

III MAF Amphibious Assault Force Buildup in 1972

STRENGTH

6000				6042					
5000				MAB BLT BLT MAU MAU	5005		4902		
4000			4614		MAB BLT MAU MAU	4331	MAB HMA BLT MAU MAU		
3000			MAB BLT MAU MAU			MAB BLT MAU		3639	
2000		3045						MAB HMA MAU MAU	
1000	1424	MAB BLT MAU							1924
	MAU								MAB HMA MAU
Date	2 Apr	9 Apr	27 Apr	23 May	25 May	13 Jun	21 Jun	26 Jun	17 Jul

Adapted from FMFPac MarOpsSEA and CNA MarActySEA Material

units, General Miller needed a more reliable means to maintain forces afloat. On 16 April, General Metzger directed that high-priority items be sent to Fleet Air Support Unit, Da Nang, for transfer by helicopter to units at sea. This effort was supported by daily VMGR-152 flights from Iwakuni, Japan, via Okinawa and the Philippines. The initial efforts to establish needed coordination in Da Nang ran afoul of the JCS-imposed personnel ceilings on General Creighton W. Abrams that prohibited Marine helicopters and personnel remaining ashore overnight. As a result, Fleet Air Support Unit (FASU), Da Nang, was unable to establish a Marine liaison team to handle the increase of cargo. The Navy met this demand by bringing in sailors from the FASU at Cubi Point in the Philippines,

and the Marines in turn sent their men to replace the sailors at Cubi Point.

This system reduced the delivery time for critical items to three and four days and mail, a high-priority morale item, averaged a four-day delivery time from the United States.²⁸ Personnel movement to and from the brigade paralleled these supply lines. Outgoing Marines on emergency leave, transfer, liaison, or advance parties traveled from ship via Marine helicopters to Hue or Da Nang and connected with flights to Okinawa or the Philippines from Da Nang. Incoming personnel arrived at Da Nang by air or ship and were picked up at FASU by helicopter for transport to their units. Replacements who had left the United States for service in Okinawa were often in a state of shock when



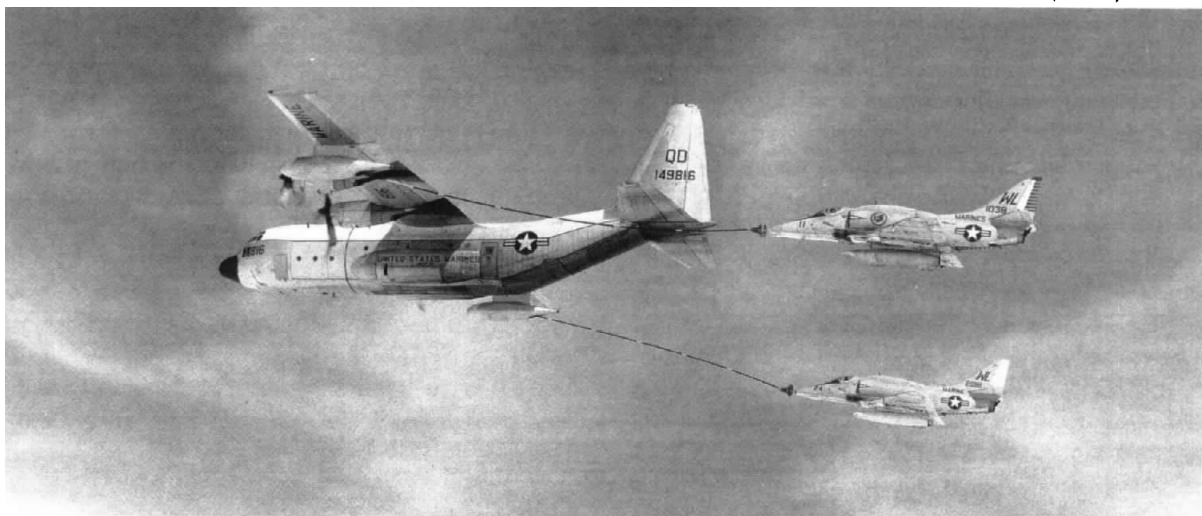
Marine Corps Historical Collection

An essential part of moving needed supplies and personnel to afloat units was the logistics flights with organic helicopters. This completed the link with deployed forces and supporting airfields at Da Nang, South Vietnam, and Cubi Point, Philippines. Here a CH-46 from HMM-165 is loaded, with rotor-blades turning, on the flight deck of the USS Tripoli.

they were sent on to Vietnam at a time when there were reportedly no Marines left "in country." "Prado's Bunker" and "The Red Dog Inn," the most convenient transient quarters and bar, became familiar landmarks to FASU "customers" as they flowed along the supply and replacement routes serving the sea-based 9th MAB for almost 12 months.

Long-range air transport was provided by Lockheed KC-130 Hercules, as this aircraft from VMGR-152, indicated by the "QD" call-letters on the vertical stabilizer. These aircraft moved both supplies and fuel as an essential element of the forward deployment.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A422883



Air transport was vital to the employment of MAG-12 and MAG-15 during the Spring Offensive. Advance parties flew to the operating area in Marine KC-130s as soon as warning orders were received to coordinate for the reception and support of the incoming squadrons to Vietnam. Concurrently, flying squadrons deployed directly to Vietnam or through NAS Cubi Point, Philippines. Squadron support personnel and material flew to forward locations in air transport obtained from a variety of sources, including the Military Airlift Command (MAC) and Pacific Air Traffic Management Agency (PATMA), while remaining supplies followed on military and civilian sealift.

VMGR-152 tankers and crews assigned to the detachment at NAS Cubi Point met initial air refueling requirements. The Hercules tanker version could carry 32,140 pounds of fuel and could refuel two aircraft at the same time. The cargo version could carry up to 92 passengers or 26,913 pounds of cargo. Both VMGR aircraft provided direct support to fighter and attack squadrons moving into Da Nang, Bien Hoa, and Nam Phong. VMFA-212 employed the services of six tankers and a cargo aircraft in its move from Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, to Da Nang during its Pacific transit from Hawaii. Eventually another four tankers were stationed in Thailand with TF Delta. A factor in the heavy demands placed upon the tankers was the incompatibility of Navy and Air Force refueling systems, although the Air Force tankers could reconfigure with advance notice. The magnitude of tanker support is

III MAF Aviation Force Buildup in 1972 (Excluding units with Seventh Fleet)

STRENGTH

6000									
5000									
4000									
3000					3578	3578		3477	3633
2000					MAG MAG TFD	MAG MAG TFD	3113 MAG MAG TFD	MAG MAG TFD	MAG MAG TFD
1000				2141					
			1639	MAG MAG TFD					
		1008	MAG MAG						
	700	MAG							
	MAG								
Date	6 Apr	10 Apr	16 May	31 May	13 Jun	18 Jun	21 Jun	24 Jun	1 Jul

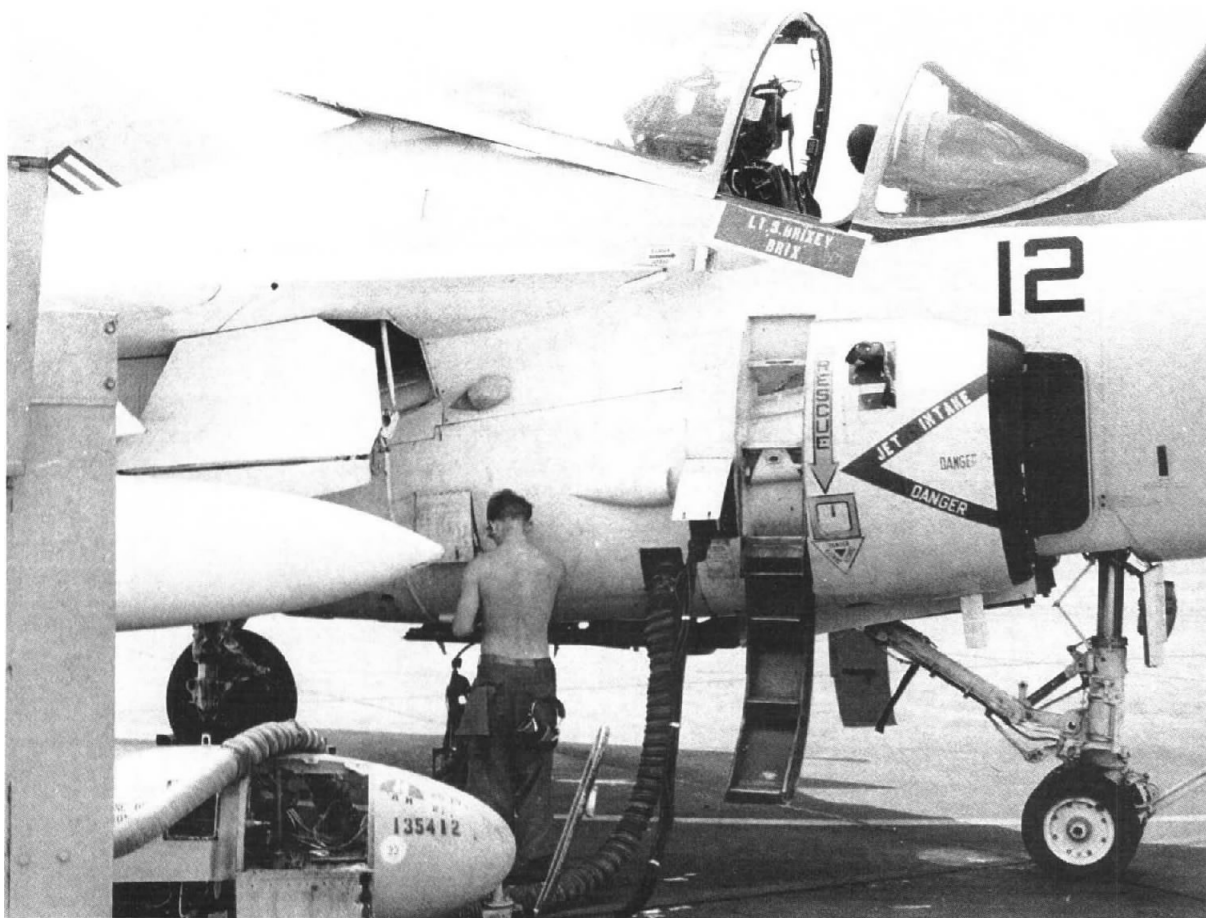
Adapted from FMFPac MarOpsSEA and CNA MarActySEA Material

indicated by statistics from the four-plane VMGR-152 Detachment Delta at Nam Phong. In the year it was deployed, it flew 4,721 hours, refueled 3,239 aircraft, and transferred 4,434,280 gallons of JP-4 fuel.²⁹

The KC-130 served to fly Marine logistic (MarLog) runs as well as for refueling. These same VMGR planes constituted an intratheater airlift between MAC and commercial air support to the forward locations. Starting in April, a daily MarLog flight ran from Iwakuni, to Okinawa, Cubi Point, and Da Nang, where helicopters ferried material to the 9th MAB. These flights were expanded to include Bien Hoa and Nam Phong as landing sites.³⁰ The demand upon the available planes

and crews from Futema required additional reinforcement. VMGR-352 aircraft deployed in April, bringing the total of KC-130s to 15 in the Western Pacific, of which eight were configured for tanker operations.

General Metzger also was concerned about his ability to support sustained operations at the new locations, combined with increasing demands for logistic support made upon General Abrams and General Vogt.³¹ The support structures in Vietnam developed by the Marines in the 1960s were no longer in place, including accurate information about existing facilities and services. Deployments to Da Nang and Bien Hoa resulted in support from Seventh Air Force of



Task Force Delta Command Chronology

Modern military aircraft were particularly demanding of supply and maintenance support to meet the needs for full-systems readiness. This was complicated by the additional demands of combat flying not normally met in peacetime service. A Marine maintenance man works on an A-6 of VMA(AW)-533 using ground support equipment for power.

common items such as ordnance and fuel. Uncommon support, including rework facilities, came from the FASU at Cubi Point and through the use of the ubiquitous MarLog for high-priority items. On 27 April 1972, General Brown established Detachment Bravo, H&MS-15 at Cubi Point to conduct scheduled inspections, engine buildups, and provide intermediate maintenance activity (AIMD) support for deployed squadrons. Remote from Vietnam, it was a secure location to work on aircraft shuttled in and out of the combat zone.³²

The deployments of MAG-12 and MAG-15 presented substantially different problems: MAG-12 moved into existing facilities with direct support from Seventh Air Force and MACV; the MAG-15 movement to Nam Phong was to an empty airstrip. For MAG-15, base development was the initial priority. Support at Nam

Phong was predicated on the Air Force's definition of "bare base" operations that required "... no physical facilities other than a usable runway, taxiway, parking area, and source of water."³³ General Jones at FMFPac took several steps to free material for the construction of facilities after receiving a report dated 10 May from Brigadier General Andrew W. O'Donnell and the Officer in Charge of Construction, Thailand. The FMFPac commander directed General Metzger to ship to Nam Phong AM-2 matting from MCAS Futema, "Butler" buildings from Camp Butler, Quonset huts from the 3d Marine Division, and contingency construction material held by 3d Force Service Regiment.

To build the base required the efforts of Mobile Construction Battalion 5, the Marine Wing Support Group, and contract civilian construction companies to install fuel storage, navigational aids, parking

ramps, ordnance storage, cargo handling facilities, and the road network. The MAG was able to fly a limited number of sorties after fuel became available and air controllers were in the field's tower. Renovation of existing buildings, development of a water system, and construction of warehouses and security positions were followed by laying concrete for a helicopter pad, and constructing housing, mess halls, and seven concrete "Wonder Arch" aircraft shelters. Support of TF Delta was dependent upon airlift to bring in 7,400 tons of cargo and 3,000 men with MAC C-141s. Seven weeks later the USS *Tuscaloosa* (LST 1187), USS *Mobile* and the MSC *American Ranger* delivered another 628 tons of cargo, mostly vehicles, through Sattahip. Despite General Jones' personal interest in building up Nam Phong, it still took from 24 May until 17 June before the first combat flights could be flown from the base.

General O'Donnell also was faced with the shortage of repair parts from the logistics support group, the lack of storage facilities, and the less-than-effective response from the Naval Supply Center at Subic Bay and the 3d FSR at Okinawa to supply requests. Repair parts for electronic and ordnance items were not stocked at levels adequate to meet increased failure rates from combat usage. All of this was further complicated by the different locations of MAG-15 and the extended distances involved with the supply "pipeline." In June 1972, when MK46 and MK47 decoy flares were expended at a rate greater than the receipt of replace-

ment stocks from the United States, General Jones expedited their resupply.³⁴ Also by 17 June, the PATMA airlift was only half completed, with a supply backlog at NAS Cubi Point. A solution had to be found before shortages affected the tempo of operations. On 4 July, Lieutenant Colonel Raneley A. Brown's KC-130s began an emergency shuttle of critical cargo from Cubi Point to Nam Phong, to build up stocks of fuel and ordnance. Without a 15- to 30-day amount of supplies on hand, General O'Donnell believed TF Delta would be dependent upon a constant flow of daily shipments from the Air Force at Udorn, 77 road kilometers to the north.³⁵

Other difficulties arose when supplies of matting, generators, and lighting became short. Shared group and wing ground support equipment (GSE) was in short supply because the number and dispersion of detachments exceeded authorized allowances of equipment. A solution to this was the consolidation of maintenance Marines and equipment at common locations to support a number of detachments. Further problems cited for sustained operations at Nam Phong were with TACAN and liquid oxygen equipment failures. This situation was compounded by clouds of insects that jammed filters and heavy rains that virtually turned the area into a swamp.³⁶

Thunder from the Sea, Fire from the Sky

During 1972, Marine advisors believed their value to the South Vietnamese was directly related to their

The location of Marine units at Nam Phong was a remote shipping point for both personnel and material. As an expeditionary base, everything needed to power it had to be produced on the spot. Logistics Support Group Delta ("Miracles Done Immediately") fulfilled these needs. This power plant dispensed electricity to run the base service facilities.

Task Force Delta Command Chronology



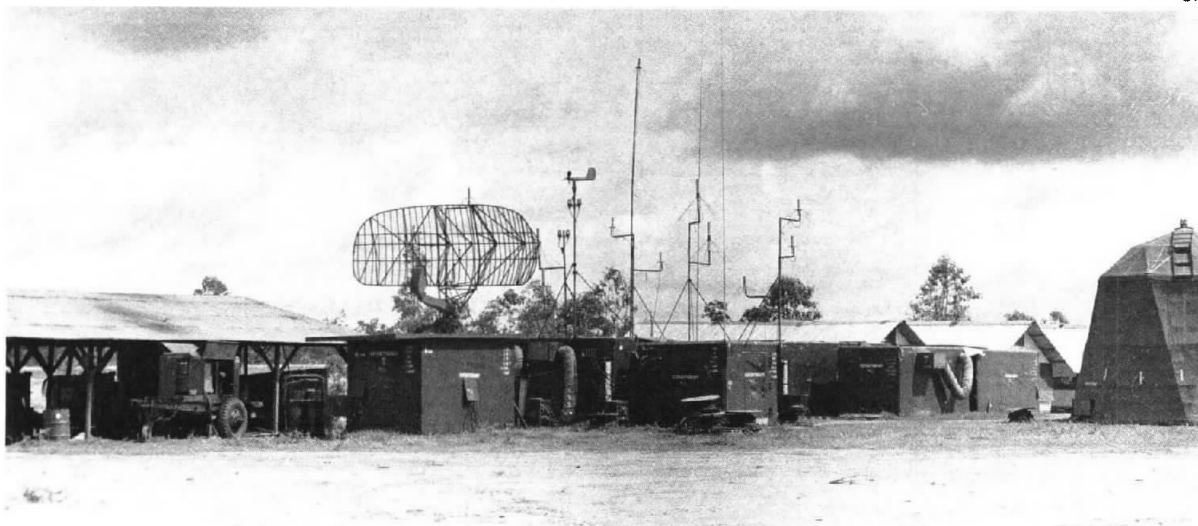


Task Force Delta Command Chronology

Aviation demands for liquid oxygen and nitrogen were met by local "expeditionary" equipment that required art, as well as science, to be made to work in field conditions.

Air traffic control communication and electronic support was by Marine Air Traffic Control Unit 62. This backing included the control tower, precision radar, surveillance radar, and the associated navigational aids required for around-the-clock air operations.

Task Force Delta Command Chronology





Marine Corps Historical Collection

The advisors were required to put more emphasis on turning the control of supporting arms over to the South Vietnamese, anticipating the time when the Americans would leave. A mixed Vietnamese-American control party coordinates air and naval gunfire.

ability to request and control supporting arms—aircraft, artillery, and naval gunfire. They were only a “troop without a rifle” if they could not. In fire support coordination, the efforts of Marine Advisory Unit and ANGLICO personnel merged, with advisors becoming supporting arms coordinators and ANGLICO members becoming involved with tactical advice. Colonel Donald L. Price remembered that every move or stop he made with his VNMC battalion caused him to go down his supporting arms checklist from mortars, artillery, naval gunfire, and air to medevac agencies and procedures; all as taught in Marine Corps service schools and observed closely by the Vietnamese Marines who saw it work when needed.³⁷

The South Vietnamese relied on supporting arms because the number of enemy forces and defenses made tactical surprise difficult to achieve, particularly after the battlefield had become immovable along fixed lines. The success of the assault landings conducted by the 9th MAB and the Vietnamese Marines depended, in part, on the availability, control, and coordination of firepower from Vietnamese and American forces.* This effort was hindered earlier in

*For the period from June through December 1972, the Vietnamese Marine Division was supported by the expenditure of 1,457,142 105mm artillery rounds; 161,058 155mm artillery rounds; 289,963 naval gunfire rounds; 4,959 tactical air sorties; and 698 Arc Light sorties. (Marine Advisory Unit Historical Summary, 1972)

the year by a lack of controlling agencies and later on by the volume and complexity of fire coordination efforts required to use this support effectively.³⁸ Therefore the majority of the American Marines sent to Vietnam to augment the VNMC during 1972 had fire-support and communications backgrounds.

Previous VNMC work in fire-support coordination was based upon battalion- and brigade-level experience where the commander had direct-support artillery. The VNMC unit commanders, some of whom had been trained in U.S. Marine schools, observed their advisor's effort at the unit level in plotting fire support down to the battalion-level mortars and were aware of the vital need to integrate the various weapons systems. Their orientation was not conducive to control and coordination by the division, which lacked the requisite personnel and communications equipment.³⁹

During the 1972 period, American supporting units often required complete and detailed planning earlier than reasonably could be expected from the South Vietnamese in I Corps.** The Vietnamese Marine Division, with its attached American advisors and ANGLICO personnel, met these requirements in most cases. In this process General Lan and his staff select-

**The combat operations in northern MR I were land operations supported from the sea rather than purely amphibious operations.

VNMC Division Supporting Arms Schedule for 11 July 1972 Assault

Naval Gunfire*

2400 – 0600	2,400 rounds harassment and interdiction fires
0600 – 0800	1,500 rounds preparation fires
0800 – L-Hour	On-call direct-support fires (Two direct-support ships for VNMC Brigade 147 on D-1, three direct-support ships as of 0800 D-Day)

Artillery

2400 – 0600	Harassment and interdiction fires
0600 – 0800	Preparation fires
0800 – L-Hour	On-call direct-support fires

Tactical Air

0800 – 1140	Ten flights of tactical air (Six sorties of U.S. aircraft with M84 bombs, two sorties of VNAF aircraft with CBU55s – between third and fourth B-52 Arc Lights) One airborne U.S. forward air controller on station until 1900**
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On-Call Tactical Air

1200 – 1230	One sortie with bombs and napalm
1230 – 1300	One sortie with bombs and napalm
1300 – 1900	Two sorties per hour

Air Cavalry

Command and control helicopter
Two light observation helicopters
Eight helicopter gunships
Two search and rescue helicopters

*An alternate naval gunfire plan was developed for 0800 – 1140 should weather preclude the use of tactical air during this period.

**A naval gunfire spotter was airborne with the FAC aircraft. The FAC was available to control airstrikes if naval gunfire targets were not available; however, priority was given to naval gunfire missions in the objective area.

ed specific objectives, while General Miller and his staff determined landing zones and beaches. Fire-support plans were then developed for two to three hours of preparatory fire from air, naval gunfire, and the VNMC Division and ARVN corps artillery; B-52 bombing of the landing zone or beaches; and tactical air strikes just prior to landing the assault forces (see chart with this chapter).⁴⁰

General Lan's staff used overlays and target lists to plan helicopter approach and retirement lanes, landing zones, friendly positions, and required fires. ANGLICO, in conjunction with USAF and VNMC planners, produced joint schedules of fire that were based upon Arc Light support availability. Delivery of fires was made according to time schedules with fluctuations in tactical air availability being covered by artillery and naval fires. Plans remained flexible until the B-52 support was confirmed, usually by 1600 the day prior to the operation. The Seventh Air Force also needed air requests the day prior to execution, which conflicted with the Eighth Air Force confirmation schedule. This situation was alleviated when the Eighth Air Force confirmation time was changed to 1400 to coincide with the Seventh Air Force. The MR 1 Direct Air Support Center received its copies of plans from the USAF liaison officer of the VNMC Division, and also briefed the supporting tactical air support squadron for assignments, planned targets, on-station aircraft, post-landing support, and air controller requirements. Artillery requirements were assigned to supporting units by the VNMC Division Artillery representative with VNMC brigade input in the form of requests via the artillery chain of command.

The VNMC Naval Gunfire Liaison Officer, or his I Corps counterpart, delivered completed plans to the Naval Gunfire Support Unit (Task Unit 70.8.9). The Naval Gunfire Support Group staff assigned targets, missions, and fire-support stations. Overall naval gunfire support in early 1972 was hampered by the decline in "gun" ships from 292 vessels in Fiscal Year 1965 to 128 in Fiscal Year 1973. When the spring offensive began, there was a shortage of ships to meet the demand for fire support.* Arrival of the USS *Newport News*

*Lieutenant Colonel D'Wayne Gray of Sub Unit One and advisors with forward VNMC battalions credit two destroyers, the USS *Buchanan* (DDG 14) and the USS *Anderson* (DD 786) with blunting the NVA ground attack across the DMZ during the first days of the offensive, a time when poor weather restricted tactical air support. Captain John W. Ripley stated that, at Dong Ha, naval gunfire was responsive to fire requests in every case ". . . and was the only supporting arm which could respond with a volume of fire approaching that of the enemy's." (Ripley intvw)

(CA 148) with 8" guns provided an increase in capabilities, if not in numbers, from the available destroyers and their 5"54 and 5"38 guns.⁴¹ Demands for support multiplied as targets south of the DMZ increased and were further expanded as restrictions against targets in North Vietnam were removed.

Generals Metzger and Miller believed that any amphibious landing by American Marines required six to eight destroyers and a cruiser for support. Such operations also needed local air superiority provided by an estimated two aircraft carriers and two Da Nang-based fighter squadrons. On 19 April 1972, General Miller noted that the Navy, engaged in Operation Linebacker, could not provide the necessary forces to support amphibious landings in North Vietnam. FRAC's Major General Frederick J. Kroesen, Jr., voiced his opposition to amphibious operations north of the DMZ, because that would result in reduced naval gunfire support to MR 1 at a crucial time. The demands for support for both Seventh Fleet operations and MACV operations were in constant conflict, influencing 9th MAB relations with VNMC and FRAC. A related constraint on naval gunfire was the nonavailability of aerial spotting. Adequate numbers of USAF aircraft to meet ANGLICO needs, as well as aircraft capable of surviving aloft in northern MR 1 and North Vietnam, were not available. As a result, naval gunfire was limited to either direct or unobserved fires of decreased effectiveness.

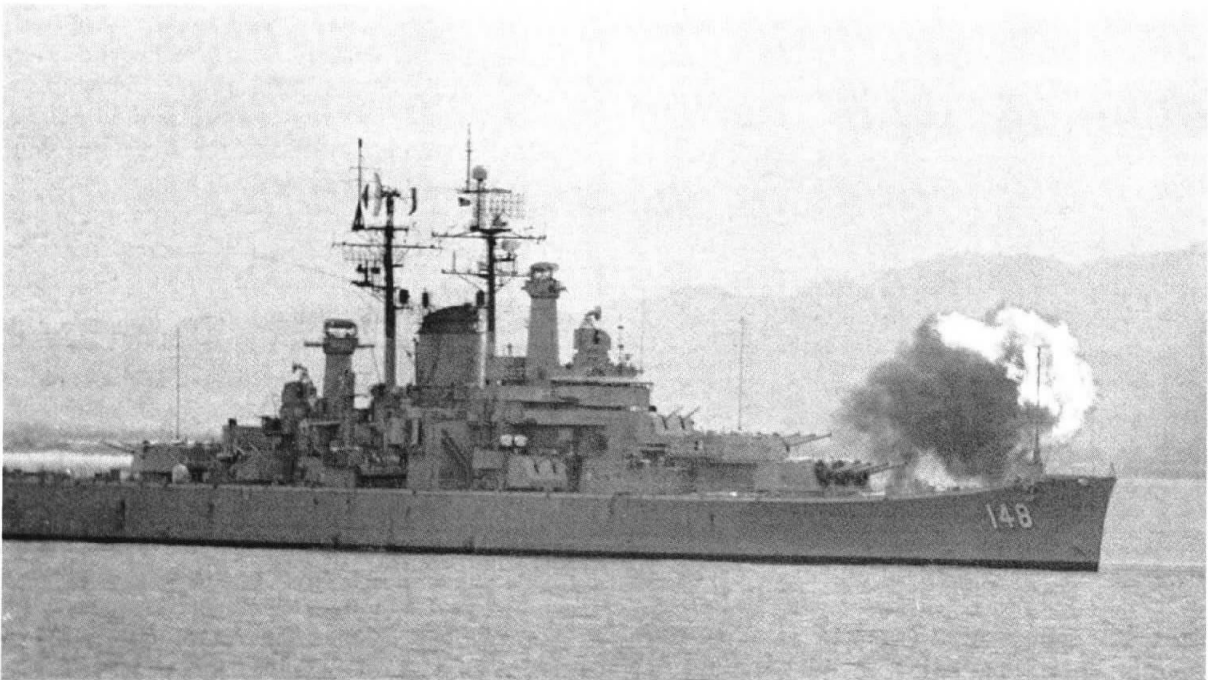
ANGLICO's Lieutenant Colonel George E. Jones believed that the problem of quality and quantity of naval gunfire support resolved itself by mid-year when targets of opportunity declined along the coast and support to the ARVN Airborne Division increased in the drive towards Quang Tri City. The need for qualified fire-support personnel and communications equipment for the South Vietnamese was recognized, but never organized prior to the ceasefire and withdrawal of American assets.⁴²

A subjective comment on the battlefield effect of concentrated firepower was provided by a North Vietnamese Army veteran of the 1972 Quang Tri City fighting who recalled a B-52 Arc Light. As the battlefield became very quiet and he knew something was going to happen:

I just looked up into the sky and saw how beautiful the day was, the sun was shining. And then we saw the bombs. tound big black discs . . . the noise of the bombs and you couldn't see anything at all because of the smoke and the dust and we couldn't hear anything at all . . .⁴³

War in the Ether

No less a part of effective firepower was the targeting



Department of Defense Photo (USN) 1151898

Supporting arms fire, such as that from the 8-inch, .55-caliber guns of the USS Newport News was not available to the Vietnamese, except through continued American participation in the war. This applied to the full range of air power as well naval gunfire.

Air power, such as from B-52 Arc Light strikes stopped North Vietnamese armor at Quang Tri and An Loc, where this Communist T-54 tank was unable to climb out of a bomb crater.

Photo courtesy of Capt Edwin W. Besch, USMC (Ret)



efforts by Captain Clarence W. Phillips with 12 men of Detachment "N," 1st Radio Battalion. This support reached the VNMC Division through Captain Frank M. Izenour, Jr., the Marine advisor with the main division command post at Hue. Detachment "N" had originally deployed with the 9th MAB for the exercise in Korea. Integrated with the Task Force 76 Joint Intelligence Center and operating from the supplemental radio spaces of the USS *Blue Ridge* using input from the service cryptologic agencies in Southeast Asia, the detachment provided signal-intelligence information. On 18 April, signal-intelligence tasking authority was passed to General Miller, commanding 9th MAB, and the next day the detachment was augmented by another officer and 11 enlisted operators from the 1st Radio Battalion in Hawaii.

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Operating from the *Blue Ridge* posed "reception" problems because of the distance from shore. From 24 April 1972, two or three direct support elements were in operation from naval gunfire ships at any one time, with control remaining at the headquarters element on the *Blue Ridge*. An additional 10 operators expanded the detachment, with further resources available as needed from the Marine Support Battalion.*

In July, Captain Phillips and his men moved to the USS *Paul Revere* (LPA 248) with the 9th MAB staff when the USS *Blue Ridge* returned to the United States. The detachment analysts relocated to the Naval Communications Station, San Miguel, Philippines, until 21 January 1973, when Detachment "N" was deactivated. It provided timely and continuous support throughout the III MAF response to the North Vietnamese invasion.⁴⁴

*The Marine Support Battalion was a component of the Naval Security Group and consisted of companies that were assigned with Naval Security Group Activities worldwide.

PART V
REPRISE AND ASSESSMENT

CHAPTER 14

Ceasefire and Consolidation

*The Final Act—Operation Countdown, 'On the Land. . .'
Operation Countdown, ' . . . and Sea'—Operation Countdown, ' . . . and Air'*

The Final Act

General Frederick C. Weyand, USA, the last MACV commander, insisted to Lieutenant General Louis Metzger that he had to have Marines off the coast of South Vietnam to ensure the security of the remaining Americans in the country, support that could be provided only by Metzger's III MAF. At a minimum, this was with two Marine amphibious units (MAUs) at sea and the planes of Marine Aircraft Groups 12 and 15. General Metzger later asserted that this period of the Vietnam war "repeatedly demonstrated the many functions that only amphibious forces can perform."¹

Determined resistance by the South Vietnamese and direct support by the Americans, including the air campaign against North Vietnam, halted and then reversed the Communist "Nguyen-Hue" Spring Offensive. President Nixon had used diplomatic and military pressure to bring about a settlement of the war as the South Vietnamese regained lost territory and the aerial bombing and mining of North Vietnam took effect. By 11 October 1972, the mining and bombing efforts had closed ports through which North Vietnam had obtained 85 percent of its foreign trade: "seaborne imports into North Vietnam have been cut from over 250,000 tons a month to almost none."² By then, U.S. authorities believed the North Vietnamese wanted to reach an agreement. As a result, on 23 October 1972, U.S. Armed Forces stopped air and naval gunfire bombardment north of the 20th Parallel. But numerous false starts and recriminations by both parties and their allies occurred as the proposed ceasefire approached.

President Nixon authorized Operation Linebacker II on 18 December 1972 when the North Vietnamese failed to act in good faith on the previous ceasefire proposals, opening the way to the Christmas bombing of Hanoi and the virtual destruction of critical targets in North Vietnam. Referring to the "late December 1972 US Blitz on North Vietnam," the Communists stated that the Nixon Administration had mobilized almost all its strategic bombers in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, and tactical aircraft in South Vietnam, Thailand, and with the Seventh Fleet, "to conduct a strategic bombing operation against North Viet Nam the savageness of which is un-

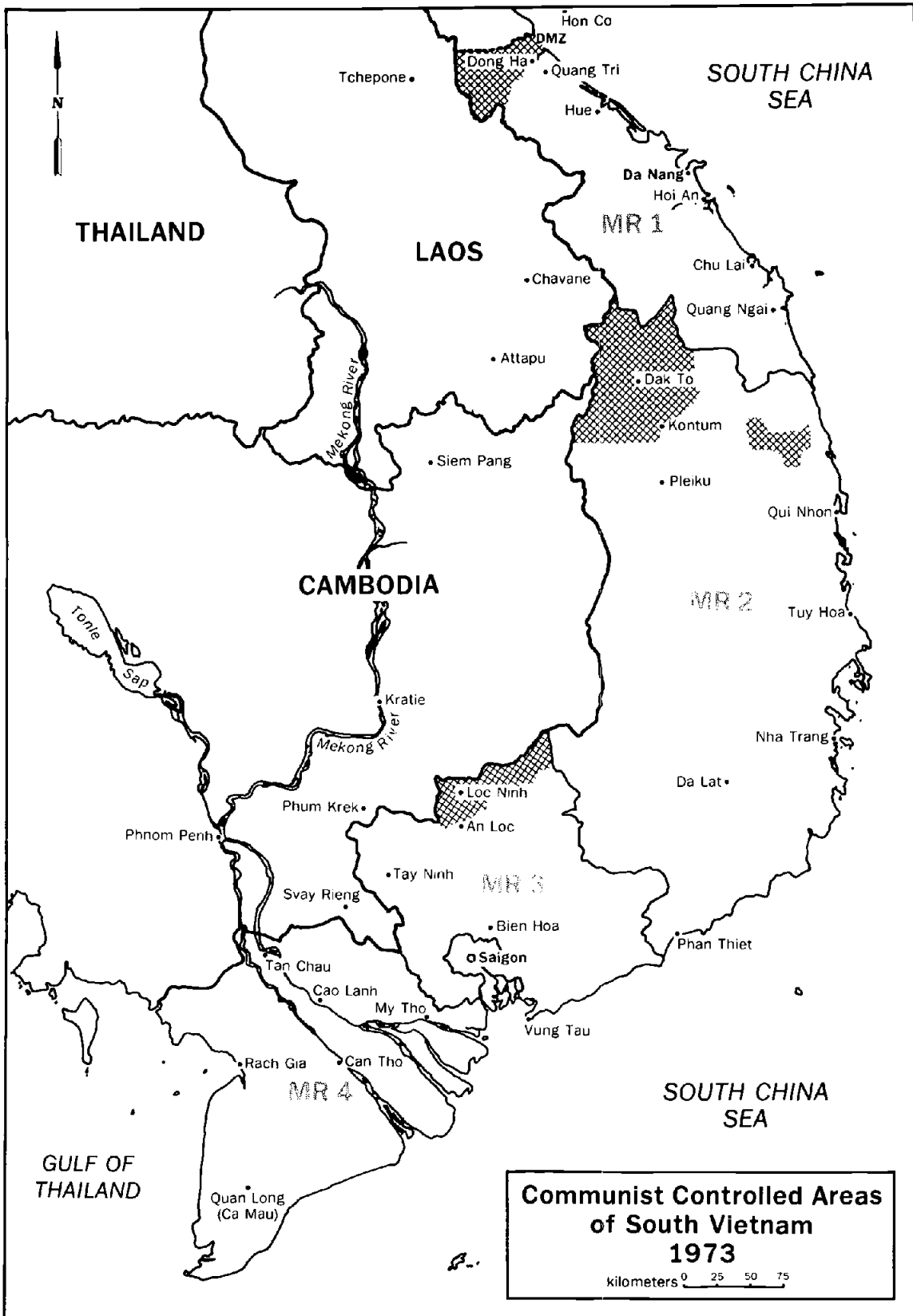
precedented in the whole history of the US war of aggression in this country."³ The intensity of operations was unmatched by any of the previous eight years of strikes against North Vietnam. Linebacker II's blows against military and economic targets brought the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table.

The "Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam" was signed as the result of negotiations by Dr. Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho at the Paris Conference on Vietnam. The ceasefire was a part of an accord that met both American and North Vietnamese demands that had evolved during the course of the conflict. It was a unilateral accord with the less-than-wholehearted concurrence of the Republic of Vietnam and the Communist "Provisional Revolutionary Government." It called for cessation of all military operations in North and South Vietnam to go into effect at 2400 Greenwich Mean Time, 27 January 1973. All forces would remain in place, with disengagement supervised by a Two Party Joint Military Commission; only replacement of existing equipment and supplies was authorized.⁴ Within 60 days all Americans would withdraw, all prisoners of war would be returned, and all U.S. mines would be cleared from North Vietnamese waterways. Seventh Fleet and III MAF operations in both North and South Vietnam ceased on 28 January 1973 with the signing of these accords. For the Americans, including the U.S. Marines, this agreement brought an end of combat and support operations.* The ceasefire campaign was over.⁵

For the Vietnamese of both sides, the struggle continued, fought hard from the morning of the ceasefire and for a month or two thereafter. The Communists throughout South Vietnam had put out the red and blue flags of the National Liberation Front in a land-grab effort just prior to the ceasefire, expecting the South Vietnamese to be hampered by the terms and timing of the agreement. The South Vietnamese countered with military attacks during and after the ceasefire, which were successful in defending territory that they already held.

While the major American equipment and resup-

*Operations continued in Laos until 21 February 1973 and in Cambodia until 15 August 1973.



Adapted from Government of Vietnam Material



Photo courtesy of LtCol George E. Jones, USMC (Ret)

Prior to departure from South Vietnam, Sub Unit One's officer-in-charge, LtCol George E. Jones, is presented a gift by the commanding officer of the ARVN Airborne Training Center, Col Vinh, honoring ANGLICO's close relationship with the Airborne Division.

ply effort ended with the ceasefire, NVA infiltration continued. This included numbers of armored vehicles and artillery moved into base areas in South Vietnam. Although the ARVN and NVA had equal numbers of armored vehicles inside South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese had twice as many with trained crews. Similar buildups were detected in artillery and antiaircraft weapons that countered any South Vietnamese air superiority.⁸

Operation Countdown, 'On the Land. . .'

Operation Countdown, the final withdrawal of Free World forces from Vietnam, began immediately after the agreement was signed and the withdrawal of Marine Corps units followed on schedule.* First to leave was Sub Unit One, 1st ANGLICO. From 1 April through 10 September 1972, this specialized unit bore the brunt of the increased demands for air and naval gunfire support throughout the whole of Vietnam.**⁷ Lieutenant General Louis H. Wilson, Jr., the FMF Pacific commander, observed that Sub Unit One's departure made it the last Fleet Marine Force unit to leave Vietnam and that the aggressive spirit displayed by

ANGLICO airborne and ground spotters, combined with the firepower of Seventh Fleet naval gunfire ships, "was given considerable credit for stemming the tide of the NVA invasion in MR 1 during March/April 1972."⁸

Lieutenant Colonel George E. Jones, Sub Unit One's last commander in Vietnam, recorded that on the morning of 28 January 1973 his Marines and sailors throughout Vietnam's four military regions ceased active operations in support of the South Vietnamese. Like other redeploying units, there was an incremental transfer of personnel and equipment phased by "X-Days."⁹ Jones stated simply on 17 February 1973 that Sub Unit One, 1st ANGLICO, "ceased to have an operational mission and all efforts were directed towards the deactivation of the unit."⁸ With a majority of personnel and equipment gone, the remaining members boarded flights for duty stations elsewhere in the Marine Corps. This marked the end of eight continuous years of combat support to the South Vietnamese Armed Forces and their allies.¹⁰ Sub Unit One, 1st ANGLICO transferred to FMFPac and deactivated as a unit on 14 March 1973.

The Marine Advisory Unit was also deactivated by the ceasefire. It had been in the process of withdrawing

*As of 31 January 1973, there were 21,821 American servicemen in South Vietnam. (MACV ComdHist 1973, p. 476)

**Sub Unit One lost three killed and three missing and suffered 14 wounded in action.

***X-Day being the ceasefire date of 28 January 1973.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800899

The American departure from Vietnam occurred at the same time as the continued delivery of equipment to the South Vietnamese. Here a 60-ton crane loads a LVTP-5 for transportation to Phung Thay for the Vietnamese Marines as part of Project Enhance Plus.

battalion advisors and shifting the emphasis of support to logistics, training, and staff functions as part of the overall reduction of American forces at the beginning of 1972. The NVA invasion reversed this as the unit was totally committed to the fight. The advisor structure had been reinforced by additional ANGLICO, U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Navy personnel as it deployed to MR 1 in April 1972. According to the Senior Marine Advisor, they all "encountered exceptionally intense and continuous enemy artillery attacks-by-fire, ground attacks, and the introduction of large numbers of enemy armored units."¹¹ To compensate for casualties, disease, and exhaustion among the Marines, nine additional temporary-duty advisors were assigned.* The first of their number arrived in July and a second group in October 1972. At the peak of the Spring Offensive, the advisory unit reached a strength of 66, including U.S. Navy medical personnel.

Anticipating the withdrawal of American forces at the end of 1972 and possible restrictions on support, the Departments of Defense and State sought to accelerate the delivery of equipment approved for Vietnamization programs. Project Enhance Plus began on

14 October 1972 and was completed with the delivery of 39 armored personnel carriers from the Army, 7 Air Force aircraft, and 31 amphibian tractors from the Marines. These high-priority items, except for the amphibian tractors, were delivered by air, interrupted only by the tentative ceasefire with North Vietnam.¹²

The U.S. Marines provided the Vietnamese Marines 1 LVTR-5, 2 LVTC-5s, and 28 LVTP-5s, all amphibian tractors in recovery, command, or personnel carrier configurations. These tractors were taken from III MAF inventories to hasten delivery and loaded on U.S. Navy amphibious ships at Okinawa beginning 8 November 1972. Delivery was completed by 27 November 1972, when all the vehicles were unloaded at the VNMC compound near Saigon. American Marines from the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion and the 3d Force Service Regiment accompanied these tracked vehicles to provide needed instruction in their use and maintenance. Follow-on training was arranged by Major Oliver M. Whipple, Jr., advisor to Captain Doan Thien Niem's fledgling Amphibian Tractor Company, including rehearsals at sea with the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAB) and Seventh Fleet amphibious groups.¹³

*Fourteen advisors were wounded in action during 1972.

General Wilson at FMFPac and the senior advisor,

Colonel Dorsey, believed the arrival of these amphibian tractors provided the VNMC Division an assault capability previously lacking, that allowed operations to be conducted north of the DMZ. In reality, the VNMC was saddled with additional maintenance and supply problems and amphibious capability was never established because the Vietnamese Navy did not assign ships for amphibious operations or training.*¹⁴ Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird allowed the Marine Corps to fund \$714 million in Fiscal Year 1974 to provide replacement LVT-7 series amphibian tractors. As the new-model LVTP-7s became available, they were to be exchanged on a one-for-one basis for the LVTP-5s. This decision was approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in November 1972, but was then canceled by Secretary Laird in January 1973, putting an effective end to the program.

Colonel Dorsey and his staff had approached the ceasefire "in accordance with MACV directives" and planned as if for any other military evolution. They conceived three phases, keyed on "X-Day:" standdown (prior to X-Day); withdrawal (X to X+45); and roll-up (X+45 to X+60). Specific tasks had to be accomplished during each phase, along the lines of standard military staff responsibilities: personnel; intelligence; operations; and logistics. The unit-level advisory effort continued through 16 February 1973, when the last two Marine advisors departed from the brigade and battalion levels. The American authorities in South Vietnam at the time reported that the "active USMC field advisory effort is terminated."

Living side-by-side with their counterparts, U.S. Marine advisors had provided tactical advice and sought to enhance Vietnamese Marine Corps combat effectiveness. The advisory unit "contributed immeasurably towards the development of the Vietnamese Marine Corps into a thoroughly professional fighting organization."¹⁵ The last Senior Marine Advisor wrote in his final historical report about the division's finest hour, when two brigades of Vietnamese Marines were ordered to hold the invading Communist army at the My Chanh River, "and hold they did. The My Chanh Line was subjected to tremendous pressure and although it bent at times, it never broke. This was due to responsive supporting arms fire plans, excellent

small-unit leadership, and the courage and tenacity of individual Vietnamese Marines."

In addition to standdown affairs, Colonel Dorsey had to request spare parts for the LVT-5s which had not been included in the previous support agreements because of the planned acquisition of the LVT-7s. In March 1973, General Wilson and Admiral Bernard A. Clarey replied that spare parts were not available through the Marine Corps, but suggested the Republic of China as a source on a "government to government" basis. By that time, the advisory group believed the Vietnamese Marine Division was "almost totally self-sufficient in tactical operations and had made giant strides in self-sufficiency in all other areas."¹⁶ The Americans described General Lan as a tough, professional Marine who demanded high standards of discipline and obedience. The Vietnamese Marines were seen as a "sharp, effective fighting unit" with ability and experience in independent, combined, and joint operations.

Colonel Dorsey reported on 27 March 1973. With the exception of minor alterations to withdrawal plans, "the phase down of the Marine Advisory Unit was accomplished in a professional manner without appreciable problems. Until the end, the Marine Advisory Unit maintained a readiness to return to combat operations in support of the Vietnamese Marine Corps."¹⁷

The Marine Advisory Unit closed down on 29 March 1973 after serving with the Vietnamese Marine Corps for 18 years. That same day, Commander, Naval Forces Vietnam and the Naval Advisory Group ended an era of commitment to the Vietnamese Navy and Marine Corps. All remaining tasks were turned over to the VNMC Logistics Support Branch, Navy Division, of the Defense Attache Office (DAO).¹⁸ The improvement of amphibious capability and equipment maintenance were felt to be the two areas where "major DAO assistance is required."¹⁹ These problems were passed to Lieutenant Colonel Walter D. Fillmore to resolve as head of the recently created Vietnamese Marine Corps Logistic Support Branch of the Defense Attache's Office in Saigon.²⁰

Headed by a Marine lieutenant colonel, the VNMC Logistic Support Branch consisted of five U.S. Department of Defense civilians and 27 Vietnamese civilians. Functions of the Naval Advisory Group, Vietnam, were continued for maintenance and supply under existing support agreements through the Office of the Chief, Navy Division. This organization was a component of Army Major General John E. Murray's Defense Attache

*In June 1974, VNMC Logistic Support Branch head, LtCol George E. "Jody" Strickland, justified the continued existence of the LVT program to the Defense Attache Office because of cross-country mobility and armored-infantry attack value rather than the amphibious assault value. (LtCol George E. Strickland, Comments on draft ms, dtd 4Jan90)



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800654

Americans were still present in Military Region 1, but with a less active role than during the previous year's fighting. These 9th MAB Marines are examining captured Communist weapons in front of the Vietnamese Marine Division command post at Huong Dien.

As active combat ended, the ready forces of the Seventh Fleet remained for a variety of contingencies. With the departure of the USS Blue Ridge, the amphibious and landing force headquarters was on the USS Paul Revere, here for joint training near Tan My.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800726



Office, which superseded MACV in March 1973. General Murray had previously served as the CinCPac J-4 and had been Admiral McCain's representative to MACV during the Spring Offensive. Instead of traditional attache duties, Murray's terms of reference in this assignment were for "cleaning up the battlefields" with the assistance of the Defense Logistics Agency.²¹

Lieutenant Colonel Fillmore monitored, managed, and coordinated supply and maintenance requirements for U.S. Marine-peculiar and U.S. Army-common equipment transferred to the Vietnamese Marines. In his initial report, Fillmore indicated the difference between his logistics branch and the former Marine Advisory Unit. Because of the physical separation of the VNMC Logistics Support Branch in Saigon from the Vietnamese Marine Division in Quang Tri Province, and with the limited number of personnel within the branch, "it is extremely difficult for the Branch to accurately report on VNMC operational matters."²²

Operation Countdown, '...and Sea'

Brigadier General Paul G. Graham's tour as 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade commander began on 16

November 1972. It was characterized by the preparation of contingency plans and liaison with MACV to support final troop withdrawals and the recovery of American prisoners. The 31st MAU and 33d MAU rotated in providing an amphibious force off the coast of MR 1. During this period, HMM-164 recovered the crew of a downed Air Force B-52 bomber from the Tonkin Gulf. The Marines provided troop training to the VNMC in December 1972 and January 1973. Colonel Charles T. Williamson, the 33d MAU commander, recalled that he worked closely with the advisory unit in late January 1973, and that this involved launching and maneuvering the LVT-5 tractors in the water: "I had been watching the tractors being driven by the Vietnamese until around noon and was just leaving the bridge of the flagship, USS *Cleveland* (LPD 7), when the Commodore called me back and handed me a 'flash' message," a ceasefire had been signed and the Amphibious Ready Group would return to Okinawa to prepare for Operation End Sweep. After going ashore to the 1st Regional Assistance Command (FRAC) headquarters in Da Nang to coordinate the abrupt discontinuation of the joint training, Colonel Williamson returned to the

Navy and Marine attack aircraft continued to be used for the conduct of direct air support during weather conditions that prevented them seeing their ground targets. These A-4s from MAG-12 used their own instrumentation to release bombs in low cloud cover.

Photo courtesy of Cdr Peter B. Mersky, USNR

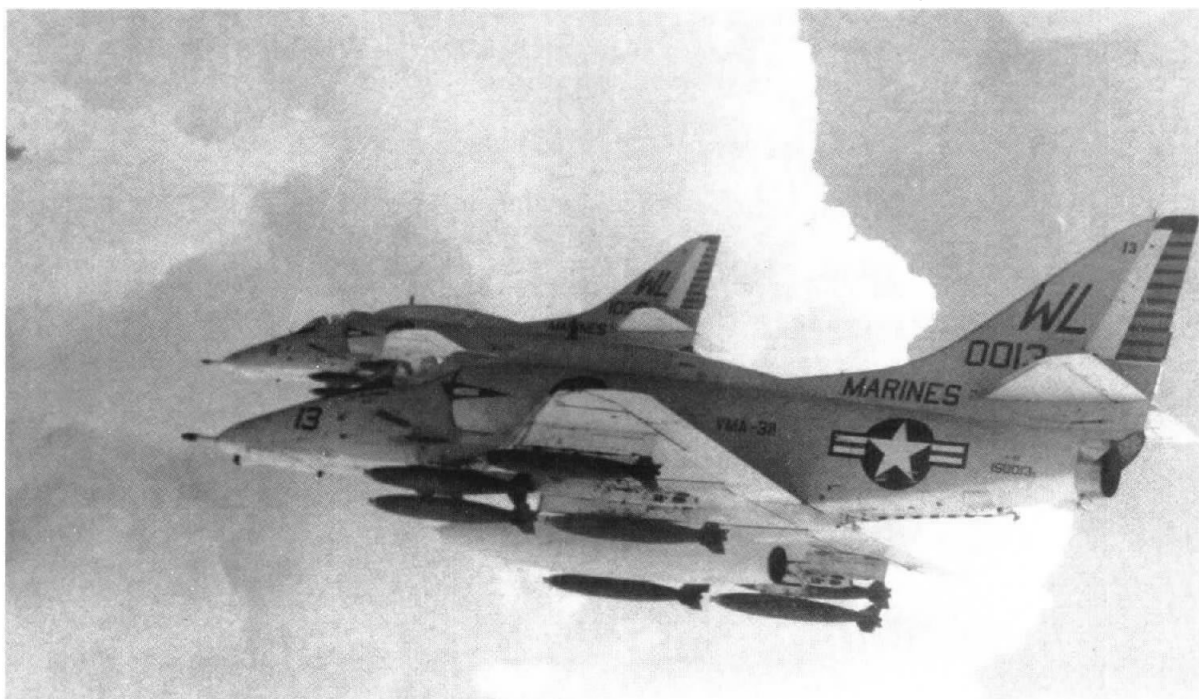




Photo courtesy of LtCol Michael S. Kelly, USMC (Ret)

As the ceasefire took effect, Marine units awaited the outcome of redeployment plans. Outside the group command post are the commander of MAG-12, Col Dean Macho, and the commanding officer of the 319 security force, Capt Michael S. Kelly. The sedan on the left had been passed down from the last commanding general of III MAF, to 3d MAB, then to ANGLICO, and finally to Col Macho, as the senior Marine commander in Vietnam.

Cleveland at dusk. "As we lifted off, I looked down at Da Nang, which I had first seen in the Spring of 1965 . . . I never had such an empty feeling."²³

After the ceasefire, the 9th MAB Headquarters returned to Okinawa and operational control of afloat Marine amphibious units was turned over to III MAF. General Graham later reported that existing operational schedules as well as the task organization and missions of the 9th MAB and its subordinate units quickly changed: "No longer did the contingency evacuation or security responsibilities have priority. Instead emphasis was placed on using MAB and amphibious assets to support Operation Homecoming Afloat and Operation End Sweep."²⁴ On 31 January 1973, Seventh Fleet directed the commanders of the 9th MAB and TF 76 to work out the details for organizing a surface ready group to support contingency operations for FRAC and the American Embassy in Saigon.²⁵

The military situation in MR 1, according to the 9th MAB liaison officer with FRAC, Major Howard L. Richey, indicated that NVA and ARVN activity would not pose an immediate threat to Americans in the region. On 2 February 1973, Major Richey observed a state of "cautious optimism" prevailing towards the ceasefire in MR 1 and that Da Nang "is in full obser-

vance of Tet."²⁶ Of a more prophetic note was the 5 February situation report that observed that South Vietnamese commanders "at all levels in MR 1 expressed deep concern over withdrawal of U.S. advisors at this time. Equally concerned over failure of ICCS [International Commission of Control and Supervision] to appear on scene to ensure compliance with ceasefire, and failure of NVA to respect terms of Paris agreement."²⁷

The 9th MAB stood down from operations and deactivated on 9 February 1973, becoming the 9th MAB nucleus staff and III MAF forward command post on the flagship of Task Force 76, the USS *Paul Revere* (LPA 248).²⁸ The 31st MAU remained on ships as the available ready force. Colonel Ray A. Stephens wrote that his unit was directed through a series of evolutions to assist in prisoner recovery and mine clearing at the same time. Then III MAF "cancelled this assignment and alerted the MAU to reconfigure for evacuation operations in South Vietnam."²⁹ This was altered drastically when Seventh Fleet assigned ARG Alpha and Bravo amphibious ships to support the Mine Counter Measures Force, Task Force 78. Control of HMM-165 and HMM-164 also went to TF 78 as it gathered forces. Fleet Marine Force, Pacific cryptically recorded that "until mine sweeping operations were



Task Force Delta Command Chronology

Security concerns continued for Task Force Delta. But Nam Phong's distant location provided the best defense. A sapper demonstration team is used to show task force personnel how terrorist attacks could be conducted through the base's defensive perimeter.

Air bases in South Vietnam remained the target of Communist attacks. Smoke rises as a group of rockets hits at Da Nang in this period. These were not followed by ground assaults.

Marine Corps Historical Collection





Task Force Delta Command Chronology
Year's end at Nam Phong in 1972 was marked by arrival of the Bob Hope Christmas Show. MAG-15 commander Col Aubrey W. Talbert, Jr., introduces Hope on an improvised stage.

completed, III MAF forces would be forced to operate without its full complement of helicopters.”³⁰ Seventh Fleet and III MAF reconstituted the amphibious ready force by organizing a surface-assault-configured ready group of five ships from Amphibious Squadron One: an LKA, LSD, and three LSTs.^{31*} Headquarters, 31st MAU remained on the USS *Cleveland* and Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 3/4 was BLT Alpha. Through March 1973, the amphibious ready group and BLT Alpha remained afloat off Da Nang on a 12-hour recall to MR 1. By April 1973, the 33d MAU on Okinawa was deactivated and the Western Pacific afloat forces returned to the posture of the previous year, the 31st MAU with Amphibious Ready Group Alpha and BLT Bravo with ARG Bravo.³²

Operation Countdown, . . . and Air'

The year 1972 had witnessed Marines flying 15,412 sorties over South Vietnam** and 539 sorties over North Vietnam, mostly in Route Package 1.³³ The New Year had begun on a discordant note with an accidental air strike on Da Nang Air Base on 8 January 1973,

causing damage and casualties to units on the ground. A flight of Marine and Navy aircraft, under U.S. Air Force control, bombed the western corner of the airbase because of a F-4 “Loran Bird” cockpit error.³⁴ Despite this, operations continued throughout the region.

Marine Aircraft Group 12 flight operations continued in South Vietnam and in Cambodia during January 1973. Colonel Dean Macho claimed credit for 864 enemy casualties and 293 buildings and 956 bunkers destroyed or damaged during this final period. MAG-12's 2,123 tons of ordnance destroyed 8 tanks, 12 artillery positions, 28 trucks, and 20 sampans, with numerous fires and secondary explosions being reported by the aircrews.³⁵ During the group's eighth month in combat, longer and heavier work loads were experienced to meet combat and withdrawal requirements. Air strikes in Cambodia were three times more frequent than previous months with the “Cambodian Reds” moving south through Kiampong Thom and Angkor Wat towards Phnom Penh. In January, according to Colonel Macho, air strikes within 200 yards of friendly positions “were not uncommon.” The threat from antiaircraft gunfire and missiles remained high over the target areas. Weather was clear, even if

*These were the USS *Tulare* (LKA 112), *Monticello* (LSD 35), *San Bernardino* (LST 1189), *Racine* (LST 1191), and *Fresno* (LST 1182).

**19 percent of the tactical air effort.

inaccurate weather reports from Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa caused the MAG-12 duty officer to “back door” estimates of the ceiling and visibility used for crew briefs.³⁶ On 15 January 1973, Vietnamese Air Force forward air controllers (FACs) took over control of all air strikes. Initial difficulties with language and procedures were overcome. By the end of the month Marine aviators were speaking pidgin Vietnamese as well as the FACs spoke pidgin English: “problems were few, courtesy was high, and the Vietnamese fliers were a pleasure to work with.”³⁷

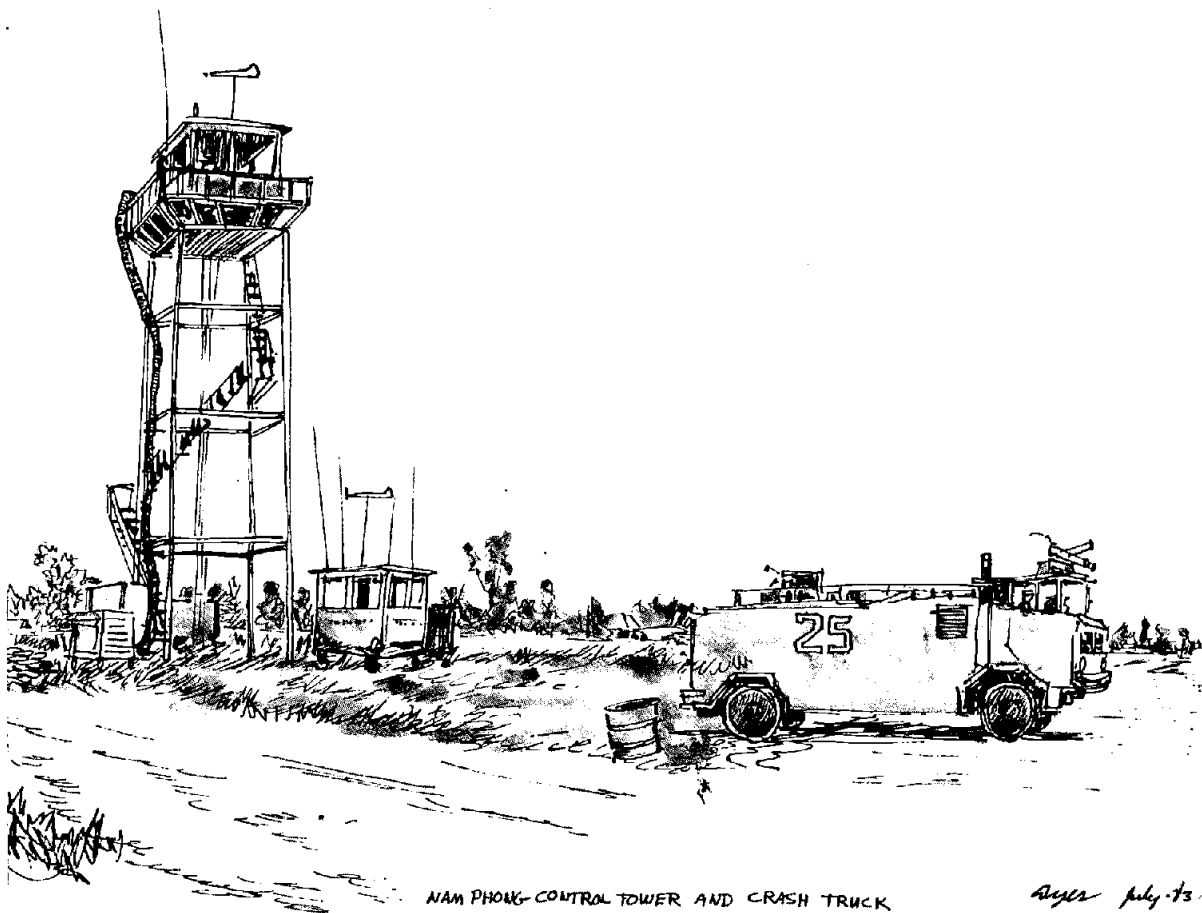
A single volley of 122mm rockets hit the group area at 0227 on 26 January 1973. The Marine killed during the rocket attack, Private First Class Mark J. Miller, was the last Marine killed in action prior to the ceasefire. This was the same day as the final combat flights, with MAG-12 becoming the last American fixed-wing aviation unit to depart Vietnam.³⁸ With the cessation

of combat operations throughout Vietnam on 27 January 1973, the group made preparations to return to Iwakuni, Japan. Colonel Macho felt the move was “smooth and orderly with no major problems.” This was through the efforts of First Lieutenant Edward J. Jobin, the MAG-12 embarkation officer, and the MAG-12 (Rear) Logistic Coordination Center under Chief Warrant Officer Larry G. Cravens at Iwakuni.³⁹ MAG-12 (Forward) aircraft departed Bien Hoa on 29 January 1973. The retrograde began within 24 hours of the ceasefire, requiring the support of 70 transport “lifts” flying around the clock to move 600 Marines and 2,791,000 pounds of cargo over the next five days.⁴⁰ The MAG’s 28 A-4s arrived at Iwakuni, Japan, on 1 February 1973 at 1430 and the remaining men and equipment followed on 3 February.

For Task Force Delta, 1972 ended with the Bob Hope Christmas Show making an appearance at Nam

Nam Phong continued to operate as an expeditionary field into 1973. The control tower crew, with its ever-present “crash truck,” could depart on short notice when ordered to leave.

Watercolor by John T. Dyer, Jr., Marine Corps Art Collection



NAM PHONG-CONTROL TOWER AND CRASH TRUCK

Dyer July '73

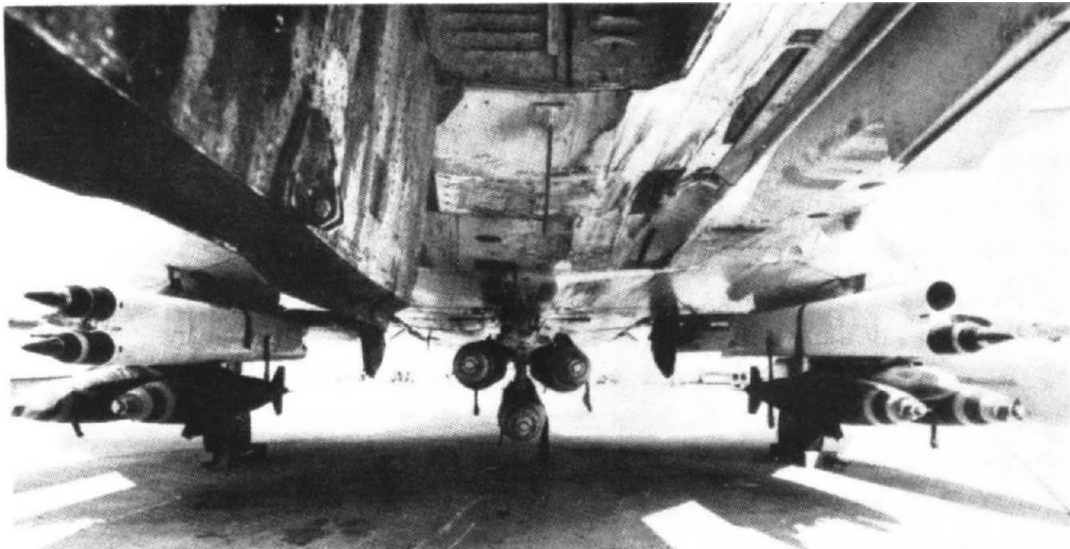


Task Force Delta Command Chronology

Despite its temporary nature, Nam Phong had reached its peak of expansion and development. Looking down the long axis of the runway, on the left is the flight line and maintenance areas, in the center is the headquarters, and farther left are the living spaces.

A contemporary comment on the ceasefire is made by this squadron photograph of a bomb- and rocket-loaded F-4 Phantom. Forces remaining in Southeast Asia were unable to return to their home bases until allied prisoners of war were released by the enemy.

Task Force Delta Command Chronology



PEACE IS AT HAND

Phong. Mr. Hope's arrival marked the seventh month of what had been perceived by some as a "90-day" deployment. Colonel Aubrey W. Talbert, Jr., of MAG-15 recalled that the start of 1973 was characterized by continued planning for the several possible contingencies which might result from a cessation of hostilities in South Vietnam and "two major changes in the geographical areas into which combat sorties were flown."⁴¹ Air operations in South Vietnam concentrated on direct support to Republic of Vietnam units in MR 1 until 26 January 1973, after which they were directed to missions in Laos and Cambodia. That same day a rocket attack at Da Nang damaged two MAG-15 Phantoms on the ground being rearmed.

By the end of January 1973, 380 tons of excess material were shipped to Japan. Preparations to leave Nam Phong began with the ceasefire agreement, but the uncertainty of the ceasefire and continued flights over Laos necessitated continued efforts to remain an effective force. Operations were flown against North Vietnamese targets in Laos until 21 February 1973 when a ceasefire agreement was reached for this area. One Air Force "Raven" air controller working the Black Lion Operation near Pakse, Laos, wrote VMFA-115 to tell them "when you guys say that close air support is your business, you don't kid around . . . I know it, the ground pounders know it, and the NVA know

it."⁴² While prepared to "retrograde," TF Delta was kept at Nam Phong by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to support any contingencies, particularly the enforcement of the ceasefire agreement, the recovery of American prisoners, and the mine-clearing operations in North Vietnam. The emphasis on combat again changed to training and waiting.

To cite the chronology of significant events at the Marine Corps Command Center for 29 March 1973, "Operation Countdown completed," marking the end of the Marines' involvement in America's long war in Southeast Asia. This was the day after the last-known Marine prisoner of war was released and as Marine participation in "post-war" operations continued. In accordance with the ceasefire accords, the U.S. had left a residual force of less than 200 American servicemen in South Vietnam. There remained three U.S. Marines "in country" with the Defense Attache Office and the 143-man State Department security guard.* The Vietnamese Communists state of the period that for "the first time in 115 years, not a single foreign soldier was garrisoned on Vietnamese land."⁴³

*The three DAO Marines were Col William B. Fleming with the Plans and Liaison Branch, LtCol Walter D. Fillmore with the VNMC Logistics Branch, and Maj Richard F. Johnson with the Operations and Training Branch.