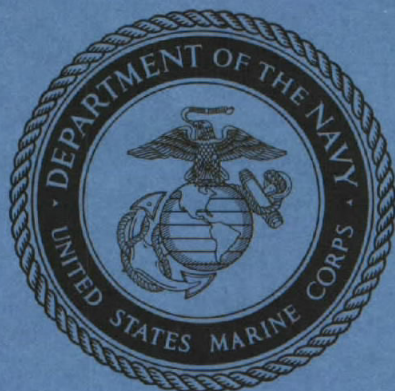

MARINE CORPS HISTORICAL REFERENCE PAMPHLET

**U.S. MARINE CORPS
CIVIC ACTION EFFORT IN VIETNAM
MARCH 1965 - MARCH 1966**



HISTORICAL BRANCH, G-3 DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D. C.

1968

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by
Captain Russel H. Stolfi, USMCR

Historical Branch
G-3 Division
Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps
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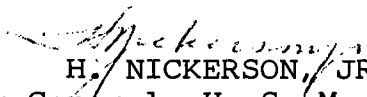
A young boy, hopelessly crippled as well as orphaned, receives a ray of happiness from an unusual source. The Marine Corps, a professional combat force, moves in to win the rural population in the ancient game of guerrilla warfare. (photograph courtesy of GySgt Russell W. Savatt)

FOREWORD

The origin of this pamphlet lies in the continuing program at all levels of command to keep Marines informed of the ways of combat and civic action in Vietnam. Not limited in any way to set methods and means, this informational effort spreads across a wide variety of projects, all aimed at making the lessons learned in Vietnam available to the Marine who is fighting there and the Marine who is soon due to take his turn in combat.

Our officers and men in Vietnam are deeply involved in efforts to improve the situation of the Vietnamese people. This pamphlet tells the story of the first formative year of civilian-aid policies, programs, and actions of the III Marine Amphibious Force. To write the study and to perform the extensive and involved research necessary to document its text, the Marine Corps was able to call upon a particularly well-qualified reserve officer, Captain Russel H. Stolfi, who volunteered for several months of active duty in the spring of 1967 for this purpose. In civilian life, Captain Stolfi, who holds a doctor of philosophy degree in history from Stanford University, is Assistant Professor of History at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California.

The pamphlet is based largely on sources available in the Washington area, including the records of various activities of the Departments of Defense and State, of the CARE organization, and of the Office of the Administrative Assistant to the President. Other sources include correspondence and interviews with participants in the actions described. In some cases documents from which information was taken are still classified, however, the information used in the text is unclassified.


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Chapter I

The Changing Pattern of War: Marine Corps Civic Action

It was early evening and the Viet Cong platoon made its way towards the bridge over the River Phu Bai a few miles southeast of Hue, the former royal capital of Vietnam. Pham Van Thuong, card carrying communist party member and commander of the platoon, could only have felt comfortably at home. He had been born a few miles from his present location. Most of Thuong's short life had been spent close to his birthplace near Hue/Phu Bai where the Marine Corps was now located. Thuong had played, gone to school, and helped his parents in household chores like myriad other children in Vietnam. He had also seen the war against the French, travelled briefly in North Vietnam, and now was participating in a war against a government of his own people in Saigon. Thuong was tough physically and at ease in his early evening environment and revolutionary task. The Viet Cong were rulers of the night. Thuong probably felt little anxiety about the presence of the Popular Forces which had been organized by the local government to resist the Viet Cong. This euphoria was merciful. Pham Van Thuong had only a few more minutes to live.(1)

The Combined Action Company (CAC) ambush had been set carefully and professionally. Marines and Popular Forces had worked together for almost four months in the Hue/Phu Bai area, and the combination of Marine Corps firepower and discipline and Vietnamese familiarity with the terrain had become literally a killing one. At about 2030 on the evening of 29 November 1965, the handful of hunters sensed the presence of the Viet Cong.(2)

Pham Van Thuong possibly never heard the rifle fire which struck him down. No warning had been given. Thuong's final thoughts will never be known. Probably they were the mundane military ones concerning the soundest way to cross the bridge into the hamlet of Phu Bai (VI).(3) Small arms fire from the CAC-3 ambush at the bridge shattered the Viet Cong platoon. Fortune was not with either Thuong or his men. The latter fled southward where they were hit by CAC-4. Then they headed westward into the hills passing through blocking artillery fires on the way. (See Sketch Map).

Since the Marine Corps had formally arrived in Vietnam in March 1965, it had learned a lot about the other war, *i.e.*, the struggle against the clandestine apparatus of the Viet Cong (the Viet Cong infrastructure). This was no surprise because the Marine Corps was a professional military organization which existed to learn swiftly from the shock of combat.

Vietnam was a combat experience that differed little in many of its lessons from other parts of the world; and, Marines had fought and operated in practically all of them. In Vietnam in November 1965, as Thuong's platoon advanced towards the Phu Bai River, the Marine Corps was as confident of producing a professional effort as it had been in Korea during the winter and Guadalcanal in the summer.

But Vietnam offered special frustrations. The original mission, to secure enclaves in the northern region of Vietnam containing air and communications installations, was simplicity itself.(4) The Marine air-ground team promptly occupied those areas and secured them. Equally promptly the Marine Corps leaders sensed the futility of defending a few bits of level terrain to support long-range air bombardment. Under Marine Corps noses the Viet Cong controlled much of the countryside. They had capitalized on the instability of the Vietnamese government from 1963-1965 to push deeply into the lowland and coastal parts of the northern region.(5) Outside of the major cities movement was possible only during daylight, and a sullen, fearful peasantry became omnipresent. When night fell, the forces of the Vietnamese government retracted into various brittle defensive points and the small numbers of hard, well-armed Viet Cong roamed at will.(6)

Targets were available for Marine Corps units in the form of Viet Cong main forces; these were conventionally organized military formations. At carefully selected times the main forces engaged units of both the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and the Marine Corps. But the precious main forces made it a rule to initiate only battles in which success was mathematically predictable. Normally they were beyond knowledge and reach. Furthermore, the destruction of main force units of the Viet Cong yielded little result. Phoenix-like, new forces arose from the ashes of the old. The Viet Cong infrastructure was the life-giver to destroyed units through its ability to recruit from among the peasant masses. At the same time the terroristic apparatus of the infrastructure ensured the neutrality of the Vietnamese peasant. The ultimate enemy of the Vietnamese government and the Marine Corps was everywhere, yet nowhere. The key to the detection of the Viet Cong infrastructure lay in the Vietnamese peasantry, comprising approximately 80 percent of the total population. The peasants alone could eradicate the Viet Cong by exposing their presence and movements to the allied forces. Properly armed and supported, the peasants themselves could destroy the Viet Cong in personal vendettas engendered by the all-pervading form of Viet Cong discipline, terror--the threat and consummation of death sentences against recalcitrant peasants.

Positive security against Viet Cong violence was needed to extract the presence and movements of the rural communist revolutionaries from the uncommitted peasantry. Security in

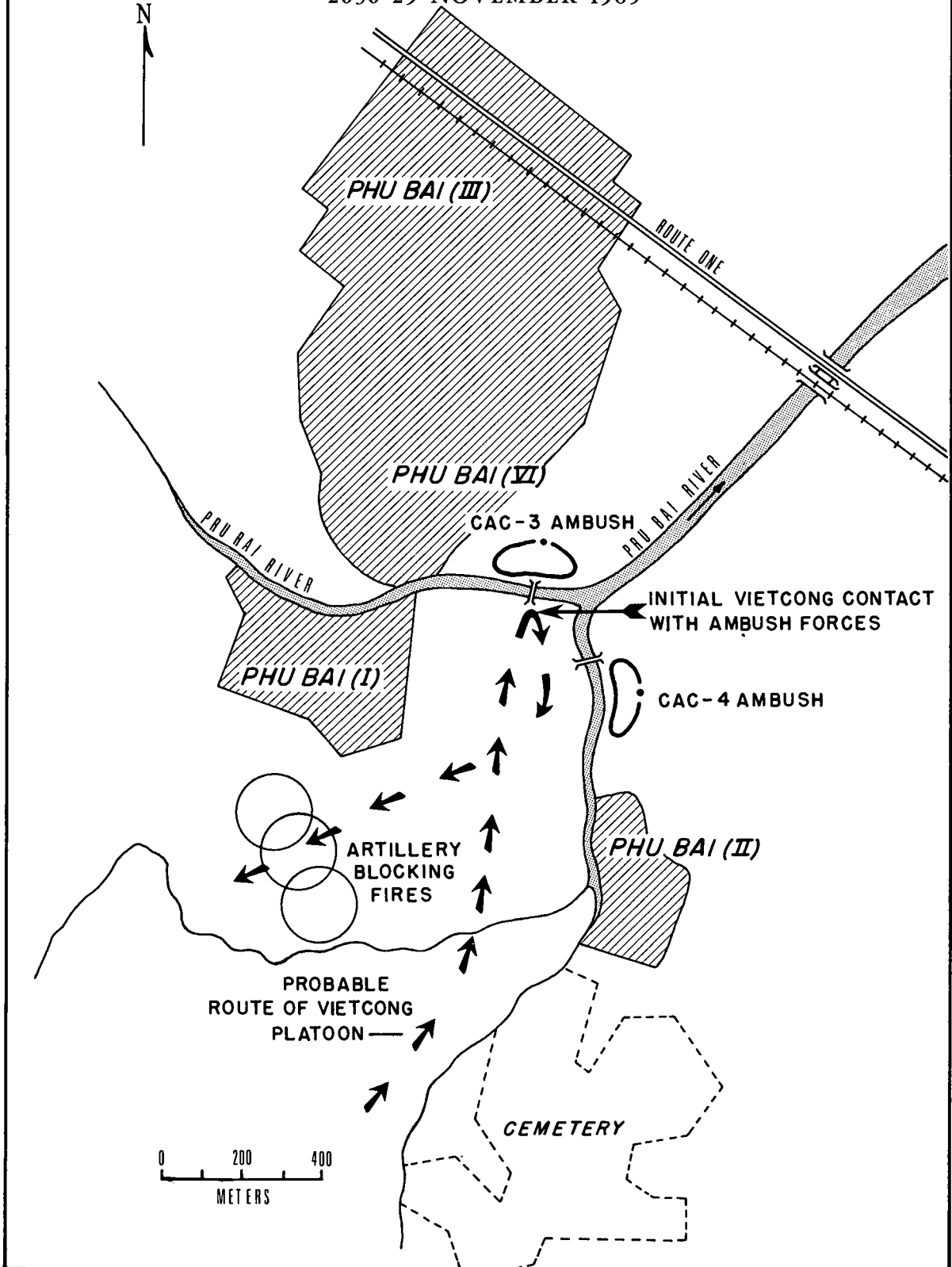


The concept of the Combined Action Company (CAC) was originated in the Hue/Phu Bai TAOR in August 1965. In this photograph taken on 21 September 1965, 1stLt Paul R. Ek, commander of the original CAC, makes a point with two members of his newly-formed company. (USMC A185800)



Summit conference: the basic unit of the Combined Action Company was the CAC squad. In this photograph, Sgt David W. Sommers (second from right), squad leader and the Marine responsible for the protection of Thuy Tan village in the Hue/Phu Bai TAOR, talks over the report of one of his lance corporals. (USMC A185759)

SKETCH MAP
COMBINED ACTION COMPANY AMBUSH AT THE
PHU BAI BRIDGE
2030 29 NOVEMBER 1965



conjunction with an aggressive program of rural development, revolutionary in the sense of its far-reaching and rapid benefits for the peasantry, were the keys to success. Obviously the Marine Corps could not provide security in every village and hamlet. Security and development would rest upon the peasants themselves in conjunction with effective local governing officials. But the Marine Corps could assist in many ways in the reestablishment of security by the Vietnamese government. In one experiment Marine Corps and local rural defense forces, i.e., Popular Forces, recruited and controlled at the village and hamlet level, were formed into CACs whose platoons were to be trained by the Marine Corps to provide 24-hour local security. The CACs were one of many Marine Corps responses to the ultimate problem of reestablishing local government in the hands of the Government of Vietnam (GVN) and freeing the peasants from the Viet Cong terror.(7)

The CAC under the command of First Lieutenant Paul R. Ek was the first of the integrated Vietnamese and Marine Corps defense and training units. The CAC was under the supervision of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, and operated in the Hue/Phu Bai enclave southeast of Hue, a city rich in the trappings of Vietnam's historical heritage.(8) Each of its platoons included one Marine Corps rifle squad, and the mission of the Marines was to train the Popular Forces to fight successfully against the Viet Cong anywhere, anytime. In one small way a new wind was blowing through Vietnam.

One of First Lieutenant Ek's squads had been responsible for the successful ambush on 29 November 1965 with its professional request for artillery fire, subsequent coordination with another ambush squad, and the calling of blocking artillery fires (see Sketch Map). The new wind passing through Vietnam carried with it a hardness of will and expertise of operation that would destroy the enemy on his chosen ground--among the peasantry. Popular Forces would be trained which would be capable of dominating the countryside not only during familiar day but especially during the dreaded night. Behind the screen of effective Popular Forces, expert cadres, i.e., core or nucleus personnel, trained by experts at the national level would destroy the Viet Cong infrastructure. Large units of the Marine Corps and the ARVN would keep at bay and destroy the Viet Cong main force and the Army of North Vietnam. The death of Pham Van Thuong represented something more than an isolated incident. The first fully coordinated effort to defeat the Viet Cong was emerging. Military civic action, expressed in security measures like the CAC concept would provide the link between the war against the enemy main forces and the reestablishment of political control by the GVN at the grass roots level.

Chapter II

The Governing Institutions of the Republic of Vietnam March 1965 - March 1966

Background

Late in 1955, a national referendum in South Vietnam deposed the head of state, Bao Dai, and chose Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem as President of the Republic of Vietnam. By 26 October 1956 a constitution had been promulgated providing for a strong executive, a unicameral national assembly, and a judicial system with safeguards for individual rights. Diem proved to be an effective leader; he was able to consolidate his political position and eliminate the private armies of the religious sects. With U. S. aid he built a formidable national army, established a system of administration, and made progress towards reconstructing the national economy. But Diem's progress threatened North Vietnamese hopes for a unification of the Vietnamese people under northern domination. Simultaneously, Diem's lack of progress in bringing about more rapid social, economic, religious, and political readjustments supported indigenous unrest in the south. Between 1956-1960 the Viet Cong, a melange of northern and southern communists, began and then expanded a campaign to destroy the stability of the southern government and move into the resulting vacuum. By 1960 the control of the movement had slipped decisively into the hands of the Hanoi government because of the stubborn resistance of Diem and his American-supported army and administration.(1)

Between 1960-1963 the Viet Cong movement made crucial gains in South Vietnam. The violent communist tactics of murder and intimidation of the personnel of the Republican government destroyed the government's political apparatus over large parts of rural Vietnam. The Viet Cong occupied the void and using techniques dating back to 1917 established an ominous shadow government which in many rural areas possessed more substance than anything which slain Republican officials could provide. By late 1963, the Diem government, was no longer able to cope with the armed, disciplined, and intellectually coherent movement which threatened its existence. The Vietnamese Army moved inexorably into the position of political power.

During several violent days, 1-4 November 1963, a military coup overthrew the Diem regime, suspended the constitution of 1956, and dissolved the national assembly. The success of the Viet Cong and the agitation of the Buddhists against the Diem Republic had forced a change of government by the armed forces.(2) The revolutionary leaders centralized power in a Revolutionary

Military Council which announced its intention to reinstall civilian leadership as soon as possible. Between November 1963-November 1964 the Vietnamese armed forces split their efforts between political and military operations. The Viet Cong made enormous gains during this period. The temporary nature of the national government weakened the resolve of the governing officials. Simultaneously, the enforced participation of the military leadership in politics restricted effective military operations. By 4 November 1964, civilian leadership had been reintroduced into the government: Tran Van Hung became prime minister and Phan Khac Suu became chief of state. By the turn of 1965, however, Viet Cong gains during the continual progression of temporary national governments ruled out the survival of any democratic, civilian government. The armed forces remained the critical element of stability early in 1965 and forced a readjustment of the civilian government during the period 27 January-16 February 1965.(3) The continuing instability of the government and the concomitant Viet Cong gains forced the intervention of ground combat forces of the United States in March 1965.

The Critical Situation of Early 1965

The U. S. intervention of early 1965 required time for the buildup of significant physical force and even more time for the formulation of an effective program of support for the Government of Vietnam. The Vietnamese political situation continued to deteriorate, and on 11 June 1965 the civilian government, which was unable either to resolve the problem of a new constitution or to cope with the accelerating scale of Viet Cong operations, asked the armed forces to assume the responsibilities of the national government. The armed forces responded by 19 June 1965 with the creation of a Provisional Convention (preliminary constitution) which vested supreme power in a Congress of the Armed Forces. This military government has been called the Ky government because of the position of Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky both as prime minister and de facto leader of the state.(4)

The Marine Corps arrived in Vietnam under frustrating circumstances. No clear-cut case of foreign aggression was in evidence and the Government of Vietnam in March 1965 was a temporary one which was obviously unable to deal with the revolutionary situation. The Marine Corps found itself in the position of defending an airbase in the Da Nang area in support of an authoritarian civilian government which was soon to be changed to a more authoritarian military government. The enemy, the Viet Cong, was a band of North Vietnamese-influenced communists characterized by an appealing program for change. But the Ky government, the authoritarian military one, made persistent claims that it had no interest in permanent power and the communists proved to be so closely associated with the

Hanoi government that little doubt was left about the unification of the two Vietnams under northern domination in the event of the triumph of the Viet Cong. If the South Vietnamese people had wanted that unification the United States would have had little justification for its intervention in early 1965. But the deliberate attempted murder of the Government of South Vietnam during the period 1959-1965 represented a method of change which was intolerable morally. Finally, the Viet Cong movement was too well organized to pass as a spontaneous rural uprising. Viet Cong brutality and organization were coldly efficient. So much efficiency so close to North Vietnam revealed the threat of the introduction of an ideology detrimental to U. S. interests.

The Formation of a Durable Military Government

The Ky government of June 1965 bore the load of almost ten years of Vietnamese struggle against a calculated attempt to destroy the governments of Vietnam. The government was a last-ditch military one based on the unity of the officer corps of the armed forces. The officer corps provisionally vested the sovereignty of the Vietnamese state in the Congress of the Armed Forces. The executive arm of the Congress was the National Leadership Committee which exercised the powers of the Congress and directed governmental affairs. The Chairman of the National Leadership Committee, who was in effect the head of state, was Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Thieu. Directly below the Leadership Committee was the Central Executive Committee whose chairman was Marshal Ky. He was the central figure in the government and acted as prime minister. Ky had the authority to organize the executive branch of the government and to propose to the Chairman of the National Leadership Committee all cabinet appointments. The center of national power lay ultimately in the National Leadership Committee which was comprised on 19 June 1965 of nine members of the armed forces including Ky as Commissioner for the Executive. Each Corps Commander was represented on the committee also; and, because of the presence of combat soldiers under the Corps Commanders, each commander was a center of armed influence in the state.(5)

The prime minister controlled Vietnam through a cabinet of several ministers and numerous secretaries of state. He appointed and replaced all public officials; approval by the National Leadership Committee was required only in the case of Province Chief, Director General, or higher. Mayors of the autonomous cities and the Prefecture of Saigon were also appointed by the prime minister. Below the national level a vast hierarchy of local government existed. Four Corps Areas or Regions existed in which the senior governmental delegate was the military commander. The Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force, became the senior military advisor to the

Vietnamese general commanding I Corps (the First Region) in August 1965. Subordinate to the Vietnamese Corps Commanders were the Provincial Chiefs who directed the efforts of the District Chiefs and carried out the functions of government at the provincial level. The Province Chiefs, who were advised by elected Provincial Councils, provided extensive services for the Vietnamese people and were supported by technical assistants from the national ministeries. Below the provinces (43 in number) were ranged districts (234), grouped villages (2558), and hamlets (13,211). Most of the population of Vietnam was rural and resided in the hamlets. The national government ultimately contacted most of the population at the hamlet level, i.e., the grouped villages were units of administrative convenience and were comprised of a certain number of hamlets, usually four to six.(6)

The Viet Cong

The Viet Cong had concentrated their attack on the Government of Vietnam by destroying the governing officials at the hamlet and village levels. The Viet Cong emphasized the political aspects of the struggle and replaced slain, kidnapped, and terrorized officials with communist or communist-appointed officials. The communists formed a government within a government and literally stole the bodies and minds of the peasants by a combination of armed force and astute rural propaganda. But the appeal to force is central in the Viet Cong movement and has remained, in combination with superlative organization, the main strength of the movement. The following comment illustrated the strength of the Viet Cong appeal to the peasantry but also revealed striking weaknesses. A village elder characterized their rule by saying:

If you do as the Viet Cong say they are very correct.
They never steal. They tax.
If they take a chicken they pay.
If you do not cooperate, they shoot you in the stomach.(7)

The Viet Cong generated much fear amongst the rural population of South Vietnam by their policy of balanced ruthlessness. In areas where the Government of Vietnam was unable to provide security for its citizens, the Viet Cong were able to swim undetected in a sea of terrorized humanity. Simultaneously, the Viet Cong made exaggerated promises of a better life for the Vietnamese peasant. Government projects were ridiculed, harassed, and destroyed by the rural Robin Hoods who had to produce no results until they were in power. The Viet Cong used promises of a better future with the reality of present violence to erode the influence of the Republican government. The Republic could succeed against the movement only by the implementation of a more effective program designed to win back the fearful rural masses. The harsh geographical reality of a

hostile border abutting on Vietnam in the North made the chances of unsupported government success against the Viet Cong problematical. (8)

Vietnamese Rural Construction (1965)
and Revolutionary Development (1966)

In 1965 with disaster staring it in the face, the Vietnamese government, with the urging of the U. S. Mission Council in Vietnam, executed a well-conceived rural pacification plan. Improved civil/military coordination was achieved and significant changes in terminology were made during the year. For example, on 5 April 1965 the government supplanted the term pacification with the new one, rural construction. But the instability of the government during the first half of 1965 slowed the release of funds for the rural construction program. The national government did not release monies until April 1965, and the program was further slowed by changes in the national organization for rural construction and finally the death of the Minister of Rural Construction in August 1965. As a result, the government's accomplishments in rural construction in 1965 were slight. But the combination of the Ky military government and massive U. S. ground and air forces prevented decisive Viet Cong success even though the allies produced no forward momentum of their own. (9)

Prime Minister Ky initiated planning for 1966 rural construction in September 1965 when he requested that the U. S. Mission Liaison Group help to determine the National Priority Areas for Rural Construction in 1966. The reason for the establishment of those areas was to ensure the concentration of national resources in vital areas of the country. The government established four priority areas for the calendar year 1966. The area around Da Nang, Quang Nam Province, became one of them. (10)

Planning continued in November and December 1965 and on 15 December 1965, the Vietnamese Joint General Staff published Directive AB 140 as the basic military plan for support of rural construction in 1966. The directive assigned Corps Priority Areas in addition to the national areas and directed the holders of real power in Vietnam, the Corps Commanders, to support rural construction in their areas. The combined campaign for 1966 was published by the U. S. Military Assistance Command and the Vietnamese Joint General Staff on 31 December 1965 and linked the U. S. and Vietnamese military plans with rural construction. But progress was slow in 1966. Civilian rural construction activities suffered from the lack of trained cadres, i.e., organizing personnel, to provide the leadership at the hamlet level for the reestablishment of government control. But the government continued to press for rural improvement and its determination was revealed in the change of the

term rural construction to the more forceful expression, revolutionary development. With the graduation of the first revolutionary development cadres in May 1966, and the aggressive leadership of the Minister of Revolutionary Development, the government's program began to edge forward after the middle of 1966. Military activities proved to be the vital flaw in the revolutionary development program. The government planners had not given enough firm and precise direction to the armed forces regarding their role. The Vietnamese armed forces continued to carry out the task of combatting the main force of the Viet Cong and failed to provide the security required to ensure the success of the revolutionary development groups. Security devolved on the Regional and Popular Forces; but, they remained too weak to provide adequate security without substantial reinforcement by the Vietnamese army.

Rural construction had become by December 1965 the thread which productively held together the military and the civil efforts of the Republic. The plans for rural construction not only coordinated the Republican military and civil activities but also related them to the U. S. and Free World military, political, and humanitarian aid programs. Rural construction became the government's coordinated plan for survival. No Ministry of Rural Construction existed in Vietnam throughout 1965. By 12 October 1965, however, a Secretary of State for Rural Construction had been created and Aspirant General Nguyen Duc Thang became first holder of the position. Later, in the national government's reorganization of 21 February 1966, General Thang became Secretary of State for Revolutionary Development within the Ministry of War and Construction. By July 1966, however, Thang had become Minister of Revolutionary Development with two secretaries of state operating under his direction. (11)

Rural construction evolved from late 1965 onwards as the attempt of the national government to reestablish its control over the basic, traditional Vietnamese political groupment--the hamlet. Hamlets had been part of Vietnamese peasant life for over two millennia; they were political bedrock for the Vietnamese nation. The importance of the hamlet was shown in the late 1940's when the Viet Minh, rural revolutionaries extraordinary, were forced to create the grouped village, an administrative superstructure used to control the hamlets. But the grouped village existed in Vietnam only insofar as it was comprised of a certain number of hamlets. The war has been fought around the latter which have borne the brunt of destruction. General Thang, with a keen sense of historical reality, recognized their importance for both sides in the present struggle. He designed the revolutionary development program to rebuild the basic structure of traditional Vietnamese life and at the same time bring about beneficial change in the life of the Vietnamese peasant. (12)

The spearhead of the rural construction program had been the People's Action Teams (PATs), 40-man groups which began the process of political and social change in secured areas. At the end of 1965 the Vietnamese began to train more effective personnel called Revolutionary Development Cadre (RD Cadre) who were organized into 59-man Revolutionary Development Groups (RD Groups). General Thang's most important task, outside of coordinating the support of the Vietnamese and the U. S. governments behind revolutionary development, has been the training of the young men who would drive the program into the political and social foundation of Vietnam. The battlefield of the struggle for change in 1965 and 1966 was in the areas where the PATs and later the RD Groups were committed. The Marine Corps quickly sensed the importance of revolutionary development and by the turn of 1966 emphasized civic action and psychological warfare in direct support of revolutionary development.

Chapter III

Military Civic Action in Vietnam

Military civic action is something which used the formidable potential of armed and disciplined military organizations to accomplish difficult civil tasks. History had shown that men could do anything with bayonets except sit on them, and this general notice was well taken in the case of Vietnam.(1) In Vietnam, sitting on bayonets in the 1960s would have been using the Allied armed forces only for large unit actions against the elusive main forces of the Viet Cong. But had the Allies followed that course of action, the struggle for control of the Vietnamese peasantry by the GVN would have remained unaffected because the Viet Cong infrastructure would have been more than a match for the local Vietnamese government. The Allied armed forces were the most effective organizations for the suppression of the guerrilla terror and had to be used in a concept which was balanced between combat against the main forces of the Viet Cong and security for local government.

Well before intervening with major ground forces at the request of the GVN in 1965, the U. S. Government had realized the importance of military organizations in accomplishing beneficial change in countries which were modernizing themselves. By 1962, "U. S. military and assistance legislation and directives provide/ d_/ that military assistance programs should encourage the use of local military and paramilitary forces in developing countries on projects helpful to social and economic development."(2) The U. S. Government encouraged the use of the ARVN for operations in support of pacification. But the ARVN operations were weakly developed because of the expressed view that economic and social aid by the armed forces should not "detract from capabilities to perform primary military missions."(3)

Operations against the main force of the Viet Cong, however, were only one part of the ARVN struggle to support the central objective of the war in Vietnam. That objective--the creation of a Government of the Republic of Vietnam viable enough to crush the insurgency and to resist future aggression--was too difficult to tie up the ARVN simply in the defense of fixed installations and actions against the main force of the Viet Cong. In the existing war the immediate objective was to create a civilian population confident enough of the protection of the GVN to expose the presence and movements of the insurgents. The central reality of the war was a Vietnamese population which was overwhelmingly rural. As a result, both the ARVN and the Marine Corps had to support local, rural government scattered through myriad hamlets and connected by a primitive communications

network. Marine Corps support, for example, had to range far beyond the static defense of air installations.

Rural Construction

The Marine Corps, however, was an organization which did not exist to create a program for viable government in a foreign state. That program lay with the GVN, and existed in spite of the dislocation of 1963-1965. In 1965, rural construction was the term describing the government's program to secure the central objective of the war.(4) The government's plan was a sound one which concentrated on the central reality of life in the new state--a primitive, rural way of existence.(5) The program was of paramount importance to the Marine Corps. Success of the program promised victory over the Viet Cong, stability for the Republic, and the release of U. S. military forces. The rural construction program was comprised of:

The integrated military and civil process to restore, consolidate, and expand governmental control so that nation building could progress throughout the Republic of Vietnam. It consisted of those coordinated military and civil actions to liberate the people from VC control, restore public security, initiate political and economic development, extend effective government authority and win the willing support of the people towards those ends.(6)

The definition was dry but the program was important. How was military civic action related to rural construction? Civic action was largely the friendly military plan of support for rural construction. It existed in close coordination with large and small unit combat operations against the Viet Cong. Military civic action in March 1965 was by theoretical definition primarily a function of the ARVN. But no directives existed discouraging U. S. military participation in civic action; to the contrary, U. S. military forces were encouraged to participate. The following Marine Corps definition of military civic action concentrates on the role of the indigenous armed forces in the support of government but it also ties in the efforts of U. S. forces:

The use of preponderantly indigenous military forces on projects useful to the local population at all levels in fields such as education, training, public works, agriculture, transportation, communications, health, sanitation, and other contributing to economic and social development, which would also serve to improve the standing of the military forces with the population (U. S. forces may at any time advise or engage in military civic actions in overseas areas).(7)



Combined Action Companies had two missions. The first was that of providing security for Vietnamese peasants. The second, shown here, was the encouraging of self-help projects among the villagers. In this scene Cpl Earl J. Suter helps to build a shelter for his CAC squad at Thuy Luong two miles south of Hue/Phu Bai on 25 September 1965. (USMC A185707)



Food for the needy: the distribution of food began to reach major proportions by the end of 1965. In this photograph taken at Tra Kieu near Da Nang on 17 August 1965, two officers of MAG-16 present supplies received from the U.S. Agency for International Development to the village priest for distribution to the local orphanage and old people's home. (USMC A184979)

This general definition was valid for the military organizations of states throughout the world in the process of peaceful technical change. But the definition was not precise enough for the Vietnamese situation. In Vietnam, military civic action served to link together the formal combat effort of the military forces with the political, social, and economic reconstruction efforts of the GVN. Civic action harnessed energies of both the ARVN and the Marine Corps, which remained after the formal combat commitments, to the tasks of rural construction.

The Place of Marine Corps Civic Action in the Vietnamese War

The question then arose: where did Marine Corps civic action fit in with the overall struggle in Vietnam? This question had to be answered before the civic actions of the Marine Corps could have real meaning. Chart Number One presents the situation graphically. The total Marine Corps effort in the triple sense of large unit, counterguerrilla, and civic actions was part of a larger effort to control and reconstruct Vietnam and to defeat the Viet Cong. The Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force (CG, III MAF) was highly placed in the U. S. chain of military command and after August 1965, he functioned as Senior Military Advisor to the Vietnamese general commanding the First Military Region. Additionally, the CG, III MAF, coordinated his operations with the programs of the various U. S. Government agencies and departments. The Vietnamese political effort was controlled by the general commanding the First Military Region; but that effort functioned largely through the local civilian officials who were supported technically by the national ministries.(8)

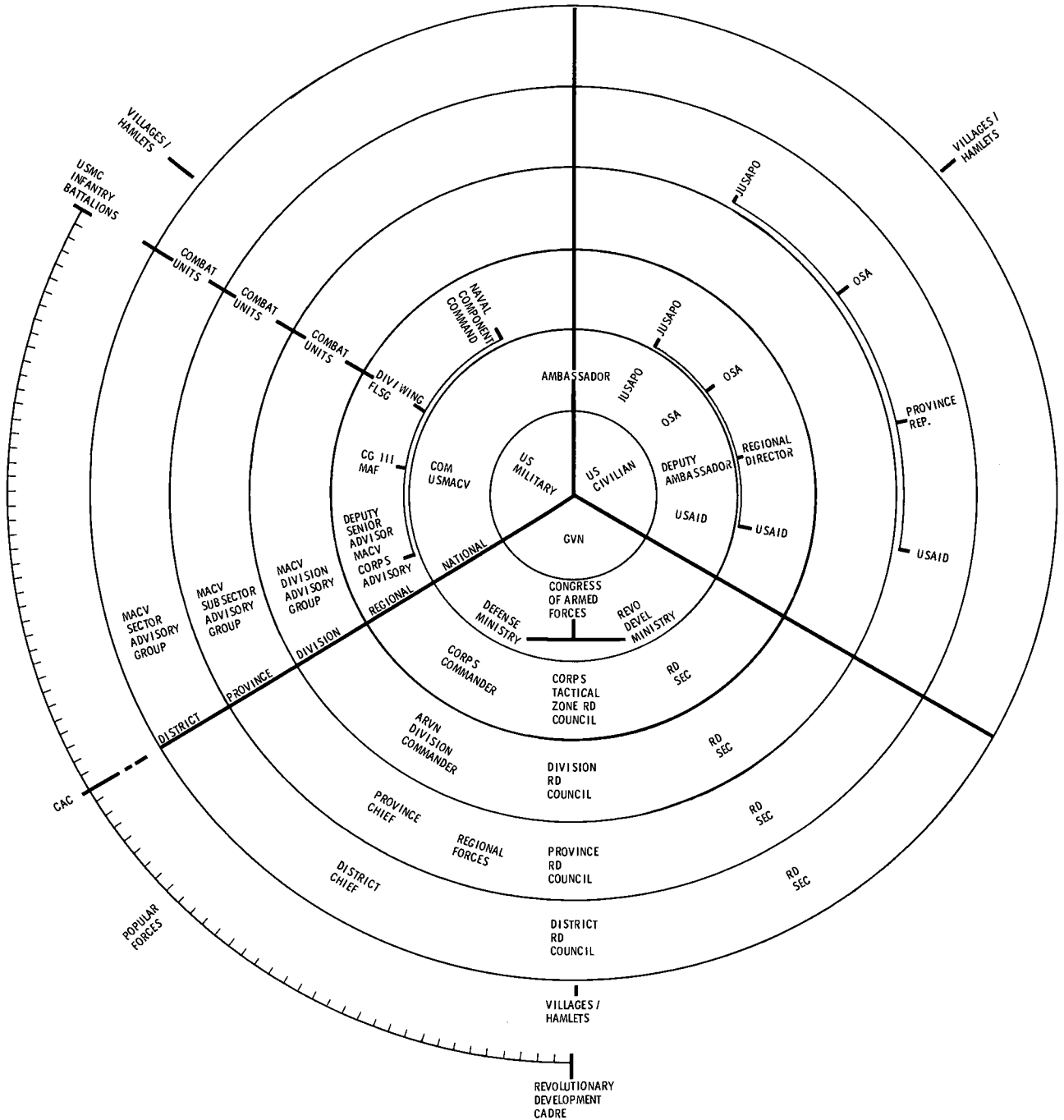
Marine Corps civic action also had to be set in the political context of U. S. involvement in a revolutionary situation in a sovereign state.(9) The basic premise of U. S. involvement was the protection of U. S. and Free World interests in SE Asia. These interests were best served by the support of the existing Government of Vietnam. But because of the political sovereignty of Vietnam, U. S. support for the Vietnamese government had to take the form of support for that government's chosen plan for survival. For example, large unit ground actions by the Marine Corps were ultimately effective only if they reinforced the stability of the South Vietnamese government and advanced its survival plan.

The Coordination of Civic Action and Vietnamese Plans for Survival

Marine Corps civic action had to be coordinated with all of the activities supporting Vietnamese revolutionary development and had to take into account the total availability of resources to be really effective.(10) For example, Marine assistance in the construction of a hamlet schoolhouse was a frustrating event for the local population and the Marine Corps alike if no teachers were available to grace the school. The Marine Corps was unable to create Vietnamese teachers, and the local hamlet or village government was also unable to manufacture them. Coordination with the higher levels of government concerning the availability of both human and material resources was one of the keys to success. Generally the Marine Corps had to coordinate with the following general entities: (1) the Vietnamese government (district, provincial, regional levels), (2) U. S. Government agencies and departments, and (3) private U. S. relief organizations. Coordination was mandatory if any lasting effect were to be obtained from civic action. It was probably accurate to say that effective Marine Corps civic action began with Major General Lewis W. Walt's formation in August 1965 of a Joint Coordinating Council for the I Corps Tactical Zone (ICTZ). General Walt, who had become commanding general of the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) in June 1965, was aware of the immense process of historical change taking place in Vietnam and was determined to join that process and reinforce in a direction favorable to the Vietnamese government.(11)

The direction which was sensed by him as being decisive in midsummer 1965 was support of Vietnamese rural construction. By August 1965, with his appointment as Senior Military Advisor to the Commanding General, I Corps, General Walt began to implement a coordinated civic action program with the formation of a council which would include representatives of all of the organizations in the I Corps Tactical Zone supporting rural construction. The purpose of the council was to coordinate the services and resources of all organizations, military, civilian and private, in support of rural construction. The thread which began to run through Marine Corps civic action after August 1965 was that of self-effacing support for Vietnamese rural construction.

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Chapter IV

The Landing of Major Marine Corps Air and Ground Forces in South Vietnam and the Early Development of Civic Action: March-July 1965

Background

By March 1964, the United States Government realized that its hopes of an early ending to the conflict in South Vietnam were premature. General Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that the Viet Cong had taken **advantage** of the instability of the Vietnamese Government and the lack of coordination and diffusion in the strategic hamlet program (the forerunner of revolutionary development) to make vast gains.(1) The Viet Cong had negated the strategic hamlet operations and had passed over to the offensive, launching major daylight attacks against the ARVN. The situation was plainly deteriorating and by the end of 1964 the U. S. advisory effort was built up to a total of 20,000 personnel. The situation in Southeast Asia had deteriorated in other ways also. Various ties had existed between the Viet Cong and the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam since the beginning of the struggle in 1956; but, in 1964 North Vietnamese assistance had become concrete in the form of massive infiltration by the North Vietnamese Army into the south. A precarious balance, at best, had existed in South Vietnam late in 1963. By late 1964, North Vietnamese intervention and the gains of the Viet Cong in combination with the internal instability in the south, threatened to destroy the balance.(2)

At the turn of 1965, the Viet Cong supported by elements of the North Vietnamese Army including the major part of the 325th Division maintained heavy military pressure against the GVN. The full measure of Viet Cong confidence was revealed in the impolitic attack on the U. S. military compound at Pleiku. The Viet Cong, for whom the essence of the struggle was political, took leave of sound political judgement in creating the incident. President Lyndon B. Johnson had made it clear that the communist tactics of force and intimidation against the GVN were not an acceptable means of social and economic change even though change was the common goal of both the United States and the two Vietnams. The attack at Pleiku focused violence against the U. S. Government, furnished stark evidence of the method of advance by force, and resulted in a reaction so powerful that the heady smell of communist victory turned to one of aid-station antiseptic. Roses turned to iodine as the Viet Cong realized that force indeed was the ultimate arbiter in the world of competing sovereign states.

The Landing of Major Marine Combat Forces

The United States began to bomb "selected" targets in North Vietnam in February 1965, and under the pressure of bold Viet Cong advances, sent the first major ground combatant forces into the Republic. Early on Monday morning 8 March 1965, Marines under the direction of the Headquarters, 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) landed by sea and air close to Da Nang, Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam. Although the intervention of ground forces ultimately ensured the survival of the Republic, the immediate physical effect on military operations in Vietnam was negligible. Brigadier General Frederick C. Karch, Commanding General, 9th MEB had only two battalion landing teams (BLTs) under his command with supporting and reinforcing air, artillery, antiaircraft, engineer, and logistics organizations. The most significant factor, though, which restricted Marine Corps operations was the Vietnamese government's fear concerning its own sovereignty. The 9th MEB was originally restricted to a few square miles of territory in several different locations. The locations became known as Tactical Areas of Responsibility (TAORs) and the Vietnamese restricted Marine Corps operations to those areas. The mission of the 9th MEB was strictly defensive--to secure the Da Nang Airbase. And the defense, in deference to the wishes of the Vietnamese government was to extend no farther than the tight limits of the assigned TAORs.(3)

Neither the national nor the local Vietnamese government was able to predict the reaction of the populace to the Marine Corps--a foreign ground combat force. The unpredictability of the civilian reaction forced a gradualist approach on the GVN. The government isolated the Marines first within the perimeter of the uninhabited airbase and then to Hills 327 and 268 (heights in meters) immediately west of the base. The hills were also practically uninhabited.(4) The TAOR, which was physically divided into two parts, had an area of only eight square miles and included the sparse population of 1,930 civilians. The Marines outnumbered the civilian population within the TAOR and remained sealed off from the rest of the people. The Marines were separated psychologically from the people by the limited defensive mission and physically by wire obstacles and cleared fields of fire.(5)

The Beginnings of Marine Corps Civic Action

Marine Corps civic action during the period 8 March-20 April 1965 was sharply restricted by the Marine Corps isolation. Civic action consisted primarily of spontaneous acts of commiseration and charity by individual Marines towards a small population whose pacification was largely extraneous to the tightly circumscribed Marine Corps mission. The concept of purposeful Marine Corps civic action to support the GVN was absent during March 1965 and most of April. The 9th MEB was

keenly aware of the importance of popularizing the presence of Marines in Vietnam but with the continuing buildup and the emphasis on static positions in the absence of room for maneuver, neither the need nor the opportunity for civic action arose. Marine Corps efforts to popularize the presence of the 9th MEB could be characterized by the words limited people-to-people contact. No full-time Civil Affairs Officers existed at battalion or squadron level. And the Civil Affairs Officers at brigade level, and after 15 April 1965, with the 3d Marines, were simply not in the mainstream of concern in March and April 1965. The Marine Corps was busy getting ashore. And during the first two months, "ashore" was a humble area divorced from the great struggle for the loyalty of the Vietnamese people. (6)

The Vietnamese government was only gradually relieved of its nervousness about the presence of Marines. By early April 1965, however, the general indifference of the civilian population to the Marine Corps landing was apparent. The care taken by the Marine Corps to reduce friction between Marines and Vietnamese civilians made a favorable impression which was reinforced by the embryonic but positive and sincere efforts of the individual Marine to relieve misery wherever it was present. At the same time it became apparent that the Marine Corps needed to establish control over areas well beyond the fixed perimeter of the Da Nang Airbase to ensure its security. On 20 April 1965, after discussion and coordination between the CG, 9th MEB and the CG, ICTZ, the Marine Corps began to patrol forward in its TAORs beyond the wire and other obstacles of the static positions. Soldiers and civil affairs personnel of the ARVN accompanied the Marine patrols which were intended to make the local villagers aware of the presence of the Marine Corps and to allow the Marines to meet the local governing officials on a face-to-face basis. (7)

On 10 April 1965, several days prior to the time that units of the 9th MEB began to patrol forward in their TAORs, the Da Nang area of responsibility was expanded from eight to twelve square miles. Although the total area of responsibility remained small, the population jumped several hundred percent to the substantial total of 11,441 civilians. On the same day, the number of BLTs in Vietnam rose from two to three with the arrival of BLT 2/3, i.e., the BLT formed around the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines. One day later, elements of that organization were lifted by helicopter to the village of Hue/Phu Bai (see Map Number Three) with the mission of temporarily securing the airfield and the radio station located there. On 14-15 April 1965, the strength of the 9th MEB rose to a total of four BLTs with the arrival of BLT 3/4. This combat organization was committed in the Hue/Bhu Bai area and relieved the units which had temporarily secured the air and radio installations. The two additional battalions accentuated the lack of room for maneuver for the Marine Corps units within the enlarged but

still sharply restricted TAORs.(8)

Summary: March-April 1965

The Marine Corps carried out a combat mission in March 1965 which entailed an extensive buildup of strength and the simultaneous orientation to the realities of war in Vietnam. The initial problems of building from a void in ground combat strength at the water's (and airfield's) edge to strength capable of carrying out the assigned mission were those simply of getting ashore. Although the landing was unopposed and several hundred Marines had been ashore in various missions prior to the landing of the 9th MEB, the task demanded the full concentration of the Headquarters, 9th MEB, and the maneuver and supporting elements.

The strictly circumscribed mission of the Marine Corps and the low population of the operating areas limited contact with the civilian population. Both the mission and the operating areas permitted by the sovereign Republic of Vietnam reflected profound fear of U. S. military strength. The Republic had no way of gauging the reaction of a restless, war-weary peasantry to the intrusion of an obviously foreign, e.g., caucasian/negro, ground force. The ARVN, which had become partly separated from the population through its emphasis on operations against the main force of the Viet Cong, did not offer a comforting precedent for the arrival of a new military force in the country. The Republican government and the ARVN expected and were prepared for difficulty and reduced the contact between Marines and the peasantry to a minimum. The Marine Corps preoccupation with the buildup of strength and the Vietnamese concern over protecting the sovereignty of the Republic permitted only a moderate amount of spontaneous civic action and practically no well-organized activity in March-April 1965.

The Expanding Marine Corps Effort: Formation of the III Marine Amphibious Force

Late in April 1965 the decision was made to establish a new TAOR for the Marine Corps which would include the area eventually known as Chu Lai, a sandy uncultivated waste near An Tan, Quang Tin Province, lying approximately 75 miles southeast of Da Nang by road. The Marine Corps chose this uninhabited area for use as an airbase for Marine Corps fighter and attack aircraft and a center for the support of the GVN in the nearby heavily populated coastal areas of Northern Quang Ngai Province and Central Quang Tin.(9) To secure the Chu Lai area the Marine Corps had to commit a force substantial enough to move the center of gravity of the 3d Marine Division from Okinawa to the Republic of Vietnam. The results of the commitment of the 3d Marine Expeditionary Brigade at Chu Lai on 7 May 1965 were

far-reaching. The place of the division commander was in Vietnam with the bulk of his division. The Marine Corps concept of the air-ground team also required the presence of an equivalent air element. In a swift rush of events, the HQ, III MEF a command element senior enough to control a division-wing organization, established itself ashore at Da Nang at 0800, 6 May 1965. Almost simultaneously the Headquarters, 3d Marine Division (-) (Reinforced) (Forward) arrived and was activated at Da Nang. One day later on 7 May 1965, III Marine Expeditionary Force was redesignated III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) for political reasons. The word, expeditionary, smacked too much of the gunboat imperialism of a bygone era and had been used by the French forces which entered Vietnam at the end of the Second World War. Less than one week later the Headquarters, 1st Marine Air Wing (MAW) (Advanced) was established at the Da Nang Airbase. On 12 May 1965, when the Chu Lai amphibious operation terminated, command of all of the Marine Corps landing force elements in Vietnam passed to the CG, III MAF.(10)

The massive buildup of early May shifted the Marine Corps mission away from a tightly circumscribed defensive one. By 12 May 1965, seven battalions stood in Vietnam and were deployed within three TAORs totalling the modest area of 15 square miles. The battalions were more than capable of defending their assigned areas. Therein lay the inefficiency of the situation. They had the mobility, firepower, and numbers to keep the Viet Cong at far greater distances than those involved in holding 15 square miles. Additionally, the presence of the Viet Cong infrastructure became familiar to Marines as an enemy closer and more real than the main force of the Viet Cong. III MAF required room for offensive maneuver forward of the tight perimeters which had been established around the airfields and radio installations. And the GVN needed the security that the Marine Corps combat units could provide in support of rural construction and the offensive strength which could be used against the main force of the Viet Cong. The situation in which more than 14,000 Marines were defending several square miles containing approximately 14,000 civilians was untenable in the light of the desperate situation of the GVN.

In May 1965, a civic action effort began which was advanced beyond the stage of spontaneous people-to-people contact between Marines and Vietnamese civilians. Between 4-10 May 1965, BLT 2/3, which was assigned the TAOR northwest of Da Nang, cleared the village of Le My (also known as Hoa Loc) (see Map Number One) For the following reason, however, the experience was a frustrating one which served to introduce more advanced Marine Corps civic action into Vietnam. Lieutenant Colonel David A. Clement, Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, who had cooperated closely with the Chief of the Hoa Vang District during the clearing operation, realized almost instinctively that his strenuous efforts would be negated unless continuing pressure was brought to bear on the remnants of the Viet Cong

infrastructure in Le My village. Accordingly, the first complete pacification in which Marines were involved began in earnest on 11 May 1965 after the elimination of most of the Viet Cong from Le My. (11)

Farther south in the TAOR located at Chu Lai, the arrival of a third BLT on 12 May 1965 gave the Marine Corps a chance to conduct offensive action in support of Vietnamese rural construction. The airfield which was being constructed at Chu Lai from Airfield Matting, AM2 (aluminum alloy material), was located only a few hundred meters from the South China Sea. The perimeter was unusually easy to defend with one side being close to the sea, the immediate area uninhabited, and the general area sparsely peopled. As a result, the three BLTs were more than adequate for the defense and were able to conduct offensive operations both along the coast and inland.

Effective 25 May 1965, the GVN authorized the first major expansion of the Marine Corps TAORs. Until that date the Marine Corps landing force had been literally bulging out of its operating areas especially in the Chu Lai area. The Da Nang TAOR was expanded to the impressive total of 156 square miles and included a civilian population of 46,146 persons. The GVN also expanded the Chu Lai and the Hue/Phu Bai TAORs, and the Marine Corps became responsible for the protection of a total area of 239 square miles with a civilian population of approximately 77,000 persons. (12) In the Chu Lai area, favorable opportunities arose for civic action, and the 4th Regimental Landing Team (redesignated on 12 May 1965 as 4th Marines) produced results on the basis of local initiative. The 4th Marines directed its efforts towards building civilian confidence in the Marine Corps and acquiring intelligence about the Viet Cong.

Advancing Concepts of Civic Action: May-June 1965

Early in May 1965, the Civil Affairs Officer of III MAF, Major Charles J Keever, had arrived in Vietnam and had proposed a concept for civic action. Additionally, he began to write instructions for the reporting of civic action activities. But coordination with the U. S. and Vietnamese government agencies and the U S private relief organizations in order to formulate an effective civic action program was a time consuming task. The Civil Affairs Officer made staff visits in the Chu Lai and Da Nang areas to get information about the Vietnamese people and the details of their home life as well as the civic action activities of the Marine Corps combat and supporting units. HQ, III MAF greatly expanded its functions of coordination within its TAORs as a result of the Letter of Instruction of 29 May 1965 from the Commander, U. S. Military Advisory Command, Vietnam (ComUSMACV), appointing the CG, III MAF, as Special Area Coordinator for the Da Nang area. The CG,

III MAF, became responsible for liaison with local military and civilian leaders concerning matters involving U. S. military personnel. (13) By the end of May, the Civil Affairs Officer of III MAF was functioning within a large area permeated by the clandestine Viet Cong political apparatus. The Marine Corps began to rub shoulders with the Viet Cong infrastructure and the friction which was created helped to impress on HQ, III MAF, the importance of Vietnamese rural construction. The CG, III MAF, and his Civil Affairs Officer (CAO) began to realize the importance of directing Marine Corps civic action towards support of the governing officials of the Republic and the Vietnamese program of rural construction.

On 7 June 1965, HQ, III MAF, now under the leadership of Major General Lewis W. Walt, promulgated concepts of civic action for the Republic of Vietnam. (14) General Walt had arrived in Vietnam on 30 May 1965 and had assumed command of III MAF on 4 June 1965 from Major General William R. Collins. As events would show, he was extraordinarily interested in supporting Vietnamese plans for rural construction. The instructions issued under his authority proved unusually durable. HQ, III MAF, correctly identified the government's rural problems and began to establish the mission and the concept of operations to assist the Republic in overcoming the attack on its authority. (15) The order of III MAF left little doubt that civic action in support of the hard pressed local government and not "civil affairs/military government operations as that term is normally understood" would be the basis of Marine Corps action. (16) The spirit came out strongly in the following part of the concept of operations:

Civic action will be conducted as needed and/or requested in a guest-host relationship with the government of the Republic of Vietnam. Reliance will be placed upon agreement and cooperation for the achievement of mutually advantageous objectives of the two governments. (17)

Civic Action in Vietnam: the Picture at the End of June 1965

In June 1965, however, civic action in Vietnam at the battalion level remained in the advanced stages of a people-to-people program. The complete cycle of rural construction was being carried out only in Le My where unusually favorably circumstances had permitted the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, to occupy the village and to cooperate with the district and village governing authorities. Elsewhere in June in the ICTZ, the Vietnamese government approved a massive expansion of the Marine Corps TAORs. As a direct result, the Marine Corps began an aggressive program of counter guerrilla operations in the midst of a moderately dense civilian population. (18) As the Marine

Corps began to contact the Viet Cong infrastructure through its operation at Le My and as a result of the counter guerrilla effort, it also began to coordinate its assistance to the rural population with the numerous U. S. government agencies in ICTZ. Simultaneously, various private U. S. assistance and relief organizations both in Vietnam and in the United States began to be synchronized with Marine Corps civic action. Finally, the first attack aircraft arrived at the Chu Lai airfield on 1 June 1965 and encouraged deeper moves against the main force of the Viet Cong, further expansion of the TAORs, and more sophisticated civic action.

III MAF had established an effective program of medical support for the rural population by June 1965. Permanent programs were set up in several fixed locations as contrasted with the numerous but irregular contacts made by individual Navy medical corpsmen operating with the daylight patrols. On 15 May 1965, at Le My, the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, had begun to support a daily medical service. Corpsmen assisted local health workers there in providing medical treatment to the local people and helped to instruct the government medical trainees. The situation at Le My was ideal. The battalion was committed to the support of the Vietnamese rural construction cycle whereby the village would be returned to the control of local officials of the Republican government. Lieutenant Colonel Clement's battalion ensured the immediate physical security of the village and encouraged a self-help attitude amongst the officials and the citizens which would free the battalion as soon as possible from its support and security functions. The Marine Corps treated approximately 3,000 villagers each week at Le My; and, often the people required immediate evacuation to hospital facilities.(19)

Late in June and farther north in the Hue/Phu Bai TAOR, Lieutenant Colonel William W. Taylor's 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, established a weekly medical service in the villages of Thuy Phu, Thuy Long, and Thuy Than.(20) Civic action had developed slowly at Hue/Phu Bai because of the military and the demographic situations. There the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines was in an unusual tactical position. It was a single battalion defending an airfield and radio station isolated from the two large Marine Corps TAORs at Da Nang and Chu Lai. The defensive situation at Hue/Phu Bai was inherently more difficult than in the other Marine Corps areas; for example, no part of the TAOR at Hue/Phu Bai lay on the sea. The isolated and land-bound position of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines was responsible for the battalion's emphasis on tactics and eventually the hard type of civic action, i.e., civic action which stressed security measures. The battalion's TAOR was also sparsely populated with most of the area hilly, covered with clear forest, and totally uninhabited.

During the first half of June 1965, the battalion had concentrated on visits by medical teams supported by powerful security detachments. The visits were important because of their immediate impact and their effectiveness in meeting a basic need of the peasantry. But the visits were irregular and had the nature of a warm, humanitarian gift rather than impersonal direct support for the local Vietnamese government. The battalion described its medical civic action as people-to-people medical assistance visits; the description illustrated the almost private nature of civic action as late as mid-June 1965.(21) But with the expansion of the TAOR on 15 June 1965 from 38 to 61 square miles, the civilian population increased from 8,000 to roughly 18,000 persons.(22) This latest expansion combined with the precise yet flexible instructions from HQ, III MAF helped to transform civic action into a regular program which would support the expanding counter guerrilla operations in the area and ultimately buttress Vietnamese rural construction.

In the Chu Lai area, two of the infantry battalions had established regular medical service by June 1965 while the 3d Battalion, 12th Marines, a more centrally located artillery battalion, provided a daily dispensary service in conjunction with Company B, 3d Medical Battalion. The Marine Corps TAOR around Chu Lai was expanded during June, and by the latter half of the month the Vietnamese government had given the Marine Corps the authority to conduct unilateral offensive operations within its limits. The Marine Corps began to place greater emphasis on patrolling and ambushing far out in the TAOR. The Marines developed a coherent system of defensive positions to stop enemy attacks which was known as the Forward Edge of the Battle Area (FEBA). The Marine Corps intended to protect the Chu Lai airfield by vigorous offensive action far from the field and anchored on the fixed positions of the FEBA. The rise in patrolling activity increased the necessity for a regular civic action program coordinated with the local Vietnamese officials. The 2d Battalion, 4th Marines began to operate a medical aid station at Ky Lien village every other day. Corpsmen provided medical treatment for 100-200 people during each visit of the medical team. The 3d Battalion, 3d Marines also provided medical assistance on a regular basis in its area of responsibility in the southern part of the Chu Lai TAOR in the District of Binh Son, Quang Ngai Province.(23) Between 25 May-15 June 1965, the TAOR was expanded from 55 to 101 square miles and the population increased from 23,000 to almost 56,000 civilians.(24) These changes in area and population initially interfered with the development and the continuity of Marine Corps civic action by focusing Marine Corps energies on the construction of new defensive positions as the FEBA expanded inland from the South China Sea.

The rough edges of Marine Corps civic action were still apparent in June 1965. First Lieutenant William F. B. Francis,

who had become Civil Affairs Officer of the 3d Marines on 15 April 1965, presented a picture of civic action which substantiated the preoccupation of the infantry battalions with tactical missions and the association of civic action with superficial people-to-people contact. Francis also made it clear that the other U. S. military units in Vietnam in April 1965 had little to offer in the way of useful precedents. He met a problem of obtaining basic supplies, e.g., medicine, food, and clothing, for a civic action program and was forced to obtain them largely as gifts. Clear, legitimate channels of requisitioning and funding for civic action supplies took time to establish. Coordination between the Marine Corps and the various relief agencies including the U. S. Agency for International Development and the Catholic Relief Society (USAID and CRS) was slow in developing. Only a gratuitous trickle of supplies for civic action was received until late June 1965. (25)

Lieutenant Francis believed that the medical program in 1965 was the most important one in civic action. He emphasized the necessity for continuity in medical civic action and stated that "to treat /the people/ once and let them go did absolutely nothing...They felt better for a little while, but really it was ineffective unless continued treatment were available." (26) Francis was critical of "pill patrols" amongst the Special Forces, or small patrols accompanied by medical personnel who would provide simple first aid. He emphasized that the irregular approach represented by the small combat or reconnaissance patrol "was almost a gimmick to win the favor and attention of the people /in order/ to gain their confidence." (27) A medical facility operating at a fixed well-known location in conjunction with a training program for Vietnamese health workers was the best approach. Francis' basic opinion of the civil affairs effort in Vietnam during the early summer of 1965 was that the action "was enthusiastic but it was disorganized...just sort of groping and feeling with inadequate supplies and personnel." (28)

Captain Lionel V. Silva, the Civil Affairs Officer of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines painted a somewhat different picture. His battalion engaged in an operation in the Le My area designed to clear the Viet Cong from the village complex and to secure the area for the GVN. The battalion commander and Captain Silva soon learned that the temporary clearing of the Viet Cong was relatively simple; for example, after one week of shooting there were no more rifle-carrying Viet Cong within the village complex. But the card-carrying Viet Cong of the infrastructure remained and the population had not changed from its apathetic attitude towards the government. Lieutenant Colonel Clement, the battalion commander, thereupon decided to make his stand in the village itself. Clement was fortunate in the location of his TAOR. The larger Da Nang TAOR was expanded several times during the pacification campaign, but the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines



Toys for little girls: two small waifs receive presents furnished through the U. S. Navy's Project Handclasp. 1stLt Brendan E. Cavanaugh makes the presentation in the village of Noa Thanh near Da Nang on 27 August 1965. (USMC A185025)



Candy was one of the basic commodities distributed during the early spontaneous days of civic action. In this picture taken on 10 September 1965 LtCol William F. Donahue, CO, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines passes out candy to the children of Cam Ne (VI). This hamlet was located in the middle of a hard-core VC area only four miles southwest of Da Nang. (USMC A185697)

was able to secure its area of responsibility without a radical shift of its tactical positions. Continuity proved to be the keynote of success. The battalion established a dispensary which proved to be permanent because Vietnamese health workers were trained to staff it and were kept alive by Marine Corps rifles. Finally, and probably most important, local security forces were reestablished and were aggressively supported by the people.(29) Captain Silva, who was running the civic action program, showed insight into the problems of successful civic action when he said "it was obvious that we would/ not always be in the Le My area. Even though we occupied it today, we knew that eventually our operations would necessitate our moving out."(30) Lieutenant Colonel Clement emphasized the same point. To him the essence of success was to create an administration supported by the people and capable of leading, treating, feeding, and protecting them by the time that the battalion was forced to leave.

But notwithstanding the individual success at Le My, the general picture of Marine Corps civic action was less a calculated effort at supporting local government and more an enthusiastic, irregular effort at medical assistance, support for local orphanages, efforts to improve communications, and various other activities. Lieutenant Francis painted the most accurate, general picture of civic action for the period March-May 1965. In June, however, HQ, III MAF provided central direction for the civic action effort in the form of concepts of civic action and the general picture began to change.

A Stormy Month and an Expanding Mission for III MAF

The transition from June to July 1965 in Vietnam was sharp and stormy for the Marine Corps. Early in the morning on 1 July 1965, Viet Cong forces attacked the southern end of the Da Nang Airbase between two fortified static posts. The attack was a raid conducted by small forces supported by 81mm mortars and probably one 57mm recoilless rifle. The Viet Cong in a stealthy, time-consuming operation cut their way through the wire obstacles at the southeast end of the runway. The cutting probably took more than 1-1/2 hours at the end of which time a coordinated attack took place. The mortars and the recoilless rifle fired for a period of four or five minutes. The fire was probably intended to inflict as much damage as possible while simultaneously suppressing resistance in the immediate area of the penetration so that Viet Cong with demolition charges could destroy the closest aircraft. The Viet Cong inflicted moderate damage during the attack and quickly retired after the demolitions thrust. Empty 81mm mortar cases found approximately 300 meters east of the runway testified to the boldness of the raid and the ineffectiveness of the boundaries of the Marine Corps TAOR. The Viet Cong had launched their raid from an area which was not part of the Marine Corps TAOR.(31)

HQ, III MAF reacted swiftly to the anomalies in the defensive situation to the east and south of the airbase. To ensure the defense of the airbase, the infantry battalion manning the defensive perimeter needed room to patrol, ambush, and maneuver several thousand meters forward of the perimeter. On 5 July 1965, CG, III MAF requested from CG, I Corps permission to enlarge the Marine Corps TAOR by moving eight kilometers into the densely populated rice growing region south of Da Nang to ensure adequate depth for the defense of the airbase. CG, I Corps sanctioned the expansion of the Marine Corps into the critical area south of Da Nang on 13 July 1965. Two days later, on 15 July 1965, CG, III MAF assumed responsibility for the area. The number of civilians under the control of the Marine Corps in the Da Nang **area** now totalled approximately 126,000 persons.(32) The raid on the Da Nang Airbase and its aftermath had deep repercussions in Marine Corps civic action. After 15 July 1965, III MAF came into direct competition with the Viet Cong for the loyalties and the support of the Vietnamese peasantry in a critical rice growing region immediately adjacent to a major city.

Nevertheless, Marine Corps civic action continued to have a people-to-people, or charitable ring to it. HQ, III MAF declared the objectives of Marine Corps civic action to be to gain support for the GVN and to win the confidence and cooperation of the Vietnamese civilians in the TAORS.(33) The Marine Corps, however, was not aware of the depth of Vietnamese efforts to win the struggle politically by means of rural construction. The Vietnamese government had placed heavy restrictions on the size of the Marine Corps TAORs and the missions to be performed inside of them because it doubted the ability of the Marine Corps to operate effectively in any of the densely populated areas of I Corps Tactical Zone. These restrictions and doubts were important reasons for the initial Marine Corps lack of concentration on the support of rural construction. For example, prior to 15 July 1965, the boundary of the Da Nang TAOR and the eastern defensive wire of the airbase coincided. The Marines were literally fenced in and physically cut off from the population to the east and south of the airbase. And they carried out little civic action on the uninhabited runway.

From March-July 1965, medical treatment was the most important civic action project of the Marine Corps. Teams of Marines, Navy medical corpsmen, and interpreters visited hamlets throughout the TAORs in a more advanced program than the original spontaneous efforts by combat patrols. In July alone approximately 29,000 civilians were treated for various minor ailments and a substantial number of people were evacuated for treatment of major afflictions. The number of treatments was impressive, but the real importance would be difficult to gauge. Medical teams made numerous treatments in unsecured areas where an appreciative but terrorized populace was simply unable to respond in any way beneficial to the Vietnamese cause. Probably the most important effort by July 1965 had been made at the

permanent dispensary at Le My which operated on a daily schedule. The dispensary attracted a large number of Vietnamese peasants from miles around the village. The provision of regular service at central locations pointed the way to increased numbers of treatments for Vietnamese peasants and greater numbers of intelligence contacts for the Marine Corps. Probably most important though, regular treatment at fixed locations enabled the Marine Corps to train Vietnamese personnel to assist and eventually run the health centers which the people had come to appreciate. Short-term, high-impact medical visits at irregular times and in varying locations continued to be made effectively after July 1965.(34) But after that month a gradual shift began towards more direct support of the Vietnamese government in the form of regular service and the training of Vietnamese rural health workers.

Other civic action programs ranked below medical assistance in both general importance and immediate impact in the period March-July 1965. But some of the other programs were unusually simple and effective. A thing so humble in the United States as soap highlighted an important reality of disease and infection in Vietnam. Approximately 75 percent of the ailments treated by the medical teams were skin infections caused largely by the lack of knowledge of basic hygiene among mothers and persons who were responsible for the care of small children. The Vietnamese peasant quickly accepted soap as a beneficial addition to his existence. The transfer of soap between Marines and Vietnamese civilians became an important part of civic action from the lowest through the highest levels in III MAF. And the CG, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (FMFPac) supported a campaign in the United States to collect soap for civic action.(35)

Units of III MAF distributed food and clothing in large quantities in South Vietnam. Sources of these basic commodities varied enormously and helped to direct Marine Corps attention to the problems of coordination among the numerous agencies and organizations competing to assist the rural population. Unused military rations, e.g., types C, B, and A, were passed on to especially needy Vietnamese individuals and families by Marine Corps units. In contrast with this spontaneous activity, III MAF received substantial quantities of wheat from the Catholic Relief Services, a powerful U. S. private relief organization which donated over 6,000 pounds of bulgur (a type of parched, crushed wheat) and delivered it to units of III MAF in Vietnam.(36) Clothing was a critical need for the Vietnamese people also, especially among the younger children. Parents and elders were often well-clothed because of their productive functions in a primitive rural society, but they neglected the satisfactory clothing of their younger children. The hot and humid climate of Vietnam was the reason for the physical neglect. The parents, who were certainly not apathetic towards their children, saw little reason for concern over clothing