



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A708034
Col Edward J. Bronars, pictured here as a lieutenant general, served as USSAG's Chief of Surface Operations and Plans Division in 1973-74. In August of 1973, he chaired the first in a series of joint planning conferences held at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand.

which, after the excitement had subsided, did take place on 4 July 1973 in a rather anticlimactic atmosphere.²⁴

Helicopter availability remained a major point of concern for CinCPac. The number of available Air Force helicopters combined with the highest estimate of evacuees required an excessive number of round-trip flights. As a consequence it prolonged the exposure to enemy ground fire and represented an unnecessary risk. The estimated duration of the operation, 48 hours, was unacceptable, and more helicopters had to be located or the number of evacuees had to be reduced. Fortunately, minesweeping operations off North Vietnam were rapidly approaching conclusion and amphibious assault ships and their embarked helicopters would be available by 1 August. The assignment of naval forces to the operation would not only double the number of available helicopters, but also would halve the distance from launch point to destination. This would significantly reduce the duration of the mission.²⁵

On 30 July, upon completion of Operation End

Sweep, the 31st MAU was reconstituted. Its helicopter organization was reconfigured to accommodate a maximum number of CH-53s on board the USS *Tripoli* (LPH 10). Consisting of 13 CH-53s, 4 CH-46s, 2 "Hueys," and 4 "Cobras," the new helicopter composition of the MAU became known as the "Eagle Pull mix". The reorganization of the MAU provided significantly enhanced flexibility to the planners. At this point though, the only MAU units incorporated in the operational plan were the helicopters.²⁶

During the period 3-5 August 1973, the first series of planning conferences involving representatives of III MAF and USSAG convened at General Vogt's headquarters in Nakhon Phanom. The initial conference had as its goal coordination of III MAF's participation. Those present included the 31st MAU's new commander, Colonel David M. Twomey; the commanding officer of the 9th Marines and designated commander of the ground security forces, Colonel Stephen G. Olmstead; the III MAF Eagle Pull liaison

Col Stephen G. Olmstead, pictured here as a lieutenant general, commanded the 9th Marines and was the designated commander of the ground security forces for Operation Eagle Pull. Although Phnom Penh was not evacuated during his tour, Col Olmstead made several inspections of the Cambodian capital.

Marine Corps Historical Collection





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 012144985
Col David M. Twomey, pictured here as a lieutenant general, commanded the 31st MAU from 26 July 1973 to 16 February 1974. The 31st MAU Marines assumed the tasks of ground security forces for Operation Eagle Pull in August of 1973 and never relinquished them.

officer, Major James B. Hicks; representatives from Seventh Fleet's Amphibious Ready Group Alpha, and key officers from participating Air Force units. Colonel Edward J. Bronars, USMC, the USSAG's Chief of Surface Operations and Plans Division, chaired the conference.

As part of the conference schedule, Colonel Olmstead and selected Marine officers visited Phnom Penh on 4 August and sighted the designated landing zones. While in Phnom Penh, Colonel Olmstead participated with the Embassy staff in a command post exercise. The Marines who remained at Nakhon Phanom helped develop helicopter coordination schedules, procedures for the rescue of downed helicopters, approach and retirement lanes, and a plan for emergency resupply of committed forces.

After Colonel Olmstead and his party returned to Nakhon Phanom on 5 August, Colonel Twomey, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur B. Colbert, and key MAU officers visited Phnom Penh for a similar reconnaissance. During these two visits, valuable liaison was established among the Marines, the Embassy staff, and

the Military Equipment Delivery Team, Cambodia (MEDTC), headed by Brigadier General John R. Cleland, Jr., USA. The members of MEDTC were responsible for organizing, supervising, and controlling the Phnom Penh evacuation and, of particular importance, the selection of prospective helicopter landing zones.²⁷

The landing zones were approved by the charge d'affaires in Phnom Penh, William K. Enders, based upon the recommendations of the MEDTC. The population concentrations in the city heavily influenced the recommended locations of the various landing zones. The number of zones reflected the planning assumption that chaos and confusion would render land transportation unusable.

The inability to improve prospective landing zones for helicopters limited the number of sites. Several athletic fields were potential landing zones, but light towers surrounding them made night use unsafe. This eliminated five of eight proposed landing zones including ones at the colosseum and at the university both of which initially were considered primary sites. Of those remaining, Landing Zone (LZ) B was adjacent to the Presidential Palace, while LZs C and H were the ones nearest to the American Embassy. The Embassy LZ, LZ C, was near the river bed, dry in winter and spring due to the absence of rainfall and completely surrounded by barbed wire. LZ H, added to the list in 1974, was a soccer field slightly removed from the river, bordered on three sides by apartment buildings; LZs D1 and D2 were alternate zones, each with a rated capacity of one aircraft per zone, to be used only if there were no means of getting evacuees to the primary zones.²⁸

Subsequent conferences involving III MAF and 31st MAU representatives occurred with greater frequency as the situation in Cambodia worsened. During each conference, the Marines significantly refined and updated plans, including the addition of two options involving the employment of 31st MAU elements. The most important accomplishment was the integration of both the MAU's helicopter and ground elements into the plan. As a result, the final plan listed five courses of action for the helicopter evacuation option, Option III.

One common factor in all five alternatives was the source of the landing force command element, the 3d Marine Division. With the two most likely alternatives involving the 31st MAU, it seemed logical that the command element should originate from within the



Photo courtesy of Col Peter F. Angle, USMC (Ret)

The hazards to helicopter flight in University LZ, above, particularly from the light towers surrounding the soccer field and track, and in Colosseum LZ, below, also from its tall light towers and its frequent use as a military vehicle staging area, caused the planners to discard them as a primary sites once consideration was given to night evacuation. The Colosseum had been designated a primary zone in 1973. All zones were approved by the Embassy.

Photo courtesy of Col Peter F. Angle, USMC (Ret)





Photo courtesy of LtCol William R. Melton, USMC

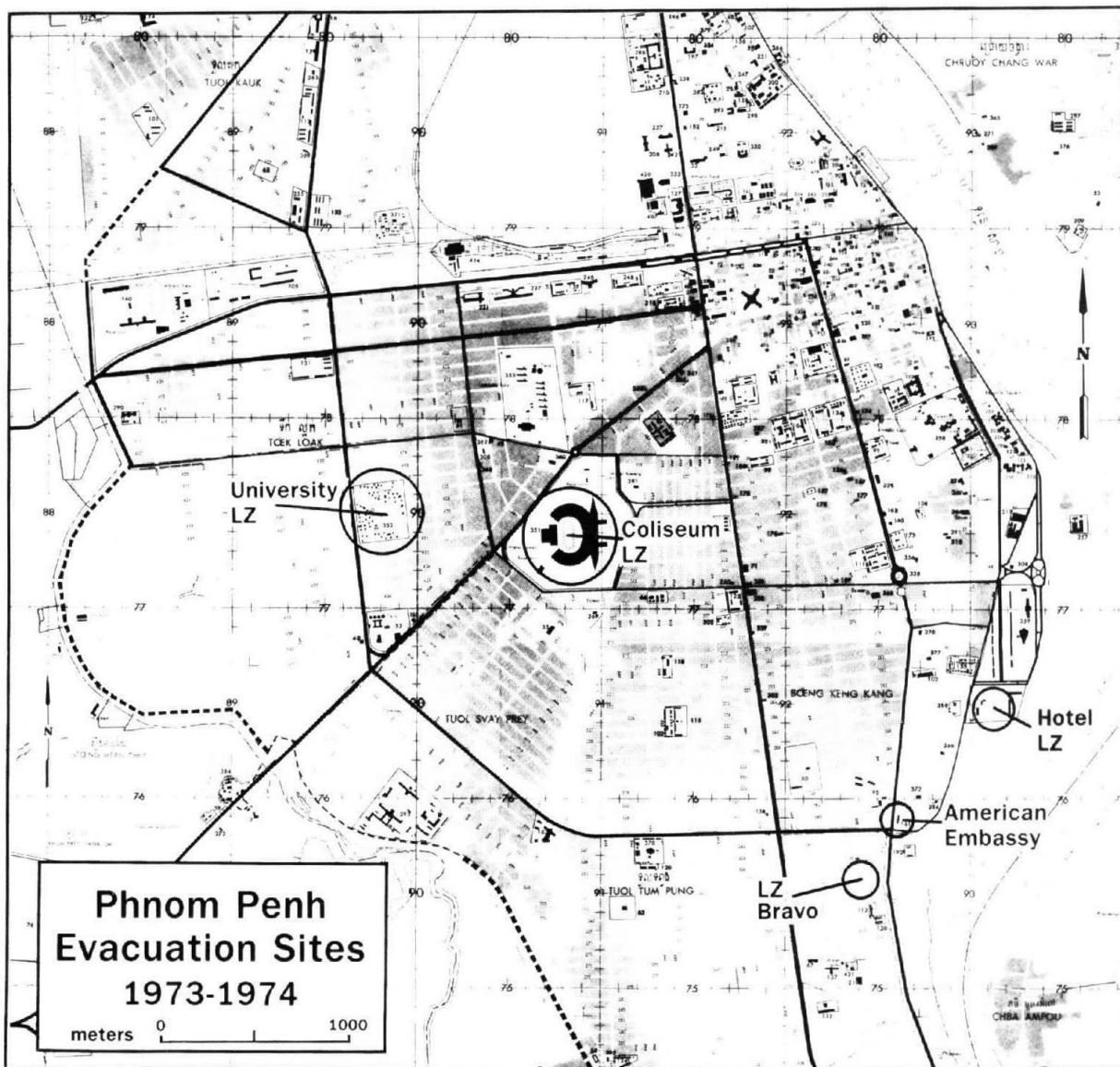
Aerial view of Landing Zone Hotel shows the soccer field shielded from the east bank of the Mekong River by an apartment building. Other side of the river is Khmer Rouge territory.

division. The 31st MAU could not provide the command element since the commander of USSAG had stipulated that the commander of the ground security force had to be prepositioned at USSAG Headquarters at least 72 hours prior to the start of the operation. His presence in Nakhon Phanom, the commander of USSAG felt, would allow the Marine commander to participate in last-minute planning and liaison. In essence, the argument was that the command element from Okinawa was always available to meet this requirement, but because of ship rotations and weather, the MAU command element was not.^{29*}

*Colonel John F. Roche III, the commanding officer of 31st MAU as of June 1974, provided an insightful recollection: "The conclusion that a command element from the MAU would not be available at USSAG headquarters 72 hours prior to the operation because of ship movements and weather simply was not logical. Were the MAU not able to provide this element, it probably would not have been able to execute the operation for the same reasons. Beyond that the state of communications among the concerned headquarters was such that real-time interactions were possible and did take place throughout the planning period. I protested this arrangement vigorously until it was reaffirmed by CG, III MAF. Although this portion of history is accurate as a record, knowledgeable military planners will question its validity." Roche Comments.

Other significant conference accomplishments pertained to logistics and communications. An emergency resupply of CH-53 parts was arranged, in effect a lateral shift of Air Force parts. The parts would be delivered to Utapao Air Base, Thailand, where they would then be picked up by a sea-based MAU helicopter. In the area of communications, USSAG assigned a block of frequencies to the landing force for its internal use, and sent it a draft copy of the communications plan. Through these efforts the Marine commanders gained valuable insight into the USSAG communications procedures, especially those involving the Air Mission Commander in the orbiting C-130. In addition the Marines gained a comprehensive understanding of what would be a complex operation.

The consensus at the joint command headquarters in Nakhon Phanom was that it would not receive the order to evacuate until the last possible moment. By that time, the ground situation would have deteriorated to the point that the helicopter landing zones would be the only available egress points and they would be available only if they could be secured by ground forces. To complicate and compound the question of when, the attitude at the Embassy in Phnom



Penh fluctuated almost daily from “never go” to “maybe tomorrow.”³⁰

After the August 1973 conference, the major question that remained was when to go, because the planners had decided method and means; evacuation would be by air, either fixed-wing or helicopter. These were further divided into five options by helicopter and two by fixed-wing. The helicopter choices involved primarily Marine aircraft from the MAU while the fixed-wing course projected use of either commercial or Air Force aircraft.

On 10 August 1973, the 31st MAU/Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) reached its designated holding area in the Gulf of Thailand with an assigned 12-hour response time. (Assuming a 20-knot speed, the ARG

could remain somewhere within a 240 mile arc of the launch point.) Three days later, USSAG issued Operation Plan 1-73 for Operation Eagle Pull. It reflected the decisions arrived at by the joint planning conference. The next day, the 31st MAU issued Operation Order 2-73 detailing its role in support of USSAG. On 16 August, General Vogt additionally tasked the 31st MAU with preparations for possible evacuation of the three MEDTC personnel from the Ream/Kompong Som area. To accomplish this mission, the MAU issued Operation Order 3-73. All of the elements of the real-life drama were now in place, and it was time to wait.³¹

Within three weeks, a crisis of a different sort confronted the Eagle Pull planners. On 8 September,



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 051222434
Col John F. Roche III relieved Col Douglas T. Kane as commanding officer of 31st MAU on 13 July 1974. Col Roche and staff developed helicopter employment and landing tables (HEALT) for the MAU's CH-53s.

while steaming between Okinawa and Subic Bay, the USS *Tripoli*, the LPH assigned to Amphibious Ready Group Alpha (ARG Alpha), suffered a major engineering casualty and had to be towed to Subic. The effect of the loss was clear, but before a solution could be devised, USS *Duluth*, an LPD with the same group, developed its own engineering difficulties.³²

Almost immediately, ARG Alpha formulated and obtained approval for a plan which would at least temporarily fix the problem. The USS *Coral Sea* (CVA 43), and subsequently the USS *Hancock* (CVA 19), were designated as standby LPHs. In addition, the USS *Vancouver* (LPD 2), an LPD with ARG Bravo, was assigned as standby for the *Duluth*. In the event of evacuation operations, the MAU elements normally on board *Tripoli* and *Duluth* would embark immediately in the *Coral Seal Hancock* and *Vancouver*, respectively. All of these planning changes were made in light of the then-prevailing requirement to remain no more than 96 hours steaming time from the waters off Kompong Som. The MAU/ARG had to be able to restructure itself to meet this requirement.³³

After extensive work at the Ship Repair Facility (SRF)

in Subic Bay, the *Tripoli* came back on line on 28 September. The plans then remained unchanged until 26 January 1974, when the 31st MAU received orders to provide support for Option II of the evacuation plan, a military fixed-wing airlift of evacuees. The effort entailed landing a 90-man security force at Pochentong Airfield to assist in the evacuation.

By the time these modifications took effect, the outlook for the Lon Nol Government had changed from outright pessimism to guarded optimism. The 1974 Khmer Communist dry season offensive was not as successful as had been expected. The Communists had pushed hard during January, but the government forces were holding their own. In February, there was a noticeable decline in the intensity of the Khmer offensive. The feeling of optimism grew, and the new-found confidence was reflected in significantly relaxed evacuation response times. The clearest indication

Col Sydney H. "Tom" Batchelder, commanding officer of 3d Service Battalion, 3d Marine Division relieved Col Olmstead as commander of the Eagle Pull landing force during the summer of 1974. Col Batchelder made several liaison trips to Nakhon Phanom and Phnom Penh in the remaining months of the year.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) IC31404





Marine Corps Historical Collection

The 1974-75 Eagle Pull command group is seen during one of its many liaison trips to Cambodia and Thailand. At center is ground security force commander Col Sydney H. Batchelder, flanked at right by LtCol Curtis G. Lawson and, left, by Maj George L. Cates.

came on 17 June 1974 when the MAU reverted to a composite helicopter squadron using medium helicopters (CH-46s) in place of its "heavy Eagle Pull mix" (CH-53s). This change occurred as HMM-164 relieved HMH-462.³⁴

To add to the rapidly changing scene, a complete turnover of Marine Corps personnel participating in Eagle Pull planning and operations took place during spring and summer of 1974. Colonel Sydney H. "Tom" Batchelder, Jr., Commanding Officer, 3d Service Battalion, 3d Marine Division, was assigned the additional duty of commander of the Eagle Pull landing force in relief of Colonel Olmstead. Colonel John F. Roche III relieved Colonel Douglas T. Kane on 13 July 1974 as commander of the unit containing the security forces, the 31st MAU.*

Within III MAF Headquarters, staff changes affecting the planning of the Cambodian operation also took place, including the replacement of Major Hicks by Major George L. Cates as the Eagle Pull planner in the G-3 section. The annual rotation of officers actually began in March 1974, earlier than the usual

*Colonel Kane, in turn, on 16 February 1974 had relieved Colonel David M. Twomey, who had assumed command on 26 July 1973 from the acting CO, Lieutenant Colonel Ronald L. Owen, the interim replacement (3-25 July 1973) for the departing commander, Colonel Thomas J. Stevens. 31st MAU ComdCs, 1Jan-31Dec73, 1Jan-31Dec74, and 1Jan-31May75.

summer changeover period, when Major Edward A. "Tony" Grimm relieved Major Baker, the key action officer at USSAG Headquarters. Grimm's early assignment afforded him the opportunity to become well versed in the plans and ready to brief the summer arrivals, including the new members of the III MAF staff.³⁵

During the period July through December 1974, the recently assigned key personnel made several important liaison visits to Nakhon Phanom and Phnom Penh. As a result of their trips, the first three Eagle Pull options were further refined. An additional concept was even explored, whereby the evacuation would be conducted by loading the evacuees in ships and sailing them down the Mekong River. It was rejected as being too risky. In December 1974, Lieutenant Colonel Curtis G. Lawson relieved Lieutenant Colonel Glenn J. Shaver, Jr., as the 3d Marine Division air officer, a position which involved the all important additional duty as air liaison officer for the command element.³⁶

Between September 1973 and December 1974, six major Eagle Pull planning conferences took place at USSAG Headquarters. As a result, the plan was further improved, but essentially it varied little from the one first issued in August 1973.**

**Colonel Roche noted that the plan to employ the CH-53 was developed by his staff in late 1974 and "provided for lifts from decks on which the MAU's elements were then located." Roche Comments.

Vietnam

Since the summer of 1972, when ships carrying the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade had stood off the coast of Military Region 1 waiting to evacuate, if necessary, Americans then under fire, specific plans for evacuation of Americans had lain dormant. General contingency plans did exist. The Pacific Command had a plan for every possible contingency, including emergency evacuation of Americans. Characterized as "outline plans," they conveyed in a very general sense a concept for operations and logistical support and a sketch of command relationships, but no specifics. In keeping with the stated policy surrounding these plans, detailed items would be filled in as the particular situation warranted.³⁷

As conditions in South Vietnam normalized following the implementation of the Paris Accords, the prospects of conducting an emergency evacuation of civilians from South Vietnam became less likely. With each day of relative stability in 1973, the sense of urgency to design specific plans waned. This complacency persisted until a few weeks after Gerald R. Ford assumed the American presidency in August 1974.

Beginning in September 1974 enemy activity intensified and the situation in South Vietnam, particularly in Military Region 1, the area immediately south of the Demilitarized Zone, began to deteriorate dramatically. Both Vice Admiral George P. Steele, the Seventh Fleet commander, and Major General Herman G. Poggemeyer, who had succeeded Major General Ryan as the commanding general of III MAF, became concerned about this turn of events.^{38*} Almost daily they received information reporting the results of the fighting in South Vietnam and recognized the possibility that with very little advance warning the forces under their command could be tasked to conduct an emergency evacuation of Americans from MR 1. With the permission of the American Embassy, Saigon, and concurrence of Admiral Steele, General Poggemeyer sent his G-3, Colonel John M. Johnson, Jr., to South Vietnam, in particular to Da Nang for an on-the-scene liaison visit.³⁹ Admiral Steele remembered that his efforts to obtain the voluminous detailed information necessary to conduct an evacua-

*Admiral Steele recounted years later that his staff was far from complacent about evacuation matters and that his first concerns surfaced soon after assuming command of the Seventh Fleet in July 1973. He visited Saigon in late August 1973 to survey the situation and left with "no doubt in my mind that Vietnam would be lost during my Seventh Fleet command tour." Steele Comments.



Marine Corps Historical Collection
During the summer of 1974 LtCol Gene A. Deegan, pictured here as a major general, commanded BLT 2/9, the landing force of Amphibious Ready Group Bravo.

tion had been thwarted by Ambassador Graham A. Martin, whose permission had to be obtained before any American could enter South Vietnam. Admiral Steele recalled, "Ambassador Martin actually blocked me from sending people in" and argued that by planning an evacuation "we [the United States] would create the very fall of Vietnam that he was there to prevent." The authorization by the Ambassador (after numerous requests by Admiral Steele) to receive a planner from III MAF reflected the first change in his position and a growing concern by the Embassy staff that serious military problems did exist.⁴⁰

While in Da Nang, Colonel Johnson reviewed emergency evacuation plans with the American Consul-General. Colonel Johnson discovered alarming news—the plans such as they were, were very sketchy and not up-to-date. The North Vietnamese offensive had placed such pressure on the South Vietnamese that, in Colonel Johnson's opinion, a concerted attack by the Communists might result in a debacle at Da Nang and thereby necessitate an emergency evacuation of the area. He reported his conclusions to Vice Admiral Steele who concurred in the findings and reported them up the chain of command, resulting in a proper sense of urgency. Johnson's report only

served to confirm the admiral's worst fears: "We were certain that in spite of the Ambassador's assurances that he had adequate plans, the in-country plans were totally inadequate. We had a major job ahead of us." In preparing for this eventuality, Admiral Steele made a personal trip in the fall of 1974 to meet with the new defense attache, Major General Homer D. Smith, Jr., USA, and the Ambassador. Although he received from General Smith what he described as "fine help which later proved crucial," his meeting with the Ambassador proved far less conclusive as he parted with Martin's final words ringing in his ears, "Do not worry, Admiral, I will initiate the evacuation in good time. I understand the necessity for doing so."⁴¹

With his mission completed, Colonel Johnson returned to Okinawa. With him he carried a "bootleg copy" of the consul-general's evacuation plan. This document proved to be of some help, but it had minimal impact on the formulation of detailed III MAF plans.⁴² III MAF would have to wait to see what the Commander, Seventh Fleet had decided, which in all probability would be reflected in his as-yet unpublished South Vietnam evacuation plan. Admiral Steele, in turn, was waiting for the publication of a plan by either Pacific Fleet, commanded by Admiral Maurice F. Weisner, or USSAG. The command relationships for this eventuality were not clear. Admiral Steele believed that for an evacuation operation, the Seventh Fleet should remain under his, and not General O'Keefe's operational control, but Admiral Gayler, CinCPac, decided that Commander, USSAG should control the evacuation and that the Seventh Fleet would provide support.* With this decision in hand, General O'Keefe, General Vogt's relief as USSAG commander, published his evacuation plan in October 1974, codenamed Talon Vise. The Seventh Fleet's plan for evacuation of Military Region 1 was then issued and codenamed Gallant Journey, subsequently retitled Fortress Journey. Admiral Steele immediately requested the designation of an amphibious objective area (AOA).⁴²

The next important step in this planning evolution was the clarification of command relationships. While this complex and sensitive process was occurring, the

*Admiral Steele recounted his consternation over this arrangement: "I still do not understand Admiral Gayler's decision to place Commander USSAG in control of the evacuation. Only a tiny fraction of USSAG's assets could be used while the operation would have to be run almost totally by the Navy and Marine Corps. However, once this decision was made by CinCPac, we did our best to support it." Steele Comments.

III MAF planners, using a draft copy of the USSAG plan also acquired by Colonel Johnson, began preparing for III MAF involvement. They designated Lieutenant Colonel James L. Cunningham, III MAF plans officer, coordinator of evacuation operations. His staff developed a concept plan and quickly disseminated a draft copy to the subordinate MAF commands.⁴⁴

With Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) Alpha, the 4th Marines, and elements of MAG-36 already committed to Eagle Pull, any amphibious forces needed for this operation would have to come from ARG Bravo. The ARG's landing force at this time consisted of a battalion landing team from the 9th Marines, BLT 2/9, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Gene A. Deegan. Due to be relieved by Lieutenant Colonel Royce Lynn Bond's BLT 1/9, BLT 2/9 would relinquish its responsibilities in the ARG on 6 October 1974.⁴⁵

In anticipation of the commitment of ARG Bravo and its landing force, III MAF planners went to Camp Schwab to brief Lieutenant Colonel Bond and his staff on the situation in Military Region 1 of South Vietnam. Based on the information gathered by Colonel Johnson plus intelligence gathered from local sources, the briefing provided both timely and accurate insight to a battalion commander deploying in less than a week.⁴⁶

From this and the available draft documentation, Lieutenant Colonel Bond and his S-3, Major Ronald J. Gruenberg, were able to outline a plan for the possible evacuation of Americans from South Vietnam. In this manner, the BLT readied itself for the order to evacuate, should it come. Higher headquarters needed only to designate time and place.⁴⁷

The essential points of this plan called for the major evacuation to be centered in the Da Nang area, and to be either a pier-side or an across-the-beach evacuation. The battalion would provide the ground security force and planned to use it to establish blocking positions inland, as well as provide security for the evacuation sites.⁴⁸

Shortly after the Camp Schwab conference, the Seventh Fleet sent out a planning evacuation format to standardize procedures. It duplicated the III MAF and Task Force 76 plans, thereby eliminating the need for additional preparation, but also pointing up the likelihood that this concept of operations, developed by the Marines in the fall and winter of 1974-75, would serve as the standard for all subsequent efforts. The initiative III MAF planners had demonstrated in fill-

ing this void, despite the absence of specific published guidance, enabled senior commands to speed their own planning process. Thus the plans for evacuation

of South Vietnam were set, and only time and events would determine if the participants were properly prepared to execute them.⁴⁹

CHAPTER 4

The Fleet Marines Are Readied

*The Air Contingency BLTs—The Eagle Pull Command Element
The 31st MAU—The Other Contingency*

In the six major planning conferences held in the 15 months between the cessation of combat air support in Southeast Asia and December 1974, III MAF liaison officers and USSAG Eagle Pull action officers developed and refined a highly sophisticated plan to evacuate Americans from Cambodia. After each conference, the Marine attendees would return to III MAF Headquarters at Camp Courtney on Okinawa and proceed to revise as necessary their plans and orders for Operation Eagle Pull. These revisions focused on the heliborne option, known as Option III of the basic evacuation plan. This option required several landing sites because of the anticipated number of refugees, whose estimated numbers varied from day to day. Since the Marine Corps possessed most of the heavy helicopters in Southeast Asia, III MAF was naturally sensitive to any talks involving their use.

As these discussions at Nakhon Phanom progressed, agreement centered on the employment of sea-borne helicopters over fixed-wing aircraft or land-based helicopters, thereby allotting the Marine Corps a proportionally larger role in Operation Eagle Pull. In his capacity as liaison officer to the joint planning headquarters in Nakhon Phanom, Major George L. Cates, III MAF's Eagle Pull planner, had to make sure that plans for the MAF's tasking matched its capabilities. By intensifying its readiness training, III MAF took a giant step toward increasing its capabilities. In light of these changes, the 4th and 9th Marines began holding evacuation training classes, making evacuation preparation the order of the day in III MAF.

The Air Contingency BLTs

In the first evacuation contingency plan of early 1973, the U.S. Army's 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii was assigned as the primary security force. Shortly after the decision, CinCPac planners realized that an interim, alternate force might be necessary if an evacuation of Cambodia were ordered without warning. To fulfill this requirement, CinCPac tasked III MAF to provide one company of Marines on a full-time standby basis. The evacuation security force contingency would rotate from company to company within III MAF, but if employed, the rifle company

would fall under the operational control of Commander, USSAG from its arrival at the designated assembly point until the conclusion of the operation.¹

On 15 April 1973, Major General Michael P. Ryan, III MAF commander, ordered the 31st MAU to provide the reinforced rifle company from its ground combat element, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines. A standing III MAF operation order directed the 31st MAU to develop and maintain the capability of conducting company-size evacuation operations. III MAF provided the 31st MAU with very specific guidance as to the organization of the reinforced rifle company. It directed that besides a headquarters detachment, the command element would include medical and communication elements, a flamethrower section, a 81mm mortar section, and a 106mm recoilless rifle section. The rifle company would also be supported by a sizeable logistics support element. The complexity of the

Maj George L. Cates, pictured here as a brigadier general, assumed the duties of Eagle Pull planner in the III MAF G-3 section during the summer of 1974.

Marine Corps Historical Collection



reinforced rifle company meant that more than just a routine mission was expected for this evacuation.

Operational and political considerations in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific dictated that the unit providing ground security for the Cambodian refugee extraction would have to be airlifted to Phnom Penh. Then if circumstances required, the rifle company would become the advance echelon of a larger security force. Equipment and supplies included trucks, jeeps, even an ambulance jeep, and seven days of ammunition, again an indicator of the level of combat anticipated. General Ryan tasked the 3d Marine Division to provide as a backup, an identically structured and equipped rifle company.²

On 17 April 1973, Colonel Thomas "TJ" Stevens, the commanding officer of the 31st MAU, reported to the Commanding General, III MAF that the designated company had completed a mount-out exercise. Having demonstrated its readiness, Stevens stated that his company was immediately deployable.³ General Ryan, in turn, notified Lieutenant General Louis H. Wilson, Jr., the commanding general of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (FMFPac), and Vice Admiral George P. Steele, commander of the Seventh Fleet, that the designated companies from BLT 1/4 and the 3d Marine Division's air contingency battalion landing team, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Charles E. Parker, were ready to deploy. On 20 April, General Ryan directed a change of principal players, Company G (reinforced) from BLT 2/9 would now be the primary ground security force to support USSAG, and Company B (reinforced) from BLT 1/4 would assume the back-up role. The entire 31st MAU remained on notice to be prepared to support the operation.⁴

This was the first of several instances during the 1973 to 1975 period that the MAF commanding general was faced with a dilemma. Given the uncertainty of the situation, he had to decide whether to divide his ready force to meet the initial requirement, opening the possibility of piecemeal commitment, or leave the forward force intact, and use another force to make the first contact. As indicated by his directive to Colonel Stevens on 20 April, General Ryan opted for the second choice.

On 26 June 1973, USSAG made General Ryan's choice slightly more difficult. It upped the ante by requesting the commitment of a second rifle company and a command group to augment the Operation Eagle Pull ground security force. To accommodate the

growing estimate of evacuees, General John W. Vogt, Jr., had added another helicopter landing zone, thereby necessitating additional forces to secure it. Again, General Ryan handed the task to the air contingency battalion—2d Battalion, 9th Marines—now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert M. Stauffer. Stauffer designated Companies F and G as the Eagle Pull forces.⁵

As far as the Okinawa-based air contingency battalion was concerned, the assumption of Eagle Pull responsibilities did not alter its normal readiness posture. Two of its reinforced rifle companies and a command group were placed in an increased alert and deployability status. The command group, consisting of a security force commander and his small staff of an air liaison officer (ALO) and two communication officers, were on call at all times. The air contingency battalion, a rotational assignment among the 3d Marine Division's six infantry battalions, was drilled more extensively and more often in air movement exercises. Battalions assumed this mission during the post-deployment phase of their life cycles. Regularly scheduled loading drills and joint air movement and transportability exercises with the Air Force not only tested the battalions, but, equally important, they also improved the efficiency of the division's embarkation and movement control agencies. Starting with command post training drills and culminating in air-ground field exercises, the 3d Marine Division's infantry battalions and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing's squadrons became increasingly proficient in emergency evacuation procedures.

The 3d Marine Division held Eagle Pull practice sessions on a monthly basis. Each drill involved all of the III MAF units required to function in the final operation: the designated companies and command group; the motor transport elements taking the security force to Kadena; and the embarkation units controlling the movement to Kadena.

From an operational point of view, the planners' gravest concern was the movement of the forces from their base camps to Kadena. It was difficult from a transportation aspect; many alerts, oddly, took place on weekends when motor transport personnel were on liberty and Okinawa highway traffic was in a snarl. In terms of operational security, 400 fully armed Marines could not move on Okinawa without being noticed, even when transported by air, because that many helicopters landing at Kadena at short, regular intervals was a highly conspicuous event.

On 28 September 1973, a typical Eagle Pull drill was conducted at the direction of Colonel Alexander S. Ruggiero, the 3d Marine Division G-3. He randomly asked individual Marines under what circumstances they would fire their weapons. Ruggiero concluded that the Marines in Companies F and G were well schooled in the rules of engagement, but also determined that some Marines knew not enough and others too much about the pending operation: “. . . Co G[’s] . . . men gave the overall impression of being quite bewildered by the whole thing Co F, knew a little too much as they identified the country.”*⁶

With the passage of time and subsequent drills, the functioning of the entire apparatus became smoother. The air contingency BLTs were ready to go, dedicated drivers from the 3d and 9th Motor Transport Battalions knew exactly where to go, and the control agencies knew how to move the air contingency BLTs in the shortest amount of time.⁷

When the dry season in Cambodia began in 1975, the air contingency BLT was the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Gene A. Deegan. In early January of that year, BLT 2/9 increased its alert status. Lieutenant Colonel Deegan recalled his designated Eagle Pull rifle companies, Company G, commanded by Captain James H. Davis, and Company H, commanded by Captain James L. Jones, Jr., from the Northern Training Area where they had been undergoing post-deployment training. As the month progressed and the Khmer Rouge pressed ever closer to Phnom Penh, the evacuation reaction time was decreased from 16 to 3 hours. Lieutenant Colonel Deegan and his S-3, Major Barry J. Murphy, became daily visitors at the division and MAF headquarters. Major General Kenneth J. Houghton, who had succeeded Major General Fred E. Haynes, Jr., as commanding general of the 3d Marine Division, almost daily presided over briefings of the designated Eagle Pull commanders. These changes foretold what everyone knew, that actual operations would soon supplant training as the priority of the day.

*Colonel Ruggiero also concluded from his inspection that each driver in the convoy needed to know through which gate to enter Kadena, because the convoy commander did not have time to wait until all the trucks had been loaded before beginning the movement (Maj Henry C. Stackpole memo to CO, 9th Mar, Subj: Eagle Pull, dtd 29Sept73, p. 1, Eagle Pull File). He also commented, years later, that the continuous rotation of companies to the Eagle Pull contingency made the maintenance of secrecy even more difficult, but the paramount concern during early training centered around the dense traffic on the roads to Kadena. Ruggiero Comments.



Photo courtesy of Col Peter F. Angle, USMC (Ret)
Col Stephen G. Olmstead, ground security force commander, stands outside his quarters in Phnom Penh.

The Eagle Pull Command Element

On 30 June 1973, four days after the requirement materialized for an overall ground commander, known as the Ground Security Force (GSF) Commander, General Ryan selected Colonel Stephen G. Olmstead, the commanding officer of the 9th Marines, to serve in that capacity. One of Colonel Olmstead's first duties involved a trip to Hawaii to brief Admiral Gayler at CinCPac and General Wilson at FMFPac on the concept and scheme of maneuver for Operation Eagle Pull. In August 1973 he went to Nakhon Phanom to participate in the initial planning conference between the USSAG staff and III MAF Marines. Returning to Okinawa, he formed his command element, which included Major Peter F. Angle (air liaison officer) and two communicators. Then throughout the fall and early winter, the command element stood ready to fly to Nakhon Phanom should the need arise for a final liaison with the USSAG commander before starting the actual evacuation. The 1974 dry season was less than a month old when the call came.



Photo courtesy of Col Peter F. Angle, USMC (Ret)

Ground security force commander Col Olmstead views Pochentong airfield during his January-February 1974 visit. The airfield was the only way out other than by river convoy.

The ground security force air liaison officer, Maj Peter F. Angle, photographed Embassy LZ during his January-February 1974 visit. The landing zone, 100 meters from the Embassy in Phnom Penh, could accommodate two CH-53s and was fenced by barbed wire.

Photo courtesy of Col Peter F. Angle, USMC (Ret)





Marine Corps Historical Collection

LtCol Curtis G. Lawson, pictured here as a colonel, became the 3d Marine Division air officer in December 1974. An additional duty of this billet was to serve as air liaison officer for the Eagle Pull command element.

In response to increased pressure from Khmer forces around the city of Phnom Penh, General Timothy F. O'Keefe (ComUSSAG) requested that Colonel Olmstead and his command element deploy to Nakhon Phanom. Evacuation appeared imminent. The III MAF commander, Major General Herman Poggemeyer, Jr., who replaced General Ryan on 31 December 1973, in his semi-annual history reported, "Colonel Olmstead, the designated GSF Commander, deployed to Southeast Asia with the Regimental AIO and two radio operators on 23 January 1974 in an increased readiness posture. The group returned to Camp Schwab on 16 February 1974."⁸

Colonel Olmstead's notification of his impending departure came during a 9th Marines mess night when Major General Fred E. Haynes, Jr., 3d Marine Division commander, pulled him aside and said, "The bell has rung and you have been called down there." The next morning Colonel Olmstead and his party left Kadena on a T-39 aircraft for Nakhon Phanom via Cubi Point, Republic of the Philippines. Even though the deployment turned out to be a false alarm the Marines used the opportunity to visit Phnom Penh. On this visit, they spent three days in the Cambodian cap-

ital, visiting LZs, checking movement routes, and photographing anything deemed important to the operation. When Colonel Olmstead and Major Angle returned to Utapao, the GSF commander met with and debriefed Colonel Twomey, the MAU commander, who had flown from the command ship to Thailand to learn first hand about the latest developments in Cambodia. Before departing Utapao, Colonel Olmstead made two more visits to Phnom Penh and on the last trip as on the first one his air liaison officer, Major Angle, accompanied him. They rechecked the security of the landing zones and took additional photographs. By this time, Colonel Olmstead and Major Angle noticed a decrease in the military activity in and around the Cambodian capital and correctly surmised that the government forces had regained the initiative. After the initial attacks which the government forces parried, the Khmer Rouge offensive stalled. Little over a month after the command element's return to Okinawa, the 1974 dry season ended and so did the immediate urgency surrounding Operation Eagle Pull. With the coming of summer and the usual heavy turnover of senior commanders in III MAF, Colonel Sydney H. "Tom" Batchelder, Jr., relieved Colonel Olmstead as GSF commander in May 1974. He also assumed command of the 3d Service Battalion on 28 May 1974.⁹

Batchelder selected as his air officer Lieutenant Colonel Glenn J. Shaver, Jr., the division air officer and a former commanding officer of a CH-53 squadron. Colonel Batchelder and his command element repeated the same round of liaison visits to Nakhon Phanom and Phnom Penh during the late summer and fall of 1974. In November of 1974, Lieutenant Colonel Curtis G. Lawson replaced Lieutenant Colonel Shaver as the air officer.

During an earlier tour, Lieutenant Colonel Lawson, an A-6 pilot, had been shot down over North Vietnam and subsequently rescued by a "Jolly Green Giant" of the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (ARRS) flying from Da Nang.¹⁰ Coincidentally, one of the 37th ARRS' detachments, redesignated the 40th ARRS in March 1968, had since moved to Nakhon Phanom, the home of USSAG.* Another recent arrival at Nakhon Phanom was USSAG's new commander, Lieutenant General John J. Burns, USAF. On 1 September 1974, the same day he pinned on

*On 16 January 1967, Detachment 2, 37th ARRS was organized and assigned to Udorn, Thailand, to rescue downed pilots in Laos and North Vietnam. In March 1968 the Air Force redesignated it the 40th ARRS and on 21 July 1971 moved the squadron to Nakhon Phanom.

his third star, General Burns replaced General O'Keefe. Besides Burns' distinguished combat record as a veteran of 340 air missions in three wars, he also had participated in a major Cold War battle. During the 1958 confrontation with China over Formosa and the ensuing crisis, he and his entire squadron deployed to Okinawa to await further orders and combat if required. Those orders never came but those that did arrive in 1974 sent a well prepared and experienced General Burns into a similar crisis environment.¹¹

In early December Lieutenant Colonel Lawson visited Nakhon Phanom in order to obtain a briefing from General Burns' staff on the state of the pending crisis in Cambodia. Conducting this visit shortly after joining the division, Lawson gained valuable insight into the command structure and USSAG's plan for the evacuation mission. By mid-December 1974, the new, fully briefed, Marine Corps Eagle Pull command element needed only two more things: the order to go and the 31st MAU.

The 31st MAU

Before the 31st MAU finally received the order to "go," it spent 25 months in training and waiting. Battalions joined the MAU and in many cases rejoined it before the call to evacuate finally came. Although only one battalion actually received the order to execute, all contributed. Those two years of waiting en-

compassed endless days of repetition, but also many hours of anticipation, concern, and preparation. It was during those hours that the Marines of the 31st MAU wrote all but the final chapter of the history of Operation Eagle Pull beginning in the spring of 1973.

During the period 17 April 1973 to 20 July 1973, the 31st MAU maintained Lieutenant Colonel Floyd A. Karker, Jr.'s BLT 1/4 on standby as a backup force for Eagle Pull. Even though the original requirement stated the need for only one company as an additional security force, all of Lieutenant Colonel Karker's companies were assigned a landing zone in Phnom Penh.¹² The MAU was ashore at the base camp at Subic Bay. The amphibious ships that normally carried it and its assigned helicopter squadron, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur B. Colbert's HMM-165, were involved in Operation Endsweep, a mine clearing mission being carried out in North Vietnamese waters as per the Paris Accords.

On 21 July 1973, with its ships and helicopter squadron inbound to Subic, the MAU was alerted for possible commitment to Operation Eagle Pull. Purely a precautionary measure, the alert's purpose was to ensure that General Vogt (ComUSSAG) had enough helicopters available. Five days later, General Ryan on orders from CinCPac directed Major General Frank C. Lang, the Commanding General, 1st MAW, to "flight

The soccer field at the university in Phnom Penh was one of the original primary landing zones. CH-53 pilots of 31st MAU, known as the "Eagle Pull Mix," expected to use this LZ, Embassy LZ, or Colosseum LZ during late 1973 or early 1974, but Phnom Penh held.

Photo courtesy of Col Peter F. Angle. USMC (Ret)



ferry" (administratively move) "not less than twelve CH-53s" from MCAS Futema to Cubi Point for transfer to the USS *New Orleans* (LPH 11) where they would be used as substitutes for HMM-165's CH-46s. The CH-53s were to be configured for extended range operations, equipped with the ALE-29 flare dispensers to counter heat-seeking missiles, and armed, clear signs that this was no drill. For the first time, the MAU's aviation element would be composed of the "Eagle Pull mix" (13 CH-53s, 4 CH-46s, 4 AH-1Js, and 2 UH-1Es).

Immediately upon assuming command of Task Group 79.4 (CTG 79.4/31st MAU), Colonel Twomey received orders to arrive, within the constraints of the response time, off the coast of Kampong Som (a Cambodian port on the Gulf of Thailand), and once there to conduct BLT training in preparation for the ground security force evacuation mission. Furthermore, his orders directed him to stand ready to assume the duties of the senior ground force commander for Operation Eagle Pull. By 31 July, the MAU was reconstituted and embarked on ARG Alpha shipping in Subic Bay, with orders to maintain a 70-hour reaction time to the Gulf of Thailand and a position off the coast of Cambodia.¹³

Just prior to the MAU's departure on 6 August 1973, Colonel Twomey and other members of the 31st MAU attended the first joint Eagle Pull planning conference hosted by the USSAG commander. Upon the group's return from the meeting in Nakhon Phanom, the amphibious ready group, with the MAU embarked, sortied from Subic Bay. Four days later, ARG Alpha/31st MAU reached its assigned holding area in the Gulf of Thailand and assumed a 12-hour alert posture. This positioning allowed the amphibious ready group/MAU a half-day to rendezvous at the prospective helicopter launch sites off Kampong Som. Seventy-two hours later, General Vogt issued his operational plan for Eagle Pull, and the next day, 14 August 1973, Colonel Twomey issued Operation Order 2-73 (Eagle Pull) in support of the ComUSSAG plan. On 26 August, General Vogt also ordered the 31st MAU to prepare for the evacuation of the Military Equipment Delivery Team (MEDTC) personnel from the Ream/Kampong Som area.¹⁴

Upon notification of their pending participation in Operation Eagle Pull, BLT 1/4 and HMM-165, the 31st MAU's subordinate elements, started detailed planning for the operation. In addition, they began to reorganize their training to make it conform more to the unusual mission, the evacuation of civilians. The

BLT conducted embarkation drills and the squadron tested the helicopter launch and recovery schedule. By the end of August, the 31st MAU was ready.¹⁵

Having an original relief date of 1 August, the BLT and its medium helicopter squadron began to experience, towards the end of August, personnel rotation problems. They would continue to occur as long as the MAU remained on station without relief. On 30 August, the personnel problem was solved, in part, when the MAU transferred the Marines scheduled for stateside return to the USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC 19).

The USS *Blue Ridge*, destined for Okinawa, carried these Marines to Okinawa where the division processed and returned them by plane to the United States. Besides the confusion created by the departure of these transferees, the 31st MAU also underwent other personnel changes. Lieutenant Colonel Bertram A. Maas arrived and exchanged positions with Lieutenant Colonel Ronald L. Owen, the executive officer. The following day, the *Blue Ridge* completed the transfer by highlining Lieutenant Colonel Owen and another key and experienced officer, Major Jerome T. Paull (the MAU S-2), to the USNS *Tuluga* (AO 62), for further transport to Subic Bay, Republic of Philippines, and then home.¹⁶

Its tour more than complete (in fact a month overdue), BLT 1/4 and its senior commands, ARG Alpha and 31st MAU, upon receipt of new orders on 30 August, sailed for Okinawa to effect a BLT turnover. ARG Alpha plotted a course for White Beach while maintaining a 120-hour (five-day) reaction time to the Gulf of Thailand and its required Eagle Pull position off Kompong Som.¹⁷ The relief of BLT 1/4 was accomplished on 7 September when Battalion Landing Team 1/9 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Larry R. Gaboury assumed the role as the ground combat element in the 31st MAU. Lieutenant Colonel Colbert's HMM-165 remained as the MAU's aviation element. During the transition period, Major Angelo A. Fernandez reported on board as the new 31st MAU operations officer. The turnover was accomplished smoothly, maintaining a seven-day response time (relaxed from the five-day response posture) to Kampong Som. The 120-hour reaction time was reassumed during the transit to Subic Bay during which, on 8 September, the USS *Tripoli* lost use of its propulsion system and had to be towed to port. The problem was fixed during the next three weeks while the MAU, ashore, prepared for Operation Pagasa II, a combined landing exercise with the Philippine Marines.

The entire 31st MAU did not take part in Operation Pagasa II, but its ground element, under the operational control of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade (as of 30 September 1973), participated as the landing force. Colonel Twomey assumed command of Regimental Landing Team 4 and controlled it during the exercise, which began on 29 September but ended prematurely, five days later, because of typhoon conditions.¹⁸

Faced on 3 October 1973 with the termination of Pagasa II and the imminent arrival of another dry season, the 31st MAU reassumed operational control of its subordinate units and reconstituted its aviation element using an "Eagle Pull helicopter mix." The MAU loaded the medium helicopters normally assigned to it, eight CH-46s and two UH-1Es, on the USS *Denver* (LPD 9) and sent them back to Okinawa.

Because of a shortage of amphibious assault ships (LPHs) in the Pacific fleet (only three for five squadrons), the LPHs operated on a rotation schedule not in synchronization with the amphibious squadron relief cycle. In October, in Subic Bay, the USS *Okinawa* (LPH 3) replaced the USS *Tripoli* (LPH 10). In order to complete the exchange of responsibilities, the two ships had to conduct a major housekeeping maneuver, a transfer of all embarked MAU elements. The move was completed smoothly with minimum disruption to the amphibious ready group's itinerary.¹⁹

During November 1973, the major training accomplished by the MAU was a helicopter landing exercise, HeloLex 1-73. In it, ARG Alpha and the 31st MAU rehearsed one of the landing plans for Operation Eagle Pull. The aviation element flew 150 Marines into three landing zones. These troops constituted the ground security force while the 120 Marines already in position in the LZs played the role of civilian evacuees. The MAU then evacuated the Marine "civilians" to the primary receiving ship, *Okinawa*, to test and evaluate the effectiveness of its shipboard procedures for handling and medically treating evacuees. The MAU satisfied its exercise objectives: no significant problems were encountered in command, control, coordination, or the evacuation process.

On 24 November, ARG Alpha, with the 31st MAU embarked, sailed for Taiwan and its scheduled port visits. While enroute, the amphibious ready group encountered high winds and heavy seas. One of its ships, the USS *Tuscaloosa* (LST 1187, a tank landing ship), suffered damage to her bow doors, which as a result needed repair or replacement. The *Tuscaloosa* and the ARG proceeded directly to Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Once

there, the *Tuscaloosa* transferred all its MAU units to the amphibious transport dock ship, the USS *Duluth* (LPD 6), and then waited for a replacement. With the *Tuscaloosa* out of commission, another tank landing ship, the USS *Barbour County* (LST 1195), detached from ARG Bravo and sailed for Kaohsiung. Upon its arrival, the *Tuscaloosa* immediately fired up its boilers and headed south for Subic Bay and major repairs.

On 30 November, five days after LST 1187's departure, the entire ARG/MAU weighed anchor in Kaohsiung and set course for Okinawa where it effected a planned swap of MAU units. BLT 2/4 assumed BLT 1/9's duties as the MAU's ground combat element while HMH-462 replaced HMM-165 as the aviation component, thereby accomplishing the final turnover of 1973.²⁰

Completing this evolution in the first days of December, the 31st MAU welcomed Lieutenant Colonel Carl E. Mundy, Jr., the commander of BLT 2/4, and Lieutenant Colonel Steven R. Foulger, the commanding officer of HMH-462, on board by immediately getting underway for Subic Bay. While enroute, the MAU staff completed final planning for the impending exercises which they conducted in the Philippines near Subic. The first of these began on 5 December in the Zambales training area. By evening on that first Wednesday of December, the MAU had finished HeloLex 2-73, a dress rehearsal for the Eagle Pull helicopter option. During the next two days, the 31st MAU completed an amphibious assault exercise, ZAMEX 2-73. Also staged in the Zambales training area, it tested the BLT landing and withdrawal plan. After completing this test of the MAU's readiness, the ARG returned to Subic on Friday evening, 7 December.

The following Sunday morning, Colonel Twomey and Lieutenant Colonels Mundy and Foulger departed Cubi Point Naval Air Station for a three day Eagle Pull planning conference. Besides an important meeting with representatives of General O'Keefe's USSAG staff and Colonel Olmstead (GSF commander), the visit included a trip to Phnom Penh where the Marines saw first-hand the proposed landing zones and assembly areas. On 12 December, Colonel Twomey and a fully briefed and well prepared staff returned to Subic and ARG Alpha. A little over a week later, the ARG got underway for liberty ports in Hong Kong and Taiwan with rumors circulating that the MAU would never get to use its training, because the evacuation response time would be lengthened so much that the MAU's presence in the Gulf of Thailand would



Photo courtesy of Col Peter F. Angle, USMC (Ret)

This area of Pochentong airfield would have to be secured if CinCPac decided to use the airfield as an evacuation site. The idea, later scrapped, was the most complicated of the many evacuation options considered from July of 1973 until April of 1974.

no longer be required.²¹ For those who had envisioned reaping the benefits, extended liberty in exotic ports, the change in assignment arrived too late. It happened on 9 January 1974, after the amphibious ready group, by then enroute to Subic, had left its Taiwanese ports-of-call. On that second Wednesday of the new year, CinCPac ordered ARG Alpha/31st MAU to assume a 96-hour (four-day) response time for the Eagle Pull contingency.

Eight days later, increased enemy activity in Cambodia required 31st MAU/ARG Alpha to assume a 72-hour Eagle Pull response posture. On 20 January, Pacific command headquarters ordered 31st MAU/ARG Alpha to the Gulf of Thailand. By that evening, all units were underway, arriving in the Gulf on 23 January 1974. Although the crisis in Phnom Penh stabilized the next day, resulting in a relaxation of the response time for other Eagle Pull units, the MAU and ARG remained on station in the Gulf of Thailand, awaiting reassessment of the situation and further word.

On the 26th, III MAF tasked 31st MAU to prepare to provide support for the fixed-wing military airlift, Option II of the Eagle Pull contingency plan. To fulfill the requirements of this task, the MAU would have to land a 90-man ground security force at Pochentong Airfield (on the outskirts of Phnom Penh). The plan called for this force to secure the airfield and assist in

the evacuation of civilian personnel. On 30 January, Colonel Twomey and Colonel Olmstead met at Uta-pao and discussed the military situation in Cambodia and the new manpower demands. The very next day, on 1 February, the 31st MAU/ARG Alpha incorporated into its flight training schedule rehearsal of the helicopter option (III) of the Eagle Pull evacuation plan.²²

During the course of this training evolution, Admiral Gayler, CinCPac, ordered the task force on 2 February to assume a five-hour response posture for possible Eagle Pull activity. This change in orders came as a result of the enemy's newly gained advantage, which allowed them to attack and fire upon Phnom Penh. In order to neutralize this capability, Eagle Pull planners decided that the operation might have to be conducted after sunset. As a consequence, the 31st MAU intensified night helicopter operations during the 3 to 8 February period. In the midst of this training, on 5 February, the commander of the Seventh Fleet, Admiral Steele, recommended to CinCPac that because of the problems normally encountered in night-time evacuation operations, Eagle Pull be executed only during daylight hours. CinCPac concurred.

With a decrease in the enemy threat, Admiral Gayler, on 9 February, directed the 31st MAU/ARG Alpha to relax its response time to 72 hours, and sail to Su-