



USMC Photo A185856

A VC prisoner leads a Marine squad to a weapons cache. The prisoner claims that the VC are using the Buddhist Pagoda in the picture to store their arms.

ferry crossing sites, LAAM sites on mountain peaks, ammunition dumps, supply dumps, and units of the MAF. I arranged for rotation of the war dogs, temporary augmentation from scarce infantry assets to help in nighttime guarding or patrolling, or improvement of the physical barriers. I withheld infantry assistance on occasion for our assets were too thin. We had to tell some sailors, soldiers, Marines, even civilians, to "do the best you can, to be alert."³⁵

Security coordinators were established at all Marine airfields. The commanding officer of the 9th Marines assumed the additional title of Marble Mountain airfield coordinator with the responsibility of overseeing the defense for the helicopter field. After the October raid, the 3d Engineer Battalion, with the assistance of MAG-16 personnel, built a barrier of minefields and barbed wire.³⁶ Similar measures were taken at the other installations.

Each Marine enclave developed its own procedures for providing internal airfield security. At Da Nang, one infantry battalion provided security; each of its four companies was assigned a defensive area from 2,100-3,400 meters wide. The battalion conducted patrols outside the airfield perimeter to add depth to the Marine defense, as well as to prevent the VC from setting up mortar and recoilless rifle firing positions.³⁷ The Vietnamese Air Force defense sector remained separate from the battalion's area of operations. At Chu Lai, the Marines also assigned one infantry battalion to airfield security, but only two of the battalion's companies were deployed on the airfield perimeter. These two companies were

reinforced by two provisional rifle companies composed of personnel from MAG-12, the Seabees, and the 2d LAAM Battalion.³⁸ At Phu Bai, the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines developed the combined action company to deal with the unique situation existing there.

III MAF experimented with several techniques to ensure the security of the major airbases. These included the use of dogs and sophisticated electronic devices. In August, 11 sentry dogs and their Marine handlers arrived at Da Nang from Japan. After three weeks of intensive training, the dogs were assigned to posts at ammunition supply points, LAAM battery sites, and Marble Mountain. In November, some of the dogs accompanied Marine patrols along the airfield perimeter. The Marines learned that the dogs were most effective when employed in remote areas where few people worked or lived. The dogs were extremely valuable at the LAAM battery site on secluded Monkey Mountain, but proved to be unsatisfactory at the ammunition supply point where Marines worked around the clock. The continuous activity at the latter site only confused the animals.³⁹

In November and December 1965, III MAF received 600 seismic detection sets for perimeter defense. These electronic devices were extremely sensitive to ground vibrations and relayed seismic disturbance signals to Marine-monitored control boxes. These instruments operated well, but, as Colonel Carrington pointed out:

We had known in the first place that there were always plenty of human beings out there in front of us in the paddies, huts, jungles, and hills. No tricky devices or stunts, however, could help Marines determine friend from foe.⁴⁰

Even so, the Marines found the devices useful. As one battalion commander explained:

We used the seismic devices in each one of these situations, very successfully so. We shot a few water buffalo and a few dogs . . . [the devices allow] you, of course, to maintain and secure a much greater perimeter with a lot less people.^{41*}

*Colonel Carrington recalled one rather humorous use of the seismic device: " . . . a senior USMC officer was concerned that sappers might be tunneling under our MAF headquarters. Use of seismic detectors to confirm this was inconclusive, but after resort to bull dozers to dig futilely for the assumed tunnel, I was chastised by another senior USMC officer for allowing destruction of a projected, ceremonial parade ground." Col George W. Carrington, Jr., Comments on draft MS, dtd 24Nov76 (Vietnam Comment File).

Extended Patrolling

Throughout the latter half of 1965, Marine units concentrated on small unit operations. General Walt referred to such actions as the "bread and butter of my command."⁴² A month-by-month comparison of the number of patrols, ambushes, listening posts, and other activities of Marine platoons and squads shows a steady increase in the tempo of operations. In October 3d Marine Division units at all three enclaves conducted 2,877 patrols and 1,061 ambushes which resulted in 70 contacts with the enemy. In December, the division reported a total of 9,698 offensive operations which resulted in 510 contacts.⁴³ One battalion commander observed that each of his platoons conducted two night patrols and one daylight patrol during an average 24-hour period.⁴⁴

III MAF developed and modified techniques and tactics for the employment of small Marine units. The Marines experimented with specially trained and equipped sniper teams. Fifty of the best marksmen were selected from each of the regiments. These troops were divided into four-man teams and equipped with Winchester Model 70 rifles and telescopic sights. After training, the teams rejoined their regiments. During November and December, 20-30 teams operated in the Marine TAORs daily. On 23 November, a sniper team at Phu Bai killed two VC and wounded another at a distance of more than 1,000 meters.

Aggressive small unit patrolling continued to pay dividends. On 5 December, a platoon from Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines surprised 70 VC on the

Trung Phan Peninsula, six miles southeast of the Chu Lai airfield. The platoon, operating from its company's combat base, had been assigned the mission of searching the Tuyet Diem (1) hamlet on the banks of the Moi River. The platoon had established an ambush site 2,000 meters south of the hamlet. At 0300, four VC walked into the trap and were killed by a burst of Marine fire. First Lieutenant Charles D. Jones, the platoon commander, fearing that the noise had compromised his position, ordered two of his squads to deploy to the left and right of the village while he led the third squad into the hamlet. At 0600 the 3d squad entered Tuyet Diem (1) and caught the VC completely unaware. According to one report: "At that time it [the hamlet] became alive with VC. They ran into the streets, some of them naked; all of them carrying weapons, and of course the squads on the right and left took them under fire."⁴⁵

At the same time, the 3d Squad pushed the enemy toward the river where the platoon killed 30 VC and captured seven more. A search of the area turned up a squad leader's diary, three weapons, and a medical kit.⁴⁶

Several hours later there was a sequel to this action. Lieutenant Colonel James P. Kelly, the battalion commander, ordered Company A to move into the same area. Kelly believed that there was a good chance that VC might still be there.⁴⁷ He was correct. The Marines of Company A killed eight VC and captured three more weapons.

Another significant engagement occurred in the Da Nang TAOR on 27 December when a 17-man patrol from Company B, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines engaged a large enemy force near the small hamlet of Quang Ha, 11 miles south of the base. As the Marines approached the hamlet they were fired on from a tree line to their front and from their right flank. The first burst killed the patrol's radioman, destroyed his radio, and damaged one of the two M-60 machine guns. The heavy fire lasted about 15 minutes, seven members of the patrol were hit, and one Marine died of wounds.

Earlier the patrol leader, First Lieutenant James P. Weller, had sent a fire team to a sandy ridge on his right flank to cover the patrol's approach. The main body of the patrol and the flanking fire team immediately returned fire. The enemy launched a frontal attack. The VC were caught in a crossfire between the main body and the fire team on the right

* These statistics must be used with care. They are reliable for showing general trends, but are not absolutely accurate. As an example, CG FMFPac's staff stated that in October the Marines conducted 3,900 patrols of squad and platoon-size, in addition to 1,361 ambushes which resulted in 323 contacts. III MAF, on the other hand, reported 3,520 small unit actions resulting in 287 VC contacts for the same period. III MAF ComdC, Oct65 and FMFPac, III MAF, Ops, Oct 65. In the text, the figures provided by the division are used in that it furnished both III MAF and FMFPac with the figures they used. On the general subject of reporting, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons observed that as III MAF G-3 he "spent 60 percent of my time reporting or generating reports (in two directions: Hawaii and Saigon)" BGen Edwin H. Simmons, ltr to Col George W. Carrington, dtd 2Dec76 (Vietnam Comment File).

flank. The Marines killed nine of the attackers, but 40 to 50 more VC moved into positions behind the ambush site. Lieutenant Weller set off a smoke grenade, the prearranged signal to the battalion for help in case of radio failure. After 30 minutes, the Americans heard a shrill whistle and the enemy fire diminished. The Marines continued to fire 60mm mortar rounds. At this point, Marine reinforcements, including two Ontos and two tanks, arrived. According to Lieutenant Weller, fire from the tanks caused another 13 VC casualties. An armed helicopter covered the Marines as they withdrew

from the area, while artillery fire was placed on the suspected enemy escape routes. The engagement resulted in 41 confirmed enemy dead and another 15-20 probable kills. The Marines suffered seven casualties, all during the initial burst of fire.⁴⁸

As small unit patrolling expanded into the populated ricelands of the growing Marine enclaves, III MAF soon realized the futility of such actions unless the Viet Cong infrastructure there was destroyed. Several programs were established to accomplish this end. They had many different labels, but pacification was the true name of the game.

CHAPTER 9

Pacification

The Combined Action Program—Protection of the Harvest: GOLDEN FLEECE—Cordon and Search: The Seeds of COUNTY FAIR and Population Control—Civic Action—The Ngu Hanh Son Campaign and the Frustrations of Pacification

The Combined Action Program

Fighting guerrillas was not a new experience for the Marine Corps. General Walt recalled that as a young officer he learned the fundamentals of his profession “from men who had fought Sandino in Nicaragua or Charlemagne in Haiti.”¹ Based on earlier experiences in the Caribbean republics, in 1940 the Marine Corps published the *Small Wars Manual*, which contains the statement:

In small wars, tolerance, sympathy, and kindness should be the keynote of our relationship with the mass of the population The purpose should always be to restore normal government and to establish peace, order, and security. . . .^{2*}

General Walt expressed much the same sentiment when he described pacification. The name doesn’t matter, the idea does: sympathy, understanding, regard for the people.³

The Marines recognized the close interrelationship between defense of the base area and the extension of Marine influence into the countryside. This was clearly demonstrated at Phu Bai where the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines faced the situation of

defending an expanding area of operations with a limited number of troops. They responded by developing the Combined Action Program. When Zone A,** the 10-square-mile built-up area directly north and east of the airfield, was incorporated in the Marine TAOR on 21 June, Lieutenant Colonel William “Woody” Taylor expected reinforcements from the 3d Marine Division to control the added area, but the diversion of Utter’s battalion to Qui Nhon forced Taylor to make do with the forces he had on hand.

At the suggestion of Captain John J. Mullen, Jr., the battalion adjutant and civil affairs officer, Taylor decided to tap a neglected resource, the South Vietnamese Popular Forces (PF). There were six PF platoons in the Phu Bai TAOR; one each in the villages of Thuy Luong, Thuy Tan, Phu Bai, and Loc Son, and two guarding the railroad and Highway 1 bridges. In July, Lieutenant Colonel Taylor was granted limited operational control of the PF units in Zone A by General Chuan, the 1st ARVN Division commander. Major Cullen C. Zimmerman, Taylor’s executive officer, developed plans for the incorporation of Marines into the PF units. Lieutenant Colonel Taylor then discussed the concept with Colonel Wheeler, still commander of the 3d Marines, and General Walt. Colonel Wheeler assigned a young, Vietnamese-speaking officer from his staff at Da Nang, First Lieutenant Paul R. Ek, the responsibility for establishing the program at Phu Bai. Ek was to integrate a Marine squad into a PF

* A former III MAF staff officer in 1965 and, later, a battalion and combined action group commander, Colonel John E. Greenwood, cautioned that the relationship between Marine Corps counterinsurgency theory and the earlier Marine experience in the Caribbean can be overdrawn. Colonel Greenwood remarked that during the Kennedy era “guerrilla warfare expertise” was one of the “popular ‘in’ topics,” and the “hundreds of Marine officers,” including himself, “attended Army schools and studied the doctrine developed and articulated by the British and by the U.S. Army.” He made the point that for officers of his generation, as opposed to the senior commanders such as General Walt, “our insights in war of this kind came from this nearly contemporary effort, not from Marine Corps experience 30 years previous.” Col John E. Greenwood, Comments on draft MS, dtd Nov77 (Vietnam Comment File).

** Zone A consisted of the ARVN Dong Da training camp, a series of hamlets, and low, wet rice lands extending to the waterways which formed a semicircle around the Marine base. The rivers in the area roughly defined the boundaries for the entire Marine TAOR: the Ta Trach in the west, the Dai Giang to the north and east, and the Nong to the east and south. See Chapter 3 for the incorporation of Zone A in the TAOR.



USMC Photo A185708

At Phu Bai, 1st Lieutenant Paul R. Ek, commander of the Combined Action Company (holding the rifle), inspects a combined squad of Vietnamese Popular Force troops and U.S. Marines.

platoon, forming what was then called a "joint action company," patterned along the lines of the British companies used in Malaya during the 1950s.*

The Marine Corps had established its own pacification precedents in the Caribbean and senior Marine officers, as early as February 1963, con-

sidered adapting this experience to the Vietnam situation. General Greene, then chief of staff at HQMC, met with Edward H. Forney, a retired Marine general, home on leave from his post in Saigon where he was the Public Safety Advisor with the U.S. Operations Mission. Forney, a Naval Academy graduate and a veteran of both World War II and Korea, had served two years with the 1st Marine Brigade in Haiti during the early 1930s. According to General Greene, Forney believed that:

The Marine Corps should get into the Vietnam job with both feet and that it should be a real grass roots level operation, not tied in with the MAAG; but rather an effort to be linked with the Civil Guard, the Self-Defense Corps, and the local Militia in the village and boondock level. This would be similar to the Guardia effort in Nicaragua or the Gendarmerie operation in Haiti and Santo Domingo. Forney thinks that this is the type of operation around which the common people of South Vietnam would rally; that this is the big deficiency in the

* General Walt made the following statement concerning the origins of the Combined Action Program: "I can unequivocally state that the original suggestion was made by Captain John J. Mullen, Jr., the first plans made by Major Cullen C. Zimmerman, with the approval of the Commanding Officer of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines (Regiment), Lieutenant Colonel William W. Taylor." Walt, *Strange War, Strange Strategy*, p. 105. According to Captain Paul R. Ek, the first commanding officer of the Combined Action Company, the Province Chief of Thua Thien Province, Lieutenant Colonel Khoa "indicated to Lieutenant Colonel Taylor that there should be only one commander for all troops, Marines and Popular Forces, in the area." Ek MR, 10Nov72.



USMC Photo A185800

Lieutenant Paul R. Ek (on the right) discusses the situation with a South Vietnamese officer (left). The South Vietnamese soldier in the center with the floppy wide-brim hat is the interpreter.

present operation and the one in which the USMC could make a solid contribution.⁴

Unlike the *Guardia Nacional* in Nicaragua or Haitian *Gendarmerie*, the joint action company was to be a cooperative effort rather than a Marine-officered native constabulary. The first, and perhaps most important, task was the selection of the Marines for the program. All of the Americans were hand-picked by Ek, and, as far as he was concerned, they were the best men available. They were highly motivated volunteers. The Marine lieutenant spent a week teaching his recruits about Vietnamese customs and the political structure in the countryside. The men were to live in the surrounding hamlets and they needed to know their exact place in this society. In Ek's words, they had to know "whom to call 'sir' and whom to call 'you'."

When the school period was over, each of Ek's four Marine squads was assigned to a PF platoon. The Marine squad leader became the platoon commander while the Vietnamese commander became his assistant. A Marine fire team was the nucleus of each combined squad with Marines filling most of the leadership billets, but with Vietnamese counterparts. This relationship existed on the company level as well; Vietnamese Warrant Officer Nyugen Diem Duong was to be Ek's executive of-

ficer. The company headquarters included a Marine first sergeant and three Vietnamese radio operators who manned the ARVN radio nets. These nets included the hamlet chief as well as the 3d Battalion's fire direction center. At first, Ek's headquarters served only as an administrative and coordinating center for the activities of each platoon, but, in time, the headquarters controlled company-size operations in which the combined unit operated with Regional Force and ARVN units.

The command structure was flexible. Although Lieutenant Colonel Taylor had operational command, the Vietnamese district chief retained administrative responsibility for the PF. Correspondingly, in each village where the joint action platoons were garrisoned, the village chief kept his administrative civil responsibilities, while the combined force was responsible for military security. A great deal depended on the tact and resourcefulness of each Marine, especially the platoon commander who had to maintain harmonious relations among his subordinates, the village chief, and his PFs.

Ek's concept of operations for the employment of the PF with Marines was patterned on the organization of the VC infrastructure, using "assistance rather than terror to win the people's loyalties." He believed that as the PFs and Marines built their "infrastructure . . . they would be destroying that of the Viet Cong." The combined force would have several basic assignments: "security, counter-intelligence, obtaining the good will of the people These formed the spokes of the wheel while training was the hub of the entire program."⁶

Training was accomplished jointly. The Vietnamese taught local customs, Vietnamese language, local terrain peculiarities, and furnished information about the VC in the area. The Americans taught tactics, discipline, and civilian population control.

On 1 August, the joint action company was formally established and two days later the first platoon made a reconnaissance of its assigned village. During the first week, the platoons entered the villages only during daytime. At first the Marines ignored the villagers and worked solely with the PFs. The Americans had to learn the terrain and local patterns. Each Marine carried a small notebook in which he recorded the daily habits of the people in the hamlets, such as what time the buffalo boys took their animals out to the fields and when the people



USMC Photo A185799

A Combined Action Company patrol moves across a dike near Phu Bai showing the complete integration of Marines and PF.

got up in the morning. He was to pay particular attention to all deviations from the daily pattern. When there was a break in the routine, it was his job to find out the reason why. Eventually the Marines were able to talk with the people, at first using a combination of sign language, and then “pidgin” Vietnamese and English.

The main obstacle to the establishment of mutual trust between the Marines and the Vietnamese was the *sub rosa* control that the VC maintained in the area. They did not rule with a tight rein, but would come into the villages several nights a week to distribute propaganda, make speeches, and collect taxes. According to Ek, the understrength Vietnamese territorial forces were unable to cope with the VC. The government troops appeared to lack the initiative to go after the Communists. Ek suspected that some of the Vietnamese village chiefs and the VC commanders had reached informal, unwritten agreements, not as a conspiracy, but as an understanding of the realities of the situation. The Communist troops had the freedom to move during the night, and, in turn, offered no interference to government operations during the day.

Once Lieutenant Ek’s combined force began to enter the hamlets, much of the collusion stopped. During the first weeks, the joint platoons saturated the area with patrols, day and night. They introduced several innovations in population control. One of the most successful was accomplished with the aid of the

local Vietnamese National Police. The PFs and Marines would enter a hamlet just before dawn and gather the people in the village street. The troops would first apologize to the inhabitants for disturbing them, but then state that it was necessary to check their identification cards in order to protect them from the Communists. The actual identification and questioning of the people was done by an accompanying force of policemen.

The allied commands were unsure how the VC would react to the U.S. Marines living in the hamlets. Ek believed that the Communists had two alternatives. They would either attack the hamlets and wipe out the joint platoons, or ignore the Americans altogether. The VC chose the latter course. As the Marines lived among the people, in time the Americans were able to sense if they were welcome or not. They had to be especially careful in hamlets where the inhabitants were overly friendly. That usually meant that the people had something to hide, and that something usually turned out to be VC.

The first significant engagement between a combined action unit* and the Viet Cong occurred

*The name of the joint action company was changed to combined action company by III MAF in October since “joint” pertains to two or more services of the same country and “combined” means services of different countries. See *Mullen Study*, p. C-H. Captain John J. Mullen, Jr., became the commanding officer on 25 September when Lieutenant Ek completed his overseas tour and left Vietnam.



USMC Photo A185740

Marines and PF troops of the Combined Action Company patrol the Nong River near Phu Bai in Vietnamese boats. The two Marine swimmers are apparently searching for any VC who may be hiding under the water.

on 29 November during a successful ambush near Phu Bai. As a VC platoon started to cross a bridge into the hamlet, a combined action squad opened fire on the VC, killing four and capturing one of the enemy troops. The enemy platoon fled to the south where it was engaged by another combined action squad and then forced to turn west through blocking artillery fires. There were no Marine or PF casualties. One of the dead VC was later identified as the enemy unit commander, Phan Van Thuong.^{7*}

The combined action platoons did not kill many VC during this early period, but by protecting their assigned hamlets they accomplished the primary mission for which they had been formed. In addition, the platoons furnished the Marine battalion with defense-in-depth protection of the base at Phu Bai.

* Thuong, a member of the Communist party, was born only a few miles from where he died and was a veteran of the Viet Minh War against the French.

The enemy was duly impressed by this factor. According to Lieutenant Colonel Vale, who had relieved Lieutenant Colonel Taylor, a report found on a VC body read "There were at least 4,000 Marines in the area. You could not move anywhere because Marines were always in the way."⁸

The platoons also became an important source of information. The combined action troops soon learned about the VC organization in the area. They knew that it was led by a man named Vo Dai, who, although born in the Phu Bai area, had lived in North Vietnam for several years. The Marines and PF troops discovered where Vo Dai's mother and wife lived and paid frequent visits to the two women. The combined action units never captured Vo Dai, but they managed to keep him on the run.

Indicative of combined action effectiveness was the close bond forged between the Marines and the local villagers. When Vale's battalion was replaced at Phu Bai by Lieutenant Colonel Hanifin's 2d Battalion, 1st

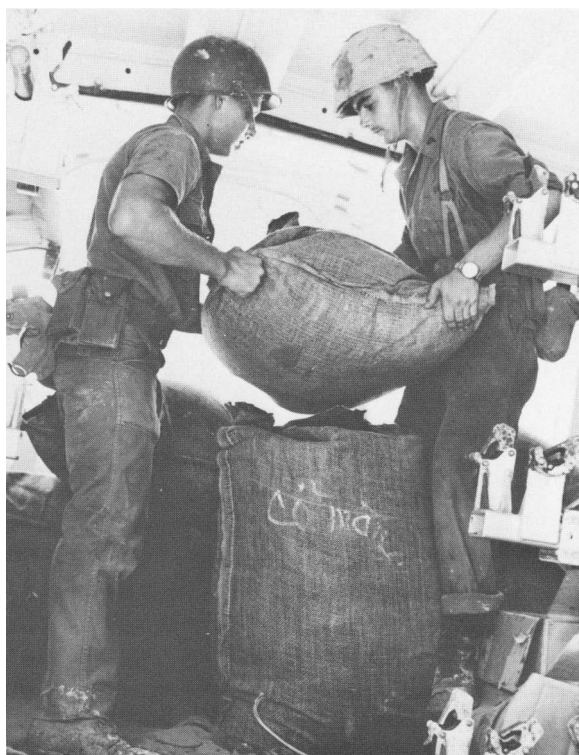
Marines in December, 40 of the 66 Marines assigned to the combined action company at Phu Bai volunteered to extend their tour with the PFs rather than return to Okinawa with their battalion.⁹

Marines in the other sectors of I Corps also experimented with the employment of local Vietnamese defense forces. On Ky Ha Peninsula, north of Chu Lai, the local chief, with the cooperation of Lieutenant Colonel Robert J. Perrich's 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, established a self-defense corps in September, composed entirely of local village volunteers. Their duty was to patrol the five hamlets which made up Ky Ha village during the night. On the 25th, members of this force began accompanying Marine patrols in the area. In the sectors of both the 4th and 7th Marines at Chu Lai, PF units were brought into the battalion sectors for introduction and training. At Da Nang, two Regional Force companies' operations were coordinated with the Marine regiments, the 3d and 9th Marines. In addition, both regiments also used PF units during offensive operations to serve as guides and interpreters. Where PF defensive positions were near to those of the Marine battalions, close coordination was maintained for mortar and artillery fires, night ambushes, patrols, and listening posts.

General Walt watched the Marine employment of local forces with intense interest. He realized that the PF soldier had the poorest training and worst equipment of the South Vietnamese armed forces, but he considered him to be a vital link in the process of providing real security for the population. He noted:

He had a signal advantage over all others; he was defending his own home, family, and neighbors. The Popular Force soldier knew every person in his community by face and name; he knew each paddy, field, trail, bush, or bamboo clump, each family shelter, tunnel, and buried rice urn. He knew in most cases the local Viet Cong guerrilla band, and it was not uncommon for him to be related to one or more of them by blood or other family ties.¹⁰

During November, the III MAF commander persuaded General Thi to release eight PF platoons at Da Nang to the operational control of the 3d Marine Division. Seven of the PF units were assigned to the airfield defense battalion and the eighth to Lieutenant Colonel Ludwig's 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, operating south of Marble Mountain.¹¹ Marine and PF troops patrolled the defensive perimeters of the airfield area together. Reports of innocent people



USMC Photo A185847

Two Marines from the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines stack newly harvested bags of rice inside a Marine amphibian tractor in Operation GOLDEN FLEECE. The rice is to be taken to a central collection point for safe keeping and marketing.

being detained at the airfield decreased considerably, and the PFs received valuable combat training. On 5 January 1966, General Walt asked General Thi to extend combined action operations between PFs and Marines to all three enclaves, which Thi agreed to do on 28 January.¹²

Protection of the Harvest: GOLDEN FLEECE

The expansion of the 9th Marines TAOR into the populated area south of Da Nang during Operation RICE STRAW coincided with the autumn rice harvest and resulted in another task for the Marines, rice harvesting protection. The most publicized effort involved the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines along the eastern perimeter of the 9th Marines' area of operations.



USMC Photo A186015

A Marine guards a Viet Cong prisoner during Operation GOLDEN FLEECE in September 1965. The Viet Cong had taken a percentage of the rice harvest for their own use for years in this area south of Da Nang prior to the arrival of the Marines.

In mid-August, the battalion was released from duty as the airfield defense battalion and was assigned to the area south of Marble Mountain bordering the South China Sea. Operating from a central base area, Lieutenant Colonel Ludwig sent out small patrols to bait the VC. When these units made contact, a mobile reaction force, composed of Marines mounted on tanks, Ontos, and amtracs, sped to the point of contact. At the same time, the battalion commander attempted to enlist each of the four village chiefs in his area of operations to support his efforts against the Viet Cong.^{13*} The chiefs were wary until the

Americans proved themselves, which did not take long. On 29 August, the battalion defeated a Viet Cong company, killing 12, capturing 12 more, and dispersing the remainder.

Impressed by this action, Huynh Ba Trinh, chief of Hoa Hai village, contacted the battalion intelligence officer the next day and reported that his villagers had told him that more than 30 of the enemy had been killed in that engagement.** Trinh then asked that the battalion provide security for the villagers when they began harvesting their rice on 10 September. The chief explained that the VC came each year and took what they considered to be their share of the harvest. According to South Vietnamese and Marine intelligence sources, the Viet Cong had already moved one battalion and several companies into the 9th Marines TAOR to accomplish their rice collection.¹⁴ Trinh proposed that the Marines help the farmers bring the rice to central collection points where it could be stored in warehouses. He would then give the people receipts for their crops and distribute the rice when the need arose.***

Lieutenant Colonel Ludwig did not believe that the local chiefs could administer such a large undertaking. He suggested that a meeting be held with the four chiefs on 7 September. The battalion commander had lunch that day with the chiefs and proposed that the Marine battalion, through active patrolling, ambushes, and sweep operations, screen the VC from the people, freeing the peasants to harvest their rice. The farmers could keep the rice in their homes and the Marines would try to keep the VC out. The chiefs were agreeable and Ludwig, borrowing from Greek mythology, labeled the operation GOLDEN FLEECE. General Walt cleared the operation with General Thi, the I Corps Com-

**The 9th Marines S-2, Major John A. Buck, commented: "Regardless of the accuracy of the reported 30 VC KIA's—which is not an improbable total for the action referred to—the fact that the village chief accepts this figure is, in itself, important." 9th Marines Intelligence Summary No. 54, dtd 1Sep65, 9th Marines S-2 Section, Journal and Intelligence Summaries, Sep65.

***The 9th Marines intelligence summary of 1 September indicated the significance of Trinh's proposal: "Hoa Hai village has a population of over 3,000 and has been considered VC controlled territory. If the villagers are now willing to risk possible VC reprisals by refusing to pay the usual rice tax, it would indicate a confidence and firmness heretofore lacking in this locality."

*One of Ludwig's company commanders was an Australian exchange officer, Captain Michael J. Harris of the New South Wales Light Infantry, who had served with the British forces in Malaya and gladly shared his experiences with the Americans. He suggested the formation of an area security council consisting of the four chiefs, a program which Ludwig later implemented. *Ludwig intvw.*



USMC Photo A185845

Marines of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines help South Vietnamese farmers load bags of rice into a Marine LVT. Note that the Vietnamese have hung the bags on their traditional carrying pole.

mander, and on 9 September, Colonel John E. Gorman, the 9th Marines commander, ordered both his forward battalions, the 1st and 2d, to render all possible assistance to the Vietnamese in the protection of the harvest.¹⁵ The 3d Battalion, 9th Marines later replaced the 2d Battalion.

The campaign produced results quickly. About noon on 12 September, Chief Trinh told Lieutenant Colonel Ludwig that a VC main force unit had moved into a hamlet south of Marble Mountain to collect its rice tax. The battalion commander immediately sent a two-company attack force, supported by Ontos, tanks, and amtracs into the area. The Marines met strong opposition from VC mortars and recoilless rifles. Shortly after dark, the enemy broke contact and fled. The next morning the Marines found no enemy bodies, but later learned that the VC had

taken refuge during the night in a leper hospital, five miles south of Marble Mountain. The Viet Cong had taken medicines and supplies from the leprosarium and moved out of the area. Ludwig believed this battle broke the back of the VC tax collection organization in his battalion's TAOR.¹⁶ After this encounter, the 1st Battalion Marines met only sporadic resistance as GOLDEN FLEECE continued through the rice harvesting season.

Rice protection was not only the preserve of the 9th Marines. In the northwestern portion of the Da Nang TAOR, Lieutenant Colonel Clement's 2d Battalion, 3d Marines conducted a similar harvest protection operation in the Cu De Valley near the hamlets of Pho Nam Thuong Ha and Nam Yen. When the peasants of this region voluntarily left their homes to resettle in the pacified village of Le My,

they agreed to do so only if the Marines would protect their autumn harvest. Lieutenant Colonel Clement accepted this condition and fulfilled his promise in September.¹⁷ On the 15th, the battalion intelligence officer, Captain Lionel V. Silva, discussed plans for the harvest with the district chief. A Marine helicopter flew a group of farmers from Le My to their fields near their former homes to survey the crops. By 18 September the battalion and South Vietnamese had completed preparations and the harvest began in earnest on the next day. During the period 18-23 September, the Marines moved approximately 150 villagers to their fields for the harvest. Marine helicopters and LVTs brought over 12,000 pounds of harvested rice into Le My, as well as some civilians who had decided to resettle there. The helicopters flew 14 sorties while the LVTs logged 800 miles in this GOLDEN FLEECE operation.*

In October, rice protection operations were extended to two other areas of operations. At Da Nang, Lieutenant Colonel Hatch's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, in the southwestern portion of the Da Nang TAOR, assisted the villagers of Hieu Duc District in their harvest of over 71,000 kilograms of rice. During this same month, Lieutenant Colonel Fisher's 2d Battalion, 4th Marines conducted two operations labeled HARVEST MOON** in "Western Valley," five miles west of Chu Lai airfield. The village chief of Ky Ha (2) reported that the battalion protected the harvesting of over 102,000 kilograms of rice.¹⁸

On 26 November, Lieutenant Colonel Clement submitted a study for General Walt evaluating the GOLDEN FLEECE Operations.*** Using figures furnished by the Vietnamese village chiefs, he declared that, "512,410 pounds of rice, threshed, was denied the VC. At the accepted rate of 1.5 pounds per person per day, this could have subsisted 1,900 VC for the six months until next harvest."¹⁹

* The battalion did not call its operation GOLDEN FLEECE, but this name was soon adopted to refer to all rice harvesting protection missions.

**III MAF records indicate that 2/3 also conducted a rice harvest operation named HARVEST MOON. The early HARVEST MOON operations should not be confused with the multi-battalion combat operation HARVEST MOON conducted by Task Force DELTA in December.

***Lieutenant Colonel Clement was detached from 2/3 on 10Nov65 and assigned to the III MAF G-3 Section.



USMC Photo A185783

A Marine officer assists a South Vietnamese woman gather the rice into a shock while another Marine stands guard during Operation GOLDEN FLEECE.

Clement concluded that the operation was both a psychological and economic success, it had kept the rice in the hands of the people while denying it to the VC. General Walt, confident of further success, ordered that plans be drawn up to implement GOLDEN FLEECE II for the spring harvest.

Cordon and Search: The Seeds of COUNTY FAIR and Population Control

During this period, III MAF started what was to become the COUNTY FAIR technique, a cordon and search operation with psychological overtones. Although the 9th Marines was to give the technique its name, the concept evolved from the experience of several units and techniques they had developed to meet local conditions. In the 3d Marines TAOR, southwest of the airfield, several operations were conducted, initially by the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines and later by the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, during which one company would surround a hamlet while another would search it for VC. In the Le My area, the regiment's northern TAOR, the 2d Battalion, 3d



USMC Photo A413090

Major Charles J. Keever was the III MAF Civil Affairs Officer in 1965. He was the author of the III MAF Civic Action Order.

Marines conducted a "similar type operation . . . in conjunction with RVN civic action personnel provided by the Province Chief and National Police."²⁰

Prior to reentering Cam Ne after the "Zippo" lighter incident, the 9th Marines planned to use loudspeakers to call the villagers out of the hamlets to a holding area where they would be fed and given medical treatment. Marines, reinforced by local forces, would then enter the empty hamlets to search for VC. The difficulty lay with obtaining the cooperation of the local South Vietnamese authorities. Colonel Edwin H. Simmons, the III MAF G-3, met with the I Corps chief of staff to discuss the problems of operating in the villages south of Da Nang, but failed to reach any agreement on methods. Simmons recalled:

His [Colonel Thanh, the I Corps Chief of Staff] solution was to react with fire at the first hostile action. I got the distinct impression that I Corps preferred a dead villager to a live refugee.²¹

Although the 9th Marines plan, which in effect was a blueprint of future COUNTY FAIR operations, was not immediately adopted, Lieutenant Colonel Ludwig's 1st Battalion tried a similar operation during GOLDEN FLEECE I. When a company from the battalion entered a village, all the people were gathered at a collection point. The Marines fed them and a Navy corpsman held sick call, while the village chief checked identity cards and attempted to identify any VC. Ludwig later admitted that these sweeps were too ambitious. At times, the Marines had more than 1,000 people from various hamlets collected in one location, but they had neither the time or personnel to properly screen all of them.²²

By the end of year, nevertheless, the 9th Marines S-2, Captain Charles Ward, and the S-3, Major Vincente T. Blaz, had improved the COUNTY FAIR concept to the degree that it was ready to be implemented on a regular basis in 1966. It would become a sophisticated procedure, combining civic action, population control, and psychological operations. Captain Ward stated: "COUNTY FAIR operations were distinguished by two features: the pre-eminence given to the role of the GVN, and the protraction of the duration of the cordon and search to surface the hidden enemy."^{23*}

Civic Action

All of these battlefield tactics were coordinated with an ever increasing civic action program, what General Walt sometimes referred to as the "Velvet Glove."²⁴ Civic action programs were basically Marine efforts to assuage the effect of the ravages of war, poverty, and sickness upon the population. There was more to the concept than just pure

*Lieutenant Colonel Ward remembered that the Hoa Vang District Chief, who had always found a ready excuse "when participation of his people was concerned," became much more cooperative after his wife's vehicle was shot at in late 1965. The chief wanted a sweep of the hamlet from which the shot was fired and his "insistence, and his promises of future cooperation if the Marines would assist him in this action, finally convinced the 9th Marines that this might be the opening they were seeking." LtCol Charles Ward, Comments on draft MS, dtd 27Oct76 (Vietnam Comment File).



USMC Photo A185777

Navy Lieutenant James R. McMillian, the surgeon for the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, examines a South Vietnamese infant. The child is the 10,000th Vietnamese patient treated by the battalion's medical team.

benevolence; it was to be used as a weapon. General Walt and his staff hoped that American civic action would sever the populace from Viet Cong control and perhaps induce popular loyalty to the government.

The Marines knew that the entire effort could be dissipated through lack of direction. In addition to the III MAF civic action program, several U. S. civilian agencies,* administered by the United States Operations Mission in Vietnam (USOM),

*These agencies included representatives from AID, JUSPAO, and CIA.

dispensed American aid throughout South Vietnam. On 25 August General Walt met with Mr. Marcus J. Gordon, the regional director of USOM in I Corps. He suggested that a council be established to coordinate American participation in the Vietnamese Rural Construction Program.** Mr. Gordon agreed

**The South Vietnamese pacification program changed names frequently during 1965-1966. The program was originally known as "rural pacification" until 5 April 1965 when it was changed to "rural construction." In May 1966, the name was changed again to "revolutionary development." These were simply other names for "pacification."

and, on 6 September, the I Corps Joint Coordinating Council (JCC) came into being. Both Mr. Gordon and General Walt hoped to bring the South Vietnamese into the council, but only American representatives attended the first session: Mr. Gordon; Colonel St. Clair, the Deputy Senior Advisor to I Corps; and the III MAF Civil Affairs Officer, Major Charles J. Keever.²⁵

Apparently, the Vietnamese authorities took a wait-and-see attitude before joining in the council's deliberations. On 28 September, General Walt visited General Thi and prevailed upon him to send a representative to the next council meeting. The I Corps commander appointed a representative from his staff to attend the October session, and he became a permanent member of the JCC.^{26*}

The I Corps JCC soon became the coordinating hub for "the Vietnamese government's rural construction plan" in the northern five provinces. Most of the important work was done by committees; and by January 1966, six were functioning. These were: public health, education, roads, food distribution, psychological warfare, and the Port of Da Nang. In November, General Walt further underscored the importance of the progress of the council by appointing Brigadier General Keith B. McCutcheon, Deputy Commanding General, III MAF as his personal representative. He was subsequently elected chairman of the council. Mr. Gordon later declared:

The fact that senior officers from all military commands under General Walt . . . sat together every Tuesday morning with the Regional Directors of Civilian Agencies contributed greatly to facilitating coordination. But to me the most important fact about the JCC was that "the word went out" through all command channels. All commands were working on a seven-day week basis around the clock. The desire to cooperate was there, but coordination required special effort. The existence of the JCC stimulated coordination at all levels.²⁷

During this same period, General Walt also concentrated on internal coordination of the civic action program within III MAF. On 29 October, he changed the designation of his III MAF general staff

G-5 Section from plans and programs to civic action. More significantly, the new organizational designation was reflected throughout III MAF with the creation of division and wing G-5 and regimental and battalion S-5 sections.

III MAF developed some tentative conclusions. In October, the Marine command noted that programs of commodity distribution to the people and medical and dental care were most successful in reaching hamlet inhabitants. The emphasis was on short-term, high-impact, low-cost projects. The Marines had perceived that long-term projects, which required continual supervision and large amounts of material, failed to have the desired effect; the people did not see any immediate results.²⁸ One of the most important reasons why the Marines emphasized short-range activities was the fact that the battalions just did not have the time to attempt more ambitious programs.^{**} The Marines primary tactical duties left very little time for action in direct support of the local government or rural construction.²⁹

The Ngu Hanh Son Campaign and the Frustrations of Pacification

During the autumn of 1965, the South Vietnamese revamped their pacification program in I Corps. Earlier in the year, MACV had urged the South Vietnamese to prepare new pacification plans in each corps area based on the HOP TAC campaign in the Saigon region.^{***} The idea was for each corps commander to select a critical region and develop plans for coordinating and focusing both the military and civilian activities in an intensive pacification campaign in the selected area. At a meeting of South Vietnamese corps commanders in April, the Joint General Staff directed them to make such plans. The following month, at a follow-up meeting, General Thi, the I Corps commander, declared that his pacification efforts would be centered in the area south of Da Nang in Quang Nam Province.³⁰

*Colonel Keever wrote in his comments: "The Vietnamese military leadership (and MACV for that matter) tended to overlook the vital importance of the civil side of pacification. The support of General Thi and GVN military leadership in I Corps for the so-called people-to-people program was the result of General Walt's leadership and persuasive powers." Col Charles J. Keever, Comments on draft MS, dtd 20Dec76 (Vietnam Comment File).

**There were some exceptions to the above: the 7th Marines and 4th Marines help in the construction of the "new life" village of Chu Lai; the 9th Marines reconstruction effort at Cam Ne; and the Le My effort in the 3d Marines TAOR. All of these met with varying degrees of success, depending on the degree of security the Marines and the local government could provide.

***For a description of the HOP TAC program see Chapter 4.

In October, Lieutenant Colonel Le Trung Tuong, the Quang Nam Province Chief, developed the Ngu Hanh Son (Nine Villages) pacification campaign in a nine-square-mile area of Hoa Vang District, south of the Cau Do River.* Tuong divided the objective area into two sectors, one consisting of a five-village complex west of Route 1 and the other, a four-village complex east of the highway. Taking advantage of the protective screen afforded by the 9th Marines' advance south of Da Nang, the province chief proposed to pacify the western sector by the end of the year. This area included the villages of Cam Ne, Duong Son, and Yen Ne where the 9th Marines first encountered organized VC resistance during July and August. Lieutenant Colonel Tuong planned to insert a political action team (PAT) and a Regional Force company from the 59th Regional Forces Battalion into each of the five villages of this sector.** He then hoped to recruit 1,000 Popular Forces troops to relieve the RF companies. Tuong intended to station one PF squad in each hamlet and a platoon in each village. The 9th Marines was to coordinate its activities to provide additional security for the pacification efforts, as well as furnishing some material resources.³¹

The VC were quick to realize the threat of the new program, but the enemy also quickly found a vulnerability. The program for the PFs and the RFs was too ambitious. PF recruiting policy had not

* Lieutenant Colonel Tuong was also Assistant Commander of the Quang Nam Special Sector, which was established on 1 September 1965, and reported directly to I Corps. As such, he assumed responsibility for rural construction in both Quang Nam Province and Da Nang Special Sector. The Quang Nam Special Sector, a military command, controlled all ARVN forces in Quang Nam Province. The authority of the Quang Nam Special Sector commander often overlapped that of the Quang Nam province chief, which was one reason why Tuong was the assistant commander of the special sector as well as province chief. By combining both responsibilities, he remained in the chain of command for the military aspects of pacification, while retaining authority over the political and administrative functions of the province.

**The political action teams were American-trained pacification cadre. While part of the teams provided limited security within the hamlets, the other members assisted the villagers in building up the local economy and meeting community needs. Colonel Simmons, the III MAF G-3, later observed that the formation of the 59th Regional Forces Battalion "actually was an innovation. RF Companies had not previously been combined into battalions." BGen Edwin H. Simmons, Comments on draft MS, dtd 26Sep76 (Vietnam Comment File).



USMC Photo A186322

As part of their civic action program, the Marines provided dental care to the South Vietnamese villagers. This makeshift dental clinic near Da Nang is obviously very popular.

showed the hoped-for success. The PFs, the RFs, and PATs offered lucrative targets; the VC were quick to take advantage. By the end of November, about 10 to 15 percent of the PAT members had resigned, fearing reprisals from the VC, forcing the 9th Marines to increase its involvement in the area to offset VC gains.

The 9th Marines provided security for nearly a quarter of the campaign area during December, but the Viet Cong avoided the Marine-held territory and continued their offensive against the PFs. During the last week of the year they halted almost all government progress. On 21 December, the enemy attacked one of the PAT units, killing four of its members. Later that afternoon, 60 VC, sheltered for two days by the peasants of Cam Ne and Yen Ne, struck the 593d RF Company, whose sole mission

was to protect the PATs. The government force suffered heavy casualties. During the next week, the VC systematically continued their campaign against local defense forces. The Marines could do little to prevent it. The PFs were to provide continuous security in the hamlets, but events had proved conclusively that they were incapable of carrying out their mission. Instead of strengthening their security forces the Vietnamese authorities changed leaders. The Ngu Hanh Son Program was allowed to drift until March 1966.

As early as September, 1965 General Krulak observed that "the Marines have never felt that the war stands to be won by the grand maneuvers of large forces, by brilliant marshalship in the Tannenberg or Chancellorsville image," but rather in the villages.³² The problem, was to provide security in the hamlets, and, in this, the Marines were not always successful. On the night of 25 October, a VC terrorist squad threw a grenade and fired a submachine gun into the house of Chief Trinh of Hoa Hai Village, the village chief who had cooperated with Lieutenant Colonel Ludwig's battalion in GOLDEN FLEECE. The chief and four of his family were wounded.* General Walt took the occasion to order all regimental commanders to insure the personal protection of village and district chiefs in their TAORs.³³ This was more easily said than done. On 24 December, in the supposedly secure Le My area, Lieutenant Colonel Dickey reported that the Viet Cong tortured and buried alive the assistant chief of Hoa Hiep.^{34**}

* Lieutenant Colonel Ludwig later commented: "we moved Trinh and his family into a special tent complex in our battalion CP. The family remained safe, and Trinh 'went to work' each day in the village. But his intelligence was never as good after that." Col Verle E. Ludwig, Comments on draft MS, dtd 8Oct76 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Colonel Clement, who had commanded the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines in the Le My area, commented: "It was security that failed. In the absence of firm security, there will be a VC intrusion every time." Col David A. Clement, Comments on draft MS, dtd 5Oct76 (Vietnam Comment File).



USMC Photo A 800917

A South Vietnamese interpreter with a Marine patrol talks with a South Vietnamese boy. The boy's father had been killed by the Viet Cong.

The following excerpt from the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines command chronology at Chu Lai graphically depicts the Marines' frustrations:

12 December: Marines from 3/7 were invited to attend the celebration . . . After the religious ceremony the Marines participated at the banquet with the hamlet chief and elders in the local village of Tri Binh (1).

13 December: A flag raising ceremony was conducted in the local village of Tri Binh(1). The hamlet chief invited Captain Long, the District Chief, and representatives from 3/7.

24 December: 3/7 Civil Affairs teams conducted a Christmas party in the local villages of Tri Binh(1) . . .

25 December: The CO 3/7 invited the children of the local villages of An Thien and Tri Binh(1) to attend the Christmas celebration at the Battalion CP.

31 December: Hamlet chief of Tri Binh(1) was shot and killed by an unknown assassin. . . .³⁵

The best that could be said for the III MAF pacification effort by the end of 1965 was that the Marines had realized the problems and had started to challenge the VC control of the countryside. There was still much to learn and do.

PART IV

SUPPORTING THE TROOPS

Marine Aviation in Vietnam

*Deployments—Control of Marine Aviation—Fixed-Wing Operations—
Helicopter Operations—Air Defense Responsibilities*

Deployments

The 1965 buildup of Marine aviation in Vietnam paralleled that of the III MAF ground forces. Following the landing of the 9th MEB in March, two Marine fixed-wing squadrons, VMCJ-1 and VMFA-531, later relieved by VMFA-513, joined MAG-16 at Da Nang in April. MAG-16 had been, until that time, the MEB's composite helicopter group.* In May, the wing established its forward headquarters in Vietnam, and the next month MAG-12 arrived at the newly built SATS airfield at Chu Lai. On 14 July, MAG-11 headquarters assumed operational control of the fixed-wing squadrons at Da Nang from MAG-16. These now included the photo reconnaissance

squadron, VMCJ-1, and two F-4B Phantom II squadrons, VMFA-513 and VMFA-542, the latter squadron having arrived on 11 July. After the President's 28 July proclamation announcing further reinforcement, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized the deployment of a second helicopter group, MAG-36, and another missile battalion, the 2d LAAM Battalion. The first elements of the helicopter group arrived on 31 August. The LAAM battalion followed 10 days later.

On 2 September, Colonel William G. Johnson, the MAG-36 commander, established his headquarters on the Ky Ha peninsula, north of the SATS field, where construction had begun on a helicopter facility for the Chu Lai base. When the group arrived, "the helicopter pad had been fully graded and about one-third or more of the matting laid" The MAG-36 squadrons remained at Da Nang until Ky Ha was operational. By the end of the month, most of the MAG-36 units, including HMM-362, HMM-364, VMO-6, H&MS-36, and MABS-36, were at Ky Ha. The only exception was HMM-363 which had relieved a detachment from HMM-161 at Qui Nhon.

The other Marine helicopter group in Vietnam, MAG-16, also had moved into new facilities. Colonel Thomas J. O'Connor, who relieved Colonel King as group commander on 7 August, established his headquarters at Marble Mountain Air Facility on Tiensha Peninsula, across the Da Nang River from the main base. The group's aircraft were operating from Marble Mountain by the end of August. In August 1965 MAG-16 consisted of three medium helicopter squadrons, HMM-261 and -361 at Da Nang and HMM-161 at Phu Bai with a 10-plane detachment at Qui Nhon, one observation squadron, VMO-2, and two support squadrons, MABS-16 and H&MS-16. In September a six-plane detachment of Sikorsky CH-37C heavy-lift helicopters from HMH-462 was attached to H&MS-16. There was a continuing rotation of helicopter squadrons between

*Colonel Thomas J. O'Connor, the 1st MAW chief of staff in the spring of 1965, recalled: "The arrival of VMFA-531 and VMCJ-1 marked the end of a long period of planning, coaxing, cajoling, begging, and outright pressure to obtain space for these units to operate out of Da Nang During the early planning stages, high level commands battled in the Pentagon, CinCPac, and in the Far East over who would conduct air operations out of Da Nang. Navy and Marine commands invoked the nebulous authority of Marine Air-Ground task forces. But these plans . . . were overtaken by events. The Air Force was there—and, they invoked the military equivalent of squatters rights . . . they occupied the entire east side of the airfield. The USAF was extremely unwilling to move around and vacate more space for the deploying Marine fixed-wing air units Finally under the weight of plans approved at high levels, and with Marine deployment dates irrevocably approaching, the Air Force finally gave in. Some promises about future construction to enlarge their area, commitments of Marine support of various projects, and a lot of sweet talk did the trick." Aircraft facilities remained overcrowded until the helicopter field at Marble Mountain was opened and the expansion construction of Da Nang Airfield was completed. O'Connor observed: "The final area occupied by two Marine fighter squadrons and the VMCJ-1 squadron was of such restricted size that effective operations were only marginally possible The three units were like three peas in a pod, but they were operational." Col Thomas J. O'Connor, Comments on draft MS, dtd 27Nov76 (Vietnam Comment File).

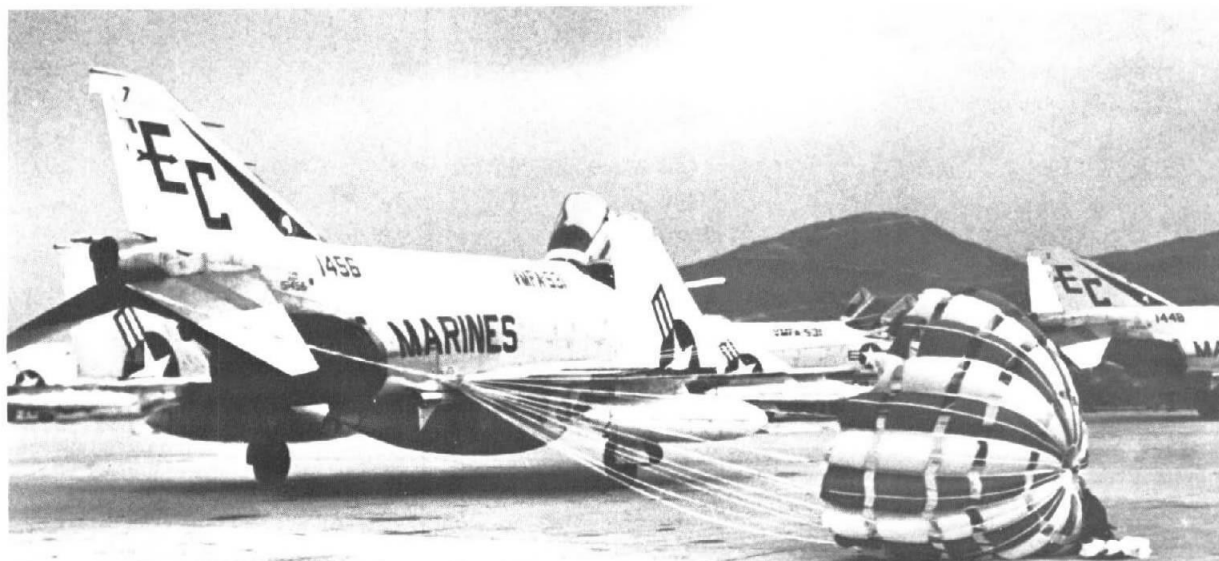
South Vietnam, the Seventh Fleet, and Okinawa, but no change in the total group strength.

Marine fixed-wing squadrons, as well as the helicopter units, continued to deploy to Vietnam. MAG-11, under the command of Colonel Robert F. Conley and his successor in November, Colonel Emmett O. Anglin, Jr., made three more squadron changes during 1965. On 15 October, VMFA-115 replaced VMFA-513, which rotated back to Japan. VMFA-323 relieved VMFA-542, which also returned to Japan on 1 December, and on 19 December, a F-8 Crusader squadron, VMF(AW)-312, joined MAG-11 at Da Nang. Lieutenant Colonel Richard A. Savage, at the time commanding VMFA-542, later commented: "These rotations were used to refurbish and change aircraft and train new aircrews as overseas tours drew to a close."²

MAG-12, under the command of Colonel John D. Noble, 16 May-18 September, and later Colonel Leslie E. Brown, 19 September through the end of the year, operated from the SATS airfield at Chu Lai. Three A-4 Skyhawk squadrons, VMA-225, VMA-311, and VMA-214, made up the aircraft group in July 1965. A fourth squadron, VMA-211, joined MAG-12 on 11 October. Although the group remained at basically the same strength, there was a rotation of squadrons between Iwakuni and Chu Lai.

The fixed-wing squadrons of MAG-12 engaged in the rotation program during this period were VMA-224 for VMA-225, 30 September-4 October, and VMA-223 for VMA-311, 14-19 December. At the end of the year, Brown's group consisted of VMA-211, VMA-214, VMA-223, and VMA-224.

By the end of 1965, most of the elements of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing had arrived, although a rear headquarters remained in Japan. Brigadier General Marion E. Carl, the assistant wing commander, arrived at Da Nang on 31 August to assist the wing commander, Brigadier General Keith B. McCutcheon, who also was Deputy Commanding General, III MAF. Colonel Harry W. Taylor assumed command of the rear headquarters (1st MAW Rear) at Iwakuni on that date; he still controlled a sizeable organization. MAG-13 with three fixed-wing squadrons remained in Japan, and one helicopter squadron was on Okinawa. One transport squadron, VMGR-152, and elements of a second, VMGR-352 (Fwd), with several service and supply elements of the 1st MAW, also remained under the rear headquarters' operational control. In addition to these units, two Marine helicopter squadrons, one attached to the Seventh Fleet SLF and the other to the U.S. Army's Field Force Vietnam in II Corps, were not available to III MAF. In spite of these exceptions,



USMC Photo A184074

Marine F4B Phantoms from VMFA-531 arrive at Da Nang in April 1965. The drag parachute in the foreground helps to slow the aircraft's landing rollout.



USMC Photo A185714

Colonel William G. Johnson, Commanding Officer, MAG-36, speaks to one of his officers on board the Princeton (LPH 5). Colonel Johnson is about to establish the newly arrived helicopter group's headquarters at Ky Ha in the Chu Lai TAOR.

the preponderance of General McCutcheon's operational units were in South Vietnam supporting General Walt's ground forces. By December, 9,402 of the 12,655 officers and enlisted men of the 1st MAW were in South Vietnam.

Control of Marine Aviation

Control of Marine aviation in Vietnam was a very sensitive issue. Many Marine aviators remembered their experience in Korea where the 1st MAW had been under the operational control of the Air Force. They believed that Marine aircraft had been used unwisely, at least from a Marine point of view, and had not furnished the Marine infantry with the close air support that could have been provided if the Marine command had retained control of its aviation.³ Marine generals were determined not to allow the Korean experience to repeat itself.

In 1964, when air operations were undertaken over Laos and North Vietnam, Admiral Sharp authorized General Westmoreland to designate the senior U. S. Air Force commander in Vietnam as coordinating

authority, since both Air Force and Navy air units were participating in these operations. When the decision was made to land Marines at Da Nang in 1965, it was natural for Admiral Sharp to direct that a similar arrangement be devised to coordinate the fixed-wing aviation of the 9th MEB. General Karch reported directly to ComUSMACV and coordinating authority was granted to the Air Force component commander, Major General Joseph H. Moore, for matters pertaining to tactical air support and air traffic control.

This emphasis on coordinating authority was reaffirmed by CinCPac in late March 1965, just before the assignment of a Marine fighter squadron to the MEB. General Westmoreland had wanted to put the Marine F-4 squadron under the operational control of General Moore, but Admiral Sharp immediately objected and repeated his earlier guidance.⁴

One month later, Admiral Sharp published a directive on the conduct and control of close air support. He stated that close air support was the chief mission of U.S. aviation in South Vietnam and that



USMC Photo A184307

A Douglas A-4 Skyhawk from VMA-225 makes the first landing at the Chu Lai SATS field. Colonel John D. Noble, Commanding Officer, MAG-12, piloted the aircraft.

top priority was to go to ground troops actually engaged with the enemy. Sharp maintained that such support should be directly responsive to the ground combat units. The directive also noted that "nothing herein vitiates the prior CinCPac provision that ComUSMACV's Air Force component command shall act as coordinating authority for matters pertaining to tactical air support and air traffic control in South Vietnam."

After receiving CinCPac's instruction, General Westmoreland ordered that a revision be made to his air support order. The new MACV directive, published on 13 July 1965, reiterated CinCPac's appointment of General Moore as the coordinating authority. In addition, the order charged him with the responsibility of insuring that coordination was established between his service and the other allied commanders. General Walt retained operational control of Marine aviation, but to insure maximum use of all aircraft, the III MAF commander was to notify the 2d Air Division daily of those aircraft available in excess of his requirements so that additional sorties could be allocated.* Finally, Walt, as Naval Component Commander, Vietnam, was charged with preparing joint operating instructions, in coordination with General Moore, to insure an integrated air effort.⁶

Concurrently, with the revision of MACV's air directive, General McCutcheon met with Major General Moore to coordinate air efforts as related to

*Colonel Roy C. Gray, Jr., the 1st MAW G-3, commented, "At the wing G-3 level it was always extremely difficult to identify those air assets that were in excess of III MAF needs. Generally both III MAF and the Air Force wanted far more than the wing could muster." Col Roy C. Gray, Jr., Comments on draft MS, dtd 28Sep76 (Vietnam Comment File).

air defense operations. Moore wanted operational control of all air defense, but McCutcheon pointed out that the F-4B Phantom II was a dual-purpose plane, capable of both close air support and air-to-air defense. To relinquish these aircraft would deprive the Marine ground commanders of an important supporting arm.

Nevertheless, General McCutcheon recognized the necessity of having one overall air defense commander. After several meetings between the generals and their staffs, it was decided to publish a memorandum of agreement to set forth the basic policies, procedures, and responsibilities. Under this agreement, the Air Force had overall air defense responsibility. McCutcheon designated those Marine forces that would participate in air defense. He agreed that the U. S. Air Force had the authority to handle alert aircraft, designate targets, and control HAWK missile readiness status, including firing orders. Generals Moore and McCutcheon signed the document in August 1965.**

The revised MACV air directive and the memorandum of agreement provided the basic policy for command, control, and coordination of Marine aviation, an arrangement completely satisfactory to General Walt. These arrangements were to remain unchanged until 1968, when General Westmoreland received approval from higher authority to establish a single management system for tactical air control.

Fixed-Wing Operations

The system of close air support which was employed by the Marines in South Vietnam in 1965 was born during the island campaigns of World War II. Since then, Marine air support doctrine had been continuously modified to keep pace with technological advances.

Marine attack aircraft were required to fly close air

**Colonel O'Connor recalled that he "was present at the key meeting of this series in Da Nang . . . I observed General McCutcheon cross swords with General Moore. The Air Force general used every argument at his command. He appealed across service lines, as aviator to aviator, enumerating the advantages of centralized control of aviation in a theater of operations. But General McCutcheon held his ground. He had his orders from III MAF and CGFMFPac. He was also buttressed by several policy directives [from] CinCPac. . . ." Col Thomas J. O'Connor, Comments on draft MS, dtd 27Nov76 (Vietnam Comment File).



USMC Photo A184866

Admiral Ulysses S. G. Sharp, Commander in Chief Pacific (left), Brigadier General Keith B. McCutcheon, Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (center), and Major General Walt are seen inside a Marine helicopter. Admiral Sharp supported the Marine position on air control.

support missions against enemy troops who were as close as 15 meters from friendly lines. To reduce the risk to allied infantry, close air support strikes were controlled either by a tactical air controller (airborne) (TAC (A)) in a high performance aircraft; a forward air controller (airborne) (FAC (A)) in a light spotter plane or UH-1E gunship; or a forward air controller (FAC) on the ground. In addition, many of the III MAF aerial observers (AOs) flying in light observation aircraft were qualified air controllers and directed air strikes, as well as artillery and naval gunfire.

The airborne controllers, familiar with the tactical situation on the ground, remained on station for extended periods of time. They maintained contact with the supported infantry unit on a FM tactical radio net while directing the attack aircraft over a UHF net. Communications for the control of air support was a flexible arrangement, depending on the

circumstances and ground radio availability. Frequency-modulated (FM) radios of infantrymen could not net with ultra-high frequency (UHF) radios of jet aircraft; usually the UHF radios at the infantry battalion level were not available for use by the company or smaller unit commanders in contact with the enemy. After the controller relayed pertinent target information and mission requirements to the attack pilots on station, he then marked the target with a white phosphorus rocket or a colored smoke grenade. When he was sure the attack pilot had properly identified the target, the controller cleared the pilots to make their firing runs.

At this time, the lead pilot rolled in toward the smoke marker and dropped his ordnance. Using the lead pilot's "hits" as a reference, the controller furnished the second plane in the flight with whatever corrections were necessary and cleared the second aircraft target run. The same procedure continued until all of the attack aircraft in the flight, usually two aircraft per strike, had completed their missions.

Two basic types of close air support strikes were flown by Marine aviators in South Vietnam, preplanned and on-call. The preplanned mission was a complex process. A Marine battalion commander would submit a request for fixed-wing aircraft through his air liaison officer the afternoon before his battalion was to begin an operation. The request would go to the direct air support center (DASC) and to the tactical air direction center (TADC) of the wing at Da Nang. At this level, all the requests were assimilated and orders were issued to both MAGs-11 and -12, the fixed-wing groups. The groups then scheduled flights for the next day and issued mission requirements to the individual squadrons. This procedure required approximately 20 hours from the initial time of request to the delivery of the ordnance on the target.

On-call missions could be processed and executed almost instantaneously. These missions were flown either in support of troops in contact with the enemy, or against targets of opportunity located by airborne or ground controllers. In the case of an emergency, the TADC or DASC could divert in-flight aircraft from their original missions to a new target. The TADC could also call upon aircraft which each group maintained on an around-the-clock alert for just such contingencies.

Marine air provided this combat support for other

than Marine units. During the battle of Ba Gia in June 1965, the A-4s of Colonel Noble's MAG-12 took off on their first night launch from Chu Lai to provide support for the embattled outpost 20 miles to the south. For three days, the MAG-12 A-4 Skyhawks and the F-4B Phantom IIs of Da Nang-based VMFA-513 bombed and strafed the enemy positions around the clock. Four months later, the F-4Bs of Colonel Anglin's MAG-11 and the A-4s of Colonel Brown's MAG-12 flew 59 sorties in support of U.S. and South Vietnamese troops at the Plei Me outpost, 20 miles southwest of Pleiku in northwestern II Corps. The attack against the outpost resulted in a major engagement, the Battle of Ia Drang Valley, in which the U.S. Army's 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) killed 1,238 enemy in 12 days.

In the 3d quarter of 1965, the two Marine air groups flew 4,614 sorties in support of Marine units and 1,656 sorties for the ARVN. Six hundred thirty-five of these sorties in support of the ARVN were close air support attacks supporting friendly forces engaged in close combat.⁸ In the month of December, in spite of poor flying conditions, 1st MAF fixed-wing aircraft still flew 119 close air support missions for ARVN troops.⁹

Marine attack aircraft performed several other duties in addition to their primary task of close air support. Both the F-4Bs and A-4s flew direct air support missions. Similar in some respects to close air support, these strikes were not conducted in the immediate vicinity of friendly lines and did not require integration with the ground unit's fire support plan, although coordination did take place at an echelon of command above that of the maneuver unit. The aim of the direct air support strikes was to isolate the enemy from the battlefield and destroy his troops and support bases.*

The two MAGs also played a vital role in protecting the MAG-36 and -16 helicopters. For a typical helicopter landing zone preparation, Marine

*Strictly speaking, this definition of direct air support applies to deep support missions. The Marines used the term direct support, as defined in the text, to differentiate between interdiction missions and ground support missions. Even so, Colonel Gray remarked that the distinction between close air and direct support was at times vague since, "The powers to be always wanted missions logged as close air support where possible to weigh in the right direction when assessing Marine air support operations." Col Roy C. Gray, Jr., Comments on draft MS, 28Sep76 (Vietnam Comment File).



USMC Photo A185852

Major General Walt climbs into the back seat of a Marine F-4B Phantom II jet at Da Nang for a reconnaissance flight. The aircraft is piloted by Lieutenant Colonel Walter C. Stewart, Commanding Officer, VMFA-513.

jet aircraft, in coordination with other supporting arms, would cover the landing area and surrounding region with bombs, napalm, rockets, and cannon fire. As the transport helicopters approached the LZ, armed UH-1Es, acting as escorts, would take over suppression of light small arms fire. Meanwhile, Marine fixed-wing close air support aircraft would orbit overhead, prepared to attack any enemy offering heavy resistance.¹⁰

Besides landing zone preparation, the attack aircraft from Da Nang and Chu Lai were called upon to provide armed escort for helicopters. Lieutenant Colonel Norman G. Ewers, who commanded HMM-163 in 1965 and whose squadron developed a close working relationship with VMFA-531, remarked, "Some people commented that using F-4s to escort helos was like driving tacks with a gold plated sledge hammer. That may be. All I know is that it worked, and worked very well."¹¹

While most of the combat strikes of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing were flown within South Vietnamese air space, Marine pilots also crossed the DMZ. On 6 May, Captain Don K. Hanna led a flight of four F-



USMC Photo A185339

A ground crew member arms the bombs on a Marine A-4 Skyhawk at Chu Lai. The A-4s could carry up to 3,000 pounds of ordnance.

4Bs from VMFA-531 over North Vietnam to provide antiaircraft suppression fires for a pilot rescue mission. A USAF RF-101 reconnaissance aircraft was down. Arriving at the crash site just north of the DMZ, the Marine pilots joined Air Force F-105 pilots attacking NVA antiaircraft gun positions while the rescue was being completed. This flight was the first occasion of Marine aviators conducting a combat strike in North Vietnam. In the last half of 1965, Marine F-4Bs flew 87 combat air patrols over North Vietnam.

On 6 December, the 1st MAW again expanded its participation in the air war when Marine aircraft struck enemy infiltration and supply routes in Laos. These operations, coordinated by the 2d Air Division, were part of the STEEL TIGER program, started by the Air Force and Navy in the spring of 1965 to reduce the enemy flow of men and material through southern Laos. From 6-31 December, MAG-11 aircraft flew 140 sorties and MAG-12 planes flew 159 sorties over the Laotian panhandle.¹²

As Marine fixed-wing operations increased, a new problem appeared with the onset of the monsoon season. This was especially true at Chu Lai, where the SATS field had to undergo extensive renovation which reduced the runway there to 4,500 feet for periods of time. Normally, this was enough room for operations when using jet-assisted takeoff and mobile-arresting gear for takeoffs and landings, but the monsoon weather made landing and takeoff conditions at the base marginal. Low ceilings, high winds, and heavy rains from 25-27 November caused

all missions to be cancelled.¹³ Fortunately, III MAF was able to use the TPQ-10 radar to guide the Phantoms and Skyhawks to their targets once the planes were airborne in spite of the bad weather. Although the number of missions flown increased in December, over 600 scheduled sorties were cancelled because of poor flying conditions.¹⁴

There were other frustrations for the Marine pilots beside the monsoon weather. During a one-week period in October, MAG-11 suspended all flights because salt water accidentally mixed with the group's fuel supply, but the largest problem for the Marine aviators was aviation ordnance. No missions were cancelled because of lack of munitions, but the pilots were not always able to use the type of ordnance best suited for a specific target. To preserve scarce munitions, 1st MAW policy stated:

... only ordnance required to destroy the target would be expended, and all remaining ordnance would be returned unless doing so constituted a hazard, as is the case in landing into the arresting gear at Chu Lai with napalm tanks.^{15*}

In 1965, there were three occasions of operational aircraft loss, resulting in the death of Marine aviators. Two crashes occurred on the same day, 26 October, when two F-4Bs returning from a combat mission crashed into the side of Monkey Mountain. One of the Phantoms had reported engine trouble before the crash. Both crews of the two aircraft were killed.¹⁶ The third incident occurred on 29 December south of Chu Lai. An A-4 from VMA-211, piloted by 1st Lieutenant Thomas F. Eldridge, was escorting a flight of helicopters attempting to resupply a besieged South Vietnamese district headquarters. As the helicopters approached, the enemy opened fire with three heavy machine guns. The Marine lieutenant

* Colonel Gray wrote: "1st MAW policy did state that only ordnance required would be expended and the remainder of the load returned to base. Statistics to bear on this would be impossible to obtain, but from experience if on a mission there was anything to bomb 'at' the ordnance would be expended many times in the interest of practice. I don't think we really brought home nearly as much as we might have wanted people to think." Col Roy C. Gray, Comments on draft MS, dtd 28Sep76 (Vietnam Comment File). The Office of Air Force History in its comments observed: "During 1964-65, MACV rules severely curtailed a pilot's choice of alternative targets; established certain free-drop zones; and required [pilots] to jettison all ordnance in designated jettison areas before landing for safety reasons. . . ." Office of Air Force History, Fact Sheet: Expenditure of Ordnance, Jan 77 (Vietnam Comment File).



USMC Photo A701478

An aerial view of the Chu Lai SATS field showing the A-4s of MAG-12 parked between temporary revetments. The SATS runway was reduced to 4,500 feet for periods of time in November and December.

rolled in on the enemy machine gunners in spite of fast approaching darkness and poor weather. Eldridge succeeded in dropping his napalm, but his aircraft was hit and he was wounded in the leg. The wounded Marine nursed his A-4 toward Chu Lai, but it crashed 13 miles from the field. Eldridge was killed.¹⁷

A significant contribution of Marine fixed-wing air support during 1965 was the performance of Marine Composite Reconnaissance Squadron 1. This jet aircraft unit performed the missions of electronic and photo reconnaissance and electronic countermeasure operations. Flying the Douglas EF-10B, affectionately called "Willie the Whale," the pilots of the squadron provided electronic countermeasure (ECM) and electronic intelligence (ELINT) support under the code name FOGBOUND for the 2d Air Division's and Navy Task Force 77's (carrier task force) ROLLING THUNDER missions over North Vietnam.*

*The EF-10B was a modified version of the Navy F3D Skynight, a two-engine jet night-fighter aircraft first built in 1956.

The primary purpose of these flights was to identify and jam enemy fire control radars. During 1965, the VMCJ-1 "Whales" flew 791 sorties in support of strikes over North Vietnam and Laos.¹⁸ Photo reconnaissance missions were flown in Chance-Vought RF-8As, the photoplane version of the Crusader fighter.** In this role, the pilots of VCMJ-1 supported III MAF, as well as the Navy and Air Force, by supplying aerial photos which pinpointed targets in South Vietnam, Laos, and North Vietnam.***

**The Crusader was a swept-wing, single-jet fighter, first built in 1958.

***Lieutenant Colonel Otis W. Corman, the squadron commander, later wrote: "During May and June the EF-10B were operated at 300 percent of normal utilization. Due to the limited total of EF-10B resources (both aircraft and spare parts) General McCutcheon directed that the utilization rate be limited to 200 percent or 60 hours per month per plane. To achieve this, a 1st MAF liaison officer was assigned to MACV's electronic warfare coordinating authority and VMCJ-1 was tasked to support Air Force and Navy operations in only high threat areas; i.e. strikes inside the SA-2 missile envelope complex." Col Otis W. Corman, Comments on draft MS, dtd [Nov 75] (Vietnam Comment File).



USMC Photo A421519

An F8E Crusader is shown at the Da Nang Airbase with all the armament it is capable of carrying. In 1965, one Crusader squadron, VMF(AW)-312, operated from Da Nang, while VMF(AW)-212 was stationed on the attack carrier USS Oriskany (CVA 34).

Another fixed-wing component of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing which performed yeoman service was the Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 152 (VMGR-152). This squadron, reinforced with aircraft from VMGR-353, was based at the Marine Air Station, Futema, Okinawa, but maintained a detachment, usually four aircraft, at Da Nang. The Lockheed KC-130 Hercules aircraft of the squadron orbited over the South China Sea to provide a ready fuel supply to American aircraft.* The presence of these flying fuel tanks was especially valuable during the monsoon season when pilots had to take into consideration that their home field might be closed because of weather. The KC-130s also were used extensively for resupply within South Vietnam and for shuttling personnel and material between South Vietnam, Japan, and Okinawa. Additionally,

the aircraft furnished an important service to the Marine ground units by providing illumination in numerous flare drop missions.

During 1965, one Marine fixed-wing squadron, VMF(AW)-212, participated in the Navy's air war over both North and South Vietnam. VMF(AW)-212, as one of the five squadrons of Attack Carrier Wing 16 (CVW-16), flew combat air strikes for seven months from the attack carrier USS *Oriskany* (CVA 34). On 27 January 1965, Lieutenant Colonel Charles H. Ludden led his squadron from the Marine Corps Air Station, Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii to San Diego, California where it embarked on board the *Oriskany*. The squadron, with 12 Ling-Temco-Vought F-8E Crusader jet fighters, boarded the carrier with a complement of 22 officers, of whom 16 were pilots, and 173 enlisted men.

After a two-month training period, *Oriskany* sailed from San Diego on 5 April, arriving off the Vietnamese coast on 8 May. That same day, the pilots of VMF(AW)-212 exchanged their peacetime orange flight suits for green combat clothing and then flew their first combat missions. Their first strikes over South Vietnam ranged from the Mekong Delta to northern II CTZ. Controlled by U. S. Air Force tactical air controllers (airborne), the "Lancers," as 212 was known, struck enemy troops and supply areas with 5-inch Zuni rockets and 20mm

*Colonel John D. Noble, who commanded MAG-12 until 19 September, remarked in his comments that the KC-130s "provided in-flight fueling to MAG-12 A-4s during most, if not all, of June 1965 while the strip was under construction. In order to carry the optimum ordnance loads from the short operating length of the strip and not disrupt the Seabees' efforts down field at every launch, all A-4 takeoffs were made with light fuel loads. One or more KC-130s would orbit over the field to top off the A-4s with fuel to give them the range and/or endurance needed for their missions." Col John D. Noble, Comments on draft MS, dtd 1Nov76 (Vietnam Comment File).

cannon fire; the F-8s were not equipped to carry bombs.

Two days later, *Oriskany* sailed northward to a position 70 miles off Da Nang known as YANKEE STATION. That day, the 212 pilots flew their first suppression escort for U.S. Navy A-4s of CVW-16 attacking targets south of Hanoi. By 11 June, the F-8Es had been modified. After that date VMF(AW)-212 was capable of carrying MK82 (570 pound), MK83 (983 pound), MK84 (1,970 pound), and MK79 (napalm) bombs. Interestingly, some of the pilots had never trained for dropping bombs with the F-8s and consequently their first bomb drops were made in combat.

The *Oriskany* rotated between YANKEE and DIXIE STATION, established 16 May 100 miles southeast of Cam Ranh Bay, with brief visits to the Philippines for the next seven months. During that



USMC Photo A42282

A helicopter from HMM-361 lands troops from the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines under flare light in Operation MIDNIGHT. This was the first night helicopter assault for the Marine air/ground team in Vietnam.

time, Ludden's squadron was credited with flying 3,018 combat hours and 1,588 combat sorties; 1,058 hours and 595 missions were flown over South Vietnam. Crusaders of the unit were battle damaged on 26 separate occasions; on 5 November one F-8E was lost to enemy ground fire.

When the squadron struck the Hai Duong rail and highway bridge on 5 November 30 miles east of Hanoi, enemy antiaircraft fire hit Captain Harlan P. Chapman's plane. Forced to eject, Chapman parachuted safely but was captured immediately. Chapman was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for the mission and was promoted to lieutenant colonel while a prisoner-of-war. He was repatriated to the United States by the North Vietnamese on 12 February 1973. Captain Chapman commented that the CVW-16 commander, Commander James B. Stockdale, USN, had been shot down in September 1965 and that "Lieutenant Colonel Ludden as the senior squadron commander took command of CVW-16 for about two months, making him one of the few Marines to command a CVW."¹⁹

In November, *Oriskany* completed its WestPac deployment and sailed for the United States. Fifteen days later on 10 December, Ludden led his Crusaders back to MCAS, Kaneohe Bay, while the rest of the squadron unloaded at Pearl Harbor. VMF(AW)-212 transferred to the control of the 1st Marine Brigade from CVW-16.

Helicopter Operations

A Marine helicopter squadron had been operating in Vietnam since 1962. The Marine UH-34s furnished the South Vietnamese with mobility and logistical support. To the individual Marine infantryman in 1965, the helicopter was the vehicle which carried him into battle, provided him with rations, ammunition, and even close air support, and carried him out of battle, dead or alive.

During the July-December period, Marine aviators and ground commanders experimented with new helicopter tactics. One of the more innovative of these experiments occurred on the night of 12 August 1965. Lieutenant Colonel Lloyd F. Childers' HMM-361 and Lieutenant Colonel Clement's 2d Battalion, 3d Marines tried their experiment in an area 10 miles northwest of Da Nang known as Elephant Valley, a narrow river plain between some of the steepest mountains in I CTZ.



USMC Photo A185722

Marines carry a wounded Marine to an evacuation helicopter. A Navy Corpsman (at left without helmet) helps to lift the stretcher.

One week before the operation, appropriately labeled Operation MIDNIGHT, Major Marc A. Moore, Clement's S-3, approached Childers about the feasibility of conducting a night heliborne operation in the valley. The battalion had received information that approximately 50 VC entered the villages in the valley after dark and left the next morning before dawn. The squadron commander studied the problem and decided it was possible for his helicopters to carry out the mission, under favorable weather and moonlight conditions.

The battalion and squadron staffs then worked out the details. They planned for artillery preparation of the landing zone, after which the helicopters would land the troops under the light of flares dropped by Air Force C-123 Providers. A Navy gunfire ship, lying offshore, was to fire star shells to provide wind drift data for the Air Force flare drop. By 12 August, preparations were complete and Lieutenant Colonel

Childers told his pilots at the preflight briefing: "You have the dubious distinction of being the first men to fly a nighttime combat helicopter strike."^{20*}

To ensure surprise, the nights before the actual landing Marine artillery and the Navy gunfire ship fired missions in the same general area and at the same hour as the proposed landing. The night of 12 August, the artillery slightly increased the intensity of its fire for the landing zone preparation and the

* This was an overstatement. HMM-362, under Lieutenant Colonel Archie J. Clapp, had helilifted ARVN forces in a night assault on the Plain of Reeds in the Mekong Delta in 1962. See Whitlow, *U. S. Marines in Vietnam, 1954-64*, Chapter 5. MajGen William R. Quinn observed that HMR-161 "made the first tactical airlift at night in Korea." MajGen William R. Quinn, Comments on draft MS, dtd 30Sep76 (Vietnam Comment File). Night helicopter medical evacuation flights by VMO-6 were almost routine in the last year of the Korean War, one reason the squadron was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation.



USMC Photo A422610

Marine helicopters carry diverse cargoes while resupplying ARVN outposts. Livestock such as geese, ducks, and chickens were often "passengers."

Navy ship fired star shells. Escorted by four UH-1E gunships from VMO-2, Lieutenant Colonel Childers led his flight of 20 UH-34Ds, 14 from his squadron and 6 from HMM-261, to the objective area. As the helicopters flew through a pass in a ridgeline west of the landing zone, the artillery shifted its fires to the north and east and flare planes began dropping their loads. The UH-34s landed safely and disembarked Company H and a platoon from Company F without incident. Four waves of helicopters landed within 28 minutes and the Marine infantry moved to encircle the Viet Cong. Most of the enemy managed to elude the Marines; Clement's troops killed two VC and detained 30 suspects. Despite the small returns in terms of enemy casualties, the Marines did prove the practicality of night helicopter assaults. Colonel Leslie E. Brown, the operations officer of the wing, concluded: "We've still got to study night lifts, but

now we have a springboard to concentrate on the full potential of night assaults."^{21*}

In October, helicopters from Colonel Johnson's MAG-36 and ground troops from Lieutenant Colonel Bodley's 3d Battalion, 7th Marines furnished another example of tactical experimentation during Operation HERCULES. Twenty-six UH-34Ds carried 697 troops of the battalion into the action after Marine fixed-wing aircraft had prepared the landing zones. Four of the troop-laden helicopters did not land, they orbited the objective for two hours, providing a mobile ready reserve force for instant support, if and when necessary.^{22**}

During the same period, on 24 October, Lieutenant Colonel Lloyd J. Childers' HMM-361 brought out two Marine reconnaissance companies from the rugged country west of Da Nang, known as

*Major Marc A. Moore, the operations officer of the 2d Battalion, remarked that, "The VC were surprised, but many had time to go underground before a detailed search could be made at daylight. Results would have been more complete if the assault units had been permitted to maintain their cordon and conduct a detailed 48-hour search; the only method to obtain extensive results in a VC controlled village. Instead the assault force was ordered to sweep the valley to the west soon after daylight, enabling those VC driven underground to slip into the mountains to the north and south." According to Moore, the detainees reported that "villagers and VC alike were not aware of the landing" until after the helicopters began lifting off after the troops had disembarked. BGen Marc A. Moore, Comments on draft MS, n.d. [Nov] 76 (Vietnam Comment File).

** This is the first time these tactics had been employed by the Marine air-ground team, but Marine helicopters carried ARVN EAGLE and TIGER FLIGHTS as early as 1962. EAGLE FLIGHTS of Marine UH-34Ds loaded with ARVN soldiers orbited the ground operational area as a ready reaction force, should contact be made with the enemy. TIGER FLIGHTS differed in that the ARVN reaction force was not airborne, but was positioned at a designated pickup zone, ready for immediate airlift, should the tactical situations so dictate. At Da Nang in January 1966, the 9th Marines and MAG-16 devised a tactical arrangement termed SPARROW HAWK for which each battalion of the regiment maintained a squad-sized force at a special landing zone as a reaction force. When the decision to commit this force was made, UH-34Ds and UH-1E gunships on strip alert at Marble Mountain Air Facility flew to the LZ, picked up the squad, and transported it to the area of contact. Employment of SPARROW HAWK differed from the TIGER FLIGHTS as the Marines used the squads as separate maneuver elements and not as reinforcements. Whitlow, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam*, Chapter 5, and CO, 9th Marines ltr to CMC, dtd 4Jul66, Subj: Updating of "A Brief History of the 9th Marines."

“Happy Valley” in what Colonel O’Connor, the MAG-16 commander called, “one of the most death-defying feats I’ve ever seen in aviation.” According to O’Connor, who was Childers’ co-pilot for the mission, the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion had completed its operation and wanted to be picked up on a ridge, south of Happy Valley:

The ridge was pretty well covered with timber and foliage. The ground troops had picked out a landing zone that was relatively unobstructed. However the zone had a 45 degree slope and could handle only one aircraft at a time. We approached in flights of three, and two aircraft went in to pick up the troops. Approaching the zone, pilots went in under overhanging trees and hovered on the slope while troops clambored aboard. We took a maximum of five or six each trip, depending on the weight of the troops and the age of the helicopter engine. The whole force of two companies was extracted one helicopter load at a time, as each aircraft penetrated to the slope, and then sneaked out to the valley through overhanging foliage.^{23*}

Marine helicopter support was not limited to Marine operations. Both MAGs ferried South Vietnamese troops into battle and resupplied both ARVN and US Special Forces outposts in the I Corps Tactical Zone. MAG-16’s record of air operations for September 1965 provides a sample of the support furnished to both Marines and allied forces: its helicopters flew 15,245 sorties, carried 23,991 passengers, hauled 2,504,663 pounds of cargo, and evacuated 410 wounded troops.²⁴

At Qui Nhon, the Marine helicopter detachment, later replaced by a complete Marine helicopter squadron, flew in support of both South Vietnamese units and U.S. Army troops, as well as the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines. In one operation, GIBRALTAR, seven of the aircraft from the HMM-161 detachment helped helilift the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division into a suspected enemy base area near An Khe on 19 September. First Lieutenant Gary W. Parker, a member of HMM-161, recalled that the first lift went without incident:

And I remembered thinking to myself that this looked like another cake walk; however, on the second wave we started receiving automatic weapons fire which was extremely accurate and soon took its toll on all the helicopters, both Army and Marine Corps. In a very short time the air was full of chatter from the pilots reporting hits upon their aircraft and the locations of the enemy gun emplacements. . . . it became quite obvious



USMC Photo A186125

A Marine CH-37 heavy helicopter lifts a damaged UH-34 helicopter from a combat zone. Ground crewmen dismantled the damaged aircraft so it could be carried back to Da Nang.

that we had landed in the middle of a fairly large and well armed enemy force; more firepower was needed . . .²⁵

All seven of the Marine aircraft sustained battle damage. One aircraft was downed, but its crew was rescued by another helicopter. The downed craft was recovered the following day. The Marines counted 57 bullet holes in the seven UH-34s and Parker later wrote: “We all felt that we had been very lucky that day.”^{26**}

The intensity of helicopter operations naturally caused maintenance problems. By August the UH-34s had exceeded planned flying hours and had to be overhauled four to six months earlier than they would have been under normal operating conditions.

******During Operation GIBRALTAR, the 101st Brigade aborted the helilift after two companies of one battalion had been helilifted into the objective area. Another force of U. S. troops and ARVN rangers was helilifted into another landing zone 1,500 meters to the east and linked up with the two stranded companies the next day. The allies killed 226 VC and captured nine while sustaining losses of 13 dead and 44 wounded. *MACV Comd Hist*, 1965, p. 167.

*See Chapter 11 for an account of the reconnaissance operation.



USMC Photo A422611

A HAWK missile is seen lifting off during a firing exercise near Chu Lai. During the exercise, the LAAM battalions fired at propeller-driven drones, jet drones, and targets towed by F-8 aircraft.

The arrival of MAG-36 in September helped to relieve the burden, but the helicopters in both groups still remained extremely active. The UH-34, in service since 1957, could carry no more than five to eight Marines in the heat, humidity, and high altitudes of much of I Corps. Moreover, the 34s had a cargo capacity of only 1,500 to 2,000 pounds, but these medium helicopters succeeded in getting the job done. A III MAF press release furnished a vivid description of the accomplishments of the UH-34:

These Marine copters have been overloaded and flown. They've been punctured more than arms in a sickbay, and flown. They've coughed, sputtered, and smoked, and still they've flown. They've landed in water, on mountainsides, through elephant grass, in ditches, on beaches, and in hedgerows . . . and have taken off again after debarking assault troops or picking up wounded.²⁷

Air Defense Responsibilities

Even though it was not likely that the North Vietnamese would launch an airstrike against South Vietnam, the possibility could not be ignored.* An enemy air attack could have caused tremendous damage, especially at the large facilities at Da Nang and Chu Lai. To meet the threat of any enemy air

*The Office of Air Force History observed that as of March 1965, the North Vietnamese Air Force had 35 MIG-15s and 17s. By May, the North Vietnamese had a total of 63 MIG-15s and -17s. All of these aircraft were based at Phu Yen airfield near Hanoi. In May, the first three IL-28 Beagle bombers arrived at Phu Yen and by early June totaled eight. These totals remained the same for the rest of 1965. Office of Air Force History, Fact Sheet: North Vietnamese Air Force in 1965, dtd Jan 77 (Vietnam Comment File).

action, four Marine F-4Bs were on alert around the clock, and two Marine light antiaircraft missile battalions, the 1st and 2d, armed with HAWK surface-to-air missiles, were deployed at Da Nang and Chu Lai respectively.

The Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Force (CinCPacAF) was responsible for all air defense in mainland Southeast Asia. He exercised this responsibility through General Moore, Commanding General, 2d Air Division, who was the Mainland Southeast Asia Air Defense Regional Commander. General Walt, the Naval Component Commander Vietnam, acknowledged this Air Force responsibility in the joint memorandum of agreement signed by his deputy, General McCutcheon, and Moore in August.

The air threat from the north never materialized and the LAAM battalions were not called upon to fire their missiles in anger, yet, Colonel George G. Long remembered:

My main concern as executive officer and [then] commanding officer of the 1st LAAM Battalion . . . was that we would not be granted firing permission early enough on an initial raid to provide the air defense needed. Often there were occasions . . . when unidentified radar tracks were observed at various altitudes inbound to the Da Nang complex from North Vietnamese airspace and after repeated failures at identification they would arrive at the airfield. . . . In every case the CRC [the Air Force Control and Reporting Center] on Monkey

Mountain suspected they were friendly and "hold fire" conditions were maintained up to their actual arrival over the field. The LAAM Battalion early warning radars would, as a matter of normal course, acquire these tracks and perform lock-on with the illumination radars. Many of these flights were tracked with the illuminators out to 110 kilometers and at altitudes below 5,000 feet.²⁸

During 1965, the two LAAM battalions conducted numerous training exercises and, during the first week of December, both battalions held their first firing exercise on an island north of the Ky Ha Peninsula. The exercise was extremely realistic using a combination of targets: propeller-driven drones, jet drones, and targets towed by F-8 aircraft. Colonel Edward F. Penico, who then commanded the 2d LAAM Battalion, recalled:

This shoot was the only time that a target towed by piloted aircraft was fired at by a HAWK battery. The computer simulations said it could not be done. The skipper of the target squadron was confident enough that he flew the plane himself. . . .²⁹

Although the firing batteries performed well, 11 of the first 18 missiles failed to function for one reason or another. They were old HAWKS, and doubts lingered about the reliability of the missile stocks.^{30*}

*Colonel Long remarked that the problems with the "shoot . . . are attributable to the lot of the missiles used and should not be considered as an air deficiency." Col George G. Long, Comments on draft MS, dtd 8Nov76 (Vietnam Comment File).

Fire Support and Reconnaissance

*Artillery Support—Naval Gunfire—Other Ground Combat Support—Marine Reconnaissance—
1st Force Reconnaissance Company, The Early Days—3d Reconnaissance Battalion, Opening
Moves—Force and Division Reconnaissance Merged*

Artillery Support

Marine artillery units arrived in Vietnam piecemeal. By mid-July, Colonel William P. Pala had established the 12th Marines headquarters, the artillery regiment of the 3d Marine Division, at Da Nang.* His 1st and 2d Battalions were at Da Nang, but under the operational control of the infantry regiments they supported, the 3d and 9th Marines, respectively. The 2d Battalion, 12th Marines had two 105mm batteries at Da Nang, D and E, while its third battery, F, remained on Okinawa. Two of the 1st Battalion's 105mm batteries, A and B, were at Da Nang and its Battery C was attached to the 3d Battalion, 12th Marines at Chu Lai.

At Phu Bai, the headquarters of the 4th Battalion, 12th Marines, which also arrived in July, took control of the artillery units there. These were one of its 155mm howitzer batteries, Battery M; a 105mm battery, Battery I, 3d Battalion, 12th Marines; and the mortar battery from the 2d Battalion, 12th

Marines. On 16 September, Battery M received six of the newer M-109 155mm self-propelled howitzers and its older M-114A towed pieces were then distributed throughout the artillery battalion. Headquarters Battery and Batteries I and M each manned two of the towed 155s. Lieutenant Colonel Sumner A. Vale later remarked:

... seldom if ever has an infantry battalion commander had so much artillery support under his control as did Taylor, I, and then Hanifin We had the 105 battery within the BLT organization, [the equivalent of] two batteries of 155 howitzers, one towed and one self-propelled, and a battery of howtars These 24 artillery pieces compensated, in part, that 3/4 had only 3 rifle companies, one being stationed in the Da Nang area.¹

The reinforced 3d Battalion, 12th Marines, under the operational control of the 4th Marines, provided the artillery support for the Chu Lai TAOR. It included three 105mm batteries, C, G, and H, its 107mm mortar battery, the 1st Platoon, 1st 8-inch Howitzer Battery (SP), and Battery K from the 4th Battalion, 12th Marines equipped with 155mm howitzers.

The 12th Marines headquarters assumed direct control of the two general support batteries at Da Nang. These units were Battery L of 155mm howitzers from the 4th Battalion, 12th Marines and two platoons of the Force Troops 1st 8-inch Howitzer Battery (SP).

As the buildup continued, General Walt made further changes in his artillery dispositions. Battery F, 2d Battalion, 12th Marines, arriving from Okinawa, joined its parent battalion at Da Nang. In August, the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines and the Force Troops 3d 155mm Gun Battery (SP) arrived, reinforcing the artillery at Chu Lai. General Karch, the assistant division commander and Chu Lai coordinator, placed all of the Chu Lai artillery in a battalion group commanded by Lieutenant Colonel

*A Marine division had a variety of available artillery support. Its artillery regiment consisted of three direct support and one general support battalions. The three direct support battalions, the 1st, 2d, and 3d, contained three batteries, each with six M101A1 105mm towed howitzers (range 11,300 meters), and one battery of six 107mm howtars (range 5,600 meters), a 4.2-inch mortar tube mounted on the frame of the old 75mm pack howitzer. The 4th Battalion, the general support battalion, had three batteries, each equipped with six 155mm howitzers (range 14,600 meters). In 1965, M-109 self-propelled 155mm howitzers were being phased in to replace the older M114A towed howitzers. The 4th Battalion, 12th Marines deployed to Vietnam with two batteries equipped with self-propelled howitzers and one towed battery. In Vietnam, the Marines found they had a use for both weapons. The heavy, tracked M109SP was largely road bound, while the lighter towed howitzer could be moved either by truck or by helicopter.

Leslie L. Page, the commander of the 3d Battalion, 12th Marines and senior artillery officer at the base. The 3d Battalion, 11th Marines provided direct support for the 7th Marines with two 105mm batteries, G and I, and 155mm howitzer Battery M, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Page attached the 3d 155mm Gun Battery to his 3d Battalion, which provided direct support for the 4th Marines and general support for the entire TAOR. At Da Nang, General Walt returned operational control of the 1st and 2d Battalions to the 12th Marines on 1 September. The command structure of the artillery units remained unchanged through the end of the year, but batteries continued to be attached and detached.²

Coordination of artillery fire, particularly in the densely populated Da Nang TAOR, was a constant source of concern to the artillery commanders and their staffs. Lieutenant Colonel Jack K. Knocke, whose 2d Battalion, 12th Marines supported the 9th Marines, reported in July that "clearance to fire became a critical factor in the timely delivery of fires." Artillerymen had to obtain clearances to fire from the Marine fire support coordination centers* (FSCC) at battalion, regimental, and division level and the South Vietnamese district headquarters as well.³

The reduced responsiveness of Marine artillery was a prime topic of discussion in September. The 3d Marine division FSCC, the responsibility of Colonel James M. Callender's 12th Marines,** reported that working relations with the South Vietnamese southern sector were extremely cumbersome. The Marines remarked that slow processing of fire clearance requests by the South Vietnamese resulted in excessive loss of time, except in the case of emergency requests. The ARVN had no centralized coordination center and only one or two senior officers possessed the authority to grant clearance for the Americans to shoot. To improve the situation,

*A FSCC is a single location in which are centralized communication facilities and personnel to effect the coordination of all types of fire support.

** Colonel Callender became 12th Marines commander on 30 July. Shortly after his arrival, Colonel Pala was sent to Qui Nhon as the senior Marine officer in the area to coordinate activities with the U.S. Army command there. Lieutenant Colonel Walter E. Stuenkel was acting commander of the regiment from 15-30 July. See Col William P. Pala, Comments on draft MS, dtd 25Oct76 (Vietnam Comment File).



USMC Photo A184062

Marines from the 2d Battalion, 12th Marines clean their 105mm howitzer in newly established positions at the Da Nang Airbase in March. The Marines have emplaced the camouflaged netting under standing operating procedures, not because of a North Vietnamese air threat.

General Walt ordered his staff to establish more positive fire support liaison with the ARVN.⁴

During the next few months, cooperation between the 3d Division FSCC and the South Vietnamese military authorities in southern Quang Nam Province gradually improved. In October, the South Vietnamese granted the Marines additional free fire zones in both the northern and southern portions of the Da Nang TAOR.*** Although South Vietnamese clearance still remained slow in the southern sector, the American advisors at Hoi An, in cooperation with the 3d Marine Division FSCC, exerted pressure to improve the situation. By November the division fire support center reported that communications with South Vietnamese officials had improved to the extent that in addition to supporting Marine units, division artillery frequently delivered fire in support of ARVN forces in the southern sector. The expansion of the 9th Marines TAOR in November caused a few problems. Some PF and ARVN units were operating in a portion of the new sector, but these difficulties were easily resolved.⁵

*** In free fire zones, all targets were considered to be hostile, so Marine batteries did not have to obtain South Vietnamese clearance before firing.

Coordination with the South Vietnamese was not the only concern of the Marine artillerymen. They also had to worry about low-flying aircraft due to the proximity of major airbases. The intensity of both air operations and artillery fire in the air space above the TAOR presented problems which demanded solution.

The doctrine limiting helicopters to designated routes proved to be too restrictive for both artillery supporting fires and helicopter operations because of the ever increasing volume of helicopter traffic in the TAORs. To alleviate the situation, the wing and the 12th Marines worked out a more flexible policy. The new system provided the pilots with the location of which areas were "hot" and which were "safe." It enabled the aviators to plan their flights accordingly. If the pilot had to fly into a "hot" area, he would

receive additional information which enabled him to avoid impact areas and firing positions. The plan operated as follows:

The pilot reports in to the Direct Air Support Center upon becoming airborne, the DASC gives the pilot the firing and gun positions which are "hot," with times of firing, if applicable. The pilot can then proceed throughout the remaining (safe) portions of the TAOR without restrictions. If the pilot is required to proceed through a "hot" area, the DASC will provide him with fixes to allow the helicopter to proceed within "hot" areas with maximum safety.⁶

This method of coordinating air and artillery fire allowed the Marines to employ artillery more extensively. Artillery missions fired in September show the degree of Marine artillerymen's support of III MAF infantry operations:

Observed combat missions	650
Unobserved call fires	439



USMC Photo A185923

Marine gunners from the 12th Marines fire off a round from a 4.2-inch mortar. The Marine Corps in 1965 was replacing its howtars (a mortar tube mounted on a 75mm howitzer frame) with the 4.2-inch mortars in the artillery mortar batteries.

Harassment and interdiction missions 6,448
 Registrations 125
 Destruction missions 4
 The artillery expended over 35,800 rounds of ammunition to complete these missions.⁷

By December, the 12th Marines was firing over 45,000 rounds a month; 6,000 were fired in support of Task Force DELTA in Operation HARVEST MOON.⁸ The 12th Marines achieved this fire support increase in spite of an ammunition shortage. During December, the regiment found it necessary to restrict 155mm howitzer firing to targets of opportunity.⁹ No infantry unit was refused support because of the lack of ammunition, but the artillerymen were not always able to use the caliber, type of shell, or fuse best suited for a specific target. These restrictions were temporary; the supply situation would improve during the next few months.

Naval Gunfire

Complementing Marine shore-based artillery, naval gunfire support provided another important weapon to General Walt's forces. The Marines expressed their appreciation of naval gunfire in the following terms:

The current deployment of Marine Corps forces is based upon the sea, with the overwhelming majority within range of naval gunfire support. Naval gunfire is one of the means whereby the material superiority of the United States can be brought to bear against Communist manpower.¹⁰

The first agreement to employ U.S. naval gunfire against targets in South Vietnam was made in April 1965. On the 17th, the South Vietnamese informed Ambassador Taylor that they agreed in principle with the United States that naval gunfire should be used to support anti-sea infiltration efforts and ground operations of both South Vietnamese and American forces. At that time, Admiral Sharp ordered ComUSMACV and CinCPacFlt to submit plans for the employment of this supporting arm in Vietnam.¹¹

In May, representatives from MACV, CinCPacFlt, Seventh Fleet, FMFPac, and III MAF met in Saigon to develop procedures for the conduct of naval gunfire. During the meetings, held on 3-5 May, the conferees ironed out differences of opinion and forwarded a concept of operations to Admiral Sharp for his approval. CinCPac approved the procedures and ordered them to be implemented. On 16 May, the USS *Henry W. Tucker* (DD 875) fired



USMC Photo A185706

Colonel James M. Callender, Commanding Officer, 12th Marines (left), Major General Walt, Commanding General, III MAF (center), and Major General William J. Van Ryzin, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-4, Headquarters Marine Corps (right), pose with the 99,999th and 100,000th artillery rounds to be fired by the 12th Marines in Vietnam. After the picture was taken the two general officers pulled the lanyard on the 105mm howitzers that fired these rounds.

the first U.S. naval gunfire missions at targets in II Corps.¹²

Under the terms of the agreement reached at the May conference, Rear Admiral Raymond F. Dubois, Commander of Navy Task Group 70.8, the Seventh Fleet cruiser and destroyer group, furnished the gunfire ships, but retained operational control of them. Rear Admiral Norvell G. Ward, who headed the Naval Advisory Group, MACV, was designated Commander Coastal Surveillance Force (CTF 115) and, in this capacity, assigned gunfire missions and provided coordination with land forces.¹³

Until the autumn of 1965, all naval gunfire missions had to be adjusted by either ground or air observers, and could be undertaken only on order of CTF 115, in cooperation with South Vietnamese officials. In November, General Westmoreland amended this policy to allow unobserved fire against unpopulated target areas which had been declared hostile by the South Vietnamese. On 22 December Admiral Sharp lifted the restrictions even further when he authorized the commanding officers of naval gunfire ships to initiate unobserved fires in emergency situations when friendly forces were



USMC Photo A184097

A Marine-Navy ANGLICO team plots firing targets for the USS Canberra (CAG 2) lying offshore. The UHF radio and antenna that can be seen in the middle of the picture permits the team to talk with both aircraft overhead and ships offshore.

under fire and “when gunfire support could be effected with positive assurance that the friendly forces and/or non-combatants would not be harmed.”¹⁴

Control of naval gunfire did not pose a problem for III MAF. Each of General Walt’s direct support artillery battalions had naval gunfire liaison and naval gunfire spotter teams within its organization to be attached to infantry units as required. In addition, the Marine tactical air observers and reconnaissance personnel had been schooled in the methods for control of naval gunfire support.

To provide control and direction of naval gun support for other American and allied units, a detachment of the 1st Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (ANGLICO), a FMFPac Force Troops unit was ordered to Vietnam.* Led by Lieutenant Colonel George H. Albers, the detachment arrived

in Saigon on 21 May. Officially designated Subunit 1, 1st ANGLICO, the unit consisted of 11 officers and 103 enlisted men organized into two shore fire spotting teams and four shore fire control parties. The subunit provided a gunfire liaison team for each corps tactical operations center (TOC). These teams provided the personnel and communications necessary to permit the U.S. senior advisor in each corps area to control naval gunfire through the South Vietnamese TOCs.¹⁵

In I Corps, the U.S. Air Force was reluctant to allow the use of naval gunfire near Da Nang Airbase for fear of interfering with U. S. air operations. On 8 June, the U.S. Air Force base commander at Da Nang agreed to permit Navy ships to fire at targets beyond a 10-mile radius from the base. The first naval gunfire mission in support of the Marines was not fired until July because of the limited availability of Navy gunfire ships.¹⁶

On 9 July, General Krulak recommended to General Walt that the Marines make every effort to increase their use of naval gunfire support. On the 18th the III MAF commander ordered all of his subordinate units to take full advantage of naval gunfire ships. In July, four ships, two cruisers and two destroyers, fired 934 rounds in support of Marine

*The Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company is a Marine unit specifically designed to support U. S. Army or allied units. It provides the control and liaison agencies associated with the ground elements of a landing force to control and employ naval gunfire and Navy and Marine close air support in the amphibious assault, or other operations when such support is required. In addition to Marines, ten Navy line officers and four enlisted men are assigned to the company.



USMC Photo A186266

155mm howitzers of the 11th Marines in position to support infantry from forward firing positions during Operation HARVEST MOON. Ammunition and supplies have been brought in by truck from Chu Lai and Da Nang.

operations. During August, navy gunships fired 5,096 rounds for the Marines, including 1,061 rounds in support of Operation STARLITE during which naval gunfire played a major supporting role. The number of missions declined during the remainder of the year; only 2,873 rounds were fired during this period. Nevertheless, two Navy ships remained on station, assigned to I Corps, one that could be deployed anywhere off the coast and the other in Da Nang harbor for harbor defense, but available in a naval gunfire support role during daylight.¹⁷

In 1965, 72 ships of the U. S. Seventh Fleet provided naval gunfire support for U.S. and allied forces. The Marine-Navy ANGLICO teams of Sub-unit 1 controlled the firing of nearly 70,000 rounds at 2,411 targets.* In at least one instance, during the

successful November defense of the Thach Tru outpost 20 miles south of Quang Ngai City by the 37th Ranger Battalion, naval gunfire from the U.S. destroyers *O'Brien* (DD 725) and *Bache* (DD 470) was the decisive factor. *O'Brien* fired 1,392 5-inch rounds in 26 hours. The destroyers' fire broke the back of the enemy attack. General Walt witnessed the naval bombardment:

From a helicopter at about a half mile distance. The destroyer shells stopped the attacking force within fifty yards of the outpost. It was a total and effective surprise to the enemy forces. It nearly annihilated the assault forces of the 18th NVA Regt.¹⁸

Other Ground Combat Support

In addition to air, artillery, and naval gunfire, Marine infantry units received vital combat support from the 3d Marine Division amphibian tractor companies and tank companies. The experience of the 3d Tank Battalion was typical of how these organizations functioned in Vietnam. The 3d Tank Battalion Headquarters, Lieutenant Colonel States Rights Jones, Jr., and Company B arrived at Da Nang on 8 July. The battalion's other two gun companies were already in Vietnam, attached to the infantry units. On 24 July, the battalion was assigned a general support mission, but retained operational control only of its Headquarters and Service Company. At Da Nang, Company A was in direct support of the 3d Marines, while Company B was in direct support of the 9th Marines. Company C was

* Major Richard E. Romine, who assumed command of Subunit 1 on 25 August 1965, remarked that most of these missions were controlled from the rear seat of L-19 observation aircraft provided by senior U. S. advisors to the corps areas. The subunit operated under MACV control and received administrative support from the Naval Advisory Group in Saigon. Romine commented that much of his time was spent coordinating "at the four Corps headquarters and the spot team sites. This meant that I traveled frequently to Can Tho, Vung Tau, Bien Hoa, Pleiku, Quang Tri, Qui Nhon and Da Nang from my office in Saigon." LtCol Richard E. Romine, Comments on draft MS, dtd 25Oct76 (Vietnam Comment File). Romine had relieved Lieutenant George M. Wasco, USN, who had relieved Lieutenant Colonel Albers on 28 July as Officer-in-Charge, Sub-unit 1.