrap, causing several casualties, and reported taking several bursts of small arms fire from its front. Company F met the heaviest resistance. As it closed on its cordon positions, the company received a large volume of automatic weapons and RPG fire from enemy-occupied bunkers on the west side of the Suoi Co Ca, killing two Marines and wounding seven. Eventually pushing through the complex, the assaulting platoons captured one NVA, counted four enemy bodies, and spotted seven more soldiers withdraw across the river. Meanwhile, a platoon of tanks and tracked vehicles made its way down Route 1, then turned west onto the recently up-

graded Route 4, and joined Glasgow's Marines in the cordoned area.

Throughout the 16th, as the Marines tightened the cordon and established defensive positions, the entrapped enemy sappers conducted several probes in a vain attempt to discover a vulnerable area in the battalion's lines. Following these initial attempts, the enemy initiated a breakthrough which Company G successfully repelled. Late in the day, it was decided to slightly shift the cordon, under cover of darkness, to the north along the Song Tam Giap into an area where Company D had captured several enemy troops the day before. After tightening the cordon and conducting a number of searches on the morning of the 17th, the area proved to be devoid of enemy troops and Colonel Glasgow reported the search complete, the battalion having killed 20 and captured 14. Later in the day, the battalion helilifted out of the area and returned to its base at Phong Luc.<sup>9</sup>

With the level of operations slowing on Go Noi Island as the enemy avoided contact, but again picking up in Dodge City, Colonel Robertson initiated planning for an additional phase. Robertson met with Colonel Thuc, Commanding Officer, 51st ARVN Regiment, and together they agreed to conduct a search of Dodge City south of Route 4, where it was suspected the enemy was hiding. Following approval by General Simpson, Colonel Robertson ordered the operation scheduled for 21 July and assigned the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and 4th Battalion, 51st ARVN



See Reference Map, Sections 26, 27

At 0800 on 15 July, four companies of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines establish landing zones near Tay Bang An, five kilometers southeast of Hill 55. By noon, the cordon of the village is complete, trapping a company-size enemy sapper unit. On the 16th, the enemy unit attempts to break through the battalion's lines, fortified with mines, tanks, and mortars. The battalion completes the search of the area on the 17th, having found no survivors.

Regiment the task. A realignment of forces within the 1st Marines' normal area of responsibility, however, was necessary before Morgenthaler's Marines could be released for the operation. The 1st Marines, as a result, assumed control of 1st Battalion, 26th Marines and assigned it control of the regiment's western area of operations. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas P. Ganey's 3d Battalion, 1st Marines extended its lines to cover the remainder of the area of responsibility as Lieutenant Colonel Glasgow's battalion prepared to join Operation Durham Peak.

At midnight on 20 July, following the completion of land-clearing operations on western Go Noi, the third phase of Pipestone Canyon came to a close. In nearly three months, the combined force logged 734 enemy killed, 382 weapons captured, and 55 prisoners taken. Marine casualties were 57 killed and 394 seriously wounded.

Pipestone Canyon's fourth phase began with the move of Morgenthaler's Marines into an area of southern Dodge City, south of Route 4 and west of the railroad berm on the 21st. While two companies

occupied blocking positions along the southern bank of the Song Ky Lam, the remainder of the battalion began search and destroy operations in the assigned area. Although no engagements with enemy forces took place during the three-day operation, the Marines continually encountered mines and boobytraps. In one mine incident, occurring on the 23d, a Marine from Company C detonated a "daisy chain," composed of three dud artillery rounds set as antipersonnel mines, resulting in the severe wounding of six men. At midday on the 24th, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines closed the short search of southern Dodge City, and again returned to its base at Phong Luc.

As July ended, Company L began moving patrol forces onto western Go Noi in relief of Company I, which returned to Ha Dong Bridge, northwest of Hill 55. Like Marines of the 1st Battalion operating in southern Dodge City several days before, Company L encountered a high number of surprise firing devices. On the 25th, an LVT carrying a squad from the company onto the island detonated a small antipersonnel mine, damaging the vehicle. After temporary repairs were made, the LVT moved out again, striking yet another mine, thought to be a 250-pound bomb, which killed three and severely wounded seven other squad members. Most, if not all, of the surprise firing devices encountered on western Go Noi were fabricated from discarded or dud American ordnance, such as grenades, mortar and artillery rounds, bombs, or cans filled with the explosive C-4. On the average, 60 percent of all devices were defused and 40 percent detonated; that 40 percent continued to inflict a majority of all Marine casualties.

Company M, under Captain Donald J. Robinson II, relieved Company L on western Go Noi at the beginning of August, continuing the cycle of patrol and short cordon and search operations. Throughout the rest of the island, the 3d Battalion, 51st ARVN Regiment conducted similar operations in the central third, while elements of the 2d Republic of Korean Marine Corps Brigade operated in the eastern third. To the north, other Korean Marines drove through eastern Dodge City, while the 4th Battalion, 51st ARVN Regiment searched the central portion. On 6 August, Lieutenant Colonel Ganey's 3d Battalion, 1st Marines began a search and clear operation in Dodge City. After some difficulty, caused by an LVT throwing a track, the battalion initiated an attack with Company L on the left flank, Company I on the right, the battalion command group in the center, and Company K pro-



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A374597  
*A radioman with the 1st Marines takes a break while on one of the numerous patrols that swept and then reswept both Dodge City and Go Noi Island.*

viding rear security. Few engagements occurred as Ganey's Marines swept north from Route 4, between the railroad berm and the Suoi Co Ca and, as a result, the battalion returned to Duong Son (2) on the 9th.

During the remainder of the month, Robinson's Marines continued sweep operations in western Go Noi, as other elements of the regiment periodically returned to Dodge City to conduct short search operations in conjunction with their Korean and ARVN counterparts. Again, no significant engagements took place. This respite allowed companies opportunity to train in all elements of offensive and defensive combat and use all available supporting arms in the process.<sup>10</sup> In addition, efforts were made to keep Route 4 open to traffic despite repeated enemy attempts to mine the road and destroy major culverts. Also during August, the Provisional Land-Clearing Company, after a period of maintenance, returned to southwestern Dodge City. Plowing a total of 2,594,000 square meters in one week, the company leveled a suspected enemy staging area bounded on the north by



Route 4, on the west by the Phong Thu hamlet complex, on the south by the Song Ky Lam, and on the east by the north-south railroad berm, before returning to the 7th Engineer Battalion's permanent base.

Major enemy activity throughout the Pipestone area of operations had all but ceased by the beginning of September. Although Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops avoided encounters with friendly forces, they did continue to concentrate their limited available resources on harassing allied units by continuing to lay surprise firing devices. But as the month passed, aerial sightings of small groups of enemy soldiers north of Route 4 increased, signaling the presence of an unknown size force in that area of Dodge City. These sightings prompted the commitment of three of Morgenthaler's four companies to the area in late September. At 1120 on the 25th, Companies C and D helilifted into two separate landing zones, approximately 1,000 meters south of the Song La Tho. Simultaneously, Company A and the battalion command group, reinforced by a section each of tanks and amphibian tractors, crossed Route 4 and advanced north, blocking enemy attempts to escape southward. Morgenthaler's Marines encountered few enemy troops during the operation, although numerous bunkers, small caches, and extensive mine fields were discovered and destroyed as the battalion's effort shifted east. On the 29th, after only four days in the area, the companies withdrew and returned to Phong Luc.

Heavy rains fell as the month of October began, turning the area into a quagmire. By the 5th, the rising flood waters of the Song Ky Lam inundated western Go Noi forcing Company L, which had replaced Company M, to withdraw by air and return to Hill 37. The rains also forced the withdrawal of the 2d Battalion, 51st ARVN Regiment from Dodge City. Five days later, as flood waters subsided and the units returned to the field, the fourth phase of Pipestone Canyon came to an end and the final phase began.

Pipestone Canyon's fifth phase, like the fourth, was characterized by a number of separate search and clear operations. On the 11th, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines again returned to Dodge City, initiating operations in the La Tho Bac, Dong Tien, and Duc Ky hamlet complex, north of the Song La Tho. Although Morgenthaler's battalion detained a number of Vietnamese as suspected members of the local Viet Cong Infrastructure, no combat engagements took place and the operation terminated two days later.

By far the most significant of the series of searches conducted by the 1st Marines within the Pipestone

Canyon area during the latter stages of the operation was the multi-battalion cordon and search of the La Huan and Giang La hamlet complex, located in northwestern Dodge City. Based on intelligence reports which indicated that elements of the *Q-82d Battalion* and a large number of infrastructure members had moved into the area, planning for the cordon began. Shortly after sunrise on the 18th, Morgenthaler's battalion, composed of Companies A, B, and C, in addition to two platoons from Company G, assaulted two landing zones, just south of the Song La Tho, following an artillery and air bombardment of the zones and nearby railroad berm. Simultaneously, elements of the 3d Battalion, 51st ARVN Regiment moved into blocking positions along the northern bank of the river, between the berm and the Song Ai Nghia. To the southeast, elements of the ARVN regiment's 2d Battalion took up positions extending from the hamlet of La Moa (1) south to Route 4. To the west, three of Ganey's four companies, plus Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, moved into positions stretching along Route 4, then north along Route 1-D to the Song Ai Nghia, south of Hill 55. Once all were in place, Morgenthaler's Marines, supplemented by 50 men of the National Police Field Force from Dien Ban District, attacked westward. By late afternoon, the cordon was set and civilians began their exodus of the area, filing across "Golden Gate Bridge" on the Song Ai Nghia toward the collection point at the base of Hill 55. By noon the following day, district Phoenix and intelligence personnel had processed 813 civilians, of which 19 were identified as Viet Cong and 50 classified as Infrastructure members.\* Meanwhile, Morgenthaler's battalion conducted a thorough search of the hamlet complex, destroying every bunker and other enemy installations, while police field forces burned every house on order of the province chief. Battalion Marines completed the search on the 21st. The residents of the La Huan and Giang La complex eventually were resettled in the village of Bich Bac, two kilometers northeast of Hill 55.

A day before the completion of the La Huan-Giang La search, the 1st Marines conducted yet another company-size reconnaissance-in-force on western Go Noi Island. At 0630 on 20 October, control of Com-

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\*The secret Phoenix, or Phung Hoang, program was carried out by Vietnamese police and intelligence agencies under the advice and supervision of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. Its objective was the "neutralization" of the Viet Cong Infrastructure, Communist clandestine government, and political movement members by death or capture.



pany C passed from the 1st Battalion to the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, and the company helilifted to the island, where it patrolled for the next week. Although the Marines encountered and sighted a number of small groups of enemy troops, most were observed south of Go Noi, outside the area of operations, and thus could not be engaged. On the 27th, Company C ended its search of the western portion of the island and returned to control of the 1st Battalion. Eleven days later, Operation Pipestone Canyon was brought to a close.

During the 164-day operation, each of the inter-related objectives was met. All major Viet Cong and North Vietnamese units were driven out of Dodge City and Go Noi Island. Route 4 was not only upgraded, but opened to traffic from Dien Ban west to the railroad berm, permitting access to western Quang Nam Province. Land-clearing operations had transformed Go Noi Island from a heavily vegetated tract to a barren waste, free of treelines and other cover long used by the enemy to conceal his movement across the island. And, through a series of combined cordon and search operations, the ranks of the local Viet Cong Infrastructure were depleted, especially in Dodge City. In the accomplishment of these goals, 852 enemy soldiers were killed, 58 taken prisoner, and 410 weapons, along with large quantities of equipment, ordnance, and foodstuffs, captured. The successes achieved during the operation were not, however, attained without friendly losses. A total of 71 troops, Marines and Navy Corpsmen, died, while 498 others were wounded, most by surprise firing devices, and evacuated, and 108 received minor wounds.

#### *1st Marines: Protecting the Southern Flank*

Although heavily committed to Operation Pipestone Canyon throughout the latter half of the year, the 1st Marines retained responsibility for the regimental TAOR. As the 1st and 2d Battalions moved into Dodge City at the end of May, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas E. Bulger's 3d Battalion, reinforced by Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, took the burden of patrolling the remainder of the regiment's assigned area.

Throughout the fertile-rice-paddy- and sand-dune-dotted region, roughly stretching from the Song Yen to the South China Sea, south of Da Nang, Bulger's Marines fanned out in company- and platoon-size combat patrols, hoping to engage elements of the *R-20th* and *Q-82d Local Force Battalions*, known to be operating in the area. The enemy, however, proved to

be illusive as they attempted to avoid Bulger's ever-present maze of small-unit, counter guerrilla operations.

Although enemy activity throughout Quang Nam Province remained relatively high during the month of June, the majority of action within the 1st Marines' TAOR consisted of attacks directed against 3d Battalion patrols, command posts, and bridge security elements. The largest of these occurred shortly after midnight on the 7th, when approximately 70 North Vietnamese troops moved against a platoon of Company K, positioned near No Name Island within the Tre Khe hamlet complex, six kilometers east of Route 1. Under heavy enemy 60mm mortar, CS-gas, RPG, grenade, and small arms fire, the platoon held its position and returned fire, while calling in artillery missions and directing "Spooky" gunship support. As a result of the attack, the enemy lost over half his force.

Towards the end of the month, as emphasis shifted from the multi-battalion search to the land-clearing effort in the Pipestone Canyon area of operations, the 1st Battalion returned to the regimental area and assumed responsibility for the western sector, including security for the Cau Do and Ha Dong Bridges. Bulger's Marines, as a consequence, were given the eastern sector and security of the Tu Cau Bridge. This arrangement continued until 20 July, when 1st Battalion, 26th Marines replaced Bulger's Marines, who then shifted operations to the regiment's western zone. The following day, as the 5th Marines assumed control of the 2d Battalion in preparation for an assault into the Que Son Mountains, Morgenthaler's battalion was assigned the mission of regimental or mobile reserve and returned to Pipestone Canyon. Little changed during this period with respect to enemy tactics as both Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops, heavily battered on Go Noi Island and in Dodge City, avoided other regimental cordon and search operations, patrols, and ambushes.

During the month of August, the 1st Marines, when not engaged in Pipestone Canyon, continued aggressive patrol and ambush operations, placing heavy emphasis on clearing the Song Yen within the rocket belt and assisting the 5th Marines in Operation Durham Peak. In addition, the regiment carried out cordon and search operations in the hamlets of An Thanh (1), Viem Tay (1), An Tra (1), Bo Mung (2), Tan Luu, and La Huan (2), all designated for upgrading under the Accelerated Pacification Campaign. At mid-month, a major shift in forces involved in the counter guerrilla campaign near Da Nang and the surrounding



Marine Corps Historical Collection

*Infantrymen of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, responsible for the security of Tu Cau Bridge, south of Da Nang, conduct a daily patrol through one of the surrounding villages.*

coastal lowlands occurred. Following successful operations against enemy forces in the Arizona Area, the 7th Marines redeployed to a new area of operations, encompassing the Que Song District of Quang Tin Province. This redeployment, along with the concurrent repositioning of the 5th Marines, 26th Marines, and Vietnamese forces, who assumed a larger role in the pacification and counterinsurgency effort closer to Da Nang, resulted in the expansion of the 1st Marines' area of responsibility.

While retaining control of the eastern, that area generally east of Route 1 between Marble Mountain and Hoi An, and southern (Dodge City and Go Noi Island) sectors, a portion of the regiment's northern zone was transferred to the 26th Marines and its western boundary expanded into an area previously occupied by the 1st and 3d Battalions, 7th Marines. The regimental command post, as a result, shifted southwestward from Dong Son (2) to Camp Muir (Hill 55), and at the same time Colonel Herbert L. Wilkerson assumed command of the regiment, replacing Colonel Robertson, who was promoted to brigadier general and given the position of assistant division commander.

Within the expanded area of responsibility, the 1st

Marines was committed to a wide range of interrelated activities, including Operation Pipestone Canyon, during September and October. Despite monsoon rains during the first two weeks of October, the regiment launched vigorous patrol, ambush, and cordon and search operations, with increased emphasis placed on combined operations with elements of the 51st ARVN Regiment and local Regional Force units in support of the pacification effort, defense of the Da Nang Vital Area, and security of the rocket belt. In addition, the 1st Marines concentrated its rice denial efforts during the beginning of harvest season in the heavily cultivated area flanking the Song Cau Bien, south of Nui Kim Son, and the rich rice-producing regions flanking the Song Yen, north of Hill 55. The regiment directed a special effort to denying the enemy rice grown east of Hill 22 in the Bo Ben and Duyen Son areas, where the rice fields were declared as belonging to the Viet Cong by the Hieu Duc District Chief.

As elections generally coincided with the rice harvest, Wilkerson tasked his Marines with assisting provincial forces in providing polling place security for the provincial elections on 28 September and hamlet elections a month later. Extensive patrols and ambush-

es were run near polling sites the day before each election. On election day, Marine security operations shifted at least 500 meters from the sites, while Regional and Popular Forces provided close-in protection. In addition, a platoon with two CH-46 and two AH-1G helicopters stood by to provide immediate reaction to any terrorist incident which might threaten the security of elections within the 1st Marines' TAOR.

During the final two months of the year, the 1st Marines, in addition to its normal responsibilities of defending the Da Nang Vital Area, securing the rocket belt, protecting allied installations and lines of communication, and participating in the rice denial effort, focused much of its attention on the support of the Accelerated Pacification Program through the Infantry Company Intensive Pacification Program (ICIPP), later renamed the Combined Unit Pacification Program (CUPP). Loosely based on the Combined Action Program (CAP), the ICIPP, or CUPP concept called for an entire Marine rifle company to merge with Regional and Popular Force platoons into a combined Marine-Vietnamese pacification effort. One Marine rifle squad and one Vietnamese platoon would work

together to pacify one specific area, with their combined efforts augmented by provincial forces, including Census Grievance Teams, National Police Field Forces, Provincial Reconnaissance Units, and Revolutionary Development Cadre Teams, when available. When the area was considered pacified, and when a sufficient number of People's Self-Defense Forces had been trained and armed, the Marines would be withdrawn and sent to other targeted areas.

On 7 November, the regiment assumed direct operational control of Captain Donald J. Robinson's Company M and assigned it to the Combined Unit Pacification Program. As early as the 3d, selected officers and NCOs began an intensive two-week training course conducted by the 2d Combined Action Group at Da Nang in order to prepare themselves for duty with Regional and Popular Forces. Training completed, the first unit, composed of one platoon from Company M and one platoon from the 759th Regional Force Company, along with a Revolutionary Development Team, moved into Chau Son Hamlet, two kilometers southwest of Hill 55 on the 9th. The following day, the regiment dispatched a second unit to Binh

*A Marine from Company M, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines stands watch with two members of the local Popular Forces. The joint Marine-Popular Force unit was tasked with providing security for the village of Binh Boc as part of the Combined Unit Pacification Program.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection



Bac Hamlet, a kilometer northeast of the regiment's command post, and on the 30th, a third moved into Le Son (1) Hamlet, five kilometers to the northeast. During December, the 1st Marines installed five additional combined platoons in hamlets designated by the South Vietnamese Government for pacification status upgrading, as the program continued to show promise.

In late December, to supplement the usual ground patrols and ambushes, the 1st Marines instituted a new system of helicopter-borne combat patrols, codenamed Kingfisher. These patrols, the latest variant in a long series of quick-reaction infantry-helicopter combinations, were intended to seek out the enemy and initiate contact rather than exploit engagements or assist ground units already under fire. As Colonel Wilkerson noted, they were "an offensive weapon that goes out and hunt[s] them . . . . They actually invite trouble."<sup>11</sup>

The initial Kingfisher patrol was to consist of one rifle platoon loaded on board three Boeing CH-46D Sea Knight helicopters which would then fly over the regimental TAOR accompanied by two Bell AH-1G Cobra gunships and a North American OV-10A Bronco carrying an aerial observer. In the air at first light, the patrol was to search the terrain for targets of opportunity, attacking enemy formations, destroying enemy installations, and detaining persons acting in such a manner as to warrant suspicion. If the Marines found enemy troops, the Cobras would provide close support and the aerial observer would call for fixed-wing air strikes and artillery if necessary. Kingfisher operations required careful coordination once in the air. Each patrol included a UH-1E Huey command helicopter. This aircraft carried the company commander, a regimental staff officer, both in radio contact with the 1st Marines' command post, and the air commander. These officers mutually would decide when and where to land the troops. Each time a Kingfisher patrol went out, the battalions would be informed as to which areas within their TAORs were likely targets to be investigated, so that the battalion's own patrols could avoid them. This same information was to be supplied the artillery, which then would suspend all fire in those areas unless called upon to support the patrol.

The regiment's first patrol, composed of a platoon from Captain Jimmie L. Adkins' Company H, lifted off at 0645 on 26 December with 10 targets of primary interest throughout the TAOR. The patrol landed on a target in the Ngan Cau area, three kilometers east

of Route 1, to establish a block for the rest of the company. As no engagement ensued, Kingfisher I spent but 35 minutes on the ground. The patrol later assaulted a target in the area of Dong Lien, between the Song La Tho and Suoi Co Ca, following an air bombardment by Cobra gunships. Although the patrol initially encountered small arms fire, there was no ground action and the patrol took off 55 minutes later—this being the first time a platoon-size unit entered Dodge City alone. After the Dong Lien landing, the patrol then secured, returned to base, and key personnel assembled at the regimental command post for a debrief and critique of the initial operation. Although Kingfisher I engaged no enemy troops, 1st Marines and Marine Aircraft Group 16 participants expressed enthusiasm about the concept, suggesting that additional trials be conducted in order to refine a number of command and control techniques. Kingfisher patrols would, during 1970, become a valued tactic for the regiment and division, especially against small enemy units operating in the rocket belt. In augmenting the regiment's tactical arsenal, the patrols would aid the 1st Marines in successfully inflicting significant losses and reducing the enemy's freedom of movement within its assigned area of responsibility.

Despite the institution of several tactical innovations during the year, the frustrating war south of Da Nang had changed little over the years, as the 1st Battalion's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Godfrey S. Delcuze, noted:

The war had moved on except for sporadic, murderous local force mining. Brave men died "pacifying" old men, women, and children who refused to be pacified. Too heavy infantry armed, equipped, and supplied to engage [Viet Cong] main force units, slogged through paddies and scrub brush past farm folk who mined trails from time to time. They—the peasants—wreaked their havoc from time to time with M16 bounding mines from fields U.S. forces had laid. Our only identifiable "military" service was a two-day lay out ambush. The ambush netted one enemy "soldier." He came walking down a trail with an M16 bounding mine in each hand. We shot him in the gut. He was a 12-year old boy.<sup>12</sup>

#### *The Arizona*

Southwest and west of the 1st Marines' TAOR, the 5th Marines continued to defend the large broad plain dominated by the confluence of two major rivers, the Song Vu Gia and Song Thu Bon. Commanded by Colonel William J. Zaro, the regiment began the latter half of the year with Lieutenant Colonel William E. Riley, Jr.'s 1st Battalion operating in the Arizona area; Lieutenant Colonel James H. Higgins' 2d Bat-

talion, deployed from the Arizona action, protecting Liberty Bridge and Road and conducting patrols in the surrounding terrain; and Lieutenant Colonel Harry E. Atkinson's 3d Battalion participating in Operation Pipestone Canyon under the operational control of the 1st Marines.

The pattern of battalion activities varied according to region. In the Arizona, between the Song Vu Gia and Song Thu Bon, the 1st Battalion defended no fixed positions, but continually moved in company-size formations from place to place, patrolling, setting up night ambushes, searching for food and supply caches, and frequently conducting multi-company sweeps with ARVN forces in this long-time enemy stronghold. Companies of Higgins' 2d Battalion not only manned the strategic outpost of Liberty Bridge and other strongpoints, and cooperated with Vietnamese forces to secure Routes 540 (Liberty Road) and 537, but also launched company-size sweeps of the surrounding terrain. Although temporarily assigned to the 1st Marines, the 3d Battalion normally operated in the regiment's eastern area, centered on the Phu Loc Valley and northern tier of the Que Son Mountains, where it saturated the countryside with patrols, ambushes, and occasional multi-company sweeps.

Enemy activity throughout the 5th Marines' area of responsibility, although light during the last week of May and the first days of June, increased sharply both in frequency and intensity as the month progressed with coordinated attacks by fire against An Hoa Combat Base and units in the field. In the early morning hours of 7 June, the enemy subjected An Hoa to a company-size sapper attack, supported by small arms fire, grenades, RPGs, B40 rockets, and approximately 10 rounds from 82mm mortars. Concentrating the attack in two sectors, the enemy broke through the defensive wire, but were driven back and forced to retreat under heavy volumes of Marine small arms, automatic weapons, 81mm mortar, and artillery fire. The action cost elements of the *3d NVA Sapper Battalion* 19 dead and two captured. The captured sappers, according to Colonel Zaro, grateful for their treatment, demonstrated and revealed many of their infiltration techniques.<sup>13</sup>

At approximately the same time, but six kilometers to the west, near the heavily fortified hamlet of An Bang (2) in the Arizona, an unknown-size enemy unit, subsequently identified as an element of the *90th NVA Regiment*, attacked the night defensive position of Lieutenant Colonel Riley's 1st Battalion command



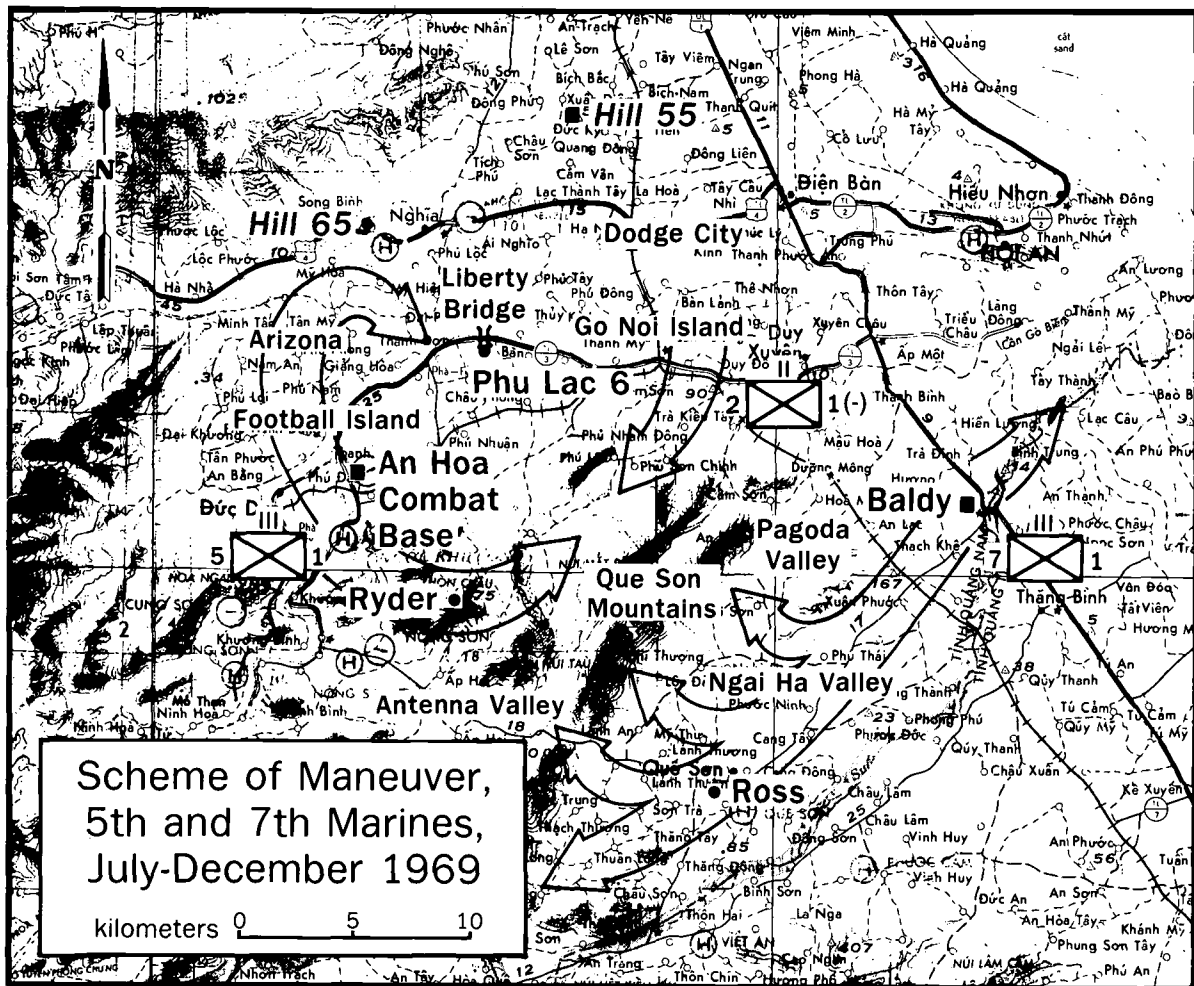
Marine Corps Historical Collection  
*Marines of Company B, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines cross a rice paddy dike while on patrol in the Arizona in search of remnants of the 90th NVA Regiment.*

group and Company A. Over the next 10 days, in a series of battles reminiscent of those fought by the 7th Marines along the Song Vu Gia a month before, Riley's Marines would batter the enemy regiment, finally forcing it to withdraw to the Ong Thu Slope in Base Area 112 to recover.

The attack began shortly after midnight, as the grenade-throwing enemy force, supported by mortars and heavy automatic and small arms fire, came at Riley's Marines from three directions. Employing organic weapons, artillery, and "Spooky" gunship support, the Marines broke the enemy ground attack. A search of the battlefield at first light revealed 11 enemy bodies and three wounded soldiers, who had taken refuge along a rice paddy dike. Throughout most of the next day, the enemy harassed the command group and Company A with mortar and recoilless rifle fire, which Riley's Marines were unable to silence. Late in the afternoon, further east, Company B executed a hasty ambush of 25 NVA troops, resulting in 19 enemy, but no friendly, casualties.

On the morning of the 8th, elements of the *90th Regiment* again attempted to drive Riley's battalion out of the Arizona. Shortly before sunrise, the enemy





See Reference Map, Sections 31-33, 37-39

struck at the command group and Company A, and again the aggressive attack was broken with the assistance of accurate artillery and air support. Later in the day, as the battalion command post attempted to relocate, lead elements of Captain Philip H. Torrey's Company A, acting as security for the move, came under very heavy .30- and .50-caliber machine gun fire. A hasty perimeter was set up while fixed-wing aircraft and artillery peppered the suspected enemy weapons site. With the lifting of supporting arms fire, Company A moved out in the attack, but again came under heavy automatic weapons fire, this time supported by 60mm mortars. In spite of the fire, a platoon of the company was able to establish a toehold on the southern flank of the enemy's perimeter, and batter his positions with machine gun, small arms, and hand-held rocket fire for 90 minutes before being ordered to withdraw because of continued resistance and impending darkness. Once contact was broken, air and

artillery moved in and pounded the enemy position throughout the night.

Following a heavy air, artillery, and mortar bombardment the next morning, the attack resumed. Reinforced by a platoon from Company C, Company A seized and secured the enemy position despite continued resistance. A detailed search of the complex, believed to be the site of the NVA battalion's command post defended by two well-entrenched infantry companies supported by at least one heavy weapons company, revealed 80 enemy bodies.

While Company A continued searching the enemy position, Company B, under Captain Gene E. Castagnetti, moving to assist, came under intensive fire. Sizing up the situation, Castagnetti ordered two of his platoons into the assault, with the remainder of the company providing cover fire for the advance. Expertly maneuvering across 300 meters of fire-swept rice paddies, the two platoons stormed the enemy position,

killing another 75 NVA troops, including the battalion commander, and capturing over 50 small arms weapons and one 12.7mm antiaircraft gun.<sup>14</sup> During the next four days, the battalion command group and Company C again came under a series of large-scale enemy attacks. Although supported by a seemingly endless supply of ordnance, in the form of B40 rockets, RPGs, 82mm and 60mm mortars, recoilless rifles, and heavy machine guns, Riley's Marines forced the North Vietnamese to sacrifice heavily. As a result of these engagements, the enemy lost another 71 troops, among them a company commander, and numerous individual and crew-served weapons.

After the beating on 12 June, enemy activity subsided throughout the Arizona for the next several days as elements of the *90th Regiment* consciously avoided encounters with Riley's patrols. Shortly after midnight on the 17th, they again struck in force. Supported by mortars, B40 rockets, and RPGs, two companies assaulted the battalion's night defensive position from the north and west. Relying on heavy concentrations of artillery, 81mm mortar, and "Spooky" gunship fire, which at times fell within yards of the perimeter, 1st Battalion Marines again beat back the attack in bitter fighting, which lasted over five hours. At midmorning, a sweep of the battlefield found 32 enemy dead, two wounded, and a large quantity of weapons and miscellaneous equipment. Losing over 300 troops in 10 days, major elements of the *90th NVA Regiment* withdrew into Base Area 112, and activity throughout the southern Arizona subsided.

While Lieutenant Colonel Riley's battalion fought the *90th Regiment* in the Arizona and Lieutenant Colonel Higgins' 2d Battalion secured Liberty Bridge and Road (North), Lieutenant Colonel Atkinson's 3d Battalion ended its participation in Operation Pipestone Canyon and began an unnamed, 13-day, search and clear operation in the Phu Loc Valley, aimed at catching enemy troops driven south by the 1st Marines. On 15 June, two companies of Atkinson's Marines crossed the Song Chiem Son from Go Noi and moved up the valley on foot. There they were joined the following day by the command group and the rest of the battalion, which air assaulted into the area. The battalion then searched the rugged, mountainous terrain, south of Alligator Lake, until the 28th, finding only empty base camps, caves, fighting positions, and encountering few enemy troops. On the 28th, Atkinson's Marines withdrew from the valley and flew to An Hoa where they assumed security duty for the base and Liberty Road (South).

During the first week of July, the 5th Marines initiated a cordon and search operation, Forsyth Grove, with the 1st and 2d Battalions, 5th Marines and 1st Battalion, 7th Marines. Conducted in a two-kilometer-square area of the northern Arizona, the objective was successfully cordoned on the south when Riley's Marines moved under cover of darkness into their assigned blocking positions from the southern Arizona. Similarly, the 2d Battalion covertly completed a crossing of the Song Thu Bon and occupied blocking positions to the east. Before sunrise on the 1st, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines forded the Song Vu Gia and closed the trap. Although the combined Marine force encountered token resistance during the search, the 5th Marines reported that the local Viet Cong again were "denied the use and exploitation of a natural sanctuary."<sup>14</sup>

Following the close of the three-day operation in the northern Arizona, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines remained in the area and continued offensive patrol operations while Lieutenant Colonel Higgins' Marines returned to Phu Lac (6) and reassumed security for Liberty Bridge and Road (North), and the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines recrossed the Song Vu Gia. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines now under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John M. Terry, Jr., continued its assigned tasks of defending An Hoa Combat Base, securing the southern portion of Liberty Road, and conducting patrols within the regiment's southern area of operations, southeast of the combat base.

On 18 July, a shift among the regiment's three battalions occurred in preparation for the 5th Marines' last multi-battalion operation of the year on the southern fringe of its area of operations. In order to free the 2d Battalion, two of Lieutenant Colonel Riley's companies moved from the Arizona to Phu Lac (6). At the same time, the remainder of the 1st Battalion airlifted to An Hoa Combat Base, there relieving Lieutenant Colonel Terry's 3d Battalion. Joining the two battalions would be Lieutenant Colonel Glasgow's 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. Site of the 5th Marines-controlled operation was to be a 20-kilometer-square area encompassing Antenna Valley, Phu Loc Valley, and the Que Son Mountains, location of the enemy's old Base Area 116, approximately 10 kilometers southeast of An Hoa Combat Base.

Protruding like spikes into the Quang Nam lowlands, the Que Son Mountains range in height to over 900 meters. Covered with single-canopy jungle and thick underbrush, the chain is punctuated by narrow ridges which drop off into deep ravines. Along



the chain's entire base runs a natural corridor from Antenna Valley in the southwest to Phu Loc Valley in the northeast; the corridor then opens onto Go Noi Island and the Dodge City area, the broad plain south of Da Nang. Scattered along the ridges and in the ravines of the chain were suspected enemy base camps, hospitals, fighting positions, storage areas, and an extensive trail network. Although no enemy force was known to have actually occupied the area since the departure of the *1st VC Regiment* in March, intelligence sources suspected that the elusive headquarters and service elements of *Front 4* and the *36th NVA Regiment* had moved into the region, having been driven out of Dodge City and off Go Noi Island by the 1st Marines during the first month of Operation Pipestone Canyon.

In preparation for the attack and search of the Que Son Mountains, codenamed Durham Peak, two 105mm howitzer batteries of the 11th Marines moved from An Hoa Combat Base on the 19th and established a temporary fire support base on the southern edge of Go Noi Island. As a deceptive measure, they trained their guns northward. Offshore stood the *Boston* (CAG 1), her six 8-inch 55s at the ready. The following morning, Batteries B and F shifted their

tubes 180 degrees, and with the guns of the *Boston*, unleashed a barrage against preselected targets throughout the operational area. Simultaneously, the 37th Battalion, 1st ARVN Ranger Group assaulted into a previously prepared fire support base and several landing zones in the upper reaches of Antenna Valley, establishing positions aimed at blocking enemy escape routes out of the valley. Later in the day, Lieutenant Colonel Terry's 3d Battalion joined the ARVN Rangers in the area of operations and set up blocking positions to the west and southwest. Both assaults went unopposed, the day being marred only by the crash of a MAG-16 CH-46 helicopter in which several Rangers were killed. The following day, Lieutenant Colonel Glasgow's 2d Battalion helilifted into three landing zones in the Phu Loc Valley and established positions astride known enemy escape routes from the Que Son Mountains to the north and northeast. Elements of the Americal Division's 196th Brigade set up blocking positions to the east and southeast, in the Que Son Valley, completing the circle. Lieutenant Colonel Higgins' 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, designated regimental reserve, remained at Phu Lac (6).

As company patrols moved out from their initial landing zones, they discovered extensive bunker com-

*Elements of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines find the terrain difficult during search operations for the elusive headquarters of Front 4 thought to be in the Que Son Mountains.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A372128



plexes, caves, hootches, supply caches, and numerous NVA graves. Most bunkers and hootches, however, showed damage as a result of B-52 bombing raids (Arc Lights), carried out in the Que Son Mountains prior to the operation. Enemy resistance was light, stemming primarily from small groups attempting to evade ARVN and Marine forces. But as the Marines moved to higher ground, specifically toward Nui Mat Rang and Nui Da Beo, activity intensified as enemy troops employed an ever-increasing number of sniper teams and ambushes.

On 25 July, as Marines of Company H, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines moved up a narrow, well-used trail toward the top of Nui Mat Rang (Hill 845), they came under heavy sniper fire from a rock ledge, 100 meters above. Responding with small arms, and rocket and machine gun fire from an orbiting Rockwell OV-10A (Bronco), the company forced the snipers to withdraw. The following morning, the company's 3d platoon moved back to the area of the previous day's encounter, and was ambushed by an estimated company of NVA soldiers. As Second Lieutenant Robert A. Lavery, of the 1st Platoon, later reported:

They had set up foxholes and positions off to one side of the trail . . . . As the point man came up they shot him. They couldn't see much of the killing zone because of the heavy vegetation, but the field of fire was cleared so low that they originally shot everybody in the legs that came into it. As people would come into it to assist a wounded person, . . . they would get shot in the legs. Then once they were down, they had one sniper that would either shoot them in the head or the back.<sup>16</sup>

As a result of the tactic, NVA sharpshooters killed six and wounded 16 without, it was thought, losing a man.

Efforts to extract the embattled platoon proved difficult as communications had broken down, causing confusion as to the platoon's exact location. Air and artillery were called in on what was thought to be the enemy's position, but, as it was later determined, the air strikes and artillery rounds impacted more than 1,000 meters to the southwest. In addition, a medical evacuation helicopter, endeavoring to bring out the dead and wounded, was shot down, compelling reinforcements which otherwise would have been sent to assist the 3d Platoon, to be diverted away in order to establish security for the downed CH-46. Despite these unfortunate events, reinforcements eventually reached the embattled unit and the platoon, with its casualties, returned to the company's position

near the summit of Hill 845, where a jungle penetrator extracted the wounded.

As the month drew to a close, both Terry's and Glasgow's Marines continued to push deeper into the mountains, following the extensive enemy trail network instead of moving cross-country through the thick jungle terrain. "The NVA travel the trails," noted Lieutenant Lavery, and "everything they have is along the trails. If we are going to find them or any of their gear, it is going to be along the trails, not on cross-country sweeps."<sup>17</sup> Lavery's observation proved correct: discoveries of bunkers, caves, and hidden encampments along the trails increased with elevation, as did the number of brief firefights with small groups of enemy troops, employing a wide range of delaying tactics. Simultaneously, enemy sightings by elements of the Americal's 196th Light Infantry Brigade and 5th ARVN Regiment, providing flank security in the Que Son lowlands, increased as a result of the Marines' push to the southeast. It was Colonel Zaro's belief that the blocks by these units were ineffective and permitted groups of enemy to escape to the south and east.<sup>18</sup>

Operating along the ridgelines and among the draws of the Que Son's created a number of problems for the two Marine battalions, chief among them, resupply. The rugged terrain, high winds, and small landing zones atop mountain peaks forced many Marine helicopter pilots to cancel direct landings and concentrate instead on resupply drops, which they often lost, forcing both Terry's and Glasgow's Marines to exist for extended periods on Long Range rations and to obtain water from local streams. The lack of purified water and adequate supplies of malaria pills produced an abnormally high incidence of the disease and related fevers in the Marines participating in the operation.<sup>19</sup>

On 31 July, Colonel Zaro committed Lieutenant Colonel James H. Higgins' 2d Battalion, 5th Marines to Durham Peak, which immediately established blocking positions near Hill 848 in the center of the area of operations. Three days later, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines relieved its sister battalion in place, continuing patrols in the Que Son highlands in search of enemy units and base camps.

By the end of the first week of August, the ground had been covered and encounters had dwindled to a few short, sporadic, but fierce, hit-and-run attacks. Based on all available intelligence, the enemy remaining in the area consisted largely of the sick and wounded—the able-bodied having fragmented into



Marine Corps Historical Collection

*Members of the 106mm Recoilless Rifle Platoon, Headquarters and Service Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines fire at an enemy target from a position on Hill 848.*

small groups and fled into the lowlands. On the 7th, the withdrawal began with the return of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and a battery of the 11th Marines to their bases in the Quang Nam lowlands. The next day, the 1st ARVN Ranger Group began its withdrawal to An Hoa Combat Base, followed by the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines and elements of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines on the 12th. The final phase of the measured withdrawal took place on the 13th, when the remaining batteries of 2d Battalion, 11th Marines and companies of 3d Battalion, 5th Marines helilifted from the Que Son Mountains to the regimental combat base at An Hoa.

With the termination of Durham Peak, the 5th Marines returned to a changed area of operation brought about by the southward shift of the 7th Marines. Of particular significance was the assumption of responsibility for the Thuong Duc Valley, north of the Song Vu Gia, including the outpost at Hill 65 and the southern slope of Charlie Ridge. On 14 August, elements of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines relieved the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines on Hill 65, while the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines moved into the southern Arizona two days later.

Under the leadership of the new regimental commander, Colonel Noble L. Beck, who relieved Colonel Zaro on the 16th, the three battalions of the 5th Marines concentrated on a variety of missions within their respective areas of operation. At Liberty Bridge, Lieutenant Colonel Riley's 1st Battalion continued defensive operations in areas adjacent to the vital river

crossing, while providing security patrols for truck convoys along Liberty Road, north of An Hoa Combat Base. To the northwest, the 2d Battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Higgins, relieved on the 24th by Lieutenant Colonel James T. Bowen, confined its operations to company-size patrols and participation in the district pacification program, north of the Song Vu Gia, within the villages surrounding Hill 65. Lieutenant Colonel Terry's 3d Battalion, operating within the Arizona, initially concentrated its efforts on destroying NVA and guerrilla havens and on interdicting enemy movement throughout the Phu Loi and Nam An village complexes, south of the Song Vu Gia and east of the Finger Lakes, and then in areas of central and southern Arizona.

Contact within the regimental area was unusually light during the remainder of August, but with the new month, enemy activity intensified, most notably within the boundaries of the Arizona. Operating in terrain characterized by low hills, numerous tree lines, and rice paddies, Lieutenant Colonel Terry's Marines, first independently and then in conjunction with elements of the 1st ARVN Ranger Group, experienced a number of sharp, violent clashes with units of the reintroduced *90th NVA Regiment*, while continually being subjected to a large volume of harassing small arms, mortar, and rocket fire. On 11 September, while Company I moved across an open rice paddy toward a tree line between the villages of Ham Tay (1) and Ben Dau (3), near the Song Thu Bon, approximately 30 enemy troops took the company under heavy au-

tomatic weapons, rocket grenade, and mortar fire. Almost simultaneously, the battalion's S-3, Major Martin J. Dahlquist, stepped on a well-concealed enemy mine, that shattered his leg and slightly wounded two other Marines. Although periodic sniper fire hampered helicopter operations, the medical evacuation was accomplished without damage to aircraft or loss of additional personnel.<sup>20</sup>

The Marines of Company I quickly returned fire, and called for air strikes, interspersed with artillery. Following a shift of artillery fire onto likely escape routes, Captain William M. Kay ordered a frontal assault and simultaneous flank envelopment. Kay's Marines moved rapidly through the enemy position, searching tree lines, bunkers, and spider holes, finding 12 NVA bodies and 16 weapons, including a Soviet carriage-mounted, heavy machine gun. Later in the day and early the next morning, Captain Kay's company again came under intense mortar and small arms fire, resulting in an additional 18 casualties. Two days later, the company, in addition to the rest of the battalion, withdrew from the Arizona and moved by air

to Phu Lac (6), where it assumed responsibility for the security of Liberty Bridge and Liberty Road. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, in turn, helilifted into the Arizona.

Towards the end of September, all three battalions began rice denial and destruction operations within their respective areas of responsibility. Working in conjunction with ARVN and district forces, designated 5th Marine units were to protect Vietnamese farmers during the fall rice harvest, assist in the removal of the crop to secure storage areas, and aid in the destruction of enemy-controlled fields identified by district officials. In addition, on 27-28 September, 5th Marine units provided security for elections to the Quang Nam Lower House of Representatives through screening operations, extensive patrols, and ambushes, while regional, provincial, and National Police forces provided close-in security. During the two days of election security operations, there was no attempt by the enemy to disrupt the voting within the 5th Marines area of operations.

Conditions during the month of October within the

*Navy Corpsman Anthony Fodale checks the pulse of one of four wounded North Vietnamese Army soldiers found in an abandoned hospital complex by elements of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines while on a patrol 11 kilometers east of An Hoa Combat Base.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A372184



regiment's area of responsibility could only be characterized by one word—wet. The northeast monsoon dumped a total of 40 inches of rain, raising river and stream levels as much as eight feet above normal. Flood conditions made movement in the lowlands difficult if not impossible. As a result, the 1st Battalion, now under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Joseph K. Griffis, Jr., pulled out of the Arizona and moved to An Hoa where it conducted defensive patrol operations in and around the combat base, cordon and search operations with Combined Action Company 29 and Duc Duc District forces near the villages of Mau Chanh (2) and Thu Bon (5), and company patrols near Tick Lake, southeast of An Hoa. On the 18th, Griffis' Marines returned to the rain-soaked Arizona and resumed search and rice denial operations begun the previous month.

To the north in the high ground, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines continued, despite the monsoon, search and destroy operations in the Thuong Duc Valley and security patrols along Route 4. The scene was different at Liberty Bridge. The Song Thu Bon quickly rose to 17 feet above normal, covering the bridge with six feet of water and forcing Lieutenant Colonel Terry's battalion to higher ground. Flood waters rose so rapidly on the night of 5 October that a security platoon and a four-man watchtower guard were cut off and had to be rescued by lifeline and helicopter. As a result of flood conditions and subsequent bridge and road damage, truck convoys were halted and resupply of An Hoa Combat Base carried out by Marine helicopters and Air Force C-130 transports. The river subsided enough for Terry's battalion to return to normal security positions, and for elements of the 7th Engineer Battalion to begin repair of the bridge's southern approach on the 13th. By 21 October, with temporary repairs completed, "Rough Rider" truck convoys again moved down Liberty Road toward An Hoa Combat Base. The regiment reported no injuries as a result of bunker, fighting position, and other field emplacement cave-ins.<sup>21</sup>

Following the two weeks of heavy monsoon rains, enemy activity within the regimental area of operations progressively increased, notably within northern Arizona. Situated north of An Hoa, west of Dai Loc, and south of Hill 65, between the Song Vu Gia and Song Thu Bon, this small triangular area had long been a region of intense enemy activity as it sat astride major east-west infiltration routes. In addition, intelligence sources reported that local guerrillas of the

*Q83d Battalion*, recently resupplied with ammunition from Base Area 112, were about to attack across the Song Vu Gia into heavily populated Dai Loc District. Consequently, plans for a multi-battalion search and clear operation were drawn up, to be put into effect at the end of the month.

Early on the morning of the 30th, Lieutenant Colonel Griffis' Companies A and D moved out of the southern Arizona and established two blocking positions paralleling a stream which ran from My Hoa (3) to Phu Long (1) in northern Arizona. Simultaneously, Company I, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines crossed the Song Thu Bon by LVTs near "Football Island," secured a landing zone for elements of 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, and then moved into blocking positions near the eastern tip of the Arizona. With the insertion of Lieutenant Colonel Bowen's command group, Companies G and H, and the establishment of an additional block by Regional Force Company 369 along the Song Thu Bon, aggressive search operations began in the loosely cordoned area.<sup>22</sup>

Concentrating on squad-size patrols, the combined force searched the paddy-dotted area, discovering numerous bunkers, food caches, dud rounds, and boobytraps. With the exception of two clashes with 10 to

*Members of the 2d Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines ford a monsoon-swollen stream while searching the Arizona during operations in November.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection



15 enemy troops, engagements consisted of numerous encounters with small units of three to four rice-gatherers. After 10 days of successful small-unit engagements, during which the combined force accounted for more than 100 enemy troops killed, elements of Lieutenant Colonel Bowen's battalion withdrew to the Thuong Duc Valley, and Lieutenant Colonel Terry's Marines moved out of their blocking position, back across the Song Thu Bon and resumed operations near Liberty Bridge; Lieutenant Colonel Griffis' Marines returned to their normal area of responsibility in southern Arizona.

Late on 17 November, operations within northern Arizona began anew with the reinsertion of two companies of the 2d Battalion in the guise of resupplying the 1st Battalion. Under cover of darkness, Lieutenant Colonel Bowen's Marines then moved into the attack, while both Griffis' and Terry's Marines entered the area and reoccupied their original blocking positions. Three days of maneuvering followed during which the three battalions pushed a large number of enemy troops onto Football Island in the Song Thu Bon. An intensive search of the island followed on the heels of massed, pre-planned, time-on-target artillery fire by the 11th Marines.\* Forced into an ever smaller area, approximately 40 enemy troops attempted to escape the island on the night of 20 November, but were ambushed by Griffis' blocking forces, who killed 18 and captured a large quantity of arms and foodstuffs. With the ambush of the remnants of the *Q83 Battalion*, operations in northern Arizona ceased and all regimental units, with the exception of the 1st and 3d Battalions which exchanged areas of responsibility, returned to their normal operational areas.

Throughout the final month of the year, the 5th Marines continued aggressive search operations throughout the An Hoa basin aimed at blocking enemy infiltration and destroying his sources of food. North of the Song Vu Gia, 1st Battalion Marines, in conjunction with Regional Force Company 193, concentrated on small-unit patrols in the Thuong Duc Valley and company-size operations in the thick canopy and steep hills of Charlie Ridge, while supplementing An Hoa base defenses. The 2d Battalion carried out similar operations in the Arizona. Until relieved on 23 December by the 3d Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Bowen's Marines, in close coordination with

elements of the 51st ARVN Regiment, employed company- and platoon-size patrols and night ambushes in an effort to counter small groups of enemy moving through the region on food-gathering missions. The combined effort, which would last into the new year, achieved limited gains due to the highly successful operation carried out in November.

During the first two weeks of December, 3d Battalion Marines under Lieutenant Colonel Johan S. Gestson, who relieved Lieutenant Colonel Terry on the 9th, continued to provide security for Liberty Bridge and Liberty Road, while conducting patrols and ambushes throughout the expanse of the regiment's eastern area of operations. On the 16th, the battalion displaced to An Hoa in preparation for the transfer of its area of responsibility to the 2d Battalion. While at the combat base, the regiment received intelligence reports indicating that enemy forces in the Que Son Mountains were preparing to attack the base. As a result, Colonel Beck ordered a preemptive strike, directing Lieutenant Colonel Gestson to split his force into two provisional battalions: Command Group Alpha, consisting of Companies I, K, and M; and Command Group Bravo, composed of Companies L, E, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, and C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. Group Alpha, commanded by Gestson, jumped off on 17 December for a five-day search and clear operation in the northern Que Sons, while Group Bravo, commanded by the battalion's executive officer, Major Denver T. Dale III, assumed complete responsibility for the security of Liberty Bridge, Liberty Road, and the regiment's eastern area of operations.

On 23 December, following several days of very little activity in the Que Sons, Command Group Alpha helilifted into the Arizona, relieving the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines of responsibility for the area. The next day, Colonel Beck deactivated both command groups and ordered Lieutenant Colonel Bowen's Marines to assume control of the eastern area of operations. Throughout the remainder of the month, Gestson's Marines conducted extensive patrols and rice denial operations within the Arizona, employing a denial technique, codenamed "Operation Butterfly," pioneered earlier.\*\* Split into 10-man teams and equipped with detonation cord, elements of the battalion helilifted into areas containing enemy controlled

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\*Time-on-target denotes the method of firing on a target in which various artillery units so time their fire as to assure all projectiles reach the target simultaneously.

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\*\*For a detailed discussion of Operation Butterfly, see Colonel Noble L. Beck, "Rice Krispies Nipped in the Bud," *Marine Corps Gazette*, May70, p. 50.

seedling beds. With the “det” cord and gasoline, Gestson’s battalion destroyed the seedlings before they could be transplanted into paddies—maximizing destruction in a minimum amount of time. Utilizing this technique, the battalion and the regiment destroyed 760 rice seedlings beds, averaging 400 meters square: potentially enough rice to supply a company-size unit

for months. This rice denial technique, combined with extensive patrols and night ambushes and the rotation of battalions into the Arizona at approximately one-month intervals, would continue to aid the 5th Marines in inflicting significant losses and reducing the enemy’s freedom of movement throughout the An Hoa basin during the coming year.



## Da Nang and the Que Son Valley

*The 7th Marines—26th Marines: Protecting the Northern Flank  
Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Battleground—Results*

### *The 7th Marines*

North of the 5th Marines' TAOR and west of that of the 1st Marines, the 7th Marines defended a large area of responsibility stretching from Elephant Valley in the northwest to the Thuong Duc Valley in the southwest, west of Da Nang. Although dominated by Charlie Ridge, a hill mass that projected from the Annamite Mountains and constituted a much-used enemy base area, the regimental area included a variety of terrain. To the north, the rolling, brush-covered foothills, interspersed with few hamlets and patches of woods, predominated, while to the south were the steep-sided, jungle-covered walls of Thuong Duc Valley and the broad, rice-paddied flood plain of the Song Vu Gia and Song Yen. Besides Routes 4 and 540, few roads crisscrossed the TAOR. The same could not be said for enemy infiltration routes. The regiment's area of operations, elongated as it was, sat astride all known routes from the western mountains into the Da Nang Vital Area.

With the end of operations in the mountains to the west, Colonel Robert L. Nichols' 1st and 3d Battalions returned to the regiment's TAOR at the beginning of June, where they rejoined the 2d Battalion, which had maintained a screen in the piedmont throughout Operation Oklahoma Hills. Based at Dai La Pass, Lieutenant Colonel Marvin H. Lugger's 2d Battalion, reinforced from time to time by two additional companies of the regiment, continued its mission of providing security for the Da Nang Vital Area by aggressively patrolling and ambushing throughout its TAOR, while strengthening and improving the Da Nang Barrier.

III MAF envisioned the barrier, or as it was later known, the Da Nang Anti-infiltration System (DAIS), as the first line of defense for the city, its vital military installations, and surrounding populated areas. In June 1968, the 1st Marine Division, at the direction of III MAF, began construction of a physical barrier along the outer edges of the rocket belt, a 12,000-meter semicircle centered on the Da Nang airfield whose radius was the maximum range of the enemy's 122mm and 140mm rockets. The project, as initially conceived, was

to consist of a 500-meter-wide cleared belt of land containing two parallel barbed wire fences, concertina wire entanglements, 23 observation towers, and minefields which would halt or at least delay enemy infiltrators. Although work continued throughout the remainder of 1968, by the beginning of 1969, the barrier remained uncompleted.

Under a revised plan prepared by General Simpson in March 1969, the final sections would be completed, and five Marine rifle companies and a supporting artillery group of two 105mm howitzer batteries, the entire force under the direct operational control of the 1st Division, would be assigned to guard the barrier. According to General Simpson's proposal, the system, when completed, would require no more than 1,800 Marines to keep the enemy out of the rocket belt, freeing nearly 5,000 Marines for offensive operations elsewhere.

By the beginning of June, Marine, ARVN, and Korean engineers had cleared the land, and had finished laying barbed wire, minefields, and over 100 line sensors, but little else. Divided responsibility, poor site planning, and the lack of manpower, materiel, and a well-coordinated fire support plan continued to prevent completion of the system. The installation of the elaborate array of sensors and indirect observation devices had not been accomplished, nor had the forces to monitor them or guard the barrier been assembled. Older portions of the barrier now were deteriorating. Brush, in places 18 feet high, covered portions of the cleared strip, and numerous cuts had been made by farmers bound for their rice fields through the unguarded wire. "Unless radical improvements are made," General Simpson stressed, "the Da Nang Barrier will prove to be ineffectual in countering enemy infiltration into the Da Nang Vital Area."<sup>1</sup> It was this concern which prompted the assignment of elements of Lieutenant Colonel Lugger's battalion to the barrier. Likewise, Lieutenant Colonel James O. Allison's 3d Battalion, designated the regiment's mobile strike battalion, initially was assigned to the barrier following Operation Oklahoma Hills, and tasked with repairing the wire and installing a string of sensors from the Song Tuy Loan to the Song Yen, before moving on to

a number of short, swift strikes into Dodge City, Bo Ban-Duong Lam villages, and Sherwood Forest-An Tan Ridge areas later in the month.

While work on the barrier consumed a portion of the efforts of the 2d and 3d Battalions, Lieutenant Colonel John A. Dowd's 1st Battalion, following its return to the lowlands, concentrated on operations along Route 4 and the Song Vu Gia from Hill 37 near Dai Loc, west to Thuong Duc, in order to reestablish a presence along the road and to block major river fords. These efforts bore fruit on the night of the 19th, when a Company D platoon ambush spotted an equal number of Viet Cong crossing the Song Vu Gia, 10 kilometers west-northwest of Liberty Bridge. The ambush, waiting until the enemy reached midstream, employed organic weapons and artillery fire, killing 20 of the infiltrators. Three nights later, three kilometers downstream, another ambush was sprung, catching eight more Viet Cong and capturing over 1,000 pounds of tea. On 30 June, Allison's 3d Battalion relieved Dowd's Marines in place, as the 1st Battalion, reinforced by one company of the 3d, joined elements of the 5th Marines in the northern Arizona for Operation Forsyth Grove.

Following the three-day Arizona operation, Lieutenant Colonel Dowd's Marines moved back across the Song Vu Gia, relieved the 3d Battalion, and immediately began extensive patrols along the western sections of Route 4. By the end of the first week of July, the 1st Marines, working to the east, completed upgrading the route from Hoi An to the railroad berm, and Dowd's battalion had secured the road and its bridges from Dai Loc to Thuong Duc. On the 10th, the Marines officially opened Route 4 and the first civilian convoy in four years made its way across Dodge City to Dai Loc and then up the Thuong Duc Valley, accomplishing a major goal of the 1st Division's Operation Pipestone Canyon.

Dowd's Marines continued to maintain security for Route 4 until 17 July, when the battalion, relieved by Allison's Marines, again crossed the Song Vu Gia into the Arizona, this time freeing 5th Marines units for operations in the Que Son Mountains. "We landed across the Vu Gia River," reported First Lieutenant Raymond A. Hord, Commanding Officer, Company C, and then "deployed four companies abreast of one another and had a coordinated sweep to the south; two companies through the My Binh region, about 4,000 meters to the east."<sup>2</sup> Once established on the high ground, 3,000 meters into the Arizona, each company sent out squad-size patrols and night am-



Marine Corps Historical Collection  
*Col Gildo S. Codispoti, right, assumes the helm of the 7th Marines from Col Robert L. Nichols at change of command ceremonies held at Hill 55 on 9 July.*

bushes which encountered numerous enemy reconnaissance and small foraging and ammunition-carrying parties. On occasion the companies combined for sweeps and cordons of specific areas. In one instance, while Companies B and D provided deep security, Company C advanced into the Nam An (5) village complex to conduct a cordon and achieved unexpected results. Lieutenant Hord noted:

We moved very late at night, had a good night move during which the forward elements of my company moved very quietly, and we had a good sound plan in setting up on the objective once we got to it. The second platoon, commanded by Second Lieutenant [Anthony H.] Yusi, moved into the right side of the objective, tied in at 12 o'clock, using north as our direction of advance, set his people down very quietly and waited for the first platoon to move in with him. The first platoon, led by [Second] Lieutenant [Ronald W.] Costello, effected the move nicely, did tie in at 12 o'clock and this led for the CP group, led by myself, and the battalion CP group with [Lieutenant] Colonel Dowd and his staff to move right in behind us. We moved into the center of the village that was encompassed by the two platoons to our north and the third platoon tied in to our rear, so we had a very sound cordon in a matter of minutes. And much to the surprise of five NVA ammo humpers sleeping, we woke them up while they were in their bunker and in a matter of about 15 minutes had five POWs.<sup>3</sup>

This constant, although low-keyed, patrol and sweep activity continued throughout the remainder of July and into the first 10 days of August.

Beginning late on the 11th, conditions worsened. That evening, every major unit throughout the 1st Marine Division area of operations was hit by either mortar or rocket fire, accompanied in most instances by a predawn enemy sapper attack. The heaviest fighting occurred in the Arizona, where Lieutenant Colonel Dowd's battalion initiated a three-day battle, reminiscent of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines encounter in June with a large enemy force, later identified as composed of the *8th and 9th Battalions, 90th NVA Regiment* and *1st Battalion, 368B Artillery (Rocket) Regiment*, which again was attempting to move through the area under cover of the intense series of indirect fire attacks.

At 0415 on the 12th, a Company D listening post and a Company B squad ambush engaged two enemy soldiers sighted midway between their positions, whereupon 15 to 20 enemy directed small arms fire against the two Marine security elements, who then withdrew once reinforced. As the security elements returned to their positions, each of Dowd's companies simultaneously came under heavy, but sporadic, enemy fire, which continued throughout the night. Activation of preplanned artillery concentrations about the friendly positions staved off a major enemy attempt to mass against a single company target. At first light, with air strikes and artillery fire placed on suspected routes of escape, Dowd's Marines swept the site of the predawn firefights. In the vicinity of the initial action, sweeping units found 58 NVA killed, 2 wounded, who were taken prisoner, and 16 AK47 rifles, 3 light machine guns, 3 grenade launchers, and a large assortment of ordnance.

In an effort to relocate the enemy force, Lieutenant Hord's company began sweeping to the northeast shortly after sunrise. At 0830, Hord's Marines regained contact. The enemy was by then deployed in bunkers within a tree line near the villages of Phu An (1) and (2), some six kilometers northwest of An Hoa Combat Base. Consolidating his position for a subsequent assault, Lieutenant Hord directed a coordinated air and artillery attack against the enemy's fortified positions. By 1330, Lieutenant Colonel Dowd committed Company D to cover Hord's right flank, and both companies then prepared to assault. Despite the results of the heavy air and artillery concentration, which made movement through the thick tree line difficult,

the enemy mustered enough strength to oppose the Marine assault. Lieutenant Hord observed:

In essence we had four platoons on line with awesome firepower going into this objective. We got the people up and we moved forward and got inside the tree lines, through the first initial trench networks. In the first trench line we found several NVA bodies, well-equipped NVA, quite young, well-equipped with web gear, grenades, AK47s, helmets, and B40 rocket launchers. In one bunker complex, as we moved through there, we had to assault one with two machine guns which had excellent grazing fire over our positions, and it is very hard to describe the efforts and the courage that each individual Marine displayed in the company as we moved forward assaulting these positions: throwing grenades, shooting LAWs, trying to envelop, getting pinned-down, getting up and moving again. This was just head-on-type stuff, grenade throwing, and almost hand-to-hand combat. On each occasion, as soon as we would secure 10 meters of ground we would come under attack again from the next network of trenches. The NVA were very well dug in and they were waiting for us.<sup>4</sup>

At 1430, Company A, maneuvering toward the battle area, caught a portion of the enemy force, either attempting to outflank the two Marine companies or to flee. By late afternoon, the main assault had broken through the tree line and routed the defenders. Air and artillery peppered the remnants as they fled to the north and northwest. All fighting ceased shortly before sunset, and the 1st Battalion established night defensive positions. Enemy losses for the daylong battle were 145 killed and 50 individual and automatic weapons captured.

Ordered to reinforce Dowd's Marines, Company L, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines moved by helicopter, and Company I, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines advanced overland by foot on the afternoon of the 12th. Neither was committed immediately, but instead held in blocking positions as a reserve. Beginning at dawn on the 13th, and preceded by an air and artillery preparation, Company I joined 1st Battalion Marines in a four-company-front, northeasterly attack through the Finger Lake region of the Arizona. At midday, the attacking force engaged an estimated 100-man NVA unit in a skirmish which lasted some seven hours. Like the previous days' battles, the fighting was again at close quarters, with Marines inflicting 73 casualties, while sustaining 5 killed and 33 wounded. Included among the dead was Lieutenant Colonel Dowd, subsequently awarded the Navy Cross, who was felled by a burst of enemy automatic weapons fire as he and a portion of his command group endeavored to maneuver toward the site of the day's heaviest fighting. Thirty-nine-year-

old Lieutenant Colonel Frank A. Clark assumed command of the battalion the following day.

On the 14th, the enemy again attacked. Just after midnight, a remnant of the scattered NVA force attempted to breach the battalion command group's night defensive position, overlooking the Song Vu Gia, near the village of My Hoa (3). Employing the full spectrum of organic and supporting arms, Clark's Marines beat back the attempt, breaking what was to be the enemy's final and somewhat feeble bid to gain a victory at any cost in the Arizona during August. A sweep of the perimeter at dawn revealed 13 bodies and 10 weapons. In three days, the reinforced 1st Battalion had inflicted over 220 casualties, severely disabling the *90th NVA Regiment* and forcing it again to withdraw in order to regroup.

Within hours of the last engagement in the Arizona, the 7th Marines, under World War II and Korean combat veteran, Colonel Gildo S. Codispoti, who had

*A Marine shoulders an M79 grenade launcher and fires into a treeline suspected of harboring several Viet Cong guerrillas during the heavy Arizona fighting.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A371757



taken over the regiment in July, received final orders from III MAF and the division to stand down in preparation for a move south into the Que Son Valley, also known as the Nui Loc Son basin. Recent Marine multi-battalion and special landing force operations had denied the enemy use of his traditional infiltration routes through the An Hoa basin, as well as access to Dodge City and Go Noi Island, forcing him to shift a larger portion of his operations into the Que Son Mountains and Valley, where elements of the Army's Americal Division likewise had disrupted his movement. This southward expansion of the 1st Marine Division area of responsibility was the next step in the continuing battle to deny the enemy access to the populated and rice-rich coastal lowlands of Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces. In addition to allowing Vietnamese regular and territorial forces a greater role in the defense of the Da Nang Vital Area, this shift not only brought the whole of Quang Nam Province, but also key terrain features, previously divided between the two divisions, under control of the 1st Marine Division.

The move of the 7th Marines 54 kilometers to the southeast was fraught with problems from the beginning. This was not to be a short tactical move, but a permanent one. In addition to men and equipment based at the regiment's seven cantonments scattered throughout the soon-to-be-vacated area of operations, all property assigned to the regiment would also be moved, necessitating use of the division's entire rolling stock. First to go would be the 2d Battalion. By the morning of the 15th, Lieutenant Colonel Luger's Marines and their equipment were loaded on board 120 trucks at Dai La Pass and ready to head down Highway 1. "This was," according to Major Peter S. Beck, regimental S-4, "the greatest single mistake we could have made, since it became readily apparent that it was absolutely impossible to control 120 vehicles in one convoy on a narrow dirt road, many sections of which were only passable one way at a time."<sup>5</sup>

What occurred later in the day on the 15th could only be termed a fiasco. As Luger's Marines moved south, without the aid of control vehicles or military police stationed at obvious choke points, unbeknownst, a 35-truck, 9th Engineer convoy, loaded with wide-angle-bladed Eimco tractors, was moving north from Chu Lai. They met at the one place on Route 1 that could have precipitated the worst bottleneck possible: a one-way, one-vehicle-at-a-time, pontoon bridge. Riding in front of the 120-truck convoy was Major Beck, and as he later reported:



Marine Corps Historical Collection

*Infantrymen of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines patrol a Vietnamese village near Landing Zone Baldy, while the rest of the regiment pushes westward into the Que Son Valley.*

Needless to say, the tractor-trailers going north completely blocked the road so that the southbound convoy could not cross and could not pass if they could cross. And the northbound convoy, which was the tractor-trailers with the bulldozers, completely blocked their portion of the road. Consequently, we had a four-and-one-half-hour bottleneck at this bridge, which ate up most of the day, and additionally, at one point in the road, concentrated in excess of 150 pieces of large rolling stock plus all the equipment that they were carrying and troops . . . We finally managed to un-snarl the bottleneck, by allowing the northbound convoy, with the wide-load angle blades, to pass first because there was no way possible for the southbound convoy to pass. In doing this we had to back up the 120 trucks off the right shoulder of the road, so that the truck convoy going north could pass. This was an unbelievable task, since Marines who can't move in either direction become very frustrated and all of a sudden we had 1,000 traffic control personnel; everybody thinking they knew exactly what they were doing.<sup>8</sup>

The Marines finally resolved the problem and the convoy continued; however, it was so late in the day when it arrived at LZ Baldy that it could not proceed to its final destination, LZ Ross, 16 kilometers inland.

Again, this presented an unacceptable tactical situation: 120 trucks and a large proportion of Luggers' Marines sitting on Baldy's landing strip—a lucrative mortar target. The battalion convoy was in fact mortared on the night of the 15th, but fortunately only one Marine was wounded. The following morning, the convoy traveled the 16 kilometers along Route 535 to LZ Ross without incident.

With one battalion's move completed, the movement procedures and schedule of the remaining two had to be revised due to the problems encountered on the 15th. In discussions which followed the move, division and regimental planners decided that instead of trucks, CH-53 helicopters would be used to move troops, while equipment would be carried by 30-truck convoys spaced over a period of days, instead of a single, 120-truck convoy. In addition, military police would be assigned to each bridge, choke point, and curve, and "roadmaster" jeeps would patrol Highway 1, regulating the flow of traffic. Beginning on the 17th,



men and equipment of the 3d, and then the 1st Battalion, moved without incident to LZ Baldy, and by 23 August, the regiment had settled into its new area of operations, which encompassed a large portion of the Que Son Valley.<sup>7</sup>

Lying south of the rugged, jungle-covered Que Son Mountains, the fertile Que Son Valley spread north-eastward from its head at Hiep Duc into the coastal plain between Hoi An and Tam Ky. Running through its center, in an easterly and then northeasterly direction, was the Song Ly Ly which marked the boundary between Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces, and also the new areas of responsibility of the 1st Marine and Americal Divisions.

As a major enemy thoroughfare, the region had experienced much warfare. In the Que Son Mountains, ridgelines, ravines, and caves hid enemy base camps and harboring sites, all within easy striking distance of the populated coast. The valley, with its many Viet Cong-controlled hamlets, was a major source of food and manpower. From the war's earliest stages, Communist main force elements roamed the area, and as a result, it was the site of one of the Marines' first large-scale operations in 1965. The Marines returned in 1966 and again in 1967, but as North Vietnamese pressure along the DMZ pulled the Marines northward, the Army took over responsibility. On 20 August 1969, the Army officially handed back the defense of the northern portion of the Nui Loc Son Basin, as the 7th Marines moved into the Que Son Valley.

From the Army, the 7th Marines inherited two combat bases, both located on Route 535, a narrow dirt road which ran westward from Route 1 to the district headquarters at Que Son. There the road divided, with Route 535 continuing southward into the Americal TAOR, while the northern fork, Route 536, climbed over the Que Son Mountains, through Antenna Valley, and then into the An Hoa basin. LZ Baldy, formerly the command post of the Army's 196th Infantry Brigade and now site of the 7th Marines' Headquarters, was the easternmost of the two bases, located at the intersection of Route 535 and Route 1, about 30 kilometers south of Da Nang. Sixteen kilometers west, near Que Son District Headquarters, was Fire Support Base Ross, which commanded the Que Son Valley.

Within days of the arrival of the 7th Marines, heavy fighting erupted in the rolling foothills around Hiep Duc, some 32 kilometers west of Tam Ky, at the head of the Que Son Valley. Triggered by elements of the 196th Infantry Brigade endeavoring to reach a downed

helicopter, the Army's 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry locked horns with elements of the *1st VC Regiment* and *3d Regiment, 2d NVA Division*, both of which were attempting to destroy the government's model pacification effort at Hiep Duc. By 20 August, the 31st Infantry had killed over 300 enemy troops, and was still heavily engaged. The following day, the Army battalion requested the 7th Marines provide "any size unit" to relieve the pressure by sweeping a finger of the Que Son Mountains to the east of their position. At 1400, in over-100-degree heat, two of Lieutenant Colonel Lugger's companies, F and G, in addition to the battalion's Alpha command group, left FSB Ross and advanced down Route 535 towards the hill mass, thought to contain an NVA battalion and regimental command post.<sup>8</sup>

Early on the morning of the 22d, Company F moved up Hill 441, north of the village of Phu Binh (3), and then back down where it joined Company G in a sweep of the hill's southern slope. As the companies moved westward, the only difficulty encountered was the heat, which caused numerous nonbattle casualties, requiring several emergency evacuations. Later in the day, again at the request of the 31st Infantry, Lugger's two companies moved off the slopes of Hill 441, and by the morning of the 23d, had set up a 1,500-meter blocking position, stretching across the valley floor. The following day, Companies F and G were to begin moving slowly forward in an effort to relieve enemy pressure on the Army battalion, pushing eastward from Hiep Duc. In the interim, forward and flank patrols were sent out. On the left, Company F made no contact as it reconnoitered the area to the front of its position, but on the opposite flank, as Lieutenant Colonel Lugger reported, Company G encountered stiff resistance:

The hill mass located to my immediate right front was a very heavily covered small hill . . . I ordered Golf Company to send a reconnaissance force forward to determine what was on that hill, and they sent a reinforced squad. The squad moved up the slope, and was about one-third of the way up when it came under intensive sniper fire. The enemy, firing from very well-concealed and very heavy sniper positions, inflicted wounds on two men and then, with his normal tactics, he covered the bodies with fire so that anyone who attempted to go forward to assist or to aid or to retrieve the bodies would himself come under very intensive fire. Before the day was out, we had about three bodies that we could not retrieve.<sup>9</sup>

At 1700, Company H moved by air to reinforce Company G and the two units attempted to recover the dead Marines, but failed. On the 24th, after air and

artillery had stripped away the heavy foliage and destroyed the enemy's positions, the two companies made another attempt during which they retrieved the three bodies.

All three companies of Lugger's battalion moved out on the morning of the 25th, but ran headlong into elements of the two enemy regiments. On the right, Companies G and H encountered the same heavy resistance they had on the 23d, and spent most of the day attempting to both move forward and recover their casualties. On the left, elements of Company F came under intensive mortar, RPG, and automatic weapons fire, as did Lugger's command group in the center. With the enemy less than 50 meters away, noted Lieutenant Colonel Lugger, "every man in the CP had to fire his weapon in order to protect himself." Lugger requested air strikes—napalm within 50 meters, 250-pound bombs within 200 meters, and 500-pound bombs "as close as we dare get them"—breaking the attack on the battalion command post. By late afternoon, with Companies G and H still heavily engaged on the right, and the forward elements of Company F unable to move on the left, Lugger requested reinforcements. At dusk, Company E helilifted into the area, and in what was a daring rescue, Huey gunships, supported by AH-1G Cobras, extracted the battered remnants of Company F, returning them to the command post while evacuating the casualties.<sup>10</sup>

That night, as the Marines of Companies E and F huddled around the battalion command post, the enemy attacked with a heavy mortar barrage which killed four and wounded 26. It appeared that all efforts to spread the Marines out and dig them in was to no avail, and as Colonel Lugger remarked:

It was a very grim lesson that was learned. Unit leaders at every level must pay more attention; especially after an intensive fight there is a tendency for people to let down because they feel they have given their all. This is not the time to let down. You must even intensify your efforts in order to spread people out and dig people in, especially when the enemy seems to have had some advantage over you. These enemy forces will press the advantage.<sup>11</sup>

Later that evening, the battalion received another mission. Once all casualties were retrieved and evacuated, Lugger's Marines were to push forward 2,000 meters, link up with the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry, and act as rallying point for its scattered companies.

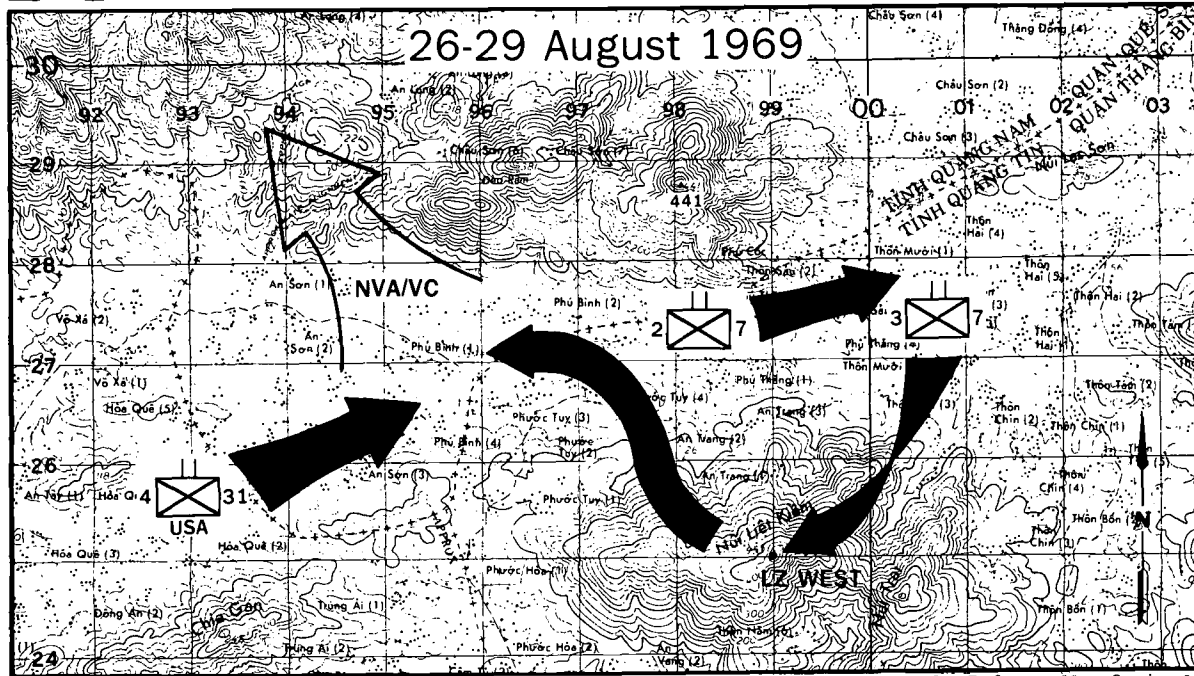
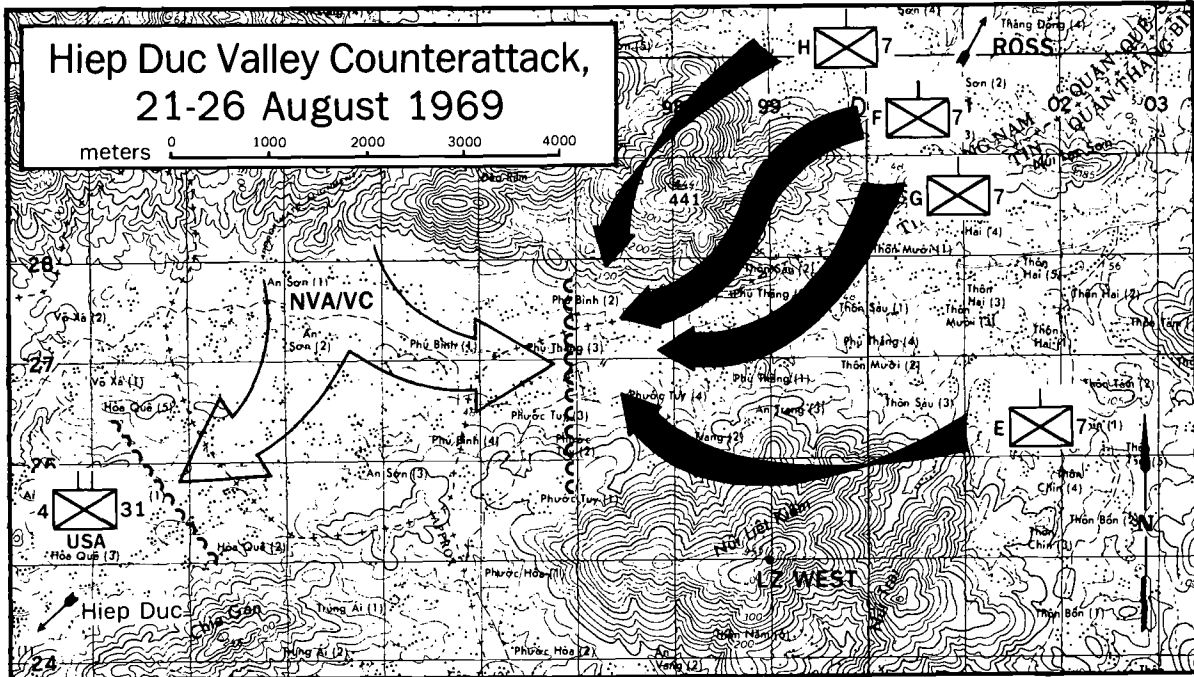
At first light on the morning of the 26th, as Companies G and H secured the high ground on the right, Companies E and F moved forward and immediately came under heavy small arms and mortar fire. By afternoon, both companies had advanced only 600 meters, and once again had come under heavy enemy fire. Digging in, the companies requested air and artillery support, but it had little effect. Under constant orders to push forward, no matter the cost,

*A machine gun crew from Company G, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines opens up on a fleeing enemy force during several days of fierce fighting east of Hiep Duc at the end of August.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection







See Reference Map, Section 38

Company G was brought down to reinforce the beleaguered companies, but it too took intense mortar fire, suffering numerous casualties. With all forward movement blocked, Colonel Codispoti ordered Luger's battalion to hold its positions, retrieve all casualties, and assist the 3d Battalion, which would be moved up in relief. In the interim, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph E. Hopkins, transferred from the 3d Marine Division to the 1st Marine Division, had assumed com-

mand of 2d Battalion, 7th Marines. Hopkins, with Colonel Codispoti's approval, issued revised orders for the battalion to "move forward to certain selected objectives . . . and recover all casualties lying in front of their positions." Second Battalion Marines accomplished the mission as ordered, noted Hopkins, "albeit reluctantly in at least two instances."<sup>12</sup>

Following its arrival in the Que Son Valley on the 17th, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, under Lieutenant

Colonel Ray G. Kummerow, who had relieved Lieutenant Colonel Allison on the 16th, was assigned by Colonel Codispoti the tasks of securing LZ Baldy and the 9th Engineer rock crusher to the west, and patrolling Barrier Island to the east. On the 26th, following several days of sweeping the island and encountering nothing but enemy snipers, Kummerow's Marines helilifted to LZ West, atop Nui Liet Kiem, overlooking the upper Que Son Valley, and ordered to relieve the 2d Battalion, heavily engaged below. After coordinating with Lieutenant Colonel Luger by radio on the relief, the battalion moved off the hill, guided by an Army reconnaissance unit. Lieutenant Colonel Kummerow described the relief:

The going was very slow, with numerous halts and very little progress. It turned out that the Army had never been off the hill on foot before, and had become helplessly lost. I instructed my point of the mile-long battalion column to use a compass heading to the rendezvous point. Approaching dusk, we finally emerged on the stream bed where I expected to pick up 2/7 guides and found to my surprise 2/7 on the march, heading back to FSB Ross. I deployed the point company to establish security for a bivouac area just short of the 2/7 furthest point of advance and closed in the battalion as darkness fell.

The next morning, following a passage through the 2d Battalion's lines, Kummerow's Marines headed west toward a planned linkup with the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry.<sup>13</sup>

Straddling a small stream with two rifle companies abreast followed by the remaining two in trace, the 3d Battalion began sweeping the valley floor. Almost immediately, Company L, on the right flank, became engaged and eventually unable to maneuver, all the while suffering heavy casualties from an entrenched enemy automatic weapons position. Kummerow ordered Company K to pass through Company L's lines and continue the attack. Surmounting a series of rice paddy dikes, the Marines of Company K, in a number of violent assaults, overran the NVA platoon, killing 13 and capturing two 12.7mm heavy and one 7.62mm light machine guns.

There were numerous displays of personal valor as Company K furiously pushed against the base of the Que Son Mountains into which the NVA had withdrawn. Among them was that of Lance Corporal Jose Francisco Jimenez, who, while shouting encouragement to his fellow Marines, plunged forward, attacking a group of enemy troops and silencing one heavy machine gun. Moving forward toward yet another position, he became the object of concentrated enemy

fire and was mortally wounded. Second Lieutenant Richard L. Jaehne, meanwhile, ordered his platoon to attack. When one of his squads was halted by heavy fire, the young Marine officer inched his way through a rice paddy toward the enemy position. After lobbing hand grenades, Jaehne ran forward firing his .45-caliber pistol, killing those of the enemy who had survived the grenade explosions. Although subsequently wounded, the lieutenant continued to lead his men during the engagement.

In another action, Private First Class Dennis D. Davis raced across 10 meters of open ground, leaped atop an enclosed, fortified bunker, and tossed a grenade into a rear aperture. Although seriously wounded by an enemy grenade which landed nearby as he released his own, Davis crawled to the front of the bunker and pushed another grenade through a firing port. He entered following the explosion and seized an enemy machine gun which he then used to fire on another nearby position. Seeing a fallen Marine about 20 meters away, Davis dashed from the bunker and dragged the man to a covered position only to discover that he was dead. Picking up the Marine's rifle he charged another fortification, but was cut down by enemy fire before he could reach it. For their heroic actions, Lance Corporal Jimenez received a posthumous Medal of Honor, while Private First Class Davis and Second Lieutenant Jaehne were awarded Navy Crosses, the former posthumously.<sup>15</sup>

By nightfall on the 27th, Kummerow's Marines had linked up with elements of the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry in preparation for the push into the Que Son Mountains. Before moving out the following morning, the Marines, in a customary search of areas adjacent to their night defensive positions, came upon a grisly scene. Apparently during their hasty retreat the night before, the NVA had executed a number of civilian prisoners—two males, one female, three young children, and a baby. All were lying side by side, shot once in the head. Continuing the search, 3d Battalion Marines moved into the high ground later in the day and discovered numerous large bunkers with connecting tunnels, all capable of holding in excess of 10 enemy troops. Most were protected by rock outcroppings or nestled among huge boulders, making them impervious to artillery and air strikes.

On the 29th, Colonel Codispoti ordered Companies K, L, and M, together with the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines into blocking positions in preparation for a multi-battalion assault to trap the two fleeing NVA regi-



Marine Corps Historical Collection

*Nestled among the boulders which dotted the Que Son Mountains, the 7th Marines discover an enemy hide-out. These temporary way stations could accommodate one or more North Vietnamese Army or Viet Cong troops, who would then move into the valley below.*

ments. As 3d Battalion Marines moved deeper into the mountains and Marines of the 2d Battalion deployed west from FSB Ross, Lieutenant Colonel Clark's 1st Battalion, in conjunction with the 1st Battalion, 51st ARVN Regiment, assaulted landing zones along the mountains' main ridgeline. During the next three days, the four battalions searched the ridgelines and ravines leading into the valley, finding caves, bunkers, and tunnels, but few enemy troops. The remnants of the two NVA regiments, it was later surmised, had scattered to the west, instead of northward, after being beaten near Hiep Duc.

September found the 1st and 3d Battalions, 7th Marines still in pursuit of the two enemy regiments, and the 2d Battalion patrolling the regiment's western TAOR, centered on the district headquarters at Que Son. In the mountains to the northwest of FSB Ross, ARVN troops and Marines of the 1st Battalion continued search operations begun the previous month, but encountered few enemy troops. To the northeast

of the western fire support base, Kummerow's Marines, following their withdrawal from Hiep Duc, conducted sweep operations up the Nghi Ha Valley, and like the 1st Battalion, participated in no significant engagements. As the month progressed, the regiment gradually shifted its operations to the northeast as Clark's Marines, still in pursuit, established blocking positions along the draws leading into Phu Loc Valley on the northern slope of the Que Sons, and 3d Battalion Marines conducted reconnaissance-in-force operations through the mountains toward the blocks.

On 16 September, Clark's Marines withdrew from the Que Son Mountains and reassumed responsibility for the regiment's eastern TAOR, centered on LZ Baldy, where they concentrated on rice denial operations and security assistance in support of Vietnamese elections held in the 28th. Behind, remained Marines of the 3d Battalion, who, as Lieutenant Colonel Kummerow was later to recount, found fighting the environment more difficult than fighting the enemy:

[It] was a "billy goat" type scramble from peak to peak, trying to maintain communications and cover of supporting arms . . . . We failed to find the main force and facilities of the [NVA] Regiment, however, which was hunkered in along the base of the mountains in caves and tunnels protected by rock outcroppings and huge boulders against which our artillery and air strikes were harmless . . . . We were surprised at the casualties sustained from malaria and other diseases after a month of continuous fighting in that environment. The battalion dwindled to half field strength. India Company lost all its officers save the company commander, . . . who requested relief because of fatigue.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of the month, Kummerow's Marines pulled out of the mountains and moved back to FSB Ross, under the command of Major Samuel J. Marfia, who temporarily replaced the wounded Kummerow. At Ross, the battalion began the task of refurbishing the fire support base's defenses and patrolling the approaches to the town of Que Son.<sup>17</sup> As an added security mission, companies periodically rotated to FSB Ryder, atop Hill 579, from which Battery H, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines conducted "pinpoint accurate fire missions, . . . shooting at anything that moved in the valley below."<sup>18</sup>

While Kummerow's Marines maintained watch over the regiment's western TAOR for the next month, 1st and 2d Battalion Marines took on the tasks of ferreting out the enemy and his supplies, first in Antenna Valley, between An Hoa and Hiep Duc, and then in Pagoda Valley, northeast of LZ Baldy. During the month, the regiment employed over 2,000 patrols, ambushes, and company sweeps which not only blocked enemy lines of communications and destroyed base areas, but significantly disrupted the enemy's rice-gathering activities. In the Pagoda Valley alone, Clark's Marines, reinforced by elements of the 1st ARVN Armored Brigade, captured over 17 tons of rice, 75 percent of the regiment's monthly total, which they subsequently distributed among the local civilian population. During November, as the regiment employed more than 2,400 patrols, ambushes, and company sweeps, encounters increased. Lieutenant Colonel Clark's 1st Battalion experienced the sharpest fighting in the mountains overlooking Antenna Valley, a rugged, heavily vegetated area which severely limited both visibility and maneuver. Assisting Clark's Marines in locating enemy troops and their main lines of communications was the Integrated Observation Device (IOD), introduced throughout the division in late October. Sited at FSB Ryder, this highly sophisticated, line-of-sight device used a laser range-finder in conjunction with high-powered binoculars and a night

observation device to locate and pinpoint enemy movement during both daylight and darkness at ranges up to 30,000 meters. The primary asset of the IOD was its range and azimuth accuracy, which, when coupled with the Field Artillery Digital Automatic Computer (an aid for solving firing problems), produced a 70 percent probability of first-round-on-target hits by supporting artillery. The device at FSB Ryder accounted for at least 83 NVA killed during an eight-day trial period, primarily along trail networks in the Antenna Valley.\*

Scouring the mountains until relieved by the 3d Battalion in mid-December, Clark's Marines pursued elements of an NVA regiment, subsequently identified as the *36th*, discovering several significant ordnance and logistical complexes. While the *36th NVA Regiment* was not encountered in strength, Marines of the 1st Battalion did chance upon several large groups of the regiment's troops. On 12 November, as Company D moved toward the summit of Hill 953, northeast of Ryder, it encountered about 40 entrenched enemy troops, supported by automatic weapons. In an action that was to gain him the Medal of Honor, Private First Class Ralph E. Dias, on his own initiative, assaulted one of the machine gun emplacements. Although severely wounded by heavy enemy fire, he continued to crawl for 15 meters toward a large boulder from which he threw grenades at the enemy gun position. Unsuccessful in destroying the gun, Private Dias left his cover, moved into the open to hurl more grenades, and was shot once again—this time fatally. His last grenade, however, destroyed the machine gun position and its crew.<sup>19</sup>

The nearly two-month-long sojourn in the Que Son Mountains proved to be extremely lucrative for Clark's Marines. In searching almost every cave and ravine, they captured over 200 individual weapons, as well as 40,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, 3,000 grenades, twelve 122mm rockets, and huge stockpiles of food, field equipment, and assorted ammunition. On 9 December, 1st Battalion Marines withdrew from the Que Sons, moved to FSB Ross, and assumed control of the regiment's western area of operations from the 3d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Kummerow, following his return to command. The 3d Battalion then returned to the Que Sons.

By year's end, the 7th Marines had tramped over virtually every square meter of ground from Barrier Island on the coast to Antenna Valley, near the western

\*For additional detail on the use of the IOD, see Chapter 14.

edge of the Nui Loc Son Basin. In four months of hard fighting, the regiment, as Lieutenant Colonel Kummerow was later to report, had turned the area around militarily:

Up to the time the 7th Marines had moved into [lower] Quang Nam Province in August 1969, there had been little, if any, patrolling done by the Army (US and ARVN) outside of the Fire Support Bases and cantonments. The enemy had used the terrain from the Barrier Island to Elephant Valley [sic], lowlands and mountains, without interference . . . [But] we had succeeded in stabilizing the region militarily. Elections went off without a hitch in the province and attacks against heavily populated An Hoa failed to materialize.<sup>20</sup>

Although badly beaten and forced to suffer severe losses in both men and materiel, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese were not defeated, as the 7th Marines would discover in 1970.

*26th Marines: Protecting the Northern Flank*

Protection of Da Nang's northern flank required the constant efforts of Marine infantrymen, and in June 1969, the 26th Marines continued to shoulder the task.

*Among the weapons captured by the 7th Marines in the Que Son Mountains was a 12.7mm anti-aircraft gun, here being presented by MajGen Ormond R. Simpson, left, and Col Gildo S. Codispoti to MajGen William G. Thrash, right, Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, and BGen Ralph H. Spanjer, Assistant Wing Commander, center right, in appreciation of the timely and accurate air support provided the regiment.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection







Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A374299

*In addition to weapons, food, and ammunition captured in the Que Sons, a cache of bicycles, here displayed by members of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, was uncovered.*

launching occasional company-size reconnaissance-in-force operations along known infiltration routes in Elephant Valley. On the 12th, the 3d Battalion, which had come ashore the day before, relieved Edmondson's Marines of the responsibility for the regimental TAOR. The 2d Battalion was then redesignated Battalion Landing Team 2/26 and assigned to Special Landing Force Bravo.

Throughout the remainder of June and into July, Lieutenant Colonel Edward W. Snelling's 3d Battalion, reinforced for a period by one medium tank platoon, one amphibian tractor (Ontos) platoon, and attached engineer, truck, reconnaissance, and artillery units, continued to provide security through patrols and ambushes for the area's vital installations. In addition, the battalion conducted cordon and search operations with local Popular Forces and actions designed to deny the enemy use of Elephant Valley as an avenue of approach into the Da Nang area. Although enemy activity, characterized by sniper and harassing fire, remained fairly constant, there were a number of sharp exchanges. In June, for example, Company M caught and severely mauled a group of 50 enemy troops cross-

ing the Song Cu De with automatic weapons fire, supplemented by artillery and Air Force C-47 "Spooky" missions. Again in July, Company M patrols and ambushes in the Elephant Valley, west of Route 1, snared another 25 enemy rice carriers, and captured large quantities of field equipment and food. The 3d Battalion's aggressive cordon and searches, patrols, and ambushes were so successful that by August, enemy infiltrators and rice gatherers made obvious attempts to avoid encountering Snelling's Marines.

In August, with the southward expansion of the 1st Marine Division's TAOR and the 7th Marines' move into the Que Son Valley, the 26th Marines assumed a portion of the latter regiment's area of operations. On the 10th, after periods of training on Okinawa and in the Philippines, and participation in Landing Force Operation Brave Armada in Quang Ngai Province, near Chu Lai, Lieutenant Colonel Edmondson's Battalion Landing Team 2/26 again moved ashore and into positions vacated by the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, west of Da Nang. By 15 August, the BLT completed the relief and split its rifle companies into heavy platoons and squads, sent out on day patrols and night

ambushes in an area of operations stretching from Hill 41 in the south to Hill 22 in the northwest. In addition to defending static positions and blocking avenues of approach into the Da Nang Vital Area, Colonel Heywood tasked Edmondson's Marines with maintaining and responding to intrusions along the regiment's portion of the Da Nang Barrier. Armed with readouts from the balanced pressure system sensors, night observation devices, and large spotlights, 2d Battalion Marines and their supporting artillery responded with both direct and indirect fire to any break in the barrier.

Throughout the remainder of August and most of September, encounters with enemy forces in the expanded 26th Marines TAOR was light and sporadic, with the exception of an attack by 15 sappers on the command post of Company F at Hill 10. The continued employment of a Marine rifle company and a Regional Force platoon from 1/25 Regional Force Company in the high ground west of Hai Van Pass, kept enemy fire in the area at a minimum. To the south, the 2d Battalion, in addition to monitoring and assisting in the continued construction of the barrier, participated with ARVN forces in securing the Hoa Vang and Hieu Duc Districts' rice harvest, not only denying the enemy a source of food, but blocking infiltration routes into the two districts.

In mid-September, another battalion "flip-flop" took place. On the 20th, Lieutenant Colonel James C. Goodin's Battalion Landing Team 1/26 disembarked by helicopter and landing craft from the *Iwo Jima* (LPH 2) and began the relief of the 2d Battalion, which in turn embarked on board the *New Orleans* (LPH 11). Ten days later, Battalion Landing Team 2/26 made a practice amphibious landing within the regiment's TAOR. On the morning of the 30th, one reinforced rifle company landed by LVTs over Nam O Beach, while three reinforced rifle platoons helilifted into a landing zone near the rock crusher at Dai La Pass, and three waves of combat support elements made turnaway landings in assault craft. The exercise terminated at midday and all elements returned to Amphibious Ready Group Bravo's shipping.

During the first two weeks of October, despite swollen streams and flooded lowlands due to the monsoon rains, the 1st and 3d Battalions continued patrol and ambush operations throughout the regiment's TAOR. On the 19th, the 26th Marines reassumed command of BLT 2/26, now under Lieutenant Colonel William C. Drumright, who relieved Lieutenant

Colonel Edmondson on 9 September. The 2d Battalion relieved elements of the 3d Battalion and 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) in the subsequent northward expansion of the regiment's area of operations. The following day, the 3d Battalion passed responsibility for securing Route 1 in the Hai Van Pass and the Lieu Chieu Esso Depot to the 2d Battalion. At the same time, the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade transferred administrative control of the 26th Marines to the 1st Marine Division. The division redesignated and deactivated the regimental and battalion landing teams, except for planning purposes. With the assumption of responsibility for Observation Post Reno, in the foothills west of Da Nang, Observation Post Eagle Eye, overlooking the Song Cu De, and security for the Da Nang Barrier construction effort by the 3d Battalion on the 23d, the division completed the internal realignment of forces and boundaries. At the conclusion of the realignment, the new area of operations of the 26th Marines encompassed some 711 square miles.<sup>21</sup>

As was the case with the preceding five months, enemy activity during the final two months of the year continued to be light and sporadic throughout the 26th Marines' TAOR. The enemy continued to devote the bulk of his efforts toward gathering food and supplies, but the regiment's aggressive patrol and ambush operations again severely restricted these endeavors. In an effort to locate, interdict, and destroy enemy lines of communication and base camps, Heywood's Marines carried out several company-size search and clear operations in the western and southern portions of the regiment's area of operations. Landing by helicopter, elements of the 1st Battalion began a three week operation in Happy Valley and Sherwood Forest areas on 3 December. Marines of Lieutenant Colonel Goodin's battalion found several tunnels and bunkers, but enemy activity, on the whole, was nonexistent. The regiment carried out similar operations in Rumor Valley, south of Dai La Pass; Leech Valley, along the Song Lo Dong; and in the foothills below Dong Den, all with the same disappointing results.

December, while not a lucrative month in terms of enemy troops destroyed or supplies captured, did witness the introduction of a number of innovations. Under the leadership of Colonel James E. Harrell, who relieved Colonel Heywood on the 12th, elements of the regiment began planning for participation in the division's Infantry Company Intensified Pacification Program and Kingfisher patrol operations, slated to





Marine Corps Historical Collection

*On a mountaintop northwest of Da Nang, Col James E. Harrell, center, Commanding Officer of the 26th Marines, discusses the movement of Company L with its Commanding Officer, 1stLt John K. Robb, right, and LtCol William A. Simpson, Commanding Officer of the 3d Battalion, who had replaced LtCol Edward W. Snelling in September.*

begin in January 1970.\* In addition, the 11th Marines installed an Integrated Observation Device on Hill 270, enabling the regiment to have a continuous observed fire capability within Happy Valley, Worth Ridge, and Charlie Ridge—all areas crisscrossed by well-known enemy infiltration routes. By integrating the new equipment with changes in tactics, the 26th Marines found itself better equipped to carry out the mission of defending Da Nang's northern flank in the coming year.

#### *Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Battleground*

On 1 June, command of the Americal Division passed from Major General Charles M. Gettys to Major General Lloyd B. Ramsey. In reviewing the accomplishments of the division during his tenure and its future prospects, General Gettys noted:

Although the enemy continues to present a significant threat in this area, because of aggressive Americal opera-

tions he has been unable to achieve a single military or political objective. His future looks no brighter. As GVN forces continue to grow stronger and to dominate the coastal plain, Americal will turn its attention further to the west, targeted against his staging areas and command and control installations, the objective of completing his destruction in the southern I Corps Tactical Zone.<sup>22</sup>

During the previous five months, emphasis was placed on maintaining a flexible offensive posture poised to counter enemy threats anywhere within the division's TAOI. The principal enemy targets, however, continued to be the heavily populated provincial capitals of Quang Ngai and Tam Ky. As a result, a majority of the significant battles fought were in response to the enemy threats against these two cities and were preemptive in nature, engaging the enemy well west of the cities, leaving him to resort only to stand-off attacks by fire. In addition to these preemptive coastal operations, the division also placed emphasis on operations into the mountainous hinterland of southern I Corps to locate and destroy previously immune enemy

\*For a detailed discussion, see Chapter 11.

units and base camps. These operations, during the latter half of 1969, would be intensified in order to provide a screen behind which South Vietnamese forces could consolidate and expand their control of the strategically important populated coastal lowlands.<sup>23</sup>

As General Ramsey took command, Americal Division forces were engaged in five major operations throughout the two provinces of southern I Corps. To the north, Operation Frederick Hill continued as elements of the 196th Infantry Brigade and 5th ARVN Regiment conducted combat operations designed to secure population centers along the coastal plain and to destroy enemy concentrations, base camps, and infiltration routes in the Que Son Mountains to the west. Within the center sector of the combined Americal-2d ARVN Division area of operations, elements of the

198th Infantry Brigade and 6th ARVN Regiment continued to protect major allied lines of communication and to locate and destroy enemy forces attempting to attack the city of Quang Ngai and the Chu Lai Base complex in Operation Geneva Park. In the mountains west of Tam Ky, the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, under the operational control of the Americal Division since 16 May, continued Lamar Plain, designed to destroy elements of the *2nd NVA Division* in Base Area 117. To the south, the 11th Infantry Brigade and 4th ARVN Regiment, in Operation Iron Mountain, secured population centers south of Quang Ngai City and continued to destroy other elements of the *2d NVA Division* operating in the mountains to the west. And, on the Batangan Peninsula, Marine Combined Action teams in conjunction with elements of the 6th ARVN Regiment and U.S. 46th Infantry

*Feeling that the Marines under his command had accomplished much in providing a secure environment for the inhabitants of Quang Nam Province, MajGen Simpson, right, relinquished command of the division to MajGen Edwin B. Wheeler on 15 December.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A372305



continued population security, guerrilla interdiction, and nation-building efforts in this long-time enemy stronghold in Operation Russell Beach.

Enemy activity during June and July was light and sporadic throughout Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces, consisting of sapper and indirect attacks by fire against Americal Division installations. Within the Frederick Hill operational zone, the division continued to place emphasis on preemptive operations designed to deny enemy forces the use of base areas, infiltration routes, and supply caches. Barrier Island was the scene of four such major preemptive operations in an effort to neutralize the area thereby increasing security for South Vietnamese pacification programs. South, within the Iron Mountain operation zone, the division conducted a series of combat sweeps and reconnaissance-in-force operations in the Song Tra Cau Valley and surrounding mountains in order to blunt a possible enemy attack upon Duc Pho. On 20 July, the Americal initiated Operation Nantucket Beach in an area north of the Batangan Peninsula in conjunction with Marine Special Landing Force operation Brave Armada to increase population security in the area, northeast of Quang Ngai City. The following day, Operation Russell Beach came to an end.

With the termination of Operation Lamar Plain in mid-August, enemy activity throughout the division's operational area rose dramatically. During 18-29 August, elements of the 196th Infantry Brigade, 5th ARVN Regiment, and 7th Marines engaged elements of two NVA regiments near LZ West, southeast of Hiep Duc. In fierce fighting the combined allied force drove the enemy from the area, inflicting over 540 casualties. Two weeks later, elements of the battered enemy force returned and attempted to launch an attack on Hiep Duc, but were again driven back by the 2d Battalion, 5th ARVN Regiment.

As the monsoon season began during the latter half of September, both allied and enemy activity declined. Continuous heavy rains during the remaining three months of the year limited combat operations in the Frederick Hill, Geneva Park, Iron Mountain, and Nantucket Beach operational zones by curtailing the effectiveness of visual reconnaissance causing delay or cancellation of close air support missions and limiting both air and ground mobility. Nevertheless, Americal forces continued to concentrate on combat operations, however limited, to increase the level of security for pacification efforts near the major population centers of southern I Corps Tactical Zone.

### Results

Measuring the results of six months of large- and small-unit action within the 1st Marine Division's area of responsibility was not an easy task. By the end of 1969, the division could point to many indications that it was inflicting more casualties on the enemy than it was taking. Casualty figures for the six-month period shed some light: 5,503 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese killed against 419 Marines killed, and 4,623 wounded. To these figures one would have to add those of the ARVN and Korean forces. The Marines could also point to the large quantity of weapons, the tons of rice and other foodstuffs, and countless rounds of assorted ammunition captured. And they could add the number of base camps, installations, and enemy fighting positions destroyed.<sup>24</sup>

Statistics tell only half the story. The other half is *PFC David A. Wosmek drops a round into a mortar tube held by LCpl Jose L. Rodriguez during an attack in progress by Company I, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines upon an enemy base camp north of Da Nang.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection



told by how well allied forces did in restoring South Vietnam to an era of peace in which the people were allowed to resume their normal pursuits. Using this measure, Major General Ormond R. Simpson thought his 1st Marine Division had done well indeed:

We achieved limited success by that measure in the Da Nang defensive area . . . the percentage of people that were voting in elections and the very high percentage of children that were in school. I counted that as a successful type of thing. At one time I had available the hectares or the acre-

age, as we used to have to do it, because that was the only thing we knew, or square kilometers of ground that was made safe enough for people to return to farming and to fishing and that sort of thing. It would be a rough guess, but I would suppose that area that I was responsible for during the year I was in Vietnam, the 1st Marine Division Reinforced must have doubled the area. Now, that doesn't mean anything . . . but it was a significant amount of acreage in which people were able to return and start in a very rudimentary fashion to rebuild their villages, to go ahead with rice farming, and the other kind of crops that they did . . . . Those are the kind of things that you measure success in.<sup>25</sup>