



Marine Corps Historical Collection

With the troops loaded, the helicopters launched to fly north. In the foreground is a group of civilians from nearby villages. The presence of noncombatants in the battle area was a continuing concern for commanders for humanitarian and military reasons.

Although enemy armor was employed in unprecedented numbers, the NVA committed its infantry prematurely, exposing it to heavy supporting arms fire. Water from the many small tributaries of the My Chanh River became undrinkable due to the hundreds of enemy dead polluting these streams. The countryside was littered with burned-out hulks of enemy vehicles.

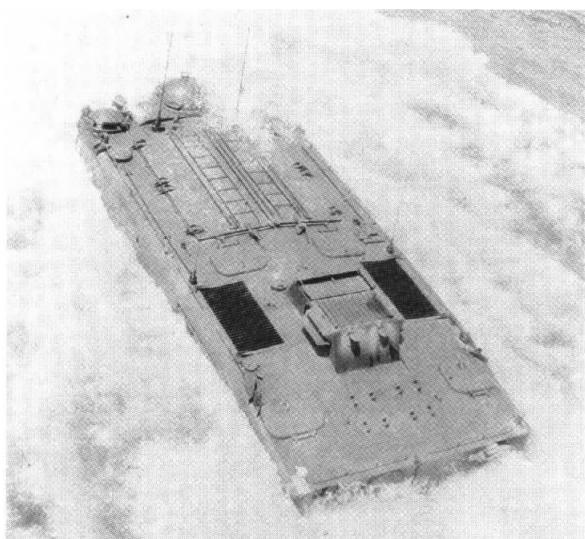
One of the biggest advantages the Vietnamese Marines enjoyed during their defense of the My Chanh River was the combat information provided by air observers and forward air controllers. "They were faceless, but every advisor knew them intimately by their callsigns," later wrote Major Sheridan, who had been with VNMC Brigade 369. "They were our link with the outside world." Captain George Philip, also with 369, recalled "The observers were on station 24 hours a day and Spectres [AC-130s] were up every night."³²

One Marine advisor, Captain Allen D. Nettleingham with VNMC Brigade 258, said the USAF FACs did an outstanding job in spite of the restrictions placed upon them:

... no way we can praise them enough. In fact we were extremely fortunate in that most of the FACs who came up to fly for us just happened to have 'faulty' altimeters and that helped us considerably. The FACs, flying much lower than the prescribed ceiling, would trace tank tracks right into the hootches with the tanks sitting inside. They would then call in an airstrike and blow the tanks away. Other FACs flying at night picked up a couple of convoys just north of the bridge and called in an "artillery raid"—a massive TOT—and destroyed the trucks.³³

As air observers and FACs uncovered road and trail networks or spotted troop movements and vehicles,

*TOT, time-on-target, is a procedure by which artillery fire from several different locations is directed at a single target and scheduled to arrive at the same time.

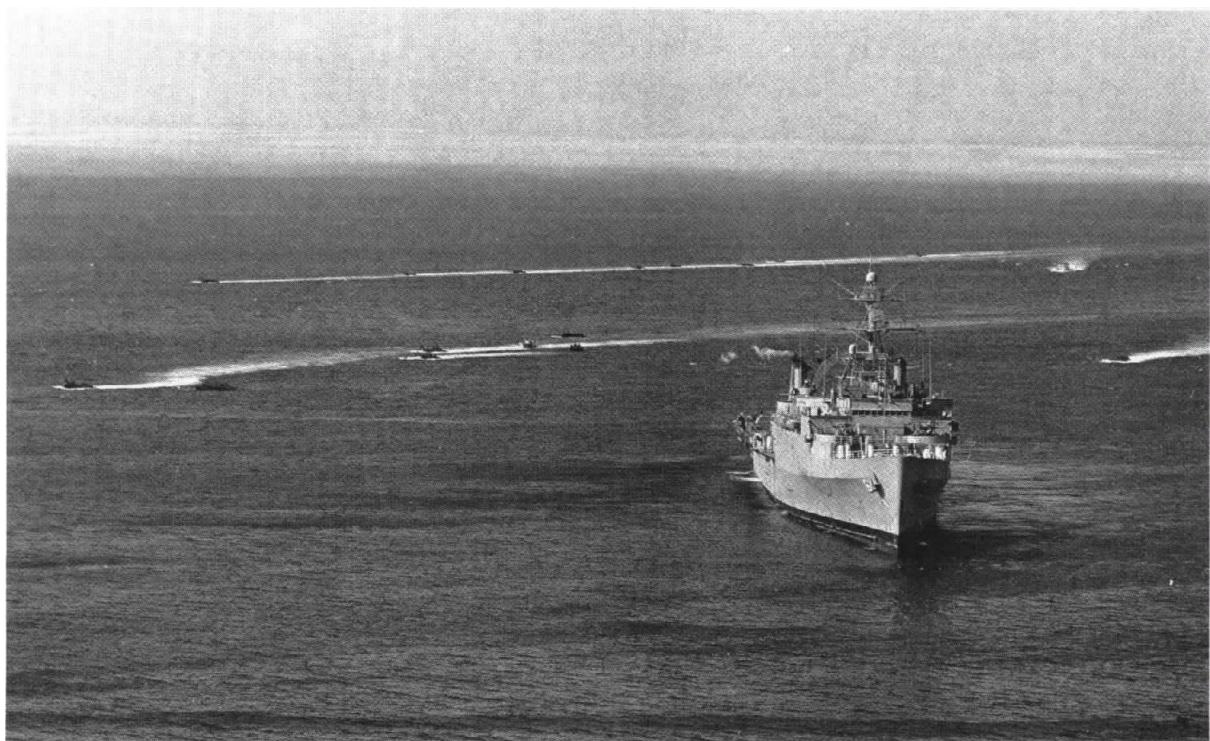


Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800746

An LVTP-5 launches from the well deck of an underway LPD with a platoon of South Vietnamese Marines on board. The vehicle's only armament is a .30-caliber Browning machine gun mounted in the turret over the bow ramp. This photo shows the normal depth at which the amphibian tractor rode in the water.

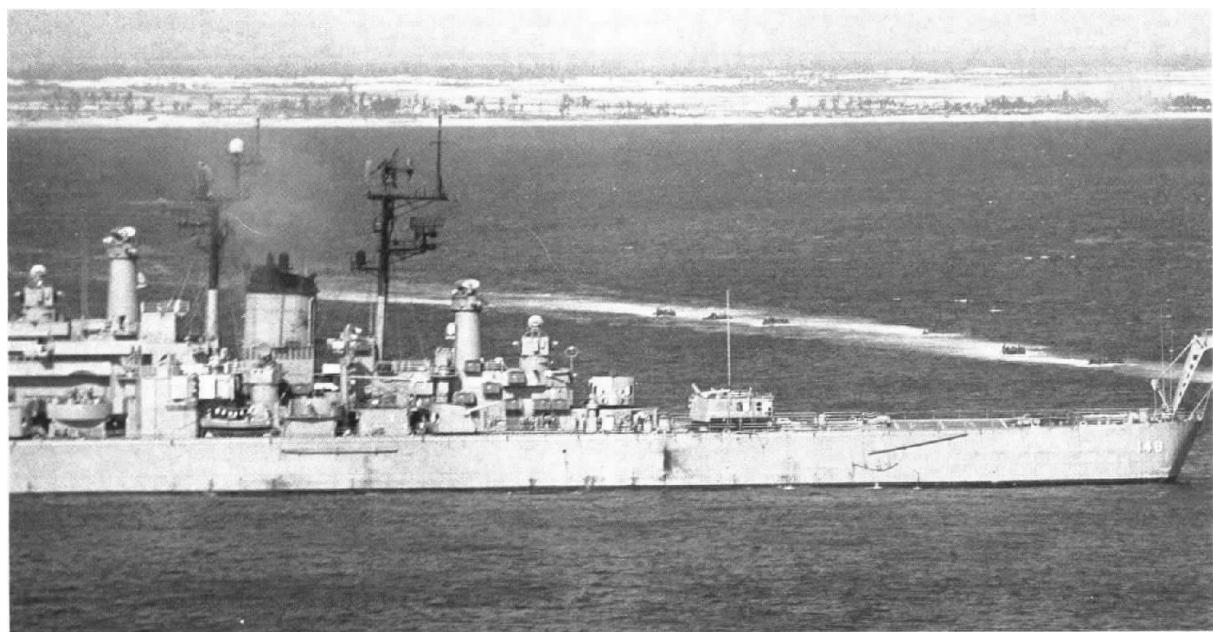
The surface assault for Song Than 6-72 moves towards Wunder Beach. The amphibian tractors (LVTs) are in two parallel platoon columns as they cross behind the USS Duluth.

Department of Defense Photo (USN) 1151901



they would report them to the Marine defenders along the My Chanh. As trails, supply points, and troop sightings were plotted and connected, a pattern soon developed showing lines of communication mainly from the Ba Long Valley toward Camp Evans. With the arrival of the 325th NVA Division in Quang Tri Province, the Communists had three divisions with which to attack the My Chanh Line.³⁴

Early on the morning of 26 May, a reinforced NVA battalion launched a savage attack against Brigade 258's western flank. Captain Robert K. Redlin, an artillery officer who had been assigned on an emergency basis as an infantry advisor, was present as one element of the enemy force made the 9th VNMC Battalion pull back more than 1,000 meters to consolidate. Redlin directed heavy air strikes and naval gunfire on the enemy, who finally broke contact, leaving their dead where they had fallen. The 1st VNMC Battalion, with Captain Lawrence H. Livingston, also was heavily hit by the enemy's fierce attack. Two NVA battalions from the 88th NVA Regiment, supported by tanks, mortars, recoilless rifles, and artillery fire, threatened to overrun the 1st VNMC Battalion's position. Livingston quickly called air strikes on the ene-



Department of Defense Photo (USN) 1151899

The heavy cruiser USS Newport News shelled the beach as the landing was completed and the LVT platoons returned to the amphibious group. In the background is the flat coastal plain which made reference points for naval gunfire hard to locate from the sea.

my, inflicting many casualties. Again the South Vietnamese had stopped the enemy drive to Hue. As the NVA withdrew from the VNMC Brigade 258 area, they left more than 200 corpses on the battlefield.

May had been a bad month for the NVA along the My Chanh River. It had suffered more than 2,900 soldiers killed, 1,080 weapons captured, and 64 armored vehicles destroyed or captured. The Communists had failed to capture Hue. The My Chanh Line had held and it was a good month for the Vietnamese Marines. On 28 May, on the Emperor's Walkway in front of the Imperial Palace at Hue, President Thieu personally promoted Colonel Lan to brigadier general. During the month more than 15,000 Vietnamese Marines had joined the defenders of MR 1 and practically every able-bodied Marine was now in the northern provinces.

In the Balance

The first part of June 1972 was characterized by limited South Vietnamese offensive thrusts north across the My Chanh River, but by the end of the month a major effort had been launched to recapture Quang Tri City. Major General Howard H. Cooksey, USA, replaced General Kroesen as the senior American in MR 1, and as such, he continued the American support to General Truong in the defense of Hue and the counteroffensive to regain Quang Tri Province. This

month also witnessed the departure of General Creighton W. Abrams and his replacement by General Frederick C. Weyand, USA, as MACV commander.

With its maneuver battalions up to combat strength and fire support agencies consolidated in the VNMC Division's FSCC, the Vietnamese Marines took the initiative on 8 June and launched a spoiling attack named Song Than 8-72. All three VNMC brigades were committed in a four-battalion attack across the river. The Marines moved forward under the cover of a closely coordinated and well-executed fire support plan which included B-52 strikes, tactical air, artillery, and naval gunfire. The American-established FSCC at division headquarters permitted supporting arms to be fired in concert, a technique heretofore fraught with problems of execution. According to Lieutenant Colonel Duncan M. Jones, the division artillery advisor who had helped set up the fire support coordination center, "there were still many problems, but none that could not be overcome."³⁵

As the battalions crossed the My Chanh River, the heaviest resistance was encountered along the coastal areas, particularly along Route 555, known to the Americans as the "Triple Nickel." The enemy was well entrenched, but friendly casualties were comparatively light with nine men killed in action. The NVA took

a heavy beating, with the successful Marine operation accounting for 230 enemy killed, seven tanks destroyed, and 102 weapons, including several SA-7 surface-to-air missiles, captured or destroyed. At the conclusion of the operation the Marines were north of the My Chanh River, once again in Quang Tri Province, and anxious to continue north.³⁶

In order to consolidate the Marines' captured territory, ARVN engineers built pontoon bridges across the My Chanh River to give tanks, artillery, and trucks access to Quang Tri Province. Plans were already being made to send the Marine brigades back into the offensive. Such plans culminated in Song Than 8A-72. This operation was another spoiling attack which began on 18 June. Once again all three VNMC brigades were involved. Marine Brigade 147 struck north along Route 555, into the notorious "Street Without Joy" coastal area. VNMC Brigade 369 held the center position as it attacked across open rice paddies, flanked to the west by VNMC Brigade 258, moving along QL-1. The NVA forces were defending in depth along QL-1 and Route

555, reinforced by armor, artillery, and antiaircraft units. Stream and canal networks between the two roads were interlaced with trenches and fortified positions. Further to the west lay rolling hills and the enemy's 130mm guns.

As the 6th VNMC Battalion with VNMC Brigade 147 moved north along Route 555, it was met by an enemy counterattack. During darkness on 20 June, a reinforced enemy infantry battalion supported by tanks and artillery hit the 6th Battalion's defensive positions. The NVA tanks were not coordinated with the infantry maneuver and VNMC artillery quickly responded to each tank sighting with massed fire.³⁷ Despite the heavy artillery fire, at least 40 NVA soldiers were able to break through the 6th Battalion's perimeter and attack the battalion command post, fragmenting the command group.

Major James M. Tully and the attached ANGLICO naval gunfire spot team became separated from the Vietnamese Marines. Locating the battalion commander, Tully, with the aid of the spot team, assisted

Touchdown in Landing Zone Columbus was in the sandy coastal strip, the "Street Without Joy" of the French Indochina War. This photograph is taken from a departing helicopter as the South Vietnamese Marines begin to move out from their dangerously concentrated landing formation which makes them vulnerable to enemy artillery or mortar fire.

Marine Corps Historical Collection



in calling for supporting fires.³⁸ For the next eight hours the battle raged. Both tactical aircraft and naval gunfire supported the battalion as Lieutenant Colonel Do Huu Tung rallied his battered Marines for a tank and infantry counterattack. Backed by B-52 strikes and other supporting arms, the 6th VNMC Battalion pushed the enemy from the penetrated position.* The enemy responded with heavy artillery and mortar fire throughout the entire zone of action. While the 6th VNMC Battalion was fighting for its life, the 1st and 5th VNMC Battalions also repulsed large armored counterattacks.

By 27 June, the VNMC had successfully established a new defensive line four kilometers north of the My Chanh River. The operation had netted 761 enemy killed, eight tanks destroyed, and freed hundreds of captive villagers.³⁹ The liberated Vietnamese from a

*Major Tully was instrumental in helping organize the effort to repulse the enemy and later was awarded the Silver Star Medal.

hamlet in Hai Lang District described their life under the Communists as being full of terror and forced labor. More than two-thirds of the population had fled south in the face of the Communist invasion; those who had stayed behind in hope of harvesting some of their rice crop found life miserable. According to one of the escapees, a young farmer named Le Thi, the NVA told the villagers that those who had fled to Hue with the ARVN forces would starve and that if any of those who had remained tried to escape they would be shot. Another said that the invaders forced the people to carry supplies, harvest rice, dig weapons caches, and build field fortifications. The attacks by the South Vietnamese Marines had made escape from NVA occupation possible for more than 2,000 people. The villagers were sent south to the My Chanh River where boats picked them up at the river's edge and took them to Hue. Trucks eventually transported them from Hue to Da Nang refugee camps.⁴⁰

CHAPTER 8

Quang Tri City Regained

Truong's Counteroffensive—The Battle for Quang Tri City—Taking the Citadel—The Final Assault

Truong's Counteroffensive

With a firm hold on the southern portion of Quang Tri Province and daily attacking the enemy supply lines, the South Vietnamese planned in earnest for the recapture of lost territory to the north. I Corps' Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong wanted to defend Hue against threats from the west while conducting offensive operations from positions along the My Chanh River to regain the Quang Tri-Dong Ha area. Troung wrote, the "limited offensive operations had brought us enough time to prepare for the long-awaited big push northward."¹ FRAC's Major General Howard H. Cooksey reported that the objective was to recapture Quang Tri Province, but that the destruction of enemy forces and material was an important secondary task and the South Vietnamese decided, at first, to bypass Quang Tri City.²

Teams from ANGLICO were in all four military regions to meet the increased demands for fire support coordination. In response to Lieutenant Colonel D'Wayne Gray's urgings, the American command organized its fire support assets, including ANGLICO, to support offensive as well as defensive operations in MR 1. FRAC integrated air, artillery, and naval gunfire for maximum effect in support of the ground fighting. Major Glen Golden was with the liaison team with FRAC in Hue; liaison/spot teams were with the VNMC Division, the Airborne Division, 1st ARVN Division, and 2d ARVN Division; and naval gunfire air spot teams were flying out of Phu Bai and Da Nang.³

Phase one of Lam Son or Total Victory 72, the multi-division I Corps counteroffensive, began after six days of extensive preparatory fires by all available supporting arms and an amphibious feint at the mouth of the Cua Viet River.* The operational concept was for the Vietnamese Airborne Division and the Marine Division to attack abreast to the northwest, employing both surface and helicopter assaults to seize a line along the Thach Han River. The Marines' axis of advance was along Route 555, taking in the area from the coast to QL-1. The Airborne Division's area included QL-1 on the right to the foothills on the left, with Quang Tri City in their zone of action.

*Known as Song Than 9-72 to the VNMC.

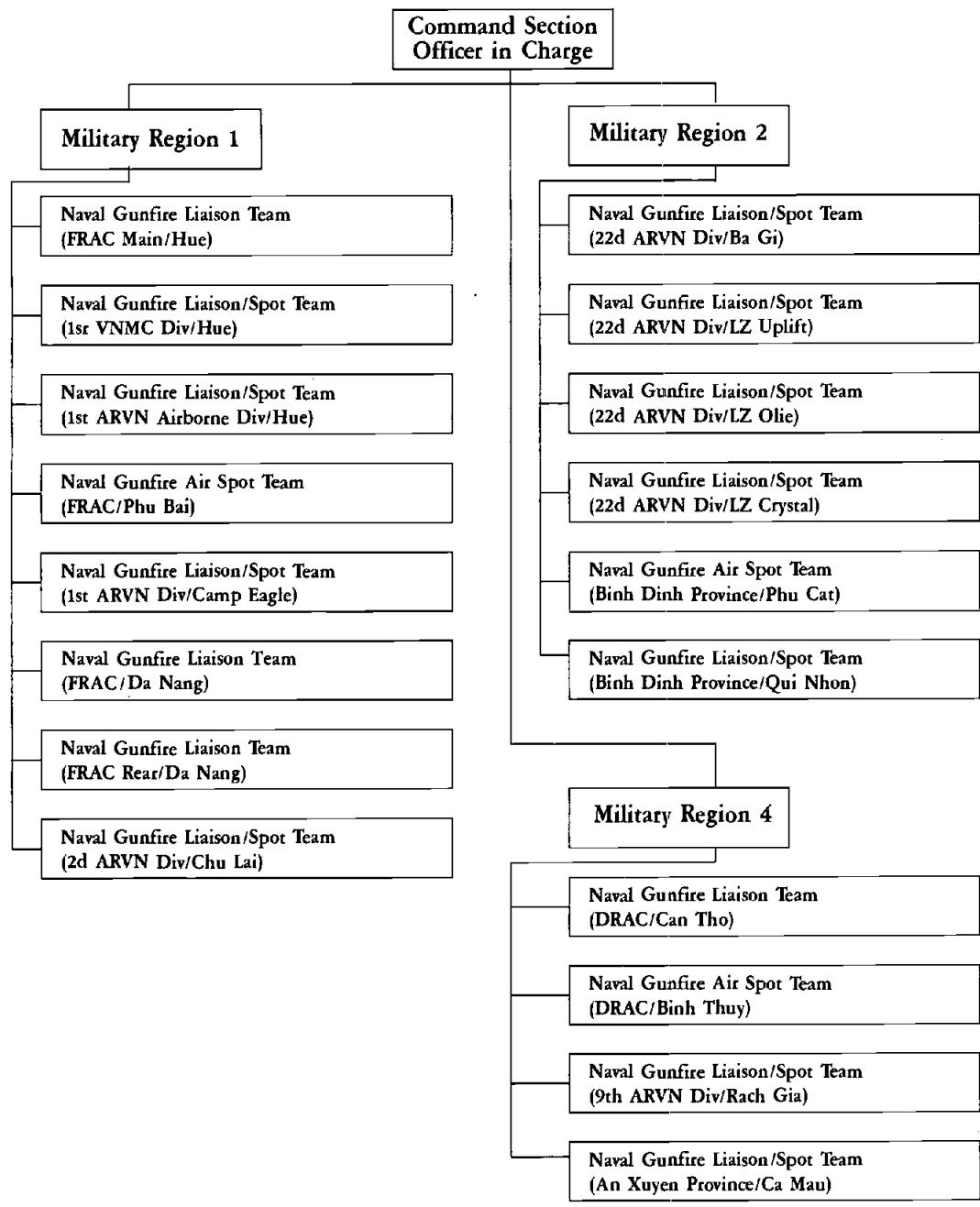
A 9th MAB amphibious demonstration on "D-1" preceded the counteroffensive. A special amphibious task group was activated by Task Force 76 to simulate the preparation and conduct of an amphibious assault. VNMC units went on board ship from Tan My to add credence to the northern feint. On 27 June 1972, the American amphibious forces moved to the objective area and by 0800 landing craft and amphibian tractors carrying South Vietnamese Marines were near their turnaway point. Helicopters from HMM-165, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Charles H. F. "Doc" Egger, launched from the USS *Tripoli* (LPH 10) and headed for the beach. At 0806, the surface force—simultaneously with the helicopter force—reversed direction 5,000 yards from the shore.

Intelligence estimates by the 1st Regional Assistance Command later indicated confusion and relocation of some NVA units in response to the demonstration, contributing to the initial success of Lam Son 72. It was also noted that the North Vietnamese reacted quickly, firing artillery at the amphibious ships from the mainland and offshore islands.⁴ Colonel Sumner A. Vale, the 9th MAB chief of staff, witnessed the NVA shore fire "landing in the wake of the *Blue Ridge* and a ship to the starboard of her." Second Lieutenant Stephen C. Fogleman, a rifle platoon commander with BLT 1/9, recalled:

... We were on the *Schenectady* and were heading out from the beach. Tiger Island was passing on our port side. It was flat and green and fairly low in the water. We saw white flashes from the foliage, then saw the shellbursts walking towards us, both in the air and on the surface. The Marines passing ammunition on the aft gun-mount didn't flinch and continued to pass ammunition to the 3"50s which banged away. The cruiser [USS *Newport News*] came in and opened up, after which the guns on Tiger Island remained silent. It was more fire than we had received during Song Than 6-72.⁵

On 28 June, the Marine Division's portion of the overall I Corps effort began. The 3d, 5th, 7th, and 8th VNMC Battalions pushed north and immediately encountered stiff resistance. The enemy was well dug-in and showed no inclination to withdraw. General Lan launched a helicopter-borne assault behind the enemy lines to relieve the pressure on the attacking Marine

Sub Unit One, 1st ANGLICO Deployments, Fall 1972



Adapted from Sub Unit One Material



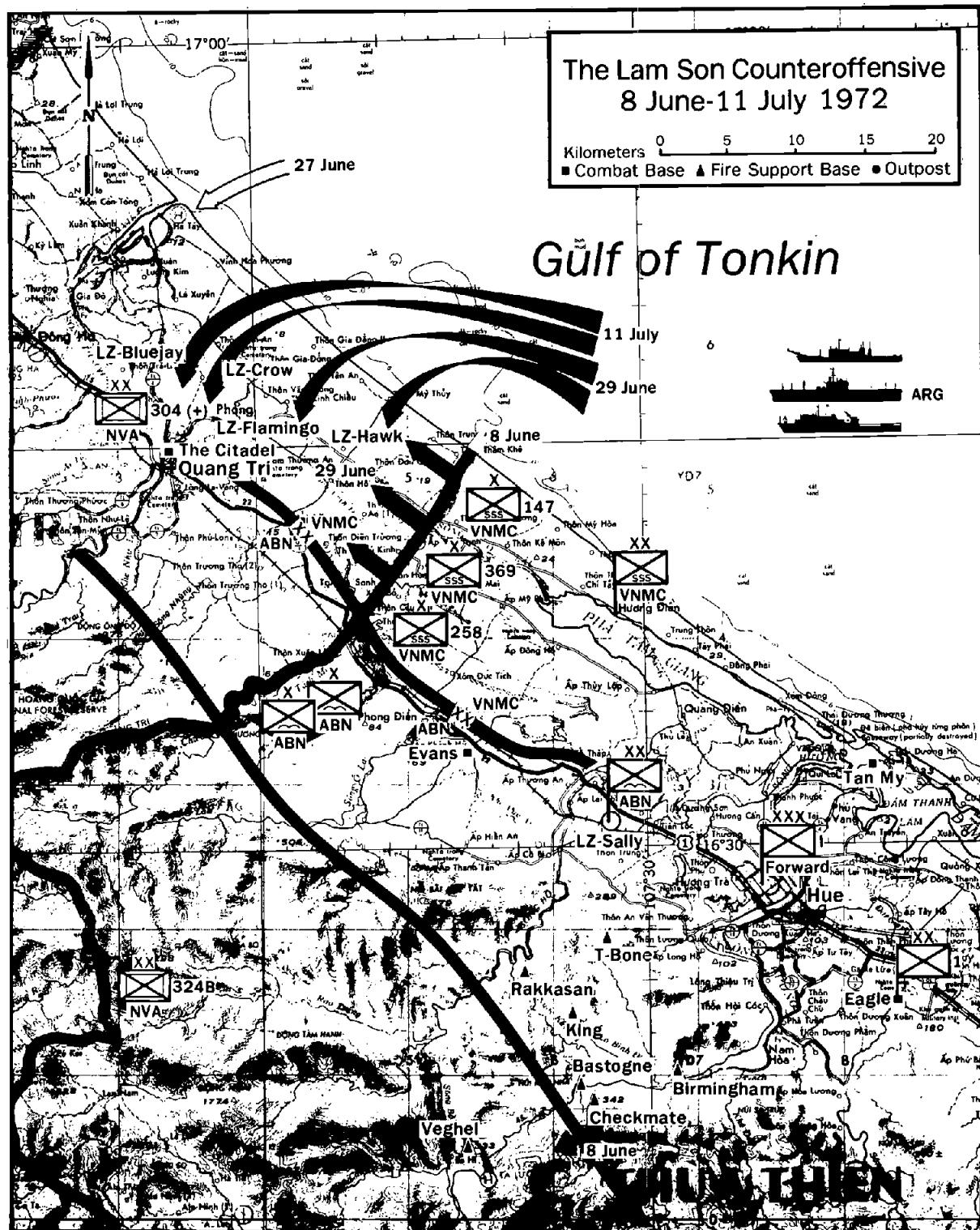
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A374578

On a command tour of the Pacific, the Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps visits units involved in the Spring Offensive fighting. From left in the Hue Citadel are Gen Robert E. Cushman, CMC; Col Joshua Dorsey, Senior Marine Advisor; BGen Bui The Lan, VNMC; LtCol D'Wayne Gray, SU1, 1st ANGLICO; and BGen Edward J. Miller, 9th MAB.

U.S. Marine helicopters turn away from the Vietnamese coast during the amphibious demonstration by the 9th MAB for the Lam Son counteroffensive. Both the air and surface assaults were aimed at the North Vietnamese rear positions along the Cua Viet River.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800753







Department of Defense Photo (USN) 1151900

Amphibian tractors underway after turning back from the shoreline. Though the Lam Son landing was contrived, the Communist reaction was genuine and the amphibious group withdrew from the area under accurate artillery fire from enemy coastal defensive positions.

battalions. On 29 June, the 1st and 4th VNMC Battalions, supported by the 9th MAB, conducted a helicopter assault and secured key objectives along Route 555 and the coastline in the vicinity of Wunder Beach. For a third time, U.S. Marine CH-46 and CH-53 helicopters had lifted Vietnamese Marines into enemy-held positions.

A helicopter pilot with HMM-165 described his first combat flight:

The first wave lifted off and the second wave of 46s were pulled out of the stack and spotted. Within seconds they were turning and launched. We were spotted on 2 and 3. We unfolded our blades and the crew chief went topside to check the locking pins. As soon as we were turning, tow-er cleared us to launch.⁶

Helicopters from the USS *Tripoli* and *Okinawa* loaded the two VNMC battalions at Tan My, flew them north, and put them down in Landing Zones Flamingo and Hawk. After intensive shore, sea, and air bombardment—including B-52 Arc Lights—had blasted the enemy, the helicopters landed and were met by small arms fire. Only scattered enemy forces opposed the 1,450 Vietnamese Marines landing with precision. The helicopters from HMM-164 and

HMM-165 returned to the ships with minor damage and no casualties. ANGLICO's First Lieutenant Stephen G. Biddulph, with the 1st Battalion, recalled that after the assault “the enemy on several occasions tried to rush tanks and armored personnel carriers down the surf to envelop us.” The NVA effort did not succeed because of the direct fire from ships positioned 4,000 meters offshore.⁷

The start of Lam Son 72 was a complete success as the vertical envelopment relieved the pressure to the south and facilitated a rapid advance and recapture of lost territory.⁸ As June ended, the NVA had given up more ground as they were pushed further back into Quang Tri Province. The South Vietnamese daily captured artillery, tanks, and armored personnel carriers. During the month, the allies killed 1,515 enemy soldiers and destroyed 18 armored vehicles. The Marines took 15 enemy prisoners.

Flying in support of these operations were airborne air controllers and naval gunfire spotters with 20th TASS out of Da Nang. As part of this continuous coverage, on 29 June, Captain Steven L. Bennett, USAF, and an ANGLICO air observer, Captain



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800684

South Vietnamese Marines head north once more as the Lam Son counteroffensive returns them to Quang Tri Province. Helicopters from HMM-164 and HMM-165 pick up waiting helo-teams from the 1st and 4th VNMC Battalions, using a road as a pickup zone.

"Like a school of sharks," was one description of the low-level flight pattern used by the Marines to evade enemy antiaircraft fire enroute to Landing Zones Flamingo and Hawk. Army escort gunships and supporting arms were also used to reduce the enemy threat.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800677





Department of Defense Photo (USN) 1151902

ANGLICO spot teams controlled naval gunfire that struck Communist targets along the coast in support of Lam Son 72. The USS George K. MacKenzie stands off the coast as its 5-inch, .38-caliber ordnance explodes on shore in support of ongoing operations.

Michael B. Brown, USMC, flew one such sortie in an OV-10. After operating for three hours over the battle area, Captains Bennett and Brown received an urgent request from a South Vietnamese unit under attack by a larger NVA force. With no air support in the immediate area and the combatants too close for gunfire, Bennett rolled in to strafe the enemy. After the aircraft pulled out of its fifth run, an SA-7 missile struck its left engine, setting it on fire, dropping the landing gear, and piercing the canopy with fragments. Bennett turned south and he and Brown prepared to eject. At this point Brown reported "my ejection system was severely damaged" and would not work. Captain Bennett then chose to ditch the aircraft in the Gulf of Tonkin, an unheard-of procedure for the OV-10 and one from which no crew in an emergency previously had survived. The aircraft cartwheeled repeatedly on impact with the water. As Brown swam clear, Bennett sank with the wreckage, giving his life for his crewmember.*

On 30 June 1972, President Thieu went out to the USS *Blue Ridge* to express his personal appreciation for the American assistance during these operations. That same day, fighting continued on the ARVN Airborne Division's portion of the Quang Tri battlefield. Corporal John E. Parton was attached to the 3d ARVN Airborne Battalion as an ANGLICO naval gunfire spotter. The battalion was engaged by a well-entrenched Communist unit and unable to move for-

ward. Corporal Parton took a LAW antitank rocket and moved forward in an attempt to locate the machine gun position to his unit's front. Exposing himself to fire, he located the machine gun and launched the rocket at it, destroying the gun while receiving mortal wounds in the process.** The airborne soldiers then assaulted the enemy position and continued forward. American support was not limited to advice and material alone.

Other ANGLICO Marines with the Airborne Division were among the first to reach the outskirts of Quang Tri City. First Lieutenant Anthony P. Shepard's spot team was assigned to the 2d ARVN Airborne Brigade. At 2300 on 4 July, the spot team accompanied the brigade reconnaissance company through friendly lines to a position southeast of the city. The 90-man company led by Captain Tran Ut, with U.S. Army First Lieutenant Terry Griswold as an advisor, split into three groups and moved to within 300 meters of the Quang Tri Citadel walls. From this location Shepard and Lance Corporal Michael Jurak directed numerous air and artillery strikes on the Citadel and surrounding NVA positions.⁹

The Battle for Quang Tri City

By 7 July, the Airborne Division, in its offensive to the west, was trying to keep abreast of the Marines to its right and had reached positions just south of Quang Tri City and the Vinh Dinh River. The airborne troops had run head-on into a strongly entrenched enemy

*For his action, Captain Bennett was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor.

**For his actions Corporal Parton was awarded a posthumous Silver Star Medal.



Department of Defense Photo (USN) 13030

Supporting arms fire was effectively controlled by airborne Air Force and ANGLICO controllers from a variety of aircraft. A North American Rockwell OV-10 Bronco turns over the Gulf of Tonkin, flying just offshore to avoid the Communist antiaircraft fire.

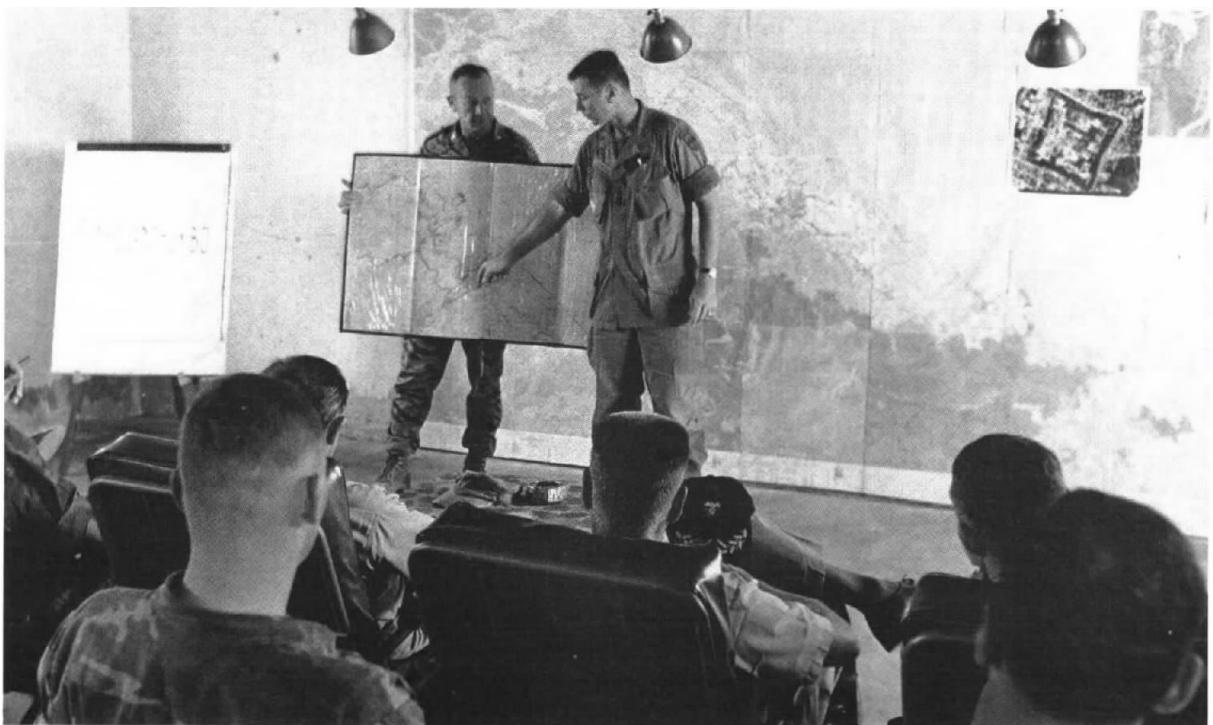
South Vietnamese forces reached the outskirts of Quang Tri City by early July 1972. By then the preceding fighting had reduced the city to rubble, as in this view of the moat and walls of the Citadel. This worked in favor of the Communist defenders by providing them defensive positions from which to hold off the attacking Vietnamese Marine units.

North Vietnamese Army Photo



force determined to hold the city. By 10 July, the forward units of the VNMC 1st, 3d, 5th, 7th, and 8th Battalions were on a line that ran generally from the bend in Route 555 as it turned west toward Quang Tri City, eastward to the coast. With the ARVN Airborne Division stalled on the outskirts of the city, General Lan was reluctant to expose an unprotected flank as his division continued northward.¹⁰ To break the impasse, Lan decided to move one battalion by helicopter across the Vinh Dinh River to a position just northeast of the city while two battalions would assault enemy positions from east to west. The mission of the Marines was to block Route 560 and to prevent the enemy from resupplying his forces in the city itself.

Supporting fires for the helicopter move began at 0600, 11 July, and the final Arc Light hit 15 minutes prior to the landing at approximately 1200, "I-Hour."



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800662

The Vietnamese Marine Division initially moved to cut off Quang Tri City from reinforcements with continued American support. At the division command post at Huong Dien, operations were briefed to the amphibious forces by the FRAC G-3, with LtCol Gerald H. Turley holding the map. At the right rear is an air photograph of the Citadel.

Thirty-four American helicopters from HMM-164 off the *Okinawa* and HMM-165 off the *Tripoli* carried 840 Marines of the 1st VNMC Battalion with 12,000 pounds of ammunition and rations into the attack. Six U.S. Army air cavalry gunships led the troop-laden helicopters into Landing Zones Blue Jay and Crow, 2,000 meters north of Quang Tri City. The six hours of heavy preparatory fires had not blunted the enemy's ability to fight.

Throughout the eight-mile flight to the objective, SA-7 surface-to-air missile firings caused the helicopters to fly the contour of the earth at the highest possible speed. Within 10 minutes of landing the helicopters had disembarked the Vietnamese and had lifted off. One pilot had been surprised when he landed practically on top of a NVA T-54 tank. Quick reaction by a Bell AH-1 Cobra gunship knocked out the tank with a TOW antitank missile before it could respond. Another helicopter had landed on top of a NVA command post. Twenty-eight of the helicopters entering the landing zones were hit by small arms fire. In spite of evasive flying, one CH-53 carrying 55 Vietnamese Marines was hit by a SA-7, burst into flames,

and went down with heavy loss of life. Five U.S. Marine crewmen of a downed CH-46 were extracted from the zone by U.S. Army crews of Troop F, 4th Air Cavalry, who braved antiaircraft fire to effect the rescue. Five of the Army's six helicopters were shot up during the assault.¹¹ Losses by the 9th MAB were a CH-53 and two CH-46s (both recovered), two Marines killed, and seven wounded. The four survivors from the CH-53 Sea Stallion were recovered later.

The U.S. CH-53 carried 50 Vietnamese Marines, an American crew of five, and a combat photographer from BLT 1/9. It was struck on its approach to the landing zone while 100 feet above the ground. The detonation of the SA-7's 5.5 pound warhead in the helicopter's right power plant sent engine-turbine fragments down and forward into the passenger compartment. The pilot autorotated the flaming aircraft to the ground in a hopeful, controlled "crash and burn" procedure. Two crewmembers were killed outright and a third seriously injured. Of the Vietnamese Marines on board, most were killed, with only seven returning to friendly lines. The helicopter was completely destroyed by fire and the detonation of ammunition



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800682

Helicopters from the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade were used to place Vietnamese Marines in position around Quang Tri City on 11 July 1972. Here HMM-165 aircraft from the USS Tripoli arrive to pick up Marines of the 1st VNMC Battalion behind friendly lines.

carried by the Vietnamese. The surviving Americans took shelter in a nearby bomb crater and "hunkered-down" as the wreckage cooled and NVA soldiers poked through the remains. At dusk a VNMC patrol located them and brought them to friendly lines and American Army helicopters returned them to their ship.¹²

Despite the helicopter losses and damage, the American-supported Vietnamese attack had been executed with precision and superb coordination. Lieutenant Colonel Gerald Turley commented, "The execution was beautiful; lift off, staging, coordination, control, communications, prep fires—everything went on schedule—never looked more beautiful." Since the beginning of July, with the arrival of Lieutenant Colonel Walter D. Fillmore as the new assistant Marine advisor, Lieutenant Colonel Turley concentrated on the recapture of Quang Tri City as the G-3 advisor to the Vietnamese Marine Division.¹³

The 1st VNMC Battalion, commanded by Major Nguyen Dang Hoa, encountered heavy fire while disembarking in the landing zone and the Marines im-

mediately began taking casualties as they engaged elements of the 320B NVA Division.* After landing and consolidating, Major Hoa personally led his men against the dug-in enemy. Two trench lines had to be overrun before the landing zone perimeter was secure. Despite severe losses, the Marines fought off the enemy and expanded their positions. By consolidating and defending the landing zones, the South Vietnamese killed 126 Communists, captured six, secured large quantities of material, and flanked the NVA position.¹⁴

The naval gunfire spot team officer, First Lieutenant Stephen G. Biddulph, was hit in the legs shortly after leaving his helicopter. Captain Lawrence H. Livingston, the 1st VNMC Battalion advisor, moved through intense small arms fire to carry the wounded lieutenant to safety. He "came sliding in beside me like a man stealing second base," recalled Biddulph.¹⁵ At the same time, Corporal Jose F. Hernandez of ANGLICO braved enemy fire and helped wounded Vietnamese Marines

*320B NVA Division: 48th Infantry Regiment (only element encountered); 52d Infantry Regiment; and 64th Infantry Regiment.



Marine Advisory Unit Photo

Air photographs were used in the planning of operations by the allied forces. This shows one of the landing zones in which very heavy resistance was met on 11 July 1972. The annotations were keyed to suspected enemy dispositions and weapons emplacements.

find protection in a nearby depression. He then called in naval gunfire in an attempt to halt onrushing NVA reinforcements. The wounded Vietnamese and American Marines, although requiring urgent medical attention, could not be evacuated as the enemy kept the landing zones saturated with artillery, mortar, and antiaircraft fire.

Despite the expansion of the perimeter, the Marines were still in a tenuous position as heavy fire continued to come from one of the initial objectives, an enemy trench network in a tree line approximately 50 meters away. Captain Livingston formed the Vietnamese Marines into an assault force. Although knocked off his feet by an exploding round in the early stage of the assault, Livingston led the casualty-riddled force to the edge of the trench fortifications. The enemy soldiers rushed out and engaged the Marines hand-to-hand,

but were defeated in the savage fight. After seizing the objective, Livingston moved back under fire to ensure that the wounded Lieutenant Biddulph, whom he had earlier pulled from danger, was still safe.* Fighting continued for nearly three days in the 1st VNMC Battalion's area. Not only did the Marines seize and hold their initial objectives, but in doing so they also forced the NVA to withdraw to the west, toward Quang Tri City. During this same three-day period, the 7th VNMC Battalion, as it moved against the enemy, overran an armored regiment's command post. The action resulted in numerous enemy tracked vehicles and trucks being destroyed or captured.

Realizing the need to resupply—particularly

*For his actions, Captain Livingston was awarded the Navy Cross; First Lieutenant Biddulph and Corporal Hernandez received Silver Star Medals.



North Vietnamese Army Photo

North Vietnamese Army defenses were in strength around Quang Tri City. This 12.7mm DSbK 38/46 heavy machine gun is operated in the antiaircraft mode. The assistant gunner in the middle is operating the mechanical tracking device used to lead flying aircraft.

ammunition—the Marines in their extended position, General Cooksey requested that Seventh Fleet Commander Vice Admiral James L. Holloway III provide a five-section causeway pier at Wunder Beach, now under South Vietnamese control. The pier provided a much-needed alternative line of communication to the battered QL-1 and other constricted coastal routes. Seventh Fleet furnished the USS *Alamo* (LSD 33), an underwater demolition team, and a tugboat for support. On the morning of 13 July, naval construction personnel, "Seabees," began installation. By 1300 they had completed the job. Once the causeway was rigged and operating, U.S. Marine shore party and naval beachmaster personnel went ashore to instruct and supervise the Vietnamese units responsible for beach operations.¹⁶

By 14 July, the Vietnamese had cut the enemy's main supply route, Route 560, into Quang Tri City resulting in diminished fighting. Only then could the first "medevac" helicopters clear the wounded from the combat area.¹⁷ Among those flown to Hue City

by the Army aircraft was ANGLICO's Lieutenant Bidulph, who "lay on the floor near the left hatch with my M16 rifle stuck out the door to the ready." He remembered, "A litter patient lay squarely across my wounded legs and I held another patient around the body to prevent him from falling out . . . we still had to make it over the heads of the enemy to get back."¹⁸

On 17 July, the Marine Advisory Unit received needed replacements when nine officers from the 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, California, arrived in Saigon. By the middle of July, the VNMC was at its peak combat strength and its prestige was such that volunteers had to be turned away. By 20 July, the VNMC Division had consolidated its positions northeast of Quang Tri City as the Airborne Division continued its efforts to take the city. Heavy fighting was continuous, but little progress could be made beyond the city's outskirts. The NVA commented "the liberation forces again hashed up its best" forces.¹⁹

For General Truong, the determination of the NVA

to hold Quang Tri City at all costs caused problems. He recalled that although the city had not been a primary objective, "it had become a symbol and a major challenge."²⁰ In response to questions from South Vietnam's President Thieu, General Cooksey observed that General Truong "played a crucial role, both in planning and execution in the battle of the Citadel."²¹

Realizing that the NVA were concentrating on defending the Citadel of Quang Tri, the Marines seized the opportunity to exploit enemy weakness along the coast by enveloping his left flank and severing his lines of communication south of the Cua Viet River. General Lan assigned this task to VNMC Brigade 147, with three battalions. The plan called for two battalions supported by tanks to attack north from their positions and link up with a third battalion that would be landed by helicopter approximately four kilometers to the north. After joining, all three battalions would attack to the southeast, seizing a crit-

ical road junction. This would either drive the enemy across the Thach Han River or force him north toward the Cua Viet River.

On 22 July, the amphibious task force's USS *Okinawa*, St. Louis (LKA 116), *Manitowoc* (LST 1180), and *Point Defiance* (LSD 31) moved into position to launch Lieutenant Colonel Hertberg's helicopters. The USS *Denver* also was assigned to provide deck space. Air, artillery, and naval gunfire softened the enemy position for three and a half hours. Arc Lights struck the landing zones just prior to HMM-164's arrival. The 5th VNMC Battalion assaulted with two waves totaling 688 men. Gunship escorts of Troop F shot-up both zones, reporting enemy fire from Landing Zone Lima, but none from Victor. Landing occurred at 0938 in Lima and at 1004 in Victor with initial objectives secured; the supporting arms plan had worked well. With moderate contact in the landing zones, the 5th VNMC Battalion moved out rapidly and linked up with the two surface assault battalions. The 2d VNMC Battal-

By July 1972, the Marine Division was assigned the mission to take the city back from the Communists. These Vietnamese Marines and their advisors were trying to avoid drawing artillery fire using an M113 armored personnel carrier as a mobile command post.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800761





Vietnamese Marine Corps Photo

Heavy fighting took place at the walls of the Citadel as massive artillery duels occurred. Despite serious losses, the Communists held onto the position through August 1972.

ion, however, ran into stiff resistance as it maneuvered to cut the enemy's supply route along Route 560. U.S. close air strikes hit the NVA bunkers, enabling the Marine battalion to move through the fortified area and complete the link-up. Once consolidated, the brigade secured its initial objective against relatively light opposition. Throughout the remainder of the two-day operation, enemy contact was light to moderate. The operation ended on 24 July. It netted 133 Communist soldiers killed, three enemy tanks destroyed and two armored command vehicles captured, a 100-bed hospital overrun, and numerous weapons captured or destroyed. No losses were sustained by the supporting American Marines.

By the end of July it was apparent that the Airborne Division, its combat effectiveness weakened by previous battles in the Central Highlands, could not overcome the hardcore NVA defenders of the Quang Tri Citadel. The paratroopers, although only 200 meters from the Citadel's wall, stood down as the Marine Division was given this mission. Lieutenant Colonel Turley briefed the advisors that changes would be required in the type of operations needed to attack and destroy the enemy entrenched in the city itself.²²

During darkness on 27 July, VNMC Brigade 258 relieved the ARVN airborne troops in place. The next four days saw heavy ground contact and massive artillery duels between the Marines and the NVA. The enemy fired more than 1,000 mortar and artillery rounds daily against the Marines, who responded in kind. Captain David D. Harris, an advisor with VNMC Brigade 147, had to be evacuated to the United States with severe leg and back wounds. Killed alongside him was ANGLICO's First Lieutenant Edward G. Hayen II.

The Communists were defending the city with the 325th NVA Division, reinforced by elements of the 308th, and 320B NVA Divisions and supporting forces in southeastern Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces.* During the month of July, these units had paid a heavy price for their persistence in holding on to Quang Tri City: more than 1,880 enemy dead and the capture or destruction of 51 armored vehicles, 7 antiaircraft guns, 4 artillery pieces, a 20-ton ammunition dump, and 1,200 individual weapons.²³ In other areas of MR

*Enemy order of battle was based on a number of sources in MR 1. Most timely were the VNMC units in contact, as verified by FRAC and the military intelligence chain.

