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*LCpl William R. Brown cautiously approaches an old boat tied up to a river bank. After several years of combat in Vietnam, 1st Division Marines had learned through bitter experience that the most innocent appearing objects often concealed dangerous boobytraps.*

In July and August, the regiment removed most of its headquarters and support units from An Hoa, implementing the division's plans to evacuate Marines from that base. The 3d Battalion, which had maintained a rear command post at An Hoa to manage administrative and supply matters while its forward CP on Hill 65 directed combat operations, moved its rear CP to Hill 37 in July. The following month, the regimental headquarters, also located at An Hoa, divided into forward and rear elements. The forward command post, consisting of Colonel Judge with the intelligence and operations sections of the staff and detachments of the personnel and supply sections, relocated to Hill 37. The regimental rear, composed of the executive officer with the personnel, supply, and pacification sections of the staff, moved to Camp Reasoner\* on Division Ridge. At the same time, the headquarters battery of the regiment's direct support artillery unit, the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, joined the 5th Marines forward CP on Hill 37, while a rear element of the artillery headquarters established itself at the 11th Marines' regimental CP. Several artillery batteries and support units also left An Hoa in August, displacing to Hill 65, LZ Baldy, and the Da Nang

\*Camp Reasoner was named after 1st Lieutenant Frank S. Reasoner, Commanding Officer, Company A, 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, 3d Marine Division, who was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions on 12 July 1965 while leading a reconnaissance patrol near Da Nang.

area. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines continued to maintain its command post at An Hoa and would take charge of the base's defense until the ARVN assumed responsibility in the fall.<sup>41</sup>

The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, besides protecting its TAOR around the division command post, conducted as many as four Pacifier operations each week during the summer. The division now used the infantry-helicopter combination primarily for quick reaction to sightings of large groups of enemy and to forestall expected enemy attacks. As the division operations officer explained it:

We get indications, for instance, that the enemy is building up for an attack on Hill 55, and we have a pretty good idea of which unit it is that's going to do the attacking, and we . . . through his normal patterns know where his assembly areas and attack positions will be, or we have a pretty good idea, so what we'll do is put the Pacifier in there all the way up to a company size . . . and they will . . . maybe not get many kills, but we find it highly effective in preempting the enemy actions.<sup>42</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Bernard E. Trainor, then battalion commander of 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, later explained that he modified use of Pacifier operations during this period to minimize the casualties taken from mines and boobytraps. "Nobody pursued. There was only pursuit by fire," he said. "Each of the units would have a different colored (cloth) patch (yellow, white, red) on the top of its helmets . . . I would usual-

ly land two units (platoons) and we'd keep one airborne. . . ." When contact was made, the VC would usually withdraw, often trying to draw Marines into heavily mined areas. Trainor's battalion would not follow on foot.

"The unit that made contact immediately pursued by fire and the unit that I had airborne we would put in to do the pursuit by air . . . . So the guys on the ground never had to do any humping which would put them into the minefields." The colored patches on helmets facilitated control from the air. "I'd be able to look down and see the color of the helmet and be able to talk . . . red, yellow, blue," said Trainor, "and that's the way we would command and control the thing. And it was quite effective." The new procedures were successful, resulting in numerous enemy killed and captured while totally avoiding friendly casualties by mines and boobytraps during Pacifier Operations.<sup>43</sup>

Pacifier companies often reinforced other Marine or South Vietnamese units to cordon and search villages. They also took part in sweeps of mountain base areas, such as Operation Pickens Forest. Their operations

produced a modest but steady accumulation of enemy casualties. In August, for example, Pacifier activities accounted for 11 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese killed, took 15 prisoners, and captured four weapons.<sup>44</sup>

The regiment's 2d and 3d Battalions carried on the pattern of operations they had established earlier in the year. The 2d Battalion emphasized two- and three-company cordons and searches of enemy hamlets, varied with tank-infantry sweeps, mostly in the Arizona Territory. In the Thuong Duc corridor, the 3d Battalion and the Vietnamese territorial forces in July abandoned and razed their defense position on Hill 25 while continuing to garrison Hills 52 and 65 overlooking Route 4. In August and September, Marines of the 3d Battalion launched an increasing number of helicopter-borne forays into Charlie Ridge and the northern Arizona. The battalions encountered only small groups of enemy during the summer, either flushed from ditches, huts, and spider holes during sweeps of villages or colliding with patrols and ambushes as the enemy sought food or tried to infiltrate populated areas. In August, a typical month of this kind of action, the regiment killed 29 NVA and VC,

*Marine tanks and infantry from the 5th Marines and Company C, 1st Tank Battalion move out through a corn field in Operation Barren Green in the My Hiep sector south of Da Nang during July 1970. This was the first named operation for the 5th Marines.*

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took nine prisoners, and captured 14 weapons at a cost of six Marines killed in action, three dead of wounds, and 60 wounded. Boobytraps caused many of the Marine casualties. In August, the battalions reported finding 50 of these devices and accidentally detonating 26.<sup>45</sup>

The 5th Marines conducted two named operations during the summer. The first, Operation Barren Green, centered on the VC-controlled My Hiep area just south of the Song Vu Gia in northern Arizona Territory. Here large fields of corn had ripened which allied intelligence expected to be harvested by enemy sympathizers and then carried by infiltrators southwestward into the mountain base camps of the *38th NVA Regiment*. In an effort to keep the enemy from obtaining this corn, on 15-16 July, a reinforced platoon from the 3d Battalion, in cooperation with RFs from Dai Loc District, protected civilians brought in from north of the river to harvest the crop. In two days, the civilians collected 30 tons of corn, but on the second day enemy sniper fire and boobytraps killed three PFs, wounded eight RFs, five civilians, and 12 Marines, and so frightened the harvesters that the operation had to be discontinued with much corn still standing in the fields.

In Operation Barren Green, from 24 to 27 July, companies from the 2d and 3d Battalions, supported by a platoon from Company C, 1st Tank Battalion, returned to the My Hiep area. In the first phase of the operation, controlled by the 2d Battalion, a cordon and sweep routed out and captured a few enemy. A reconnaissance team nearby ambushed a party of NVA from the *38th Regiment* fleeing the area with a load of corn and killed seven of them. In the second phase of the operation, the 3d Battalion took charge and oversaw the destruction of the rest of the standing corn, much of which was crushed by the tanks. When the operation ended on 27 July, the Marines had killed 18 NVA and VC, captured three prisoners and four weapons, and destroyed about 10,000 pounds of the enemy's corn.<sup>46</sup>

The 5th Marines' second named operation, Lyon Valley, was also aimed at stopping the movement of food from the northern Arizona to the base areas of the *38th Regiment*, in this case by blocking trails and destroying camps and caches in the mountains bordering the Arizona area on the southwest. On 16 August, Companies F and H of the 2d Battalion with a battalion command group were inserted by helicopter into mountain landing zones. At the same time, Company L of the 3d Battalion, under operational

control of the 2d Battalion, screened the northern face of the mountains. The 2d Battalion companies pushed northeastward from their landing zones along the trails toward the blocking company while searching for enemy troops and installations. In two small firefights, Marines of Company F killed three North Vietnamese, but the companies encountered no large enemy units. The trails the Marines followed showed signs of frequent use, and the companies found numerous bunkers, holes, and rocket launching sites. They also came upon several antiaircraft gun positions and in one they captured a 12.7mm machine gun. On 22 August, Companies F and H reached the northern foot of the mountains, where they boarded helicopters and flew back to An Hoa. Company L on the same day returned to the control of the 3d Battalion.

On 23 August, Companies F and H resumed the operation. With minimal air or artillery preparation of their landing zones, they landed by helicopter in the southwestern Arizona in an effort to surprise and trap enemy combat and transportation troops who might have hidden there while the earlier maneuvers blocked movement into the hills. The Marines captured only one North Vietnamese soldier, but they found a large quantity of food. Operation Lyon Valley ended on 24 August; results were modest. The Marines suffered no combat casualties, although 11 men were incapacitated by heat stroke and accidents. They killed five enemy and captured one, uncovered and destroyed 13 base camps, and collected two weapons, assorted other ordnance, and over three tons of food.<sup>47</sup>

#### *Combat Declines, But the Threat Continues*

For the Marines—whether combing Base Area 112 in Operation Pickens Forest or patrolling and ambushing in the Rocket Belt, the Arizona Territory, the Thuong Duc corridor, and the Que Son Valley—it had been a summer of diminishing contact with the enemy. Throughout the summer, and in fact throughout the first eight months of 1970, *Front 4* had withheld most of its main force units from battle. By early September, there were indications that *Front 4's* main force strength actually had decreased. Documents captured in Operations Pickens Forest, Lyon Valley, and Dubois Square, supported by other information developed through continuous patrolling by infantry and reconnaissance units, pointed to a consolidation and reduction of *Front 4's* military command organization and to the disbanding or departure from the province of three of the four North Vietnamese infantry regiments reported there at the beginning of the year.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A 373546  
*A Marine from the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines searches a bomb crater in the "Arizona Territory," named after the Western badlands and an enemy stronghold.*

Only the 38th Regiment, which had probed ARVN defenses at Thuong Duc in May and threatened FSB Hatchet in August, still seemed to be active.<sup>48</sup>

Month by month, the amount of local force activity had also diminished. By late August, in Quang Nam, III MAF was conducting an average of 21 percent more small-unit and company-size operations per month than it had conducted in the province in 1969, but the average number of contacts per month had fallen to only 78 percent of that in the previous year.<sup>49</sup>

South of III MAF's TAOR, the results of the summer offensive reflected a similar decline in enemy activity and aggressiveness. The 196th Infantry Brigade of the Americal Division and elements of the 2d ARVN Division in Operation Elk Canyon had secured Kham Duc airfield in the mountains of western Quang Tin on 12 July.

From then until 26 August, they defended the airstrip against enemy fire attacks and light ground probes while carrying on search and destroy activities in the surrounding hills. By the 26th, when they evacu-

ated Kham Duc and fell back toward the coast, the Army and ARVN troops had achieved only minor contact, killing 66 enemy and taking one prisoner at a cost to the Americans of five men killed in action.<sup>50</sup>

North of Quang Nam, on the other hand, where elements of the 101st Airborne and 1st ARVN Divisions advanced toward the enemy's vital A Shau Valley infiltration routes, the North Vietnamese reacted strongly. During July, they massed troops against the 101st Airborne's Fire Support Base Ripcord in the mountains west of Hue and pounded it with mortars, recoilless rifles, and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs). Artillery fire, air strikes, and ground sweeps failed to drive off the determined NVA, who appeared to be preparing for a full-scale attack. Rather than fight a bloody, politically embarrassing, and militarily unproductive battle in the highlands, the U.S. and ARVN high commands decided to evacuate the firebase. The evacuation was carried out under fire on 22-23 July, at a cost to the Americans of eight helicopters damaged and one shot down and several artillery pieces abandoned. Combat around Ripcord between 13 March and 23 July had resulted in American losses of 112 killed and 698 wounded, but the 101st Airborne Division considered the occupation of the firebase a successful operation. Air strikes and artillery fire had killed an estimated 400 of the NVA troops concentrated around the base, and by massing against it the enemy had left major cache areas unguarded elsewhere, opening the way for several productive allied sweeps.

In August and September, the story of FSB Ripcord was repeated at FSB O'Reilly, another allied firebase menacing the A Shau Valley. From 6 August to 16 September, the NVA mortared the base and massed troops around it in defiance of allied artillery and air attacks which included 19 B-52 Arc Light missions. The South Vietnamese Joint General Staff decided to abandon the base before the fall monsoon restricted supporting air operations, and by 7 October all of the defenders, elements of the 1st ARVN Regiment, had been extracted by helicopter. In two months of heavy contact around O'Reilly, the 1st ARVN claimed to have killed over 500 North Vietnamese while losing 61 of its own men.<sup>51</sup>

As the summer ended, the military situation in MR 1 remained ambiguous. In areas where the allies were strong, such as Quang Nam Province, the enemy maintained a persistent but declining level of small-scale activity and avoided major contact. However, the



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*Marines from the 1st Military Police Battalion near Da Nang search for hidden Viet Cong. LCpl Bobby Rose, in the foreground, uses a metal rod to prod a haypile for any enemy who might have sought refuge there. The Viet Cong were adept at evading pursuers.*

Communists vigorously protected their most important base areas and supply routes, especially in northern MR 1, and their pressure on FSBs Ripcord and O'Reilly indicated that they still had enough strength to exploit allied points of weakness. Further confusing the allies' anticipation of enemy actions, documents captured during the summer appeared to MACV analysts to suggest the enemy would renew emphasis on large-scale attacks as well as enjoining continued guerrilla activity.<sup>52</sup>

Late in 1970, Lieutenant General John R. Chaisson, Deputy Chief of Staff (Plans and Programs) at HQMC and a former director of MACV's Combat Operations Center, summed up the enemy's strategy and offered an explanation for its apparent contradictions:

For the past five years the enemy has employed a mixed strategy, which may be defined as the sum total of violence perpetrated against a variety of GVN and U.S. targets by a spectrum of enemy forces with distinct organizational characteristics, intended purposes and doctrines. The enemy's strategy is also "mixed" in a geographic sense, with the lev-

el (as well as the causes) of violence differing markedly from one locale to another. In a given area, he is liable within the same short time frame to strike at hamlet officials, PF outposts, ARVN forces on sweeps, and U.S. fire bases . . . . He exploited weakness or carelessness by attacking. And while his directives stressed some target categories (such as combined action platoons) more than others, his actual attacks reflected tactical opportunism.

That in different areas of the country we have seen different enemy styles and targets should not be attributed *a priori* to his deliberate choice. In various areas he may not have the wide range of strategic options we have attributed to him . . . . He may be impeded by the U.S./GVN actions, or by command-and-control problems, or by the decentralized, localized nature of the war.<sup>53</sup>

In MR 1, more than in any other region of South Vietnam, the enemy had available their entire range of military options, from large-unit offensives to guerrilla raids and terrorism. The diminishing level of actual combat did not diminish the continuing enemy threat. To be prepared to counter any possible Communist assault, MACV and XXIV Corps wanted to retain strong American forces in reserve in MR 1 until

quite late in the Keystone Robin and subsequent troop redeployments. Their effort to maintain this reserve in the face of reduced Service budgets and manpower strengths forced radical changes in the Marines' withdrawal schedule during the last weeks of the summer campaign.

*Deployment Plans Change: More Marines Stay Longer*

Since the start of redeployment planning, MACV had favored a rapid clearing out of the Marines from I Corps, both to simplify command and administrative relationships and to trade Marine aviation spaces withdrawn for Army ground troops able to remain in-country. Repeatedly, Army manpower shortages had forced slowdowns of the Marine withdrawal. Indeed, as Lieutenant General Van Ryzin later put it, "The conditions of the Army and the Marine Corps dictated the redeployment. I don't care what Abrams said or what the JCS said or what the President said, conditions were such that things . . . work[ed] themselves out."<sup>54</sup>

This pattern repeated itself early in August, causing major revisions in the timetable for Marine withdrawals and for activation of the 3d MAB. In mid-summer, plans seemed set for pulling out about 18,000 Marines before 15 October in Keystone Robin Alpha and 9,400 more by 31 December in Keystone Robin Bravo. At the beginning of the new year, the 3d MAB Headquarters would go into operation as III MAF Headquarters redeployed.

Between 1 and 4 August, however, the JCS informed General Abrams, through CincPac, that reductions in the Army's budget and manpower would leave that Service unable to maintain the troop strength in Vietnam envisioned to be retained in current redeployment plans. The JCS directed Abrams to suggest revisions of the withdrawal timetable to take this fact into account, and in particular they instructed him to consider postponement of some Marine redeployments.

Abrams replied to the Joint Chiefs on 6 August. He reaffirmed the need to keep strong forces in Military Region 1 to counter possible large-scale enemy efforts to disrupt Vietnamization and pacification. He proposed a new withdrawal plan under which 50,000 men, including the previously planned 18,000 Marines, would leave as scheduled by 15 October. A second increment, Keystone Robin Bravo, consisting of 40,000 men, all but 1,900 of them Army and the rest

Navy and Air Force, would be out by 31 December. The remaining 60,000 of the 150,000 promised by President Nixon in April would redeploy between 1 January and 1 May 1971. This contingent would include about 11,000 Marines, leaving 12,600 still in-country, who would withdraw between 1 May and 30 June. This proposal, which reduced Army strength in Vietnam more quickly while relying on the Marines to maintain allied power in MR 1, received prompt approval from the JCS. Although review and final acceptance of the plan by the Secretary of Defense and the President took several more weeks, the Services in mid-August, on the advice of the Chairman of the JCS and with the permission of the Secretary of Defense, began detailed planning on the basis of it.<sup>55</sup>

These changes left III MAF with a much lengthened withdrawal schedule. The 5th Marines, instead of redeploying almost on the heels of the 7th Marines, now would not leave until late spring of the following year, and aviation withdrawals would be slowed as well. Activation of the MAB would have to be postponed for at least another five or six months, and the MAF, division, and wing headquarters would have to remain in-country for the same length of time. General McCutcheon and his staff now confronted a problem anticipated by a III MAF staff officer back in May: "When you start . . . getting a MAF of about 27[000], you get yourself in a pretty good hum, because you have a hell of a time balancing off a force like that. It's . . . too doggone big to be a MAB, and it's an awful small MAF . . ." <sup>56</sup>

Marine commanders and staffs viewed this change in withdrawal timetables without enthusiasm. For the Marine Corps as a whole, it meant major readjustments in recruiting requirements and in personnel assignment and separation policies. For III MAF, it necessitated a hurried revision of the troop list for Keystone Robin Alpha. Throughout its redeployment planning, III MAF had tried to maintain a balance between combat and service and support elements, so that combat units remaining in-country after each withdrawal would have ample maintenance, transport, engineer, medical, and other assistance. In planning Keystone Robin Alpha, III MAF had violated this rule on the assumption that the 5th Marines, scheduled for redeployment in Keystone Robin Bravo and sure to cease combat operations soon after 15 October, could get along for a short time with less than the normal support for a regiment. Therefore, they had included extra support personnel in Robin Alpha to



make room in the smaller Robin Bravo for the 5th Marines and the units deleted in June from Alpha. Now with the 5th Marines due to remain in combat four or five months longer than expected, III MAF had to extricate additional support units from Keystone Robin Alpha. Some of the affected units already were cancelling requisitions, turning over cantonments and equipment to the Vietnamese, and preparing for September stand downs, so whatever changes in the troop list were going to be made would have to be made quickly.<sup>57</sup>

Accordingly, in mid-August, Lieutenant General McCutcheon proposed to General Abrams the deletion of a total of 2,395 Marine spaces from the Keystone Robin Alpha redeployment. Some of these spaces would be filled, for McCutcheon wanted to withdraw an additional jet squadron, VMFA-314 (which Fiscal Year 1971 budget limits on the Marines' monthly aircraft sortie rate had rendered superfluous in Vietnam); the 1st 175mm Gun Battery; a detachment of the 5th Communications Battalion; and Company C, 1st Tank Battalion, the last Marine tank unit in Vietnam. This would leave 1,550 Marine Corps Keystone Robin Alpha spaces which McCutcheon said would have to be reassigned to other Services or taken out of Marine combat units. General Abrams quickly approved these alterations and agreed to shift the 1,550 spaces to the Army. Early in September McCutcheon's plan to stop the stand-down of several of the affected units at once was also approved while awaiting final JCS acceptance of the proposed changes.<sup>58</sup>

These actions came too late to halt the departure of two important Marine support units. On 22 August, the 9th Engineer Battalion and most of the 7th Engineer Battalion began embarkation. Their departure left the 1st Marine Division, still responsible for the same TAOR it had had at the beginning of the year, with less than half of its former engineer support.<sup>59</sup>

The authorities in Washington accepted McCutcheon's proposals, and the Marines' share of the Keystone Robin Alpha redeployment finally was fixed at a little over 17,000 men. No Marines would withdraw in Keystone Robin Bravo between 15 October and 31 December, but probably in March and April of 1971 over 11,000, including the headquarters of the MAF, division, and wing, would go out in Keystone Robin Charlie. This would leave in Vietnam about 13,000 Marines of the 3d MAB, 2d CAG, and logistic rollup force whose exact date of departure remained to be set.<sup>60</sup>

The final Marine troop list for Keystone Robin Alpha, issued on 29 September, reflected the last minute changes arranged by McCutcheon. The 175mm Gun Battery had been added to the roster. Company C, 1st Tank Battalion was now scheduled to redeploy. The detachment from the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion had been reduced in size from 376 men to 245. The 1st MP Battalion had been dropped from the list, but the 3d remained under orders to leave and in fact had embarked before the final troop list was issued. The 7th and 9th Engineers had already left. Four fixed-wing squadrons—VMFAs -122 and -314, VMA(AW)-242, and VMJ-1—and one helicopter squadron, HMM-161, made up the bulk of 1st MAF's contribution. They would be accompanied out of Vietnam by Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron (H&MS) 13, Marine Airbase Squadron (MABS) 13, the housekeeping units of MAG-13 which was standing down, and detachments from other aviation support units. Over 1,100 CAP Marines were still to go. Many of the support and service troops had begun preparing for departure in mid-August, and most of the air and ground combat units were in the process of following them by the end of September.<sup>61</sup>

The abrupt changes in withdrawal timetables and troop lists forced reexamination of plans for the 3d MAB. The brigade's activation now would be delayed for almost six months, and as a result its probable time in combat in Vietnam would be very short. In mid-August, Major General Widdecke's 1st Marine Division staff proposed to General McCutcheon that the MAB headquarters be formed around 15 October, as initially planned, to control the two RLIs and the aircraft groups remaining after Keystone Robin Alpha. They argued that with Marine manpower so much reduced, a brigade could manage the remaining troops as efficiently as could the understrength MAF, division, and wing headquarters and could do it with fewer personnel, thus saving expense to the Marine Corps and allowing MAF, division, and wing staffs to redeploy on schedule. McCutcheon did not adopt this plan, preferring to retain the wing and division until after the next Marine withdrawal.<sup>62</sup>

The new redeployment schedule also made necessary a reexamination of the issue of adding a fourth infantry battalion to the MAB. Early in August, General McCutcheon, adopting the proposal of his staff, had recommended to FMFPac the exchange of the brigade's heavy artillery and tanks and possibly of a fixed-wing squadron for more infantry, and

FMFPac had given tentative approval. During September, XXIV Corps Headquarters informed McCutcheon that the MAB definitely would be responsible for defense of both the Rocket Belt and Da Nang airfield. This information confirmed the need for more infantry, but at the same time inclusion of the 175mm guns, the tanks, and an additional jet squadron in Keystone Robin Alpha took away most of the units McCutcheon had planned to trade for the extra battalion. A memorandum from Major General Widdecke, Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, to General McCutcheon reflected the division's concern over having sufficient infantry units to protect the Da Nang TAOR: "The outer perimeter of Da Nang, now the AO of the 1st Marines, is a large one and even with four battalions (including 1st Battalion, 5th Marines) still must be reinforced during high threat periods to reduce the enemy rocket capabilities. As the more dis-

tant forces are withdrawn the outer perimeter forces become even more vulnerable . . . . This situation is further aggravated by the redeployment of most of the service support units presently located in the NSDC and SSDC who provide forces for the security and defense of much of the area west of Da Nang."<sup>63</sup> At the end of September, the issue remained unsettled, with the III MAF and division staffs still hoping to secure the additional infantry.<sup>64</sup>

Although questions of MAB organization remained unresolved, the timetable for Marine withdrawal from Vietnam had taken final form. It would undergo no more radical changes. For the remaining months of 1970, III MAF could look forward to major strength reductions and repositioning of troops. The Marines would continue pacification activities, and they would renew efforts to eradicate the centers of enemy strength within their TAOR.



# Offensives and Redeployments: Imperial Lake, Catawba Falls, and Keystone Robin Alpha, July-October 1970

*Preliminaries to Imperial Lake—Operation Imperial Lake—Keystone Robin Alpha Redeployments Begin  
Operation Catawba Falls—The Regiments Realign*

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## *Preliminaries to Imperial Lake*

While battalions of the 7th Marines swept the hills west of the Thu Bon during Operation Pickens Forest, the staffs of the regiment and the 1st Marine Division kept much of their attention fixed further to the east on the Que Son Mountains. This range, which projects toward the coast from the rugged, jungle-covered mountains of Base Area 112 about 20 miles south of Da Nang, long had constituted a major military problem for the allies. From its hilltops, as Colonel Edmund G. Darning, Jr., commander of the 7th Marines, put it, "You could see all of Da Nang; you could see any airplane that took off; you had complete observation . . . of the whole terrain up to the north."<sup>1</sup> The canopied ravines and numerous caves of the range sheltered Communist headquarters, hospitals, supply dumps, and training and rest camps. Innumerable infiltration routes connecting hinterland base areas with the coastal rice fields and hamlets ran through the tortuous terrain. Here North Vietnamese regulars and main force Viet Cong often massed for operations in the lowlands, and guerrilla units gathered for training or political indoctrination. A 1st Marine Division staff officer called the Que Sons "a geographical tragedy . . . . If those mountains were not there, the war, as far as the NVA or the Viet Cong are concerned, would have been over years ago in Quang Nam Province."<sup>2</sup>

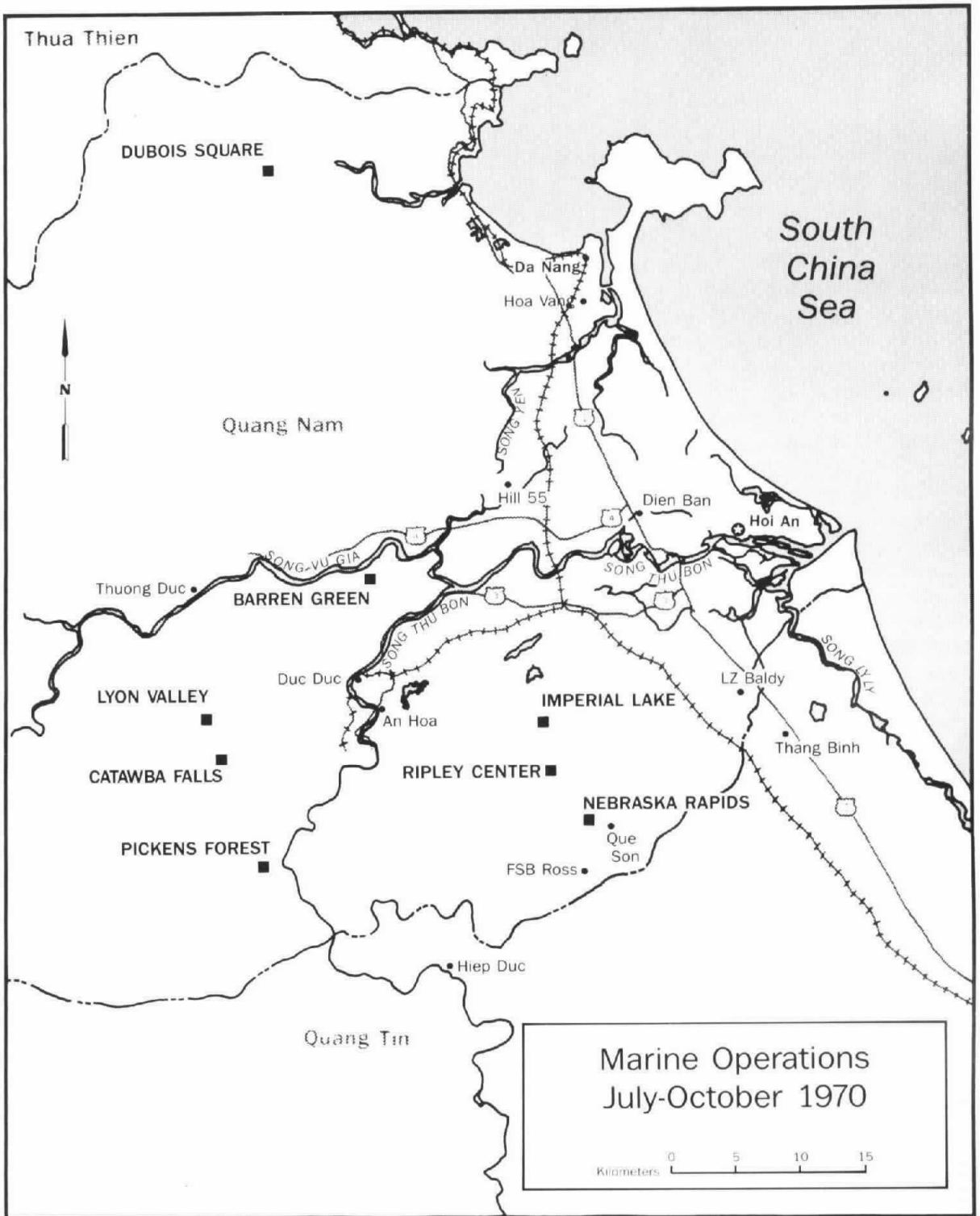
Since late spring, the 7th Marines had maintained forces in the Que Sons. The effort began with a multi-company operation by the 3d Battalion in late May and early June which resulted in numerous small contacts and discoveries of enemy camps and hospitals. From the results of this operation, Colonel Darning concluded that "it didn't take a battalion to go into the Que Son[s]."<sup>3</sup> In late June, he proposed, and Major General Widdecke approved, a plan for keeping a reinforced Marine rifle company continually in the mountains.

Thereafter, throughout July and the first part of August, company after company from the 7th Marines spent five days at a time combing the ridges and ravines. Each company went in by helicopter and was

reinforced with an additional rifle platoon, an engineer detachment, and a forward air controller. By day, the company deployed in platoon patrols and ambushes to cover a search area assigned on the basis of current intelligence and reconnaissance information, and by night it pulled into defensive positions. At the end of five days, helicopters would land a relieving company in a zone covered by the out-going unit.<sup>4</sup> The companies had many small contacts with enemy parties and uncovered a growing number of installations. In one day, 3 July, for example, Company I of the 3d Battalion killed four NVA in two encounters, lost one Marine killed, and found a large cave containing weapons, food, and medical supplies. Marine commanders believed that this continuous pressure was disrupting enemy operations by denying the NVA and VC use of their bases.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to pursuing the VC/NVA aggressively in small-unit patrols, the 7th Marines also developed deceptive measures to conceal the actual movement of units by helicopter within its area of operation. Normal practice was for the troops to board the helicopters, lash in, then sit upright next to the windows (assuming the zone was not hot) as they entered the landing zone. Recognizing that enemy observers around the Que Sons got fairly accurate troop counts and knew the precise locations of some Marine units, Colonel Darning changed tactics. In a given zone the unit might enter by helicopter with the Marines visible through the windows. Rather than deploy, the Marines would lay down on the floor of the aircraft and the aircraft would exit the zone, giving the impression that a unit had landed. In another zone, the tactic might be reversed with the unit unseen on the way in but visible when extracted. A third option was to keep the Marines concealed on the way into the zone, crawl the unit off quickly, and exit the zone, making it appear that the helicopter had gone empty both into and out of the zone. Since the enemy had observers throughout the Que Son mountain area, the intent was to confuse the reports to enemy command posts, thus immobilizing or slowing down the movement and reaction time of enemy forces.<sup>6</sup>

On 5 August, the 7th Marines changed com-



manders. Colonel Dering, his Vietnam tour ended, handed the regiment over to his relief, Colonel Robert H. Piehl. Colonel Piehl, a native of Wisconsin, had enlisted in the Marines in 1940 and two years later entered the United States Naval Academy, graduating in 1945. A Korean War veteran, he came to the 7th Marines from the 3d Marine Division on Okinawa, where he had served as Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3. Under Colonel Piehl's direction, the 7th Marines completed Operation Pickens Forest and continued and enlarged its campaign in the Que Sons.

At this point, the 1st Battalion was engaged in patrolling around LZ Baldy while the 3d Battalion kept up counterinsurgency and pacification operations in the Que Son Valley and provided companies in rotation for the continuing search of the mountains. These two battalions retained these areas of operation until they ceased combat activity in middle and late September.<sup>7</sup>

Using elements of the 1st and 3d Battalions and reinforcements from the division reserve (1st Battalion, 5th Marines) on 13 August, Colonel Piehl expanded his regiment's company-size effort in the Que Sons into a series of battalion-size operations, later grouped for reporting purposes under the codename Operation Ripley Center. Besides continuing to disrupt enemy facilities in the central and eastern Que Sons, these operations were aimed at capturing elements of *Front 4 Headquarters* which allied intelligence sources believed were hiding in the mountains. In conjunction with Ripley Center, the South Vietnamese launched Operation Duong Son 4/70 in the eastern Que Sons with two battalions of the 51st Regiment, the 101st RF Battalion, and a troop from the 17th Armored Cavalry Squadron, all under control of the 1st Armored Brigade Headquarters.<sup>8</sup>

Operation Ripley Center began on the 13th when three rifle companies—Companies I and L of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, and Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines—deployed from helicopters in two landing zones in the south-central Que Sons. Company A then was serving as the division Pacifier company, and the entire operation began under command of Lieutenant Colonel Cornelius F. ("Doc") Savage, Jr., of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, whose mobile battalion CP had been placed temporarily under the 7th Marines.

Ripley Center continued for the rest of the month. The 5th Marines' elements returned to Da Nang on the 15th, leaving the 7th Marines' Companies I, L, and

D to continue the search. As soon as Operation Pickens Forest ended on 24 August, Lieutenant Colonel Albers' 2d Battalion, 7th Marines was airlifted directly from western BA 112 to a landing zone in the Que Sons to take over the operation. Companies from this battalion swept north and east farther into the mountains.

Neither the composite force under Savage nor Albers' battalion found any trace of *Front 4 Headquarters*, but they uncovered numerous base camps and small supply caches and had brief firefights with enemy groups. In the most significant contact of the operation, on 30 August, Company F of the 2d Battalion ambushed 12 Viet Cong. The Marines killed nine and captured three, one of whom identified the group as a hamlet guerrilla unit on its way to an indoctrination meeting. The operation ended on 31 August, and the 2d Battalion moved at once into Operation Imperial Lake. In Ripley Center, the Marines had killed 25 Communists and captured eight, while losing 27 of their own men wounded, mostly from boobytraps. The caves and base camps had yielded an assortment of weapons, food, and documents.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Operation Imperial Lake*

In September, a month of new offensives and redeployments for the 1st Marine Division, the 7th Marines launched Operation Imperial Lake, the regiment's most ambitious effort of the year in the Que Sons. Planned by the 1st Marine Division and 7th Marines' staffs while Albers' 2d Battalion was still scouring the hills in Operation Ripley Center, Imperial Lake was targeted against the *Front 4 Headquarters* element which had eluded the earlier American sweeps in the Que Sons. Intelligence sources now believed this unit to be concealed somewhere northeast of Hill 845, one of the highest elevations in the central Que Sons. According to information derived from reconnaissance patrols and from the 7th Marines' spring and summer operations, the same area also might contain headquarters and combat elements of the *R20th*, *V25th*, and *D3d Infantry Battalions*; the *3d*, *T89th*, and *T90th Sapper Battalions*; and the *42d Reconnaissance Battalion*. Units of the *160th Transport Battalion* were also thought to be active in the mountains.

Expecting the enemy to try to evade any sweeping force, the Marines planned to begin Imperial Lake with several hours of artillery and air bombardment of the target area. The Marines' intent was to force the Communists to take cover in their caves and bunkers and



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A 194734  
*LCpl Lewis A. Raborn of the War Dog Platoon, 1st MP Battalion is shown with Scout Dog Nick in Operation Imperial Lake searching for enemy caches.*

stay there while helicopters deployed all four companies of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines into 12 separate landing zones, establishing a cordon around presumed enemy locations. The infantry companies would then drive the NVA/VC into the center. Directly supporting the battalion, the 4.2-inch Mortar Battery of the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines would establish a firebase on Hill 845, and the 1st Platoon, Company D, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion would set up three observation posts surrounding the operation area. Simultaneous with the start of Imperial Lake, two battalions of the 51st ARVN Regiment would begin operations in the Que Sons south and east of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.<sup>10</sup>

Just after midnight on 31 August, ten batteries\*

\*The batteries involved were: Batteries G, H, and I of 3/11; K, L, and M of 4/11; E and W (155s) of 2/11; the 3d 8-inch Howitzer Battery (-); and the 3d 175mm Gun Battery (-).

coordinated by Lieutenant Colonel Dickey's 3d Battalion, 11th Marines opened fire in one of the largest single preparatory bombardments delivered by Marine gunners in Vietnam and certainly the largest of the war for the 11th Marines. From FSBs Ross and Ryder, from LZ Baldy, from An Hoa, and from Hill 65, 105mm and 155mm howitzers, 8-inch howitzers, and 175mm guns for six hours rained shells on 53 selected targets in the Que Sons. These targets had been chosen on the basis of information from the 1st Marine Division and 7th Marines intelligence staffs, and the artillerymen carefully had prepared a fire plan for each. By 0645, when the bombardment ended, the batteries had thrown 13,488 shells—a total weight of some 740,000 pounds of metal—into the Que Sons. Two hours of fixed-wing air strikes followed in which 63 tons of ordnance were delivered.<sup>11</sup> The 7th Marines commander, Colonel Piehl, who had recommended a far shorter preparation, years later recalled its effects: "I believe only one or two enemy bodies were found, although admittedly many may have been sealed up in the numerous caves in the area."<sup>12</sup> At 0900, the first flights of CH-46s and CH-53s carrying the assault troops dropped into predesignated landing zones.<sup>13</sup>

According to plan, the 2d Battalion command post and two platoons (four 4.2-inch mortars) of Battery W, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines took position on Hill 845, codenamed LZ Vulture. South of Vulture, Company E deployed to form the southwest side of the cordon while Company H filled in to the north and Company F closed in from the east. Company G, held in reserve during the initial assault, landed two hours after the other companies to complete the ring on the southeast. During this first day of the operation, the companies made no contact with the enemy.

For the next four days, Lieutenant Colonel Albers maneuvered his Marines south, east, and north of Landing Zone Vulture, guided by information from the regimental intelligence staff. He continually tried to position his companies so they could quickly envelop any hostile force discovered and prevent it from breaking contact.<sup>14</sup>

On 5 September, in a ravine near LZ Vulture, the Marines finally trapped an enemy unit, estimated later to have been 30-50 North Vietnamese. Company E, sweeping toward the southeast along the ravine, had a man wounded while chasing a lone NVA into a cave. When a helicopter came in to evacuate the wounded

man, heavy small arms fire drove it out of the area.\* Five other evacuation attempts failed because of the volume of enemy fire. The other three Marine rifle companies worked their way over the rough ground to encircle the contact area and by 2230 they had closed the ring.

From 6-9 September, the Marines fought the encircled North Vietnamese. The enemy resisted tenaciously and skillfully from caves and behind boulders. As always in the mountains, the steepness of the ravine's banks, the many caves, and the thick trees and brush aided the defense. Repeatedly, the Marine companies advanced along the bottom of the ravine or down the sides. Each time they met accurate fire from AK-47s, SKSs, and American-made M14s. Assisted by artillery fire, helicopter gunships, and jet attack aircraft, the Marines tried to eradicate the enemy. Several of the air strikes caused secondary explosions, and Marines claimed they could hear small arms rounds going off in the fires started by bombs and napalm.

As the Marines gradually pressed the NVA back, the fighting at times came to close quarters. On the 8th, for instance, as Company G worked its way down the side of the ravine, small arms fire wounded four Marines. A corpsman went to aid one man and was himself hit. As the company, aided by gunships, fired at the enemy positions, several NVA broke cover and ran. The corpsman, who later died from loss of blood, shot one with his pistol. A Marine with a grenade launcher dispatched another enemy soldier who had bolted for a cave. Two more NVA plunged into the mouth of a cave which the Marines promptly blasted shut with a 106mm recoilless rifle.

On 9 September, with the Marine casualty toll at three dead and 12 wounded, Lieutenant Colonel Albers pulled his rifle companies back from the contested ravine while jets of the 1st MAW in nine strikes dropped over 40 tons of ordnance into it. The air attacks, in the words of the battalion's report, "rearranged the terrain considerably" and sealed up several caves, probably killing many of the NVA. At any event, when the Marines resumed their search of the ravine the following day, they encountered only sporadic

sniper fire. During the next couple of days they found several large caves. Two of them contained still-defiant NVA whom the Marines dispatched with bullets and grenades or left to die behind blocked tunnel mouths.<sup>15</sup>

By 12 September, the North Vietnamese in the ravine had been killed, sealed up in their caves, or had slipped through the encircling Marines. Among the enemy dead were a battalion commander and a political officer. Albers' troops resumed routine search and destroy activities. To reduce the risk of his men hitting boobytraps or running into prepared enemy positions, Lieutenant Colonel Albers instituted what he called the "Duck Hunter" scheme of maneuver. Instead of moving through the hills in search of the enemy, most units of the battalion under this plan established numerous day and night ambushes along known enemy trails and at assembly areas and water points and waited, like hunters stalking game, for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong to come to them. Some came. Between 14 and 30 September, Marines of the 2d Battalion killed 14 enemy.<sup>16</sup>

From LZ Vulture, the four mortars of Battery W, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines helped maintain pressure on the enemy. The Marine gunners fired an average of 170 rounds per day, mostly in evening preemptive bombardment of suspected hostile mortar positions and escape and supply routes.<sup>17</sup>

While Albers' battalion swept the central Que Sons, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth L. Robinson, Jr.'s 3d Battalion on 5 September began Operation Nebraska Rapids in the flat paddy land south of FSB Ross along Route 534 where the 1st Marine Division TAOR adjoined that of the Americal Division. In this operation, the battalion, with three of its own companies (I, K, and M), Company B of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, and several RF platoons worked in coordination with Americal Division elements. Their mission was to open long-unused Route 534 all the way from LZ Baldy to Hiep Duc, a district town on the upper Song Thu Bon about 12 miles southwest of Ross. Once the Marines and Army troops repaired and secured the road, a South Vietnamese truck convoy would travel along it with supplies for Hiep Duc.

During the four-day operation, Company K protected the Marines of the 1st Platoon, Company C, 1st Engineer Battalion as they swept a portion of the highway for mines, repaired it, and installed a temporary bridge. The other three Marine companies searched the nearby countryside for enemy soldiers and

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\*Referring to the incident years later, Colonel Piehl said the Marine was finally evacuated by helicopter: "The doctor, I believe, cut off several feet of protruding intestine and put a bandage on the wound. When the helo took off, the wounded Marine was holding the bandage with one hand, waving with the other and grinning broadly. . . ." Col Robert H. Piehl, Comments on draft ms, 23Apr83 (Vietnam Comment File).

caches, then moved into position to block for a drive from the south by Americal Division troops. They encountered only small groups of local guerrillas, who harassed the Marines with sniper fire and boobytraps. On 6 September, the ARVN truck convoy made an uneventful round trip from Baldy to Hiep Duc, and two days later the Marines' part of Operation Nebraska Rapids came to an end. In brief exchanges of fire, the Marines had killed two of the enemy, captured one carbine, and detained two Viet Cong suspects while losing one of their own men killed and 13 wounded.<sup>18</sup>

The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, now under Lieutenant Colonel Franklin A. Hart, Jr., who had taken over command from Lieutenant Colonel Robinson on 6 September, joined Operation Imperial Lake on 13 September. On that date, Company I and a battalion command group were lifted by helicopters into the Que Sons southwest of the 2d Battalion's area of operations. They entered the mountains in response to reports that enemy troops might have moved southward to escape Albers' encircling maneuvers. The 3d Battalion had minor contact with a few enemy but found no major force. On 20 September, with its own Company K, Company H of the 2d Battalion, and Company K of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, the 3d Battalion launched Operation Imperial Lake South in the Que Son foothills southeast of the 2d Battalion's

*View of LZ Vulture, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines command post in Operation Imperial Lake. Mortars of Battery W, 11th Marines can be seen in the foreground.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection



search area. Once again following up intelligence reports, the 3d Battalion was hunting for *Front 4 Headquarters* elements. Hart's Marines did not find the enemy command group, and the number of troops committed to the operation rapidly dwindled. The 5th Marines company left the mountains on 21 September and Company H of the 2d Battalion followed the next day. This left Company K of the 3d Battalion to continue searching the mountains, which it did until relieved by Company I, on the 25th. Company I operated in the mountains until the end of the month.<sup>19</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Albers' units, meanwhile, were using enemy defectors and other sources of information to make significant discoveries. On 16-17 September, a VC defector led Company F to two company-size base camps of the *91st Sapper Battalion*, and Company G walked into the abandoned camp of another unidentified NVA or VC unit. On 20 September, a squad-size unit from the 2d Battalion command group entered what was probably an abandoned headquarters complex hidden in caves in the slopes of Hill 845 almost underneath the Marine CP and fire base. Here the Marines found about a dozen connected caves, one large enough to contain a log hut, that extended 70 feet into the ground and included a kitchen cavern with running water from an underground stream. Near the headquarters, in 10 more caves, the Marines uncovered a hospital with a primitive operating room and wards radiating out from it; they captured two Viet Cong near the hospital, a nurse and a medical corpsman. The prisoners claimed the installation had been evacuated by guards, staff, and patients immediately after the artillery shelling and air strikes of 31 August. These prisoners and another, a NVA corporal, taken elsewhere proved a rich source of information on enemy units and operations in the Que Sons.<sup>20</sup>

On 18 September, as the 7th Marines prepared to stand down for redeployment, the regiment began reducing its forces in Imperial Lake. Company H of the 2d Battalion returned to Baldy on that date, only to move into the Que Sons again on the 20th in Imperial Lake South. On the 22d, Company F ceased operations in the Que Sons, and the next day Company G, the mortar battery, and the 2d Battalion command group boarded helicopters for the flight back to Baldy. Company E continued combing the Imperial Lake areas of operations for the rest of the month, while Company I of the 3d Battalion maintained a Marine presence in the southern Que Sons.<sup>21</sup>

By the end of September, in 35 contacts, the Marines of the 2d and 3d Battalions in Imperial Lake had killed 30 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. The 2d Battalion claimed about 20 more killed, most of them trapped in caves during the fight at the ravine. Intensive searches of the rugged terrain had uncovered six major Communist base camps with substantial quantities of weapons, food, and medical supplies. From captured documents and interrogation of the three prisoners, allied intelligence obtained valuable information on the enemy underground and order of battle. Most important, Marine commanders were convinced that the presence of their forces in the Que Sons was disrupting enemy operations and reducing the possibility of large-scale attacks on populated areas. Imperial Lake, therefore, would continue into the fall and winter, with the 5th Marines taking over for the redeploying 7th Marines.<sup>22</sup>

#### *Keystone Robin Alpha Redeployments Begin*

By the time the 7th Marines began Operation Imperial Lake, the redeployment of the units of III MAF scheduled for Keystone Robin Alpha was already well under way. On 9 July, the ships carrying Embarkation Unit One of the withdrawal, consisting of elements of the 7th Engineer Battalion, 3d Force Reconnaissance Company, and Force Logistic Command, sailed from Da Nang. Three other embarkation units, made up mostly of detachments of support and service troops, would soon follow. From the 1st MAW, VCMJ-1 flew from Da Nang to its new station at Iwakuni; personnel from various support and service squadrons left Vietnam by ship and plane. Beginning the process of removing Marine aviation from Chu Lai, the A-4s of VMA-311 moved north to Da Nang, where the squadron transferred from MAG-13 to MAG-11.

During August, redeployment of both ground and air units accelerated. From the 1st Marine Division, the 3d Platoon, 1st 8-inch Howitzer Battery; the bulk of the 7th and 9th Engineer Battalions; the 1st Bridge Company (-); and the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company (-) embarked for the United States. The other platoons of the 1st 8-inch Howitzer Battery; Company C, 1st Tank Battalion; and the 3d 175mm Gun Battery ceased combat operations and began preparing for September departures. The 1st MAW gave up one of its medium helicopter squadrons, HMM-161, which on 16-18 August loaded its CH-46Ds on ships for transfer to MCAS El Toro, California. On 24 August, VMFA-115 continued the evacuation of Chu Lai by



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A 422854  
*A cargo hook lifts a CH-46 helicopter from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161 on board a LSD at Tien Sha Deep Water Pier as redeployment begins.*

shifting its base of operations to Da Nang and passing under the control of MAG-11.

During September, the aircraft wing completed its Keystone Robin Alpha reductions. On 3 September, jets from MAG-13 flew Marine aviation's last combat missions from Chu Lai. MAG-13 spent the rest of the month redeploying its remaining tactical and support squadrons. The last two jet squadrons of the group, VMFAs -122 and -314, joined VMA(AW)-242 from Da Nang in Operation Key Grasp, the second major trans-Pacific flight of redeploying 1st MAW aircraft. Begun on 10 September, this long-water flight ended without serious incident 12 days later. As in the earlier operation Key Wallop, the squadrons stopped for fuel, rest, and repairs at Okinawa, Guam, Wake, Midway, and Kaneohe, Hawaii. VMFA-122 remained at Kaneohe as part of MAG-24 while the other two squadrons continued on to MCAS El Toro. MAG-13's housekeeping squadrons, H&MS-13 and MABS-13, also displaced to El Toro by ship and airlift.<sup>23</sup>

These withdrawals left the 1st MAW, now commanded by Major General Alan J. Armstrong, who had replaced Major General Thrash in July, with two



aircraft groups. Colonel Albert C. Pommerenk's MAG-11 at Da Nang had four fixed-wing squadrons, VMA-311 (A-4Es), VMFA-115 (F-4Bs), VMA(AW)-225 (A-6As), and VMO-2 (OV-10As). At Marble Mountain, MAG-16 under Colonel Lewis C. Street controlled six helicopter squadrons: HML-167 (UH-1Es); HML-367 (AH-1Gs); HMMs -262, -263, and -364 (CH-46Ds); and HMH-463(CH-53Ds). Among them, these squadrons possessed over 80 fixed-wing aircraft and 170 helicopters.<sup>24</sup>

The most complex and potentially dangerous part of the Keystone Robin Alpha redeployment began in September. This was the takeover of the 7th Marines' area of operations by the 5th Marines. All three of the division's infantry regiments would have to shift position to accomplish this. The 7th Marines would give up its bases at Ross and Baldy and extricate its companies from the Que Sons; the 5th Marines would move southeast from An Hoa and the Thuong Duc corridor; and the 1st Marines would send forces to the southwest to fill in behind the 5th Marines. Complicated enough in themselves, these rearrangements would involve the portions of the 1st Marine Division TAOR closest to enemy bases and most exposed to attack. Hence the redeployment would have to be conducted so as to avoid as far as possible any slackening of allied pressure on the NVA and VC and to deny the Communists any chance of disrupting the movement with a major offensive.

As the Marines thinned out their forces in Quang Nam, ARVN and Korean units would have to assume new TAORs or enlarge the ones they already had. During August and September, III MAF, XXIV Corps, I Corps, QDSZ, and the 2d Korean Marine Brigade negotiated who would take over what. Initially, the Marines wanted the South Vietnamese to relieve them of the defense of An Hoa, FSBs Ross and Ryder, and LZ Baldy, but the ARVN proved unwilling to enlarge its responsibilities that rapidly. Early in September, Lieutenant General Lam agreed with Lieutenant General McCutcheon that one battalion of the 51st ARVN would occupy An Hoa, but for the time being Marines would continue to defend the other major bases. Even at An Hoa, the South Vietnamese would accept responsibility for only a portion of that sprawling combat base. Marines would defend the rest of it until their engineers could remove equipment, dismantle buildings, and destroy bunkers and entrenchments.<sup>25</sup>

On 3 September, the 1st Marine Division issued a warning order to its subordinate commands detailing

the plans and timetable for the shift of regiments. The operation would begin on 5 September when the 5th Marines would place one rifle company under operational control of the 7th Marines to relieve the 7th Marines' CUPP company in the hamlets along Route I and on Route 535 between Baldy and Ross. Six days later, the 5th Marines was scheduled to turn over An Hoa to the 51st ARVN and begin moving its 2d Battalion to LZ Baldy. At this point a complex series of temporary exchanges of battalions between regiments would begin, designed to maintain continuity of operations, especially in the 7th Marines TAOR, while allowing the battalions and regimental headquarters of the 7th Marines gradually to cease combat activity. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines upon arrival at Baldy would come under the 7th Marines; at the same time the 7th Marines' 1st Battalion would be standing down and preparing to embark. On 20 September, the headquarters of the 5th Marines would begin operations at LZ Baldy, having moved there from Hill 37 and Camp Reasoner. The 5th Marines would then assume control of the 7th Marines' TAOR, with its own 2d Battalion and the 2d and 3d battalions of the 7th Marines. On the same day, the 1st Marines would take control of the 5th Marines' 3d Battalion in the Thuong Duc corridor, which now would become part of the 1st Marines' TAOR. Between 20 September and 4 October, companies of the 1st Marines would relieve the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines in its positions along the Vu Gia River, and the battalion would go south to Baldy to rejoin its parent regiment. During the same period, the regimental Headquarters Company and the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 7th Marines would end active operations and prepare to sail for the United States.<sup>26</sup>

The final 1st Marine Division order for the redeployment, issued on 8 September, modified the original timetable to allow for expected delays in completing the partial demolition and the ARVN takeover of An Hoa. The 5th Marines would now turn over formal responsibility for An Hoa to the 51st ARVN on 20 September, but most of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, would not move immediately to Baldy. The 2d Battalion would remain at An Hoa protecting the base and Liberty Bridge and Road until the last Marine engineers left An Hoa. The relief of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, on the other hand, would be speeded up so that it could reassemble at Baldy by 24 September.<sup>27</sup>

On 11 September, plans for the enlargement of South Vietnamese and Korean responsibilities reach-

ed completion. At a conference of commanders of the 1st Marine Division, Quang Da Special Zone, and the 2d Korean Marine Brigade, at which Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, the assistant division commander, represented the Marines, the Koreans agreed to take over the eastern portion of the 7th Marines' TAOR between Route 1 and the South China Sea\* and to extend the boundaries of their enclave to the north and west. Quang Da Special Zone accepted a 1st Marine Division proposal that the 51st ARVN take charge of a TAOR around An Hoa covering most of the An Hoa Basin and the Arizona Territory. The South Vietnamese refused, however, to accept a definite tactical area of responsibility around FSB Ross, claiming that the RF company they planned to station there lacked the men to cover it. Brigadier General Simmons and the QDSZ commander decided to give the RF company "a smaller, floating boundary to be determined at a later date by mutual agreement." This meant that Marine defense responsibilities at Ross would continue for some time.<sup>28</sup>

The relief of the 7th Marines began on schedule. Captain Marshall B. "Buck" Darling's Company G of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines on 5 September moved from An Hoa to LZ Baldy and the Que Son Valley. There it took the place of Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines in the Combined Unit Pacification Program, distributing its rifle squads in nine hamlets along Routes 1 and 535. The relief actually was an exchange of personnel, as about 55 percent of the Marines of Company A, those whose length of time in Vietnam did not qualify them for redeployment, transferred to Company G and remained in their assigned hamlets. Their presence eased the integration of the new rifle squads with the Popular Force platoons with which they would live and fight. Within a week of the relief, Company G and the PFs resumed the usual routine of patrols and ambushes. On 9 September, Company A joined the rest of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines at the former 9th Engineer Battalion cantonment near Da Nang, where redeploying units of the 1st Marine Division made their final preparations for embarkation.<sup>29</sup>

#### *Operation Catawba Falls*

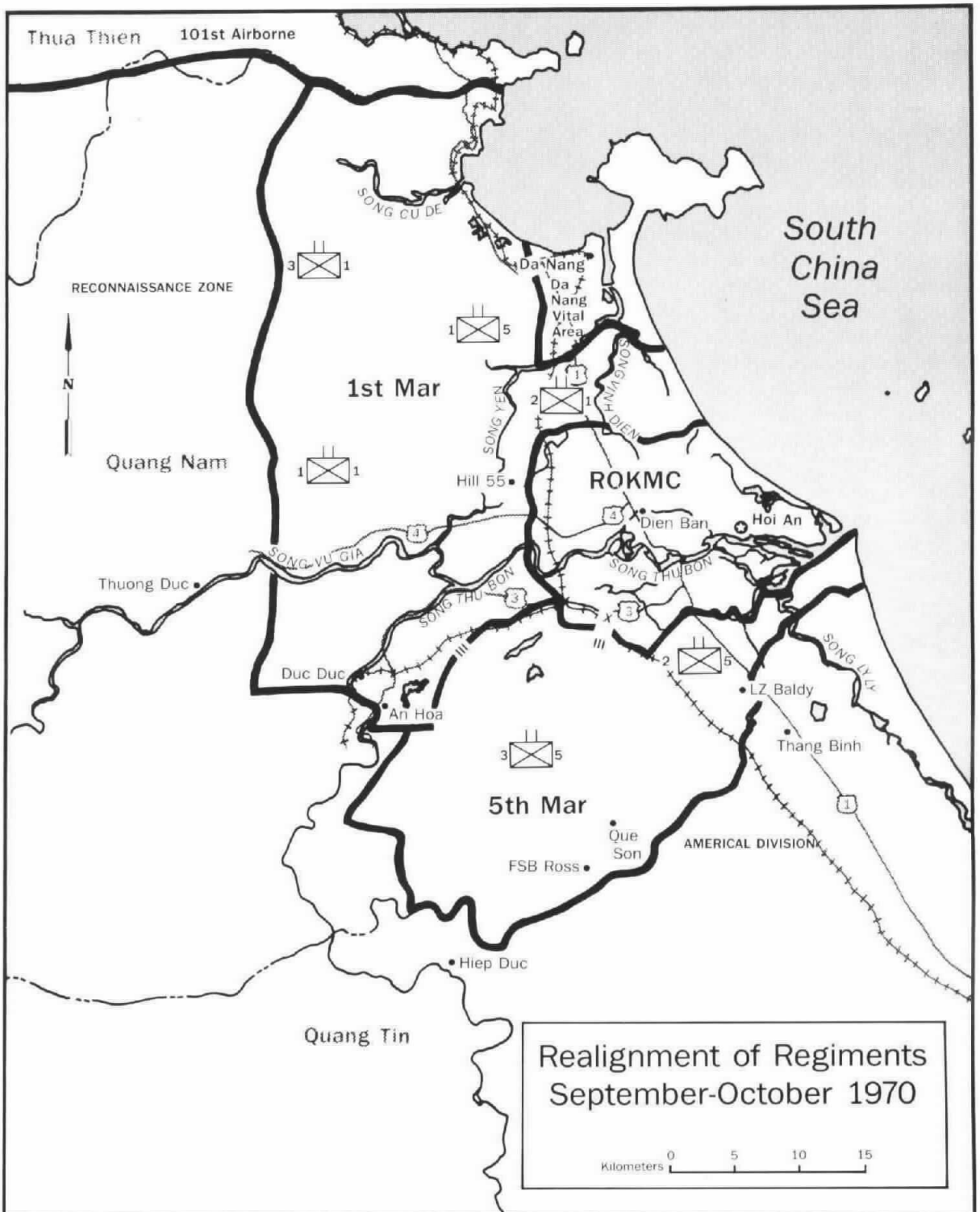
To throw the enemy off balance during the 5th Marines' move From An Hoa and the Vu Gia River Val-

ley, the 1st Marine Division carried out a large-scale diversionary artillery attack in Base Area 112. This attack had its origins early in August in plans for a conventional infantry operation. At that time, intelligence reports located the headquarters of the *38th NVA Regiment* and a number of other NVA and VC combat and support units in the mountains northwest of the area swept by the 7th Marines in Pickens Forest. In response to these reports, Colonel Clark V. Judge, commander of the 5th Marines, had his staff begin planning for a two-battalion operation in the area, to be called Operation Catawba Falls.<sup>30</sup> On 26 August, as a preliminary to launching the main operation, a command group and two 105mm howitzers of Battery D, 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, with the 3d Platoon of Company I, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines as a security force, landed from helicopters deep in Base Area 112 on Fire Support Base Dagger. The base, intended as the center of the proposed operation, covered the flat top of Ban Co, a peak 1,031 meters high which lies about 10 miles west of An Hoa. About 100 by 400 meters in area with sheer cliffs dropping away on all sides, Dagger overlooked the maze of ridges and valleys in which the enemy were believed to be concealed.<sup>31</sup>

On 16 September, the 1st Marine Division issued orders for the execution of Operation Catawba Falls, but in a form far different from that originally contemplated. The orders called for a two-phase operation. Phase I, to be conducted by the 11th Marines under direct control of the division commander, Major General Widdecke, would consist of intensive bombardment of the target area by howitzers and mortars airlifted into FSB Dagger. Quickly emplaced, these weapons would fire rapidly for a short period of time, alternating their shelling of selected targets with intensive air strikes. This phase would begin on 18 September. A second phase, to consist of a sweep of the objective area by the 5th Marines, was included in the original orders, but only as a ruse to confuse enemy intelligence. Division headquarters hoped that the Communists, battered by the shelling and bombing, would spend the crucial period of the American redeployment preparing to resist or trying to evade the threatened infantry assault rather than conducting an offensive of their own.<sup>32</sup>

Responsibility for conducting Phase I fell to Major George W. Ryhanych's 2d Battalion, 11th Marines. Ryhanych and his staff began detailed planning for the attack on 15 September. Given little time for their fire

\*This area constituted a narrow corridor bounded on the north by the Korean TAOR and on the south by that of the Americal Division.



planning, they worked long hours allocating the 10,000 rounds allowed for the attack among 160 targets furnished by intelligence. They developed a daily schedule for firing and for suspending artillery fire periodically to allow jets of the 1st MAW to make bombing runs. To carry out the plan, Ryhanych would have the two 105mm howitzers from Battery D already on Dagger, two more 105s from Battery E of his battalion, and two from Battery H of the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines.\* Ryhanych also had available six 4.2-inch mortars, four from his own battalion and two from the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, and four 155mm howitzers, two from the 2d Battalion and two from the 3d. All 16 of these artillery pieces would be emplaced on Dagger. For still heavier long-range support, Ryhanych could call on the 1st 175mm Gun Battery at An Hoa and a platoon of Army 175s from the 2d Battalion, 92d U.S. Artillery, located on Hill 65. For this operation, the Army unit was integrated into the 2d Battalion's communications and fire direction system.<sup>33</sup>

On 17 September at 0800, the first of a total of 76 helicopters—CH-53Ds of the 1st MAW and Army CH-54s—began lifting guns, crews, ammunition, and equipment from Hill 65, An Hoa, and Baldy to FSB Dagger. Detachments of engineers and artillerymen swarmed over the mountain top preparing gun positions and helicopter landing zones. They were hampered in their labors by a shortage of equipment. The one minidozer on Dagger broke down after a few hours, as did a second sent in to replace it. The single chain saw “was exceedingly dull and broke down on the second day of operation.” With hand tools and explosives, the Marines continued work throughout the day and into the night of the 17th. They finished gun positions and other installations and distributed thousands of rounds of ammunition.

By dawn on 18 September, 14 artillery pieces (two of the mortars were held in reserve) were emplaced and prepared to fire, and 10,000 rounds of ammunition lay ready for their crews' hands. Major Ryhanych, who remained on Dagger for the first two days of the operation, organized his guns and crews into a provisional composite battery commanded by his battalion operations officer, Major Robert T. Adams. Under him, Adams had three sections, one of 105mm howitzers, one of 4.2-inch mortars, and one of 155mm

howitzers, each commanded by a first lieutenant. A central fire direction center controlled all three sections.

At 0300 on the 18th, the provisional battery opened fire. For the rest of the day, howitzers and mortars methodically pounded each suspected base camp, cave, bunker complex, and troop position. At intervals, the battery ceased firing while jets delivered their strikes. It became apparent as the day went on that the original fire plan could not be carried out in the two days initially allotted for the operation without exhausting the gunners. The resulting fatigue would increase the risk of accidents and firing errors. Therefore, on the 18th Major General Widdecke ordered the operation extended through 20 September. The following day, another division order postponed the end of Phase I to 21 September. This order also declared that “Preparation for Phase II having accomplished its intended diversion mission . . . , Phase II [is] postponed indefinitely . . . . Op[eration] Catawba Falls will terminate concurrently with termination of Phase I.”<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the 19th and 20th and part of the 21st, the battery on Dagger kept up its rain of destruction on Base Area 112. Preliminary intelligence reports indicated that the enemy had been hit hard in certain of the target areas, and additional fire was directed there. The soft sand and loam which formed a shallow layer over most of the flat mountain top caused recoiling howitzers to shift position and required the mortar crews periodically to dig out and reset the base plates of their weapons, but hard work and ingenuity overcame these problems. During the second day of firing, heaps of trash and expended cartridge cases “became an almost overwhelming problem,” but the riflemen of the 3d Platoon, Company I, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, who manned the firebase perimeter throughout the operation, helped the gunners dump the trash over the side of the mountain and also furnished what Major Ryhanych called “invaluable” assistance in moving ammunition to the guns. The Marines burned the mound of trash when they left the firebase.

Operation Catawba Falls ended at noon on 21 September. The weapons and crews of the composite battery were lifted by helicopter back to their permanent positions. Between 18 and 21 September, Major Ryhanych's artillerymen had fired over 11,500 rounds, and jets of the 1st MAW had dropped 141 tons of bombs. Allied intelligence later estimated that Operation Catawba Falls had inflicted casualties on several ene-

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\*Battery H was under operational control of the 2d Battalion at this time as part of the Keystone Robin Alpha troop rearrangements.

my units and destroyed a suspected training center. Further indicating the success of the operation, no major enemy attacks or harassment marred the relief of the 7th Marines by the 5th Marines.<sup>35</sup>

### *The Regiments Realign*

Protected by the artillery fire of Catawba Falls, the regiments of the 1st Marine Division carried out their complex exchanges of position. On 18 September, companies of Lieutenant Colonel Robert P. Rose's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines began relieving units of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines on Hills 52, 65, and 37. The relieving companies came under temporary operational control of the 5th Marines' battalion, which in turn on 20 September passed under the control of the 1st Marines. During this relief, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines took command of Company M, the 1st Marines' CUPP unit, which had its squads defending hamlets along Route 4. Company M was part of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines. On the 21st, Battery A, 1st Battal-

ion, 11th Marines assigned direct support of Rose's battalion, moved its six 105mm howitzers and two 155mm howitzers from Hill 10 to Hill 65. The following day, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines assumed control of its new TAOR.

To fill in for the 1st Battalion as it extended itself to the southwest, the other battalions of the 1st Marines enlarged and rearranged their operational boundaries. The 2d Battalion surrendered a strip of the southwestern part of its TAOR between Route 1 and the coast to the Korean Marines while extending westward to take over Hill 55. The 3d Battalion sent companies southward to occupy several square miles of the old 1st Battalion TAOR including OP (Observation Post) Reno. By the end of September, as a result of these realignments, the 1st Marines' TAOR extended from the Cu De River on the north southwestward to where the Vu Gia and Thu Bon Rivers join. Near the coast, it abutted the enlarged Korean enclave, which extended well north of the Thu Bon-Ky Lam River line.

*A jeep is lowered onto the deck of the cargo ship Saint Louis (LKA 116), as the 7th Marines and Marine Aircraft Group 13 begin their redeployment from Vietnam as part of Operation Keystone Robin. The 7th Marines departed Vietnam on 1 October 1970.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373377



From the South China Sea on the east, the 1st Marines' TAOR stretched westward to Hill 52. The regiment also now had responsibility for An Hoa, having taken operational control of the elements of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines remaining there.<sup>36</sup>

The 5th Marines took the better part of a month to extricate itself from its old TAOR and move all its elements into positions around LZ Baldy and FSB Ross. Between 18 and 20 September, the regimental headquarters displaced from Hill 37 and Division Ridge to Baldy. There, on the 20th, the regimental commander, Colonel Judge, and his staff assumed control of the units operating in the 7th Marines' TAOR, which now became the 5th Marines' TAOR. These units included the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 7th Marines. Using companies from these battalions, the 5th Marines continued Operation Imperial Lake. During the rest of September, all of the 5th Marines' 3d Battalion and about half of the 2d Battalion redeployed a company or two at a time by helicopter into the 7th Marines' TAOR. This operation was complicated by frequent exchanges of control of companies between regiments and battalions. On 18 September, for example, Company K of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines turned over its positions on Hill 52 to Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. Company K then moved to Baldy where on the 20th it was placed under the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines for Operation Imperial Lake South. Two days later, it returned to the control of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines. Two other companies of the 3d Battalion were attached temporarily to the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 1st Marines to reinforce the Rocket Belt against a threatened enemy offensive; they finally rejoined their parent battalion on 28 September. Throughout the month, a forward command post and the better part of two companies of the 2d Battalion remained at An Hoa under control of the 1st Marines.<sup>37</sup>

By 30 September, the 5th Marines had all elements of its 2d and 3d Battalions but those at An Hoa, ready for operations in its new TAOR. The 3d Battalion, its CP at FSB Ross, deployed its companies in the Que Son Valley; the 2d Battalion, its headquarters at Baldy, operated in the eastern part of the regiment's sector. By 30 September, also, the artillery battalion assigned to direct support of the regiment, the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, had placed its batteries at Baldy, Ross, and Ryder, relieving the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, which had stood down for redeployment.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout these readjustments, the 1st Battalion,

5th Marines continued to perform its mission as division reserve. It protected the installations on Division Ridge and conducted Pacifier operations. On 25 September, the battalion extended its TAOR northward to the Cu De River between the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, and the sea. This placed the battalion in charge of coordinating the defense of all the units and cantonments in what had been the Northern and Southern Sector Defense Commands. Deploying one platoon into the extension of its area of operations, the battalion also kept up Pacifier operations until October.<sup>39</sup>

The 7th Marines meanwhile gradually withdrew its units from combat and prepared to leave Vietnam. The regiment's 1st Battalion had started redeploying on 6 September. On the 23d, reduced to cadre strength, the battalion left Da Nang for Camp Pendleton. The regimental headquarters and Headquarters Company ceased operations and displaced from LZ Baldy to Da Nang on 20 September, leaving the remaining two active battalions under control of the 5th Marines. Of these, the 3d Battalion began departure preparations on the 26th, followed on 2 October by the 2d Battalion.<sup>40</sup>

On 1 October, in a ceremony at the 1st Marine Division CP attended by Lieutenant General McCutcheon, Lieutenant General Sutherland of XXIV Corps, Lieutenant General Lam of I Corps, Major General Widdecke, and other high-ranking guests, III MAF officially bade farewell to the 7th Marines. Under a drizzling sky, Lieutenant General Lam bestowed Vietnamese decorations on Colonel Piehl and 18 other members of the regiment. The colors of the regiment, and its 2d and 3d Battalions, and those of the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines were paraded for the last time in Vietnam, and the 1st MAF band played "Auld Lang Syne." At 2000 that same day, the regimental command group boarded planes for the flight back to Camp Pendleton, and the Headquarters Company began loading equipment and supplies on ships at the port of Da Nang.<sup>41</sup>

The ceremony on 1 October ended a long war for the 7th Marines. The regiment had entered the conflict on 14 August 1965, landing at Chu Lai. Four days later, the 7th Marines acted as controlling headquarters for Operation Starlite, the first major American battle with main force Viet Cong, and its 1st and 3d Battalions participated in the fight. Since 1967, the regiment had operated around Da Nang, conducting large and small operations with distinction. From

spring 1969 until its departure from the country, the 7th Marines had scoured the Que Son Mountains and Valley and killed over 2,300 enemy.

It took another two weeks after the farewell ceremony for the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 7th Marines to actually leave Vietnam. In the same period, all the other remaining combat and support units scheduled for Keystone Robin Alpha also embarked for destinations in the United States and the Western Pacific. On 13 October, the amphibious cargo ship USS *Saint Louis* (LKA-116) pulled away from the dock at Da Nang carrying detachments of the 7th Marines; MAG-13; the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines; the 1st Motor Transport Battalion; and the 1st 175mm Gun Battery. Her sailing brought to an end the Marines' part of Keystone Robin Alpha. The redeployment had reduced III MAF's strength from 39,507 officers and men in July to 24,527 on 15 October.<sup>42</sup>

On 15 October, the last Marines finally moved out of An Hoa. Throughout September and into October, Marines of the 1st Engineer Battalion and helicopter support teams of Company C, 1st Shore Party Battalion had worked to dismantle the base, protected by elements of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. While the engineers rearranged the base with bulldozers, the helicopter support teams rigged the many watchtowers of An Hoa for helicopter relocation to other bases using CH-54 heavy lift helicopters and the Army's

"Flying Cranes." Division headquarters viewed the slow progress of the job with increasing anxiety, as the heavy rains of the fall monsoon had begun. Any day, flood waters might make the single road and bridge out of An Hoa impassable for the heavy artillery and engineer equipment still there.

On 11 October, work had reached the point where division headquarters could finally issue withdrawal plans. The operation, coordinated by the 1st Marines, was to emphasize secretly scheduled and heavily guarded movement of the road convoys. The infantry would hold their positions covering Liberty Road and Bridge until the last Marine vehicle rolled onto the north bank of the Thu Bon. They would then turn protection of the bridge and road over to RFs and PFs of QDSZ and board helicopters for movement to LZ Baldy. Even then, five bulldozers, their engineer crews, and a rifle company, were to be left behind for final cleanup.<sup>43</sup>

Worsening weather cancelled plans for leaving Marines at An Hoa any longer. On 15 October, early in the morning, with Typhoon Joan approaching and heavy rains and flooding threatening, the division ordered immediate removal of all Marines and equipment from the base. Evacuation of the vehicles by road and the personnel by helicopter went forward through a stormy day in what the 1st Marines' report called "an orderly and expeditious manner." By 1900, An Hoa belonged entirely to the South Vietnamese.<sup>44</sup>



# The Fall-Winter Campaign in Quang Nam, October-December 1970

*New Campaign Plans and Changes in Tactics—The Course of the Fall-Winter Campaign  
Operation Imperial Lake Continues—5th Marines in the Lowlands: Noble Canyon and Tulare Falls I and II  
1st Marines Operations, October-December 1970—The War in Quang Nam at the End of the Year*

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## *New Campaign Plans and Changes in Tactics*

As Marine strength declined, allied staffs throughout Military Region 1 drafted their fall and winter campaign plans. With fewer allied troops available and with the monsoon rains sure to restrict air support of operations deep in the mountains, Americans and South Vietnamese alike prepared to commit their regular units alongside the Regional and Popular Forces in major pacification efforts in the lowlands. At the same time, III MAF modified its operating methods to get the most out of its remaining Marine air and ground forces.

On 8 September, XXIV Corps and MR 1 issued their Combined Fall-Winter Military Campaign Plan for 1970-71. The plan, which would guide operations from September 1970 through February 1971, assigned tasks to each component of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces (RVNAF) and allied forces in the military region. Mostly restating earlier directives, the plan called for a balance between offensive actions against base areas and protection of population centers, with an increased emphasis on efforts to eliminate the Viet Cong and their administrative apparatus at the village and hamlet level. The plan directed III MAF essentially to continue what it already was doing: to protect the Rocket Belt; to cooperate with the Government of Vietnam (GVN) in pacification activities; and to continue its drive against enemy bases in the Que Son Mountains.<sup>1</sup>

The XXIV Corps/MR 1 Combined Campaign Plan conformed closely to MACV guidelines. The MACV fall and winter campaign directive, which was formally issued on 21 September, instructed all U.S. forces to concentrate on small-unit action to protect pacified and semipacified areas. Units were to undertake large-scale offensives only when intelligence sources identified and located especially important targets.<sup>2</sup>

Lieutenant General Lam soon committed all the ARVN forces in Quang Nam to support pacification. On 22 October, he launched Operation Hoang Dieu. Conceived by Lam and named after a 19th Century

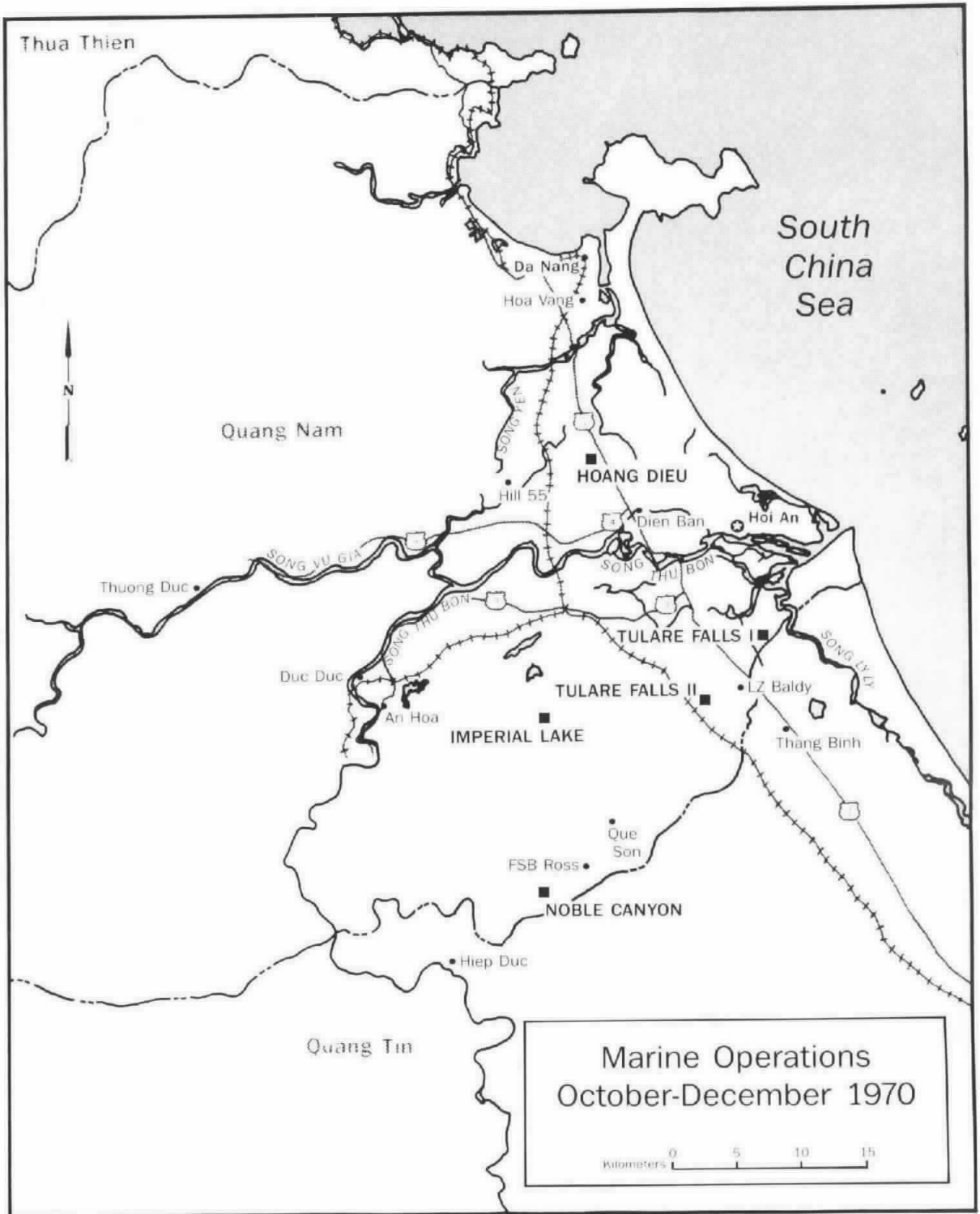
Vietnamese national hero\* who had been born in Quang Nam, the operation involved the 51st ARVN Regiment, the 1st Ranger Group, and the 2d and 3d Troops of the 17th Armored Cavalry Squadron. These Vietnamese regular units would cooperate with over 300 RF and PF platoons, the People's Self Defense Force (PSDF), and the national police in a province-wide combined offensive against Viet Cong who had infiltrated the populated areas. Lam assigned each military unit and each district in the province an area of operations to be covered by the troops under its command. In the case of the districts, which controlled the RFs and PFs, these areas usually were smaller in size than the territory encompassed within their political boundaries. Lam also arranged for III MAF to cover areas in the northern and western fringes of the populated region of Da Nang and in the Que Son Valley and for the Korean Marines to conduct saturation operations in two portions of their TAOR.

Within each command's zone of responsibility, troops would fill the countryside around the clock with small-unit patrols and ambushes. They would cooperate with police and local officials to cordon and search hamlets, concentrating on about 80 known VC-infested communities. In an attempt to restrict clandestine movement of Communist personnel and supplies, the allies would set up check points daily at a changing series of positions on major roads. They also planned to establish two combined holding and interrogation centers for persons detained by the roadblocks and by cordon and search operations, thus assuring rapid correlation and distribution of current information. Operation Hoang Dieu initially was planned to last 30 days. In fact, it continued through November and into the first days of December.<sup>3</sup>

By shifting his forces from search and destroy operations in the mountains to saturation of the populat-

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\*Hoang Dieu was born in 1828 in Phy Ky in Dien Ban District, Quang Nam. In 1882, during the French conquest of Indochina, he served as governor and minister of defense of Bac Ha City (later renamed Hanoi). When the French overran the city, Hoang Dieu hanged himself. 1st MarDiv FragO 62-70, dtd 19Oct70, in 1st MarDiv Jnl File, 20-31Oct70.



ed areas, Lieutenant General Lam was following a course of action long advocated by Lieutenant General McCutcheon and many other Marines. III MAF, therefore, welcomed Operation Hoang Dieu. Summing up the predominate opinion, Colonel Ralph F. Estey, G-3 of the 1st Marine Division, rejoiced that the South Vietnamese finally:

... were actually getting out and doing the things they're supposed to do. I'm talking about population control and resource control . . . They've saturated the lowlands and the populated areas, and got the territorial forces and . . . the 51st ARVN Regiment actually operating in the lowlands instead of out there in the bush.<sup>4</sup>

On 19 October, the 1st Marine Division committed all of its forces to support Operation Hoang Dieu. This operation and the continuation and enlargement of Imperial Lake constituted the focus of Marine activity in Quang Nam for the rest of the year. The two remaining regiments of the 1st Marine Division more or less divided these responsibilities between them. The 1st Marines, cooperating closely with the Vietnamese units involved in Hoang Dieu, concentrated on small-unit action in the Rocket Belt and the Vu Gia River Valley and conducted search and destroy operations on Charlie Ridge. The 5th Marines, reinforced by elements of the 1st Marines, the 2d ROKMC Brigade, and the Americal Division, continued and expanded Operation Imperial Lake while defending the hamlets around Baldy and in the Que Son Valley.<sup>5</sup>

Both to assist the South Vietnamese in Operation Hoang Dieu and to improve general military effectiveness, the 1st Marine Division during October and November changed its methods for employing artillery, developed new helicopter-infantry reaction forces, and revamped the deployment of its reconnaissance teams. The division staff late in the summer had begun a review of the use of artillery. They especially questioned the value of the 4,000-5,000 rounds of harassing and interdiction fire\* (H&I) delivered daily by the 11th Marines. Analyses showed that this fire, aimed at such targets as known or suspected rocket launching sites, infiltration routes, and troop concentration points, had little disruptive effect on the small-unit guerrilla operations which the enemy were now conducting. Therefore, the division began reducing the number of H&I missions. By late September, for example, the number of rounds expended for this pur-

\*Harassing and interdiction fire in late 1970 was referred to by the euphemism "fire at pre-emptive/intelligence targets."



Marine Corps Historical Collection  
*Col Clark V. Judge, commanding officer of the 5th Marines, on LZ Baldy briefs 1st Marine Division staff officers on his regiment's quick reaction operations.*

pose in the TAOR of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines had declined by 90 percent. The division instead used more ammunition in short, concentrated attacks on well-defined targets, as in the first day of Imperial Lake and in Catawba Falls.<sup>6</sup>

To avoid hitting friendly patrols in Operation Hoang Dieu, the division curtailed H&I still further. On 19 October, Major General Widdecke issued an order forbidding most artillery fire at targets within 500 meters of inhabited areas. Troops in actual contact, of course, could still call for fire against observed enemy within the 500-meter limit. In the heavily populated TAOR of the 1st Marines, this order stopped H&I fire in all but the foothills west and northwest of Da Nang. Elsewhere in Quang Nam its effects were less drastic but still evident. Ammunition expenditures by the 11th Marines dropped sharply. In October, the regiment fired 50,735 rounds in 3,420 missions. The following month, with the restriction order in effect, its batteries expended only 21,532 shells in 1,919 missions.<sup>7</sup>

The reduction had no noticeable adverse military effects. In fact, in the estimate of Marine commanders, it had positive benefits. These included reducing the chance of casualties to friendly troops and civilians from American fire and lowering the level of battle noise in the villages and hamlets. Lieutenant General McCutcheon attached special importance to the latter benefit, arguing that minimizing the sound of gunfire would give Vietnamese civilians a greater sense

of security and perhaps increase their confidence in the GVN.<sup>8\*</sup>

As it reduced the use of artillery, the division, in cooperation with the 1st MAW, increased and decentralized helicopter support of its infantry regiments. This development began with a proposal by Colonel Clark V. Judge, commander of the 5th Marines. Judge suggested to the division and the wing that his regiment's mobility and tactical flexibility would be much increased if the wing would station at LZ Baldy a helicopter force assigned exclusively to support the 5th Marines and to operate under control of the regimental commander. Both the division and the wing agreed to try out Judge's plan. Beginning on 14 October, the 1st MAW daily dispatched six CH-46Ds, four AH-1G gunships, one UH-1E command and control aircraft, and usually a CH-53 to Baldy. The wing also furnished an officer to serve as helicopter commander (airborne). These helicopters were at Colonel Judge's disposal for trooplifts, supply runs, medical evacuations, and other support missions previously conducted from Marble Mountain. In consultation with the helicopter commander from the wing, Colonel Judge and his staff could plan and execute heliborne combat operations, often in rapid response to current intelligence. With an infantry platoon stationed at Baldy, the helicopter package constituted the 5th Marines' Quick Reaction Force (QRF), which was employed for much the same purposes as the old Pacifier, but, unlike Pacifier, it was controlled by the 5th Marines rather than by the division.<sup>9</sup>

The assignment to the 5th Marines of what amounted to its own miniature helicopter squadron proved satisfactory to both air and ground Marines. According to Major General Alan J. Armstrong, the 1st MAW commander:

... The flexibility it gave the commander of the 5th Marines was marvelous. If he wanted to have a tactical operation, he could suspend the logistics runs and say, "Well, all right, we won't schedule any in the morning. We'll put all the birds on logistics in the afternoon and have ... five CH-46s doing them and doing them in a hurry, and take the larger number of 46s available in the morning and run a tactical operation." And at other times they were there with a ready platoon for immediate reaction if they got a flash

\*Not all Marines in the field agreed that H&I fires were unproductive. For example, Major John S. Grinalds, S-3 of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines during the last half of 1970, reported that intercepted enemy radio messages and other sources indicated H&I fire was taking a toll of guerrillas and VCI. Maj John S. Grinalds intvw, 8May71, pp. 115-116 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

call. And so was the helicopter commander (airborne), right there, right outside the Three Section [operations]; and they planned everything together. And this got to be a very, very successful thing . . .<sup>10</sup>

As the dedicated package system demonstrated its value, the 1st Marines on 22 November was given one UH-1E, three CH-46Ds, and three AH-1Gs, to be kept on call daily under regimental control at Marble Mountain. The 1st Marines then created its own QRF by stationing an infantry platoon at the regimental command post at Camp Perdue. As each regiment acquired its own airmobile reserve, the division discontinued its Pacifier force. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, while still acting as division reserve and protecting its TAOR of rear area installations, began sending two of its companies at a time in rotation to reinforce Operation Imperial Lake.<sup>11</sup>

The 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, which had been reduced to two letter companies and a subunit of the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company by the Keystone Bluejay and Keystone Robin Alpha redeployments, modified its operations to assure full employment of its men during the monsoon and to help the infantry regiments cover their enlarged TAORs. Early in October, the battalion began establishing platoon patrol bases within the regiments' TAORs. From each of these bases, which would be maintained in one place for several weeks and which could be reached by foot in bad weather, reconnaissance teams would fan out to patrol assigned areas. By the end of October, the battalion had conducted five patrol base operations, two on Charlie Ridge, two in the Que Sons, and one in the Cu De River Valley.\*<sup>12</sup>

The next logical step soon came: combination of the reconnaissance teams with the regimental QRFs in a new system for rapid exploitation of sudden contacts. On 18 October, the division ordered the 5th Marines to implement a new plan of operations for Imperial Lake. Under the new plan, continuous infantry patrols in the Que Sons would be supplemented by 6-10 reconnaissance teams working out of one or more patrol bases. The six-man teams, their activities closely coordinated with those of the infantry, would seek out base camps and enemy troops. If a team found a site worth intensive search or became involved in a larger fight than it could handle, the regimental commander could send in the QRF to assist in the

\*For further detail on 1st Reconnaissance Battalion operations during 1970-1971, see Chapter 17.



Marine Corps Historical Collection

*Marines of a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) from the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines scramble aboard a waiting helicopter. About 30 North Vietnamese troops have been spotted in the open from LZ Baldy. The QRF was a tactic to exploit fast-breaking intelligence.*

search or exploit the contact. With this concept, Marine commanders hoped to combine the stealth of movement of the reconnaissance team with the greater firepower of the conventional rifle platoon. The plan was expected to enable the Marines to engage and destroy small enemy groups that usually evaded infantry sweeps and to overrun base camps before the NVA or VC could strip them of valuable equipment and documents.<sup>13\*</sup>

\*The 7th Marines had considered a similar scheme of operations in August. At that time, reconnaissance teams in the Que Sons were encountering enemy units of platoon or larger size and often had to be extracted hastily under fire. Colonel Dering and his staff worked out a plan for exploiting this Communist aggressiveness against the reconnaissance teams. They wanted to insert an infantry platoon in the same helicopters that carried the reconnaissance Marines. The platoon, its arrival concealed from the Communists, could set up ambushes into which the reconnaissance teams would lead pursuers. This plan was never carried out. Col Edmund G. Dering, Jr., debriefing at FMFPac, 10Aug70, Tape 4958 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

After the QRF-reconnaissance combination proved effective in Imperial Lake and after both regiments had employed QRFs, on 8 December the division issued an order further refining the procedure. Under the revised system, the location of reconnaissance platoon patrol bases in the regiments' TAORs would be determined by the regimental commanders in consultation with the commander of the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion and would be subject to review by the division. A rifle platoon from the host infantry regiment would protect each patrol base while the reconnaissance teams operated around it. When a team made a potentially significant sighting or contact, the regimental commander was to consider deployment of the QRF. The QRF could land at the team's location and act with the team; it could land near the team and maneuver in cooperation with it; it could go in after the team was extracted; or it could be inserted in the same helicopters that took out the team in hopes of luring the enemy into an ambush. The QRF

could also operate independent of the reconnaissance teams.

The order directed both the 1st and 5th Marines to keep one rifle company on QRF duty with one platoon on 15-minute alert and the rest of the company on one-hour alert. In addition, the division reserve battalion, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, was also to establish a QRF company. Each QRF would have its own helicopter package, that for the 1st Marines based at Hill 37, and that for the 5th Marines remaining at Baldy. Helicopters for the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines QRF would stand by at Marble Mountain when ordered by the division. The division delegated full authority to the regimental commanders to conduct QRF operations within their TAORs, while the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines QRF would be controlled directly by the division and could be employed anywhere in the division's TAOR. In close cooperation with the regiments, the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion would make the final decisions on insertion and extraction of its reconnaissance teams and on the conduct of their missions.<sup>14</sup>

#### *The Course of the Fall-Winter Campaign*

The intensified clearing effort in the hamlets and the continuing sweeps in the Que Sons went forward against slackening enemy resistance. The NVA and VC

had avoided major engagements with allied troops throughout the year, but during the last four months of 1970 even low-level harassing activity declined in frequency. In September, for instance, the 1st Marine Division reported 133 enemy initiated contacts in its TAOR, mostly sniper fire and small ground probes. During October, only 84 such contacts occurred, and in November only 79 incidents were reported. As the worst of the monsoon weather ended in December, the Communists increased their effort to 165 attacks, but these continued to be small in scale and usually ineffective.

Mortar and rocket attacks followed a similar pattern. In September, the NVA and VC fired 125 mortar rounds and 19 rockets at allied installations. In October, they fired 145 mortar rounds and maintained their rate of rocket fire at 18. In November, their fire dropped off sharply, to only 25 mortar rounds and seven rockets, and during December they managed to fire only 41 mortar rounds and seven rockets.<sup>15</sup>

Much of the reduction in enemy activity resulted from unusually severe monsoon rains and floods. Throughout October, intermittent heavy rains fell in Quang Nam, and four tropical storms hit the province: Typhoon Iris on the 4th; Typhoon Joan on the 15th; and Tropical Storms Kate on the 25th and Louise on the 29th. The last two storms brought more than 17

*Vietnamese villagers pick their way through flood waters caused by Tropical Storm Kate in October 1970. The unusually severe deluge temporarily brought the war to a standstill in Quang Nam Province during the month. These were the worst floods since 1964.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection





Marine Corps Historical Collection

*An aerial view shows the Ba Ren Bridge under water as a result of the October flash floods caused by more than 17 inches of rain falling in less than eight days. As can be seen in the picture, the rushing waters isolated thousands of villagers in Quang Nam.*

inches of rain within eight days. The deluge overwhelmed the natural drainage system of the Quang Nam lowlands. On the 29th, as rivers and streams burst their banks, flash floods inundated most of the area extending from about a mile south of Da Nang to Baldy and from Hoi An on the coast west to Thuong Duc. The floods, the worst in Quang Nam since 1964,

transformed most of the populated area into a vast shallow lake broken by islands of high ground. Over 200 people, most of them civilians, drowned; over 240,000 temporarily or permanently lost their homes; 55 percent of the season's rice crop was ruined.<sup>16</sup>

The floods all but halted allied military activity in the lowlands just as Operation Hoang Dieu was be-



ginning. Many units had to evacuate their TAORs to escape the rising water. The 2d Battalion, 1st Marines for example, with most of its operating area under several feet of water, had to extract most of its patrols from the field by helicopter and collect them at Hill 55 and the battalion CP at Camp Lauer just south of Marble Mountain. In the 5th Marines' AO, over 350 Marines of the 2d CAG, numerous CUPP units, advisory teams, and RFs and PFs, and the Headquarters Company of the 2d Battalion, 2d ROKMC Brigade used LZ Baldy as a temporary refuge. Advance warning of the approaching storms and carefully planned disaster-control procedures kept III MAF's storm losses in men and material to a minimum, but casualties occurred. Both the 1st and 2d Battalions, 1st Marines lost men swept away by rushing water as patrols caught in the field by the flood tried to cross swollen streams.<sup>17</sup>

The rapidly rising waters threatened the lives of thousands of Vietnamese civilians, and air and ground units of III MAF cooperated with the U.S. Army and ARVN forces in a large-scale rescue effort. Disaster-control sections were established at III MAF and 1st Marine Division, and General McCutcheon called on the wing to support the evacuation. Colonel Rex C. Denny, Jr., who was awaiting assignment as Wing G-3, was in the G-3 bunker when General McCutcheon arrived to discuss the evacuation of thousands of stranded Vietnamese. "A rather heated discussion ensued with the Wing and MAG-16 reps concerned with weather conditions and, of more importance," said Denny, "was the lack of control of the evacuees—they stated they would be hauling VC as well as legitimate citizens." According to Denny, General McCutcheon listened patiently, then responded, "As of now the war is over, let's get on with the evacuation."<sup>18</sup>

The helicopter pilots and crews of MAG-16 especially distinguished themselves. Between 29 and 31 October, they braved darkness, high winds, driving rain, and 500-foot cloud ceilings to fly 366 hours and 1,120 sorties on rescue missions. In the words of the 1st Marines' Command Chronology, "extraordinary feats of heroism and airmanship were commonplace."<sup>19</sup> Assisted by Marine and Vietnamese ground troops, the Marines of MAG-16 rescued over 11,000 persons and later delivered a total of 56.3 tons of food, clothing, and emergency supplies to thousands more. In addition to the wing, the 1st Motor Transport Battalion was instrumental in rescuing the Vietnamese from a dire situation. In desperate need of resupply for his pacification program, Colonel John W. Chism, USA,

the Senior Province Advisor, whose headquarters was in Hoi An, appealed to the 1st Marine Division for 30 trucks to move supplies. "Within fifteen minutes after making our needs known to General Widdecke, . . . [the division] had the first convoy rolling. A convoy which grew to 90 trucks and lasted three days. This action saved the entire program."<sup>20</sup> As the flood waters receded, Marine engineers began repairing roads and bridges, and the GVN with extensive American assistance, began the resettlement and reconstruction effort.<sup>20</sup>

By 1-2 November, the floods had begun to subside, although rain, fog, and swollen streams hampered military operations for the rest of the month. As the civilians began returning to what was left of their homes, allied troops quickly moved back into the field and resumed the hunt for the enemy. The Americans and South Vietnamese soon discovered that the floods had hurt the Communists, too. The water had covered innumerable caches of food and supplies. With many infiltration routes blocked, other material had piled up in the Que Sons where it soon fell into the hands of Marine patrols on Operation Imperial Lake. Groups of enemy soldiers, their usual hiding places inundated, were caught in the open by allied troops and killed or captured in sharp fighting. In Dien Ban District alone, the ARVN claimed 141 VC and NVA killed and 63 captured between 2 and 5 November. These bands of displaced enemy would also furnish profitable targets for the new regimental quick reaction forces.<sup>22</sup>

Hoping to capitalize on the natural disaster the enemy had suffered, the allies pushed ahead during November with Operation Hoang Dieu in the lowlands and continued Operation Imperial Lake in the Que Sons. Operation Hoang Dieu ended on 2 December. The South Vietnamese forces reported killing over 500 enemy and taking almost 400 prisoners. Lieutenant General McCutcheon declared the operation an "unqualified success" in denying the Communists access to food and the people, and he urged Lieutenant General Lam to continue saturation operations.<sup>23</sup>

Lam did so. On 17 December, he initiated Operation Hoang Dieu 101, a second province-wide saturation campaign.\* As in Operation Hoang Dieu, the Vietnamese regulars and RFs and PFs concentrated their forces in the lowlands. They patrolled and am-

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\*The operation had actually begun on 24 November by a few ARVN units south of Hoi An, and Lam's order of 17 December enlarged it to the whole province.

bushed around the hamlets, conducted cordon and search operations of known VC hideouts, and established roadblocks. In support of the operation, the Marines continued to restrict artillery fire in the populated areas and did most of their patrolling in the hills west of Da Nang and in the Que Sons. This pattern of operations continued through December.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Operation Imperial Lake Continues*

From the completion of Keystone Robin Alpha through the end of the year, the 1st Marine Division continued and expanded Operation Imperial Lake. Using the Quick Reaction Force and reconnaissance patrol bases, the division refined and improved its tactics for scouring the mountains. The division steadily increased the number of Marines committed to the operation, and its forces were supplemented by contingents of Korean Marines and U.S. Army troops. By the end of the year, Imperial Lake had produced no major engagements with enemy units, but it had uncovered large amounts of food and equipment, had led to the destruction of numerous base camps, and had yielded much information on Communist operating methods, personnel, and order of battle.

In late September, when the 5th Marines took control of the units in Imperial Lake, the forces operating in the Que Sons had dwindled to two companies of the 7th Marines, one operating around LZ Vulture (Hill 845) and the other in the southern foothills four or five miles north of FSB Ross. On 2 October, Lieutenant Colonel Herschel L. Johnson, Jr.'s 3d Battalion, 5th Marines relieved the remaining 7th Marine units. Company M of Johnson's battalion occupied LZ Vulture and began patrolling around it while Company L launched operations in the southern Que Sons. These companies worked in the mountains until 20 October. From 13-15 October, they were reinforced by a forward command post and Companies A and C of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. In one of the last Pacific operations there, 1st Battalion companies, reacting to current intelligence, searched an area about three and one-half miles south of Vulture. As 7th Marine units had before them, the companies found many small caches of arms, food, and clothing and killed a few North Vietnamese and Viet Cong in brief firefights.<sup>25</sup>

On 18 October, beginning implementation of the division's new QRF-reconnaissance concept of operations, Lieutenant Colonel William G. Leftwich, Jr.'s 1st Reconnaissance Battalion established a patrol base at LZ Vulture, which was now renamed LZ Rainbow.

From this base and later from another at LZ Ranch-house one and one-half miles east of Rainbow, 8-10 reconnaissance teams continually operated in the mountains. To ensure rapid response to their reports, Leftwich stationed a liaison officer and a communications team at the 5th Marines' combat operations center.<sup>26</sup>

The 5th Marines on 18 October issued orders directing a new battalion to take over Imperial Lake and organize a quick reaction force. The regiment instructed Lieutenant Colonel Thomas M. Hamlin, commanding the 2d Battalion, to deploy one of his companies to LZ Rainbow to relieve Company M of the 3d Battalion. Another company of the 2d Battalion would constitute the Quick Reaction Force, based at LZ Baldy. Lieutenant Colonel Hamlin's battalion headquarters would remain at Baldy but be prepared to establish a forward command post in the Que Sons if operations expanded to multi-company size. The 3d Battalion, relieved of responsibility for Imperial Lake, would continue patrolling the southern foothills of the Que Sons, defend FSBs Ross and Ryder, and provide one rifle company as regimental reserve for use in emergencies anywhere in the 5th Marines' TAOR.<sup>27</sup>

The relief of the 3d Battalion by the 2d Battalion in Imperial Lake took place on 21 October. Company F of Hamlin's battalion occupied LZ Rainbow and patrolled around it while Company H acted as the Quick Reaction Force. Two companies and a mobile CP of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines moved to LZ Baldy to join the operation, but diversion of their escorting gunships to another mission prevented their insertion in the Que Sons on the 19th, and Tropical Storm Kate prevented it on the 27th. The 1st Battalion elements remained at Baldy and finally entered the mountains in November.

The QRF-reconnaissance combination soon produced results. On 21 October, the 3d Platoon of Company H was inserted four miles southeast of Rainbow in reaction to a reconnaissance team's sighting of four enemy. The platoon found over 1,000 pounds of rice buried in urns covered with dead leaves. The following day, in two separate actions, two QRF platoons of Company H killed four North Vietnamese, captured one rifle and 700 pounds of rice, and discovered a bunker complex.<sup>28</sup>

Late in October, the tropical storms which swept Quang Nam sharply restricted activity in Imperial Lake, although they did not force a complete halt to operations. Marines caught in the hills by the storms,

while safe from floods, endured miseries of their own as they huddled under wet ponchos in muddy holes and vainly attempted to ward off wind and rain. The weather and the need for helicopters for rescue work temporarily prevented aerial resupply of Companies F and H of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. These companies tightened their belts and lived on short rations or none at all as they combed the ridges and ravines.<sup>29</sup>

Significant discoveries and contacts occurred during the stormy last days of the month. On 26 October, for example, the 2d Platoon of Company H, which had been inserted as a QRF just south of Rainbow before the arrival of Tropical Storm Kate, found an enemy communication wire strung along a trail. Weather-beaten and hungry after three wet, chilly days in the hills, the Marines followed the wire into a deserted battalion-size base camp. The platoon spent three

days searching the holes and caves of the enemy haven, which yielded a substantial cache of arms, ammunition, and boobytrap material.<sup>30</sup>

Also on the 26th, two reconnaissance teams, Cayenne and Prime Cut,\* combined in a surprise attack on 10-15 NVA in a small camp north of FSB Rainbow. The reconnaissance Marines killed five enemy while suffering no losses of their own, and they captured an AK-47 rifle, a Chinese Communist-made radio, and a small amount of other equipment. The next day, to the west of the firebase, a squad from Company F attacked another small camp, killed six NVA in the first burst of fire, then came under attack by an estimated 10 more. Reinforced by a second squad, the

\*Each reconnaissance team had a codename which also served as its radio call sign.

*Maj James T. Schulster, the operations officer of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines enjoys an improvised meal of C-rations on Hill 381 in the Que Son Mountains during the Christmas season. A Christmas wreath can be seen in the foreground outside the battalion CP.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection



Marines, who lost one man killed and three wounded in the fight, called in artillery and air strikes. The enemy fled. On 30 October, another squad from Company F killed three more enemy in the same area. By the end of October, the 5th Marines could claim 74 NVA and VC dead in Imperial Lake and 34 weapons captured.<sup>31</sup>

While the rifle companies searched the mountains, the 1st Marine Division and 5th Marines intelligence staffs during October sought ways to more quickly and thoroughly exploit information discovered in or useful to Imperial Lake. During the month, division G-2 personnel began holding daily meetings with the 5th Marines' S-2 staff to exchange information. The regimental staff used every expedient to increase the amount of intelligence collected in the field. For example, units operating in Imperial Lake received orders to send photographs and, when possible, the actual corpses of all enemy dead back to Baldy by helicopter. At Baldy, enemy POWs and defectors would try to identify the slain NVA and VC. Major Jon A. Stuebe, the 5th Marines' S-2, claimed to have discovered by this means the names or ranks of 80 percent of the VC and NVA killed during October in Imperial Lake.<sup>32</sup>

During November, the 5th Marines committed still more troops to Imperial Lake. The 2d Battalion, which directed operations in the mountains throughout the month, on 6 November established a forward command post on Hill 381, two and one-half miles south of Rainbow. From there the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Hamlin, controlled three of his own companies and two from the 3d Battalion, which rotated its companies between Imperial Lake and other assignments, as they searched the central and western Que Sons. A 2d Battalion rear CP remained at Baldy to direct base defense and logistic support and to conduct QRF operations. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, by 1 November, had inserted a forward CP and two companies in the northern Que Sons, where they continued operations for the rest of the month. The 1st Reconnaissance Battalion had 5-10 teams in the mountains at all times. On 26 November, the reconnaissance Marines moved their patrol base from LZ Ranch House to Hill 510 deep in the western Que Sons.

The reconnaissance teams shifted westward in part to make way for units of the 2d Republic of Korea Marine Brigade. The Korean Marines joined Operation Imperial Lake on 19 November. On that date, a newly formed ROKMC reconnaissance unit, trained by the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion and ANGLICO Sub-Unit

One and accompanied by advisers from those units, established a patrol base on Hill 322 in the northeastern Que Sons. To exploit their sightings, the Koreans stationed a quick reaction infantry platoon at Baldy. Later in the month, two Korean Marine infantry companies, the 6th and 7th of the 2d Battalion, began patrolling in the northeastern Que Sons. The Korean Marines would remain committed to Imperial Lake for the rest of the year.<sup>33</sup>

All the units in Imperial Lake kept up the pattern of small-unit patrolling and thorough searching of any area where it was suspected enemy camps or supply caches were concealed. Operations increased the toll of NVA and VC dead in ambushes and brief firefights, and resulted in the capture of over 50,000 pounds of rice. A patrol from Company B, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines made the most important discovery of the month. On 5 November, while searching a base camp, the patrol found a cache of documents, photographs, and tape recordings. The material when examined turned out to be the central files of the Viet Cong security section for Quang Nam Province. The file was full of names of enemy underground leaders and agents. Other base camps and cave complexes yielded weapons, radios, communication equipment, and explosives. As the Marines uncovered bunkers and tunnels, they blew up the structures with plastic explosive and seeded caves with crystallized CS riot gas. If the enemy reoccupied a seeded cave, the heat from their bodies and from lamps or cooking fires would cause the CS to resume its gaseous state, and render the cave uninhabitable.\*<sup>34</sup>

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong continued to avoid combat except when small groups were

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\*Lieutenant General Bernard E. Trainor, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, remarked in 1985 that Company B did not just happen by chance on the enemy headquarters complex. As a result of a successful Pacifier operation in late September, the Marines captured the chief of *Da Nang-Que Son Communications Liaison Network, Espionage Section, Quang Da Special Zone*. After extensive questioning the prisoner finally agreed to lead the Marines to the enemy headquarters complex. Based on this and other intelligence, the Marine battalion in late October and early November launched an operation in an "almost inaccessible portion of the central Que Son Mountains." A VC company, the *C-111*, attempted unsuccessfully to draw off the Marines from the headquarters complex. As described in the text, Company B "captured intact the central files of the *VC Quang Da Special Zone*." According to General Trainor, "The captured files were described by the intelligence community, both military and CIA, as the most significant find of the war in I Corps." LtGen Bernard E. Trainor, Comments on draft ms, 1Dec85 (Vietnam Comment File).

brought to bay by Marine patrols. Only sporadically and on a limited scale did they strike back at the units in Imperial Lake. On 8-9 November, for instance, an estimated 10 NVA or VC probed the defenses of LZ Rainbow, but fell back before the Marines' fire. During the night of the 28th, the enemy struck harder. They fired rockets and grenades into the command posts of Company F of the 2d Battalion and Company K of the 3d Battalion, killing one Marine and wounding nine. On the 30th, in an exchange of small arms fire during a Marine search of a base camp, the Communists killed 1st Lieutenant James D. Jones, commander of Company I, 3d Battalion.<sup>35</sup>

A helicopter accident cost the Marines more lives than did this occasional harassment. During the afternoon of 18 November, reconnaissance team Rush Act, on patrol from LZ Ranch House, had a man severely injured in a fall down a cliff and called for an emergency extraction. The call reached the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion CP at Camp Reasoner on Division Ridge just as a CH-46D from HMM-263 piloted by First Lieutenant Orville C. Rogers, Jr., landed on the pad after completing another mission. The helicopter was carrying the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel William G. Leftwich, Jr., and six other Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Leftwich, a 39-year-old honor graduate of the Naval Academy and holder of the Navy Cross, had come to the battalion in September from command of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. He often flew on missions to extract his patrols when they ran into trouble, and this day he decided to pick up Rush Act in his own helicopter. As one of his officers later said, "There was no regulation which said he had to go, but he always went."<sup>36</sup>

It was a difficult and dangerous mission. Clouds and fog hung low over the Que Sons. With no clear space near the patrol for a landing, the helicopter would have to pick the team out of the jungle with an emergency extraction rig, a 120-foot nylon rope to which the men could hook themselves with harnesses that they wore. In spite of the weather and the rough terrain, the helicopter found and extracted the team. With the seven Marines of Rush Act dangling from the extraction rig, the helicopter climbed back into

the clouds to return to base. Instead, it smashed into a mountainside about two miles southeast of FSB Rainbow. The next day, two reconnaissance teams worked their way through jungle and thick brush to the crash site. They found all 15 Marines dead amid the strewn wreckage. The tragedy was the worst helicopter crash in I Corps since 26 August, when an Army aircraft had been shot down, killing 31 soldiers. It had cost III MAF one of its best liked and most highly respected battalion commanders.<sup>37\*</sup>

The tragic crash also necessitated a change of commanders. Lieutenant Colonel Bernard E. Trainor, who had experience as a reconnaissance company commander, was moved from command of 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, to command of 1st Reconnaissance Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Franklin A. Hart, Jr., who had commanded the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines in the Que Son area of operations earlier in the fall, was transferred from the division plans section to command the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. As Lieutenant Colonel Hart would later observe, making these changes put experienced officers into the vacated command billets and enabled the division "to continue Operation Imperial Lake with the least disruption of operation."<sup>38</sup>

Imperial Lake continued into December with elements of all three of the 5th Marines' battalions; companies of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines; and troops of the Americal Division taking part. On 2 December, a forward command group of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines replaced that of the 2d Battalion on Hill 381. Initially this command group controlled the operations of two of its own companies and three from the

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\*A native of Memphis, Tennessee, Leftwich graduated from the Naval Academy in 1953, having held the rank of brigade captain of midshipmen. He served his first Vietnam tour in 1965-1966 as advisor to Task Force Alpha of the VNMC. He earned the Navy Cross for heroism during operations with the Vietnamese Marines in the Central Highlands. Fluent in the Vietnamese language, he had made himself an expert on pacification and the role of the American advisor. From Vietnam, he went to assignments with the Marine Corps Schools and HQMC and from March 1968 to May 1970 was Marine Corps Aide and Special Assistant to Undersecretary of the Navy John W. Warner. In June 1970 he returned to Vietnam to command the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines and in September took over the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion. Respected by fellow Marines for courage and professional skill, he was believed by many to be destined for the highest military ranks. The *Spruance* class destroyer USS *Leftwich* (DD 984), named in Lieutenant Colonel Leftwich's honor, was commissioned on 25 August 1979. For a list of his writings on Vietnam, see Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, *The Marines in Vietnam, 1954-1973: An Anthology and Annotated Bibliography* (Washington, 1974), pp. 264-265.

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\*Colonel Albert C. Smith, Jr., was present at the briefing when Lieutenant Colonel Leftwich was given a verbal order by the division commander, General Widdecke, to accompany emergency extracts "to prevent mismanagement faults by Recon and 1st MAW inexperienced personnel." Col Albert C. Smith, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 1May83 (Vietnam Comment File).



Marine Corps Historical Collection

*A Marine firing party from the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion fires a salute at the funeral service of LtCol William G. Leftwich, Jr. LtCol Leftwich commanded the battalion when he was killed together with 14 other Marines in a helicopter crash on 18 November 1970.*

2d Battalion, but rotations during the month reduced the number of companies under its control to two. From 2-20 December, the 2d Battalion, its headquarters located at LZ Baldy, directed operations in the lowlands and maintained the regimental QRF. On the 20th, a 2d Battalion forward command group with two companies returned to Imperial Lake. Deployed by helicopter, the command group took station at the reconnaissance patrol base on Hill 510, and the companies moved out to search the western Que Sons. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines continued operations in the northern Que Sons throughout the month, rotating companies to keep two in the mountains while the other two protected the division rear. Reconnaissance teams kept up their saturation patrolling, and on 18 December the 5th Marines implemented the division's orders which refined and elaborated upon the system for using the QRF to support them. The Korean Marines continued working in the northeastern Que Sons.

On 16 December, a mobile battalion command post and Companies G and H of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines landed from helicopters northwest of Hill 510 to join Imperial Lake. Until the 23d, they patrolled and searched, making no major discoveries or contacts. Then they returned to their TAOR south of Da Nang.

Elements of the Americal Division also entered Imperial Lake. On 2-3 December, the 1st Marine Division granted the Americal an extension of its TAOR northward into Antenna Valley and the southern Que Sons. Americal Division companies operated in those areas throughout the month to seal off the infiltration routes between the Que Sons and the enemy bases farther to the south and west.<sup>39</sup>

The pattern of operations in Imperial Lake continued unchanged in December. Usually as squad and platoon patrols, the Marines searched the mountains and occasionally ambushed or collided with groups of 5-10 enemy. The Communists continued to evade

rather than resist. As Colonel Ralph F. Estey, the division G-3 put it, "In the mountains we're finding the enemy is not standing to fight. He's running away; he's leaving weapons and other . . . things in the caves."<sup>40</sup> The toll of enemy dead, captured weapons and equipment, and destroyed base camps continued to mount.

On 24 December, Company L of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines stumbled upon a major NVA or VC command post. At 1515 on the 24th, a squad from Company L, returning to base after a patrol, saw nine enemy—eight men and a woman—sitting in front of a cave about one and one-half miles southwest of the battalion CP on Hill 381. The patrol cut down three or four of the enemy with small arms fire, but the survivors, aided by others from inside the cave, dragged away the bodies and disappeared into the brush. Sweeping the area of the contact, the Marines quickly realized they had an important cave complex. Elements of Companies K and L came in to help in the search, which continued into the afternoon of Christmas day.

The Marines discovered six large caves, two of the biggest floored with bamboo. Besides a scattering of weapons, ordnance, food, and medical supplies, they collected over 100 pounds of North Vietnamese uniforms, about 10 pounds of documents, and 8 wallets containing letters and pictures. Most important in indicating the function of the complex, they found three Chinese Communist-made radios, three portable generators, headsets, telegraph keys, and quantities of spare tubes and transistors. The radios could be attached to cunningly constructed and concealed cable antennas which ran from the caves to ground level and then were threaded inside or wrapped around tree trunks. From the quantity and type of equipment found and from the layout of the caves, one of which appeared to have been a combat operations center, some allied intelligence officers believed that at last they had found the elusive *Front 4* forward CP.<sup>41</sup>

While the burden of effort in Imperial Lake fell on the infantry and the reconnaissance teams, Marine aviation and artillery also helped keep pressure on the NVA and VC. Jets of the 1st MAW flew 137 sorties in support of troops in Imperial Lake in October, 108 in November, and 54 in December, dropping hundreds of tons of bombs and napalm. Helicopters of MAG-16 launched 3,000-4,000 sorties per month, mostly carrying troops and cargo and evacuating wounded. By November, Marines in the Que Sons

could call for fire support from 44 light, medium, and heavy artillery pieces, most of them controlled by the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, in batteries at Ross, Baldy, and FSB Ryder. In December alone, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines directed 87 fire missions on observed targets using 1,794 rounds. The battalion also called for 76 missions, expending 968 rounds, on intelligence and preemptive targets.<sup>42</sup>

Imperial Lake continued into the new year. Between 1 September and 31 December, the operation had cost the 1st Marine Division 20 Marines and 2 Navy corpsmen killed and 156 Marines and 2 personnel wounded. Enemy losses amounted to 196 NVA and VC dead and 106 prisoners and suspects detained. Captured materiel included 159 individual and 11 crew-served weapons and tons of other ordnance, food, and equipment. In addition, the Marines had wrecked innumerable enemy camps and installations.<sup>43</sup> Even more damaging to the Communists was the continuous denial to them of safe use of their long established mountain haven. As Colonel Estey summed up on 14 December:

Our presence there now is certainly keeping him [the enemy] off . . . balance, and he doesn't have a sanctuary in the Que Son Mountains that he enjoyed . . . before. I know we've conducted operations in the Que Son Mountains . . . , but we've never actually maintained a presence there, and this is what we're doing now . . . .<sup>44</sup>

#### *5th Marines in the Lowlands: Noble Canyon and Tulare Falls I and II*

While the 5th Marines kept most of its companies in the Que Sons during the Fall-Winter Campaign, it still had to protect populated areas around LZ Baldy and in the Que Son Valley. The regiment employed elements of its 2d and 3d Battalions for this purpose, and it relied heavily on South Vietnamese RFs and PFs and units from the Americal Division to supplement its own thinly spread manpower.

In the area north and west of Baldy, Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines conducted most of the defensive operations. Squads from this Combined Unit Pacification Program (CUPP) company, integrated with Regional and Popular Force platoons, patrolled and ambushed in nine AOs along Routes 1 and 535. With their Vietnamese allies, the CUPP Marines had numerous small contacts and carried out occasional company sweeps and cordon and search operations.

Other 2d Battalion companies also operated around Baldy when they could be spared from Imperial Lake





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A 373814

*Marines from Company L, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines move off Landing Zone Ross into the Que Son Valley to begin Operation Noble Canyon on 23 October 1970. Bad weather continued to hamper the operation and forced cancellation of a planned helicopter lift.*

and from QRF duty. From 26-31 October, for example, Company E patrolled just south of Baldy, killing four Communists. In December, with all of the battalion's organic companies under operational control of other units (Company G, as a CUPP unit, was under regimental control), Company G of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines reinforced the defense of Baldy. The company captured 400 pounds of rice, took five prisoners, and killed three VC while under the operational control of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. On 17 December, Company G moved to the Que Sons to join another company and a command group from its parent battalion, now also temporarily under control of the 5th Marines, in Operation Imperial Lake.<sup>45</sup>

The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, with its CP at FSB Ross, rotated its companies between Imperial Lake and various other missions. During most of the fall and winter, the battalion kept two companies at a time in the Que Sons. A third, under operational control of the 11th Marines, stationed a platoon at FSB Ryder and platoons or squads at the artillery integrated ob-

servaion device (IOD)\* sites on Hill 425 in the Que Sons, Hill 119 overlooking the An Hoa Basin, and Hills 218 and 270 commanding the Que Son Valley. The remaining rifle company, stationed at Ross, conducted small unit operations around the fire base and constituted the 5th Marines' regimental reserve which stood by to relieve district headquarters and CUPPs. The battalion Headquarters and Service Company at Ross formed its own CUPP platoon which defended two refugee hamlets close to the base.

The 3d Battalion Marines around Ross operated in a joint AO with the Que Son District Regional and Popular Forces. The RFs and PFs concentrated on close-in protection of the hamlets while the Marines, with the exception of the CUPP platoon, patrolled and ambushed on the edges of the populated areas in an effort to prevent infiltration.<sup>46</sup>

The 3d Battalion conducted one named operation

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\*The IOD was a highly sophisticated and effective day and night observation instrument.

during the Fall-Winter Campaign. This was Operation Noble Canyon, which was aimed at clearing enemy troops from the area around Hill 441 four miles south of FSB Ross. This section of rugged terrain, pocked with caves, had long served the NVA and VC as an assembly area for attacks northward into the Que Son Valley and southward toward Hiep Duc.\* Operation Noble Canyon began on 23 October when Company L of the 3d Battalion marched into the objective area after the weather had forced cancellation of a planned helicopter lift. From then until 3 November, Company L, hampered by the late October storms, searched its assigned AO. In light and scattered contacts, the Marines killed four Communists and detained one VC suspect, at a cost to themselves of eight men wounded. They found no large enemy units or supply caches.<sup>47</sup>

When suitable targets were located, the 5th Marines employed its Quick Reaction Force in the lowlands. Late in the morning on 4 November, for example, as the paddy lands were beginning to emerge from the floodwaters, a CUPP unit from Company G engaged 15-20 enemy near the Ba Ren River three miles north of Baldy and called for support. The regiment dispatched the QRF to head off the enemy, who were moving north, while the CUPP squad and elements of the 162d RF Company took blocking positions south of the Communists.

The QRF unit, First Lieutenant John R. Scott's 2d Platoon of Company F, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines caught the enemy on an island in the Ba Ren. The helicopters carrying the platoon landed in the middle of the enemy column. A melee ensued. The NVA and VC, a few of them armed with AK-47s but most equipped only with pistols, scattered in all directions. Some dove into the brush and began firing at the Marines. Others fled, only to be stopped by the surrounding water. The AH-1G gunships escorting the QRF cut down many of the enemy with rockets and machine guns, while Scott's men dispatched others with grenades and rifle fire. Scott later recalled that "it got pretty vicious for a while . . . . We were sweeping the area toward the river, firing and throwing grenades all the time . . . . The NVA were firing and throwing grenades too."<sup>48</sup> One Communist soldier tried to escape by submerging in the river and breathing through a hollow reed, but the Marines spotted him and killed him with a grenade. By 1410, the fight had ended. While one Marine was killed, Scott's Marines had

killed nine enemy, and the gunships claimed 11 more. Policing the battlefield, the Marines picked up one AK-47, three 9mm pistols, and an assortment of American and Chinese grenades, packs, and miscellaneous equipment.<sup>49</sup>

Throughout October and November, units from the Americal Division took over the defense of much of the lowland part of the 5th Marines' AO. The Army troops came in initially for Operation Tulare Falls I, a large U.S.-Vietnamese-South Korean effort to forestall a predicted series of Communist attacks in the populated area between Hill 55 and the Que Son Mountains. The 5th Marines was given command of all the American troops in the operation, which was coordinated by the Quang Nam Province Chief. Since the 5th Marines' battalions were fully committed to other operations, III MAF and XXIV Corps decided to place a battalion-size task force from the Americal Division under the operational control of the 5th Marines. Named Task Force Saint after its commander, Lieutenant Colonel C. E. Saint, USA, the task force consisted of the 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry reinforced by the 1st Squadron (-), 1st Armored Cavalry; a troop of air cavalry (several served with the task force in rotation); and a 105mm howitzer platoon from the 3d Battalion, 82d Artillery. All these units were drawn from the 196th Brigade of the Americal Division.

Task Force Saint established its CP at LZ Baldy on 2 October, and on the following day it began operations in an area north and east of the combat base. Guided by CUPP Marines from Company G, the Army troops saturated the countryside with small-unit patrols and ambushes, using their air-cavalry troop as a quick reaction force. In minor contacts, Task Force Saint killed 30 NVA and VC and detained 21 suspected Viet Cong while suffering 19 wounded. Operation Tulare Falls I ended on 15 October, having succeeded in its purpose of forestalling a wave of enemy attacks. The same day, Task Force Saint departed for the Americal Division TAOR.<sup>50</sup>

At the end of October, the Army units of Task Force Saint returned to the 5th Marines' TAOR as Task Force Burnett. In Operation Tulare Falls II, jointly planned by the 1st Marine Division and the Americal Division, Task Force Burnett was again under operational control of the 5th Marines. Between 27 and 31 October, the Army force established its CP at Baldy and from then until 30 November, it patrolled around the northeastern foothills of the Que Sons. Using the same tactics they had employed earlier, the Army troops

\*For details of earlier Marine activities in this area, see Chapter 2.

killed 22 VC, captured two, and seized 14,950 pounds of rice, while suffering casualties of four killed and 26 wounded. By 1 December, the units of Task Force Burnett had returned to their parent division, but Army operations in the Marine division TAOR continued through the end of the year in the far southwestern Que Son Mountains.<sup>51</sup>

While the Americal Division operations had produced only modest results, they had helped the thinly spread 5th Marines to keep pressure on the Communists throughout its TAOR and had assisted Operation Hoang Dieu by blocking the enemy's routes of withdrawal from the lowlands to the mountains. As Colonel Estey, the 1st Marine Division G-3, said, "Colonel Judge just doesn't have the units that are necessary to adequately saturate his AO and this is what the 23d Infantry [Americal] task force is doing, and they're welcome any time in the area."<sup>52</sup>

As the meager results of the Tulare Falls operations indicated, the enemy in the lowlands of the 5th Marines' TAOR seemed few and unaggressive throughout the fall and winter. They moved in groups of no more than three to five men and devoted their efforts to recruiting, accumulating supplies, and harassing the allies with sniper fire and boobytraps.

Only in early December did the Communists show a willingness to fight. On 3 December, two platoons of VC, believed to have been members of the *105th Main Force Battalion*, attacked the Que Son District Headquarters. They struck at 0230 with fire bombs and small arms, only to be met and driven off by the RF and PF defenders. The raid resulted in the destruction of three huts, the death of one PF soldier, and the wounding of eight. The Viet Cong left one man dead on the field.<sup>53</sup>

The enemy launched a more intense attack on 9 December. Before dawn on that day, an estimated 60-80 VC assaulted the CP of the 1st Platoon of Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines near the village of Phu Thai three miles southwest of Baldy. Covered by a barrage of mortar rounds, rockets, grenades, and small arms fire, the VC rushed the east side of the perimeter and became entangled in the wire. CUPP Marines and RFs blasted the attackers with rifle, machine gun fire, and mortars and called for artillery support. The action continued until sunrise when the enemy, unable to penetrate the perimeter, withdrew. The VC left 11 dead in the wire and a litter of abandoned weapons, including four AK-47s and one B-40 rocket launcher. Two of the Marine defenders were wounded seriously

enough to need medical evacuation; the RFs lost two soldiers killed and 14 wounded. On the afternoon of the 9th, Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky of the Republic of Vietnam, then on a tour of Quang Nam, visited the compound and congratulated the Marines and RFs for their small but unquestionable victory.<sup>54</sup>

#### *1st Marines Operations, October-December 1970*

During the last months of 1970, Colonel Paul X. "PX" Kelley's 1st Marines continued to protect the Rocket Belt. Each of the regiment's battalions defended the same general area of operations it had had since March, although the boundaries of each battalion's TAOR had been shifted and enlarged by the Keystone Robin Alpha troop redeployments. The 3d Battalion remained responsible for the arc of the Rocket Belt north and northwest of Da Nang. The 1st Battalion, now extended into the Thuong Duc corridor, guarded the western and southwestern sector. The 2d Battalion operated in the heavily populated and Viet Cong-infested farmlands between Hill 55 and the South China Sea.

The two massive Vietnamese saturation operations, Hoang Dieu and Hoang Dieu 101, increased the number of ARVN and RF/PF small-unit activities within the 1st Marines' TAOR and forced curtailment of the use of artillery. For each of these operations, Colonel Kelley directed his battalions to conduct as many joint activities as possible with the RFs and PFs in their TAORs, emphasizing cordon and search operations. Kelley enjoined his battalions to give "maximum support" to the efforts of the districts in which they operated—Dai Loc and Hieu Duc for the 1st Battalion, Hoa Vang for the 2d, and Hoa Vang and Hieu Duc for the 3d. The battalions were to take special care in coordinating their patrols and ambushes with those of the ARVN, RFs and PFs, making sure that Marines in the field always knew where their allies were operating. Beyond reductions in artillery fire and limitation of small-unit activities in some areas, however, Hoang Dieu and Hoang Dieu 101 had little effect on the endless round of squad and platoon patrols and ambushes with which the 1st Marines protected the Rocket Belt.<sup>55</sup>

The 1st Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert P. Rose, had moved companies onto Hills 52, 65, and 37 to protect Route 4 where it passed the foot of Charlie Ridge toward Thuong Duc. On Hill 52, the westernmost of the three defended by the battalion, Company C came under persistent Communist

pressure early in the fall. The company, commanded by First Lieutenant James N. Wood, Jr., had its CP on the hill, a low elevation which overlooks Route 4 and the Vu Gia River to the south of it and is itself overlooked from the north by Charlie Ridge.

On 28 September, the enemy began a series of harassing attacks on Hill 52. The action started close to midnight when a trip flare went off on the west side of Company C's perimeter, revealing two enemy soldiers trying to work their way through the barbed wire. The alerted Marines attacked the infiltrators with small arms and grenades, but with no observable result. This incident was followed by a night of sightings of groups of four or five NVA or VC and brief exchanges of fire. In the most costly of these for Company C, a Marine squad shooting at enemy in the wire was hit from the rear by two RPG rounds, losing two

men killed and two more wounded. Early on the 29th, Marines on Hill 52 spotted nine enemy swimming across the Vu Gia from the south bank. Catching the Communists in the middle of the river, the Marines opened fire with mortars and recoilless rifles and directed artillery on the Communists' position. By dawn, the NVA and VC around the perimeter had withdrawn. Marines sweeping the area of the various contacts discovered four enemy dead and picked up a 9mm pistol, 31 grenades, and an RPG launcher with five rockets.<sup>56</sup>

Enemy harassment of Company C continued until 9 October. Daily, the North Vietnamese or Viet Cong fired at the Marine position with mortars, and they occasionally used recoilless rifles, RPGs, and rockets. Snipers in a treeline northwest of the hill also harassed the Marines. Helicopters in the area frequently came

*Marines of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines prepare to celebrate the 195th birthday of the Marine Corps on 10 November 1970 in a formal ceremony on the aluminum helicopter pad on Firebase Ross. The Ross observation tower can be seen in the background.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection



under fire. In a total of 20 attacks, the Communists hit Hill 52 with 52 60mm and 10 82mm mortar shells, 33 75mm recoilless rifle rounds, 2 RPG rounds, and 4 122mm rockets.

Company C met every attack with mortar and recoilless rifle fire and called for counterbattery artillery fire against the suspected enemy positions. The enemy gunners, who usually fired from the hills north and southwest of Hill 52, were well protected by the rough terrain and proved difficult to silence. Nevertheless, the rapid and well-directed Marine counterfire forced the Communists to change position frequently and kept the bombardment sporadic and inaccurate. In the entire series of attacks by fire, Company C suffered only six Marines seriously wounded. Beginning on 4 October, jets of the 1st MAF flew a series of strikes against enemy mortar positions which the artillery could not reach. By 9 October, these strikes had forced the Communists to break off their attack. Marine commanders believed that ammunition shortages caused by the heavy October rains also had helped curtail the Communists' harassment.<sup>57</sup>

Enemy aggressiveness in the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines' TAOR diminished after the October floods. The battalion spent the last months of 1970 carrying out small-unit patrols and ambushes and protecting engineer minesweeping teams on Route 4. As Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces increased their activity around the villages and hamlets, the battalion, in November, conducted a company-size sweep on Charlie Ridge and later established a patrol base there for reconnaissance teams. From 12-15 November, and again on 19-20 November, two companies swept the Football Island area near the Thu Bon north of An Hoa. Hunting for enemy food caches, the companies found about 2,000 pounds of hidden rice and corn. They also engaged one group of five NVA/VC, killing one and wounding and capturing another. During December, the battalion conducted two search and destroy operations on Charlie Ridge, and it provided two companies to block for an ARVN sweep south of Route 4 near Hill 37. None of these operations produced significant contact.<sup>58</sup>

During December, the 1st Battalion turned over the static defense of two of its major fortified positions to the South Vietnamese. In the far northern part of its TAOR, the battalion handed Hill 10 over to local Vietnamese forces between 27 November and 2 December. Shortly thereafter, it gave up Hill 52 on which Company C had earlier stood siege. The division and

1st Marines staffs had begun a reconsideration of the military value of the hill on 24 October, and on 3 December, III MAF agreed to their proposal for its abandonment on grounds that the Marines no longer needed it as a patrol base or an artillery position. Instead of holding the hill, the 1st Marines would protect Route 4 to Thuong Duc by mobile operations and by establishing an infantry reconnaissance patrol base north of Hill 52 on Charlie Ridge. Withdrawal of Marines from Hill 52 began on 9 December and was completed by the 13th. The redeployment left the 1st Battalion with fixed positions on Hills 65 and 37 and with the better part of three companies free for maneuver in the field.<sup>59</sup>

The 2d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Donald J. Norris, who had taken over on 13 September from the ill-fated Lieutenant Colonel Leftwich, emphasized population control and efforts to eradicate the VC underground in the many hamlets in its TAOR. As it had since June, the battalion deployed three of its companies throughout the fall and winter in assigned AOs and kept one in reserve for special operations and, after 22 November, for QRF duty. The 2d Battalion also conducted operations with ROKMC and 51st ARVN units. To reduce boobytrap casualties, the three companies in the field did most of their patrolling and ambushing at night (when the 2d Battalion believed the enemy removed many mines to let their own men move) and tracked movement in their AOs during the day from observation posts and watchtowers. After Operation Hoang Dieu began, the 2d Battalion cooperated with Vietnamese RFs and PFs and with CAP Marines to maintain daily checkpoints on major roads and to cordon and search hamlets or conduct surprise raids on suspected VC hideouts and headquarters.

On 10 November,\* in order to increase mobility, the battalion directed its three rifle companies in the field to dismantle all their fixed defensive positions, mostly CPs and patrol bases. This would leave the battalion with only the fortifications of Camp Lauer and

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\*The 10th of November 1775 is the Marine Corps birthday. While the war went on throughout the III MAF TAOR, Marine commands took time to conduct modest ceremonies to honor the 195th birthday of the Marine Corps. Colonel Don H. Blanchard, the Chief of Staff, 1st Marine Division, later remembered visiting several of the more remote outposts, and was guest of honor of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines (with whom he served in Korea) in the morning and celebrated with the Marines at FSB Ross in the afternoon. Col Don H. Blanchard, Comments on draft ms, 2Jun83 (Vietnam Comment File).

with two observation posts and four watch towers, the latter manned only during the day and on moonlit nights. The companies in the field were to change position daily within their AOs. Each day the battalion S-2 provided the companies a list of recommended patrol missions on the basis of which each company commander would plan his activities for the next 24 hours. While three companies operated in this manner, the fourth would remain at Camp Lauer, serving as both the regimental Quick Reaction Force and the battalion reserve.<sup>60</sup>

Rapid and imaginative exploitation of current intelligence proved successful for the battalion during November. On the 15th, the battalion responded to a report from an informant that the VC were going to hold a political meeting that night in An Tru (1), a hamlet just south of Marble Mountain and Camp Lauer. Lieutenant Colonel Norris and his operations officer, Major John S. Grinalds, set a trap. They knew that the VC customarily approached An Tru (1) by boat along a shallow lake south of the hamlet and would flee by the same route if infantry approached from Camp Lauer. Therefore, they arranged for a Vietnamese Seal\* team to swim stealthily to an ambush position overlooking the lake on the west side. Then they sent a squad of Company G sweeping noisily into the hamlet from the east side. The Marines flushed out five VC who, as expected, piled into two sampans and paddled out into the lake toward what they thought was safety. They ran directly into the Seal ambush, which blew them out of their boats at close range. The Marines and Seals recovered the body of one of the enemy. The others, almost certainly killed, sank with their weapons and were not found.<sup>61</sup>

Three days later, at 1322, Companies E and G deployed from helicopters to assault the hamlet of Quang Dong (1), one and one-half miles east of Hill 55, where intelligence indicated a VC headquarters might be located. Company G swept into the hamlet while a platoon from Company E and elements of the 4th Battalion, 51st ARVN Regiment took up blocking positions around it. An enemy force of unknown size fled the hamlet and ran into the Marines of Company E who, with the aid of a Cobra gunship, killed

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\*Seal teams operated under the Vietnamese Coastal Security Service. Each consisted of 12 South Vietnamese Navy personnel dressed in black pajamas like the enemy and carrying AK-47s. The teams, accompanied by U.S. Navy advisors, were used to block traffic along waterways or, as in this case, to move into position by water and conduct ambushes.

three and wounded and captured two others, one of them a NVA lieutenant. A search of the hamlet turned up 150 pounds of wheat and 125 pounds of rice in buried caches, 5 boobytraps, 1 AK-47, and 2 bunkers made of steel-reinforced concrete. The Marines sent 85 civilians to Hill 55 to be screened as VC suspects and set ambushes around the bunkers and food caches. Before the operation ended on 20 November, the ambushes had resulted in three more enemy dead and three weapons captured. The Marines suffered no casualties.<sup>62</sup>

In December, two companies of the 2d Battalion and a mobile battalion CP were detached for most of the month to support the 5th Marines in Imperial Lake. As a result, the battalion made fewer attacks within its TAOR. Nevertheless, on 7 December, again working with a Seal team, two rifle companies and a RF company cordoned off a known VC haven near a finger lake one and one-half miles south of Camp Lauer. After the cordon had been established, the Marines worked over the area within it with mortar fire and air strikes and then began a thorough search which continued through the end of the month. By 31 December, they had found 1 dead VC, 3 rifles, 1,350 rounds of AK-47 ammunition, 40 boobytraps, 11 81mm and 60mm mortar shells, and about 6 pounds of documents in the target area.<sup>63</sup>

In the northwestern part of the Rocket Belt, Lieutenant Colonel Marc A. Moore's 3d Battalion operated in the thinly populated foothills west of Da Nang and in the villages along the Cu De River. Small-unit patrols and ambushes, most of them aimed at preventing rocket and mortar attacks on Da Nang, continued to form the bulk of the battalion's activities, varied with frequent company-size sweeps of the hills west of Outpost Reno and the rugged mountains north of the Cu De. From 22-31 December, the battalion furnished the 1st Marines' Quick Reaction Force.

During the Fall-Winter Campaign, the 3d Battalion centered much of its attention on the villages of Ap Quan Nam and Kim Lien in the northern part of its TAOR. Ap Quan Nam, just south of the Cu De, long had been a center for enemy infiltration, political agitation, and rice collection. Kim Lien was located on Route 1, a mile north of the vital Nam O Bridge over the Cu De, and bordered the large Esso gasoline storage depot. It offered the enemy an assembly and supply distribution point easily accessible from base areas in the mountains above Hai Van Pass.

On 19 October, in cooperation with the 1/158th RF

Company, Company I of Moore's battalion started an intensive population control campaign in Ap Quan Nam (1) and (2). The two companies first surrounded the hamlets with checkpoints to control movement of people in and out. Then they began a house-to-house census, registering each inhabitant and preparing a detailed map of each home and its surroundings. By continually comparing actual observation of the hamlets with this recorded information, allied officers hoped to stop infiltration and the accumulation of supplies by the enemy more quickly. By 20 December, the Marines and RFs had finished the census and registration. They had channeled all movement into and out of the hamlets past guard posts where they verified each person's registration and checked names and descriptions against a blacklist of known local VC. By the end of the year, the campaign seemed to be succeeding, since the number of enemy sightings and contacts in the Ap Quan Nam area declined.<sup>64</sup>

Action around the village of Kim Lien intensified early in November. At 2400 on the 4th, three enemy entered Kim Lien and killed an assistant hamlet chief, two members of the People's Self-Defense Force, and a civilian. They threatened similar action against anyone else who took up arms for the GVN. Early in the morning of 6 November, 30 NVA and VC returned to the village, collected 400 pounds of rice, and kidnapped a minor local official.

The enemy came back before dawn on 7 November, but this time Marines of the 1st Platoon of Company I were waiting. At 0200, the platoon, in ambush west of Kim Lien, saw 10-15 NVA, all armed, approaching the village from the northwest and six others at the same time leaving the community. The Marines opened fire at a range of about 30 meters with small arms, M79s, and M72 LAAWs and set off several claymore mines. The NVA returned small arms fire and fled, and two mortar rounds exploded near the Marines, but they suffered no casualties in the brief fight. Searching the area later, the Marines found three dead North Vietnamese, two AK-47s, a pistol, and an assortment of equipment and documents.<sup>65</sup>

Following this encounter, on 16 November the 3d Battalion helilifted a platoon from Company I into the foothills west of Kim Lien to hunt for a suspected enemy base camp while a platoon of Company K blocked to the eastward. The brief operation produced no contacts or discoveries. From 21-30 November, Company K and elements of Company L, directed by

a mobile battalion CP, cooperated with troops of the 125th RF Group in a cordon and search of Kim Lien, and the following month the battalion began a population control operation there similar to the one in Ap Quan Nam. By 31 December, Company I, which had returned to the area north of the Cu De after operating for several weeks further south, had established a permanent cordon around the village to keep out enemy food details and propaganda detachments. The battalion issued orders on the 31st for a population census to begin on 2 January.<sup>66</sup>

The 1st Marines' Quick Reaction Force, established on 22 November and initially consisting of the 3d Platoon of Company H, 2d Battalion, was employed six times during November. In the most successful of these actions, on the 28th, the 3d Platoon landed near the hamlet of Le Nam (2), six miles northeast of An Hoa. Responding to an IOD sighting of three enemy, the 3d Platoon, later reinforced by the 2d Platoon of Company H, swept through the hamlet, driving two VC to their deaths under the guns of the escorting Cobras. The Marines later found another dead VC in the hamlet and rounded up a defector and two suspects. They set up an ambush near the hamlet that night which killed one more VC and captured three. QRF operations continued through December, with the 3d Battalion and later the 1st Battalion furnishing the rifle platoon, but produced no significant results.<sup>67</sup>

The 1st Marines' use of artillery and air support declined during the fall and winter under the impact of the division's restrictive fire plans. Nevertheless, the regiment continued to employ aircraft and artillery against both observed and intelligence targets, mostly in the thinly populated or uninhabited western and northwestern fringes of the 1st and 3d Battalions' TAORs. The 3d Battalion consistently required about 50 percent of the artillery fire used by the regiment. In November, for example, of 12,196 rounds expended, 6,611 fell in the 3d Battalion's TAOR, while the 2d Battalion called for no artillery missions at all in November.<sup>68</sup>

Use of supporting air strikes by the 1st Marines, already limited by the restrictions imposed in connection with Operation Hoang Dieu, was confined to the area west of Route 1 by a division order of 13 December. East of the highway, Marines could call in air strikes only to support troops in contact or when ground troops intended immediately to sweep the target area. The division issued this order because recent strikes

east of the highway had produced little evidence of casualties or damage to the enemy and because "tactical air strikes east of QL 1 have an adverse psychological impact on the local Vietnamese populace residing in the area since the area is regarded as a secure area."<sup>69</sup>

In the last three months of the year, the 1st Marines lost 11 men killed in action or dead of wounds and 127 wounded. Its battalions in the same period killed 31 NVA and VC and took six prisoners. Four enemy defected in the regiment's TAOR, and Colonel Kelley's Marines captured 33 individual and two crew-served weapons. Probably more significant as an indication that the regiment was accomplishing its primary mission, the enemy during October, November, and December launched only three rocket attacks on Da Nang. None of the 12 missiles fired in these attacks did significant damage.<sup>70</sup>

#### *The War in Quang Nam at the End of the Year*

The 1st Marine Division in December was operating with less than half the number of troops it had at the beginning of the year. From over 28,000 officers and men in 12 infantry and five artillery battalions, it had shrunk, by December, to about 12,500 officers and men in six infantry and two artillery battalions. Nevertheless, the division continued to defend essentially the same TAOR it had defended in January.<sup>71</sup>

The division's ability to protect the same area with fewer men resulted, in part, from improvements in the South Vietnamese forces in Quang Nam and even more from drastic reductions in enemy strength in the province. From an estimated 11,000-12,000 troops of all kinds in January, by December Communist strength had fallen to about 8,500. Much of this decline, according to American analysts, resulted from the Communists' inability to replace their casualties. Fewer troops had infiltrated from North Vietnam in 1970 than in 1969, and captured documents indicated that the Communists' local recruiting efforts were falling short of their goals.

Changes in Communist organization in Quang Nam appeared to parallel the enemy's dwindling troop strength. By the end of the year, *Front 4* was believed to have discontinued its three subordinate wing headquarters, probably for lack of personnel to staff them and units for them to control. American intelligence in December located only one full NVA regiment, the *38th*, in the province. Of the other two which had been there in January, the *141st* had moved elsewhere

and the *31st* had been reduced to one battalion. The enemy seemed to be continuing and expanding the practice of disbanding NVA and VC main force units to rebuild local guerrilla organizations.

According to increasingly numerous and reliable reports reaching allied intelligence, hunger, disease, and despair were eroding the fighting efficiency of the remaining enemy troops. A year of systematic allied attacks on base areas and supply routes had reduced many enemy units to half their usual rations of rice and other foodstuffs. The capture of hospitals, medical personnel, and medical supply caches in the Que Sons and elsewhere had diminished the Communists' ability to offer even rudimentary care to their sick and wounded. Prisoners and deserters carried tales of enemy soldiers refusing to fight, of friction between North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, of military and civilian discontent with Communist policies, and of loss of confidence in the possibility of victory. Such evidence had to be heavily discounted, drawn as so much of it was from the fainthearted, the discontented, and the disillusioned in the enemy ranks. (American opponents of the war spread similar stories about allied troops, and, in fact the Marines, like the other American Services in Vietnam, faced increasingly severe discipline and morale problems during 1970.)\*

Declines in all forms of enemy activity constituted more tangible evidence of diminished Communist strength. In the single month of January 1970, allied troops and aerial observers reported sighting 4,425 enemy troops. By contrast, in four months between 1 September and 31 December, only 4,159 NVA and VC were spotted. Fire attacks followed a similar pattern. In January, the Communists fired 658 rounds, mostly mortars and rockets, at allied troops and installations. They took the last six months of the year, July through December, to approximate their January total, firing in that period 638 rounds. Even terrorism, now the enemy's principal offensive tactic, appeared to decline, although weaknesses in the reporting system made the figures on this subject unreliable.\*\*<sup>72</sup>

As they examined casualty statistics for the year, many 1st Marine Division officers concluded that the

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\*For details of III MAF's efforts to cope with these problems, see Chapter 20.

\*\*The accuracy of the figures on terrorism is doubtful, as the South Vietnamese were believed by the Marines to conceal many incidents.





Marine Corps Historical Collection

*A Marine carrying an M60 machine gun plods over a slick and muddy rice paddy dike, participating in a search for suspected Viet Cong infiltrators in a hamlet near Da Nang.*

division's combat effectiveness was improving, even as its troop strength and the intensity of the fighting declined. The division's total loss during 1970 of 403 killed and 1,625 wounded represented a reduction by about 61 percent from the 1969 totals of 1,051 killed and 9,286 wounded. From over 9,600 killed in 1969, reported Communist casualties had fallen to about 5,200 killed in 1970, a reduction of some 46 percent. Summarizing the division staff's analysis of the mean-

ing of these figures, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, the assistant division commander, declared:

*Kill ratios are always invidious, but it can be seen that while enemy losses went down in 1970 they did not decline at the same rate as Marine losses. So we can conclude that the combat effectiveness of the division actually improved during 1970.<sup>73</sup>*

Throughout 1970, the 1st Marine Division had accomplished its mission with diminishing resources. In

spite of reductions in strength, it had continued to protect Da Nang and the populated areas around it, and it had continued to maintain offensive pressure on the Communists' mountain bases. As the year ended, the division's military efforts appeared to be succeeding and, if anything, to be increasing in effectiveness. Regular military operations, however, in Quang Nam as elsewhere in South Vietnam, were con-

ducted largely in support of what earlier in the conflict had been called the "Other War"—the allied effort to break the Viet Cong's political hold on the people and to prepare the Government and Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam to assume the whole task of defending and rebuilding the nation. That effort, also, had continued throughout 1970, and Marines had contributed to it.

PART III  
PACIFICATION

## Pacification 1970: Plans, Organization, and Problems

*Pacification: The Nationwide Perspective—The 1970 GVN Pacification and Development Plan  
Pacification Plans and Organization in Military Region 1—Pacification Situation in Quang Nam, Early 1970*

### *Pacification: The Nationwide Perspective*

In 1957, a French officer, summing up the lessons of his country's defeat in Indochina, wrote of warfare against guerrillas:

The destruction of rebel forces is not an end in itself: we know that as long as the enemy's infrastructure remains in place, he is able to maintain his control over the people and can replenish his decimated forces. Military operations are therefore only worthwhile insofar as they facilitate winning the people and contribute to the dismantling of the revolutionary politico-military organization . . . .<sup>1</sup>

This lesson, which the French had learned painfully in the 1950s, the Americans and their South Vietnamese allies had relearned, equally painfully, in the 1960s. By early 1970, "pacification," long a major concern of the Marines in Vietnam, had become the center of country-wide allied strategy. In theory and to an increasing extent in practice, all allied military operations, from battalion-size sweeps of enemy base areas to squad ambushes on the outskirts of hamlets, were conducted in support of pacification. Increasingly, too, allied forces engaged in a variety of paramilitary and nonmilitary pacification activities.

Definitions of "pacification" varied with time and with the agency using the word. The III MAF/ICTZ Combined Campaign Plan for 1970 defined pacification as:

The military, political, economic, and social process of establishing or re-establishing local government responsive to and involving the participation of the people. It includes the provision of sustained, credible territorial security, the destruction of the enemy's underground government, the assertion or re-assertion of political control and involvement of the people in government, and the initiation of economic and social activity capable of self-sustenance and expansion . . . .<sup>2</sup>

After years of confusion about goals and policies, resulting in divided authority and fragmented administration, the Americans and South Vietnamese had developed and were implementing a comprehensive pacification strategy. This strategy involved, first, the use of regular military units to clear the NVA and VC main forces and most of the guerrillas from the populated rural areas. The regular forces then

were to keep the enemy out by a combination of small-unit patrolling, ambushing, and larger sweeps of base areas. Within the screen thus established, Regional and Popular Forces and paramilitary forces and civilian agencies of the Republic of Vietnam would attempt to destroy the enemy political organization among the people, reestablish government control in each village and hamlet, and, it was hoped, win the allegiance of the people through economic and social improvements.

In the GVN's Accelerated Pacification Campaign, proclaimed in October 1968 by President Nguyen Van Thieu, the allies broke down these general concepts of pacification into specific tasks and assigned responsibility for each task to particular civil or military agencies. The plan set goals to be met for each task at national, corps, and province levels. Expanding upon the 1968 plan, the GVN Pacification and Development Plan for 1969 continued and refined the definition of tasks and assignment of goals and provided the framework for a nationwide effort.

By early 1970, both the United States and South Vietnam had achieved substantial central control over the many civilian and military agencies involved in pacification. For the Americans, the U.S. Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), formed in mid-1967, combined most of the personnel engaged in pacification and in advising GVN nonmilitary agencies into one chain of command under MACV. The CORDS organization paralleled the military and political structure of the South Vietnamese Government, with a deputy for CORDS under each U.S. corps area commander and lower-ranking CORDS deputies at province and district headquarters. In Saigon, the national head of CORDS in 1970, Ambassador William Colby, was a member of General Abrams's staff. On the South Vietnamese side, a Central Pacification and Development Council (CPDC),\* chaired by the Prime Minister and including represen-

\*The CPDC was defined in the 1970 Combined Campaign Plan as the "ministerial council at the cabinet level responsible for planning, coordinating and executing the national Pacification and Development Program."



Marine Corps Historical Collection

*South Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky is shown with MajGen Charles F. Widdecke, Commanding General, 1st Marine Division on a visit to I Corps.*

tatives of all government agencies, prepared the annual Pacification and Development Plans. Similar military region and province councils, working closely with their counterpart CORDS organizations, oversaw implementation of the national plans at lower levels of government.

Between 1967 and 1970, President Nguyen Van Thieu had consolidated his administrative and political control over South Vietnam. In the process of doing so, he devoted increased attention to pacification and made important advances on the crucial problems of development of local government and land reform. Thieu's regime restored to the villages and hamlets their ancient right, suspended under Ngo Dinh Diem, to elect their own governing councils.

President Thieu delegated to these elected councils increased control over local budgets and taxation, and he gave the village chiefs, who were chosen by the councils, command of the PF platoons, Revolutionary Development teams, and national police working

in their villages. To enlarge their prestige and self-confidence as well as improve their training, he held national conferences of village and hamlet officials. Thieu also took the province chiefs out from under the authority of the senior ARVN commanders in their provinces and made them responsible directly to their military region commanders and through them to Saigon. At the same time, he transferred the power to appoint province and district chiefs from the local ARVN commanders to the central government. American observers interpreted these changes as efforts by Thieu to create a new political constituency for himself outside the RVNAF and the established Saigon political parties, but the changes also offered the promise of a more responsive and efficient civil government—a major goal of pacification.<sup>3</sup>

Land reform, for years urged upon the GVN by its American advisors as a means of winning the loyalty of the peasants and half-heartedly attempted by previous Saigon regimes, also took a step forward under President Thieu. Early in 1970, he signed the "Land to the Tiller" bill passed the year before by the National Assembly after long debate. The bill drastically limited the amount of land any one person could own and required distribution of the excess acreage (for which the owners would be compensated) to the tenants who actually worked it and to other categories of needy and deserving Vietnamese. While implementation of the law quickly bogged down in administrative and legal difficulties, its adoption gave the GVN a means of matching Communist promises on an issue long monopolized by the VC.<sup>4</sup>

#### *The 1970 GVN Pacification and Development Plan*

On 10 November 1969, President Thieu promulgated his government's 1970 Pacification and Development Plan which was approved by President Thieu, the Prime Minister, and the Cabinet. It was to be signed in formal ceremony by each province chief and American province senior advisor. Designed to complement the allies' military combined campaign plan for the year, the Pacification and Development Plan constituted the guiding directive on pacification for South Vietnamese and Free World Military Armed Forces (FWMAF). General Abrams distributed copies of it to the United States corps area commanders, including the Commanding General of III MAF, with instructions to regard it as "guidance, directive in nature to advisory personnel at all echelons."<sup>5</sup>

The 1970 plan was designed to expand the pacification advances of 1969. During that year the GVN and its allies had been able to extend their military presence and influence into most of South Vietnam's villages and hamlets. This had resulted in impressive territorial gains. By the end of the year, CORDS estimated that about 90 percent of the South Vietnamese people lived in localities wholly or partially GVN-controlled and that the enemy remained a major military threat in only nine provinces, including Quang Nam and Quang Ngai in MR 1.\*<sup>6</sup> The GVN and its allies now planned to consolidate these security gains and to reinforce them by extending local self-government and intensifying efforts at economic and social improvement. As the preamble to the 1970 plan put it:

... We will vigorously push our attacks into the Communist base areas and exploit their weakness to eliminate them completely from pacified areas, and thus create an advantageous milieu so we can increase the quality of life in the future. At the same time we must bring a new vitality to our people in a framework of total security, so that the people can build and develop a free and prosperous society.<sup>7</sup>

The 1970 plan contained five guiding principles, five operational principles, and eight objectives. The guiding and operational principles were pacification truisms and generalities, such as "Pacification and Development must unite to become one" (Guiding Principle One), and "Establish the hamlet where the people are; do not move the people to establish the hamlet" (Operational Principle Three). The practical goals for action for the year were established in the eight objectives, which were: "Territorial Security; Protection of the People against Terrorism; People's Self Defense; Local Administration; Greater National Unity; Brighter Life for War Victims; People's Information; and Prosperity for All." These titles covered programs or combinations of programs, most of which had been underway for many years.<sup>8</sup>

Under "Territorial Security," the Vietnamese Government committed itself to assuring that 100 percent of its people lived in hamlets and villages with pacification ratings of A, B, or C, the three highest grades on the six-level evaluation scale employed in the

CORDS Hamlet Evaluation System (HES).<sup>\*</sup> The government set the goal of reducing attacks, shelling, terrorism, and sabotage by 50 percent of the 1969 level in areas being pacified and 75 percent in areas rated secure. Expansion in numbers and quality of the national police "in order to help the local governments maintain law and order in both rural and urban areas" also came under this objective.

"Protection of the People against Terrorism" covered the program codenamed Phoenix by the Americans and Phung Hoang by the Vietnamese. This program had been previously conducted under tight secrecy by Vietnamese police and intelligence agencies with supervision and advice from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Its objective was "neutralization" by death or capture of members of the VCI, the Com-

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\*The Americans had instituted HES in 1966 to reduce the vast amount of pacification-related information to a more or less reliable set of statistical indicators of progress or lack of it. Data for the system was collected by the U.S. senior district advisors who completed periodic questionnaires on each hamlet and village. The questions covered all aspects of pacification—security, political, and socio-economic. The information thus obtained was collated and translated into statistics. The system came under much criticism for incompleteness and biases in reporting and analysis, and on 1 January 1970, CORDS put into effect the improved Hamlet Evaluation System (HES)-70. While always controversial and viewed with skepticism by many Americans in the field, HES did provide a unified quantitative picture of what was going on in pacification, and its numbers and percentages at least served to indicate trends.

CORDS in July 1969 defined its security letter categories as follows:

A. Hamlet has adequate security forces; Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) has been eliminated; social and economic improvements are under way.

B. A VC threat exists, but so do organized and "partially effective" security forces. VCI has been partially neutralized; self-help programs and economic improvements have been undertaken.

C. The hamlet is subject to VC harassment, the VCI has been identified; the hamlet population participates in self-help programs and local government.

D. VC activities have been reduced, but an internal threat still exists. There is some VC taxation and terrorism. The local populace participates in hamlet government and economic programs.

E. The VC is effective; although some GVN control is evident, the VCI is intact, and the GVN programs are nonexistent or just beginning.

VC. The hamlet is VC-controlled, with no resident government officials or advisors, although military may come in occasionally. The population willingly supports the VC. IDA Pacification Report, 3, p. 296.

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\*The other seven were Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Pleiku, and Kontum in MR 2; and Kien Hoa, Vinh Binh, and An Xuyen in MR 4. Reportedly there were no enemy-controlled villages in MR 3.



Marine Corps Historical Collection

*A crying child sits on the steps of what had been his home. Communist gunners had shelled the village, destroying his house and killing his parents.*

munist clandestine government and political movement. Late in 1969, the U.S. and the GVN decided to acknowledge Phoenix/Phung Hoang openly as a major element of the pacification program. By doing so, they hoped to rally popular support for it and to coordinate all allied military and political agencies for a more intensive and wide-ranging attack. Therefore, the 1970 Pacification and Development Plan established the goal of eradicating 1,800 known VCI per month and identifying additional members of the infrastructure who were believed to exist, but did not yet have dossiers on file. It prescribed the structure of Phung Hoang organizations down to the district level, in which the national police were to be the “principal operational element” and all other military and civil agencies were to participate. It specified which Communist activists could be considered members of the VCI and which could not and laid out procedures for apprehension, trial, and sentencing.

“People’s Self Defense” denoted further expansion

and improved equipment and training for the People’s Self Defense Force (PSDF). The PSDF, a civilian home guard, had come into spontaneous existence in portions of Saigon, Hue, and other localities after the Communist attacks on the cities during the Tet Offensive of early 1968. The GVN by law extended the organization nationwide in June of 1968 with the ultimate intention of enrolling entire urban and rural populations including women, children, and all men above or below ARVN draft age. The men were to be formed into combat groups, armed, and trained to guard their hamlets and neighborhoods. The women, children, and old people, organized in support groups, would be instructed in first aid, firefighting, and other noncombatant defense tasks. All members were to aid in identifying and capturing local VCI. Many American officials considered the PSDF potentially one of the GVN’s most promising pacification devices, more for its mass involvement of people in supporting the government than for its still unproven military value. By early 1970, the PSDF included about 1,288,000 men in combat groups—armed with 339,000 weapons—and 2,000,000 members of support groups.<sup>9</sup> The 1970 Pacification and Development Plan called for enlarging the membership figures respectively to 1,500,000 and 2,500,000 and for increasing the armament of the combat groups to 500,000 weapons, including 15,000 automatic rifles, by the end of the year.

The remaining five objectives constituted the development part of the pacification program. “Local Administration” prescribed plans for electing hamlet, village, municipal, and provincial councils and for improving the skills of local officials.\* “Greater National Unity” directed continuation of the “Chieu Hoi” Program under which enemy soldiers and political cadres who surrendered voluntarily were resettled in civilian pursuits or put to work for the allies. The plan set a nationwide goal of obtaining 40,000 new Hoi Chanh (persons who gave up under the Chieu Hoi program) during the year. “Brighter Life for War Victims” covered aid to refugees, disabled veterans, war widows, and orphans “in order that these people can continue a normal and useful life.” The “People’s Information” objectives outlined propaganda and psychological warfare themes for the year. “Prosperity for All” covered an array of programs for improving ur-

\*These would include second elections for many hamlets and villages whose officials had been elected in 1967 for three-year terms.

ban and rural life, including land reform under the "Land to the Tiller" Act.

The plan assigned responsibility for achieving its goals to the various government ministries and to military regions, provinces, municipalities, and districts. For each of the eight objectives, the plan designated one "responsible ministry," such as the Ministry of Defense for Territorial Security, and listed a number of "participating" and "interested" ministries. Officials of the concerned ministries were to carry out their portions of the plan at military region, province, and district levels. They were to coordinate their activities with each other and with local officials through military region and province Pacification and Development Councils (PDCs) which were also to draft pacification and development plans, based on the national plan, for their areas of responsibility. The national plan for 1970 declared that:

The CTZ and the province/municipal PDCs must play an active role in local pacification and development, insuring that implementation is comprehensive, not neglecting

*Residents of the same village shown on the previous page rebuild their home after the Viet Cong attack. The Vietnamese Government with supplies donated by CORDS provided the villagers with the necessary building material and tools to reconstruct their houses.*

some areas by concentrating on too narrow a spectrum, and orchestrated so as to create a pacification effort that is interrelated and mutually supporting throughout the land.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Pacification Plans and Organization in Military Region 1*

In Military Region 1 (MR-1), as elsewhere in South Vietnam, 1969 had been a year of progress in pacification. Of the 2,900,000 inhabitants of the corps area's five provinces, 2,800,000 people or 93.6 percent by the end of the year resided in hamlets rated A, B, or C under the HES. This percentage dropped to 85.7 early in 1970 under the stricter standards of HES-70, the revised evaluation system introduced by CORDS in January. Elected governments were operating in 91 percent of the villages and 99 percent of the hamlets. The PSDF had enrolled 548,000 members, 287,000 of them in combat groups with 81,000 weapons. Over 5,300 VCI had been neutralized during 1969, and almost 6,000 Hoi Chanhs had rallied to the GVN. I Corps still contained more refugees than any other corps area, between 600,000 and 900,000, but a start

Marine Corps Historical Collection





had been made on resettling them and there were other indications of economic and social improvement.<sup>11</sup>

Corps and province level pacification and development plans for 1970 included efforts to achieve the national goal of 100 percent of the people in A, B, and C hamlets, to kill or capture more than 2,200 VCI during the first half of the year and identify 3,800 others, and to bring in 3,000 Hoi Chanh in the same period. Plans called for no major enlargement in numbers for the PSDF but for an increase of about 10,000 weapons and the establishment of a military training cadre for each two villages. About one-third of the villages and hamlets and all the provinces and municipalities were to participate in the planned local elections, and over 9,000 officials were to receive training at province or national level. The planners set no numerical goals for refugee resettlement or economic improvement but promised much activity, including training, which would facilitate the self-sufficiency of refugees upon relocations.<sup>12</sup>

The U.S. organization for pacification in I Corps/MR 1 conformed to the standard CORDS structure established in 1967.\*<sup>13</sup> Until the change of command in March, III MAF acted as controlling military headquarters for pacification with the civilian Deputy for CORDS as a member of its staff. After the change of command, control of CORDS passed to the Commanding General, XXIV Corps. The Deputy for CORDS, George D. Jacobson, who held Foreign Service rank equivalent to that of a major general, directed the efforts of over 700 military personnel and 150 civilians who were drawn from the Agency for International Development (AID), the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), the Department of Defense, and other agencies. The staff had a division for each major element of the pacification program: Territorial Forces, Phoenix/Phung Hoang, Chieu Hoi, Public Safety, Revolutionary Development, Government Development, Economic Development, Refugees, and Public Health.

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\*In the pre-CORDS days in Vietnam, III MAF had made some of the first American attempts to coordinate civilian and military pacification activity by U.S. and Vietnamese agencies. A relic of the *ad hoc* groupings of those days, the I Corps Combined Coordinating Council, continued to meet sporadically throughout 1970, but it now was "used primarily by the Vietnamese as a channel to short-circuit . . . the proper channels whereby they should get things done." Col Clifford J. Peabody, Debriefing at FMFPac, 8Sept70, Tape 4956, (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

Under the regional Deputy for CORDS, the five province senior advisors (PSA), each with a staff similar in structure to that at corps level, worked closely with the GVN province chiefs. The position of the province chiefs, who commanded the RFs and PFs and PSDF as well as directing all aspects of civil government, made the senior advisors attached to them the key American officials for carrying out pacification policies. According to Colonel Wilmer W. Hixson, the senior Marine on the I Corps CORDS staff, the PSA was "the most important single individual in all of Vietnam" in making pacification work. "The scope of his duties are more broad than [those of] any other single officer, of comparable rank . . . He's the guy that makes it tick in the province."<sup>14</sup> Of the five province senior advisors in MR 1 during the first half of 1970, three were military officers and two were civilians. Under control of the PSAs, the 44 district senior advisors (DSAs) worked with the GVN district chiefs who in their administrative hierarchy were responsible to the province chiefs.

In comparison with the size of its forces in I Corps, the Marine Corps had only small representation on the CORDS staff. During the first half of 1970, the highest-ranking Marine with CORDS was Colonel Hixson, who served as Chief of Staff to the Deputy for CORDS and as Program Coordinator for Security. In the latter job, he supervised the staff sections for Regional and Popular Forces, Phoenix/Phung Hoang, Chieu Hoi, Public Safety, and Revolutionary Development cadre.\* Besides Hixson, seven other Marine officers and five enlisted men held corps-level CORDS billets, and four officers served as province psychological warfare advisors. When the 3d Marine Division left Vietnam late in 1969, six officers still having time to serve in-country temporarily joined CORDS as advisors to the paramilitary Revolutionary Development cadres. They were replaced by Army officers as their Vietnam tours ended.

The Marines had no representation at the important province and district senior advisor level, not even in Quang Nam where they were the principal allied military force. Colonel Hixson believed that this situation reduced Marine influence in pacification, saying:

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The Marine Corps made a mistake when they did not get into this program, particularly in Quang Nam Province. It

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\*Hixson received his CORDS assignment from the MACV staff, to which he was attached, rather than from III MAF. For further detail on the activities of other Marines in Vietnam not assigned to III MAF, see Chapter 21.

would have been an excellent chance to have had the Province Senior Advisor in Quang Nam a Marine, and as many of the District Senior Advisors as we could have . . . . Not that the liaison [between III MAF and CORDS] was not good, but it would have been much better had there been Marines on the staff.<sup>15</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Warren E. Parker, a retired Army officer, who was PSA in Quang Nam from 1968-1970 and who spent eight total years as a PSA after serving two years as a Special Forces officer, years later challenged Colonel Hixson's contention that the PSAs in I Corps should have been Marine officers:

I consider [the argument] debatable. Although the CG, III MAF was the Corps senior advisor, the PSA was directly responsible to the CORDS chain of command. A Marine officer in the role as a PSA probably would have been more intimidated by the III MAF and Marine division staff. Fortunately, I thought the CORDS-Marine staffs worked remarkably well together.<sup>16</sup>

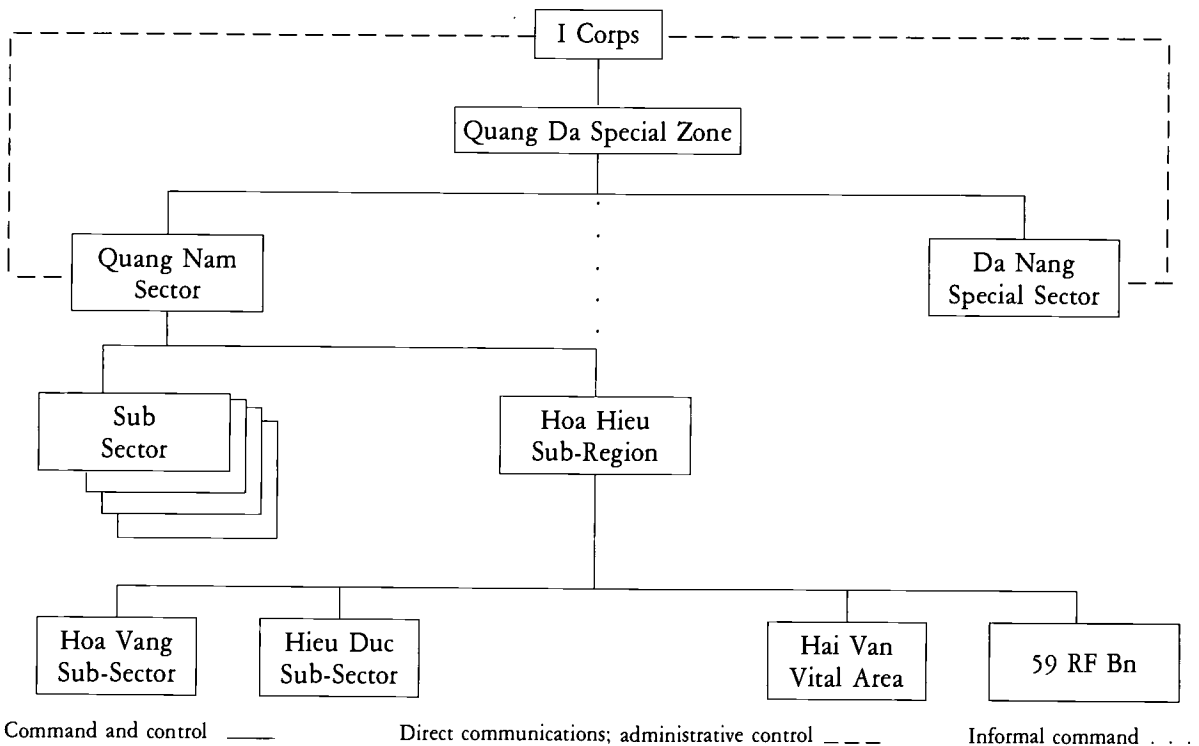
*Pacification Situation in Quang Nam, Early 1970*

Throughout most of 1970, Marine pacification efforts were concentrated in Quang Nam Province. Here the Marines had to deal not only with the inherent

difficulties of rooting out the Viet Cong, but also with the complexities of divided Vietnamese military and political authority.

As was quite common in Vietnam, an ARVN officer, Colonel Le Tri Tin, served as Province Chief of Quang Nam. Colonel Tin directed civil government and as military sector commander he controlled Quang Nam's RFs and PFs and PSDF units. In his military capacity, Colonel Tin, under an arrangement established by the I Corps commander, Lieutenant General Lam, came under tactical control of Quang Da Special Zone (QDSZ), the senior ARVN headquarters in the province. Reflecting his combined civil and military functions, Tin had two staffs, one military and the other civilian. The latter consisted of 23 officials concerned with administrative, economic, and social matters. Land clearing operations, rice harvesting, and refugee resettlement were among the largely nonmilitary responsibilities with which the province chiefs had to concern themselves. Under Tin, the nine district chiefs/subsector commanders, all ARVN officers, also had both political and military authority within their areas. Separate from Quang Nam Province, the city of Da Nang had its own mayor, appointed from Sai-

ORGANIZATION FOR AREA SECURITY IN QUANG NAM AND DA NANG



gon, to control its civil affairs and militia forces. The city, like the province, came under the control of QDSZ for military purposes.\*<sup>17</sup>

Interference from Lieutenant General Lam, who maintained his corps headquarters in Da Nang, complicated and disrupted this apparently straightforward distribution of authority. While QDSZ, for example, controlled the operations of the 51st ARVN Regiment, other regular units stationed in Quang Nam, notably the 1st Ranger Group, the 1st Armored Brigade, and the 17th Armored Cavalry Squadron, were usually under the direct control of Lam. These units displayed little sense of obligation to assist in pacification and security activities. Major John S. Grinalds, S-3 of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, recalled that the armored cavalry, which camped near Hill 55 between operations:

... never provided any support to anyone within the area immediately around Da Nang . . . . Once they got back in our area . . . we couldn't count on them for any kind of support at all. They were also, I think, tied up to General Lam who considered them his special reserve for a lot of reasons and just wouldn't let them deploy and run the risk of getting sunk in somewhere else.<sup>18</sup>

Further confusing command relationships, Lieutenant General Lam on 16 January 1970 established still another military headquarters in Quang Nam called the Hoa Hieu Defensive Area. Supposedly subordinate to Quang Nam Province, this area encompassed Hai Van Pass and the districts of Hieu Duc and Hoa Vang which surrounded Da Nang. Hoa Hieu controlled the 1/25 RF Group, which protected Hai Van Pass, the RFs and PFs of Hieu Duc and Hoa Vang Districts, and an independent RF unit, the 59th Battalion. The new headquarters was to "utilize the RF and PF that are available . . . for ARVN only operations or for coordinating operations with allied forces," "to give Hoa Vang and Hieu Duc a hand in military matters for the good of . . . Pacification and Development," and to "deal accordingly and effectively with enemy intention of launching mortar and ground attacks on Da Nang City and its outskirts."<sup>19</sup>

In July, a U.S. Army advisor summed up the con-

voluted South Vietnamese command relations in the province:

Quang Da [Special Zone] is a tactical headquarters, primarily concerned with tactical operations in the unpopulated areas. It has the authority to establish AO's and it has tactical command over Quang Nam Sector [Province] and Da Nang Special Sector. It also exercises rather direct supervision over Hoa Hieu Sub-Region, issuing orders direct to Hoa Hieu without going through Quang Nam Sector. As a result, Quang Nam is often uninformed concerning the tactical situation in Hoa Hieu and has abdicated its responsibility in that area. In the southern districts, however, Quang Nam does exercise tactical command under QDSZ. As a further complication, General Lam will sometimes issue instructions directly to Quang Nam, Da Nang, or Hoa Hieu.<sup>20</sup>

As was true throughout I Corps, the Quang Nam CORDS organization, which worked alongside the Vietnamese province and district staffs, contained few Marines. The majority of key CORDS positions were held by active or retired Army officers. Of the three province senior advisors who served during the year,\* two were active-duty Army officers and the third was a retired officer employed by AID. Most of the district senior advisors and the members of the province CORDS staff also came from the Army.<sup>21</sup>

III MAF and its subordinate units maintained contact with CORDS and the province government primarily through the G-5 or S-5 (Civil Affairs/Civic Action) sections of their staffs. The Marines had added this section (G-5 at MAF, division, and wing, and S-5 at regimental and battalion level) to the usual four headquarters staff sections early in the war in recognition of the close relationship between pacification and the military effort. The G-5 and S-5 officers, responsible for pacification and civil affairs, kept in close touch with the GVN and CORDS officials at the various levels of command. They attempted to fit military civic action into overall pacification plans, settled civilian damage claims against Marines, and in some instances helped to coordinate Marine operations in populated areas with those of local security forces.

Lieutenant Colonel Parker, who was PSA from January to April, recalled that among the American, Viet-

\*For the development and organization of QDSZ, see Chapters 2 and 4. This was a departure from the prescribed chain of command under which province chiefs were to report directly to the MR commander. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of defense and pacification in the Da Nang Vital Area and Da Nang City.

\*PSAs during 1970 were Lieutenant Colonel Warren E. Parker, USA (Ret) who had begun his tour in July 1968 and served until 24 April 1970; Lieutenant Colonel William R. Blakely, Jr., USA (Acting PSA), from April to July 1970; and Colonel John Chism, USA, from July through the end of the year. Colonel Hixson considered Chism one of the best PSAs in Vietnam. Hixson Debrief.

namese, and Korean units with which he worked on a daily basis the Marine Corps appeared to have the "clearest understanding that in a situation such as Vietnam pacification operations were as important as combat operations." He observed that "with very few exceptions, even the Vietnamese military and political leaders failed to grasp this basic, but very important, fundamental. The Vietnamese people, for very good reasons, distrusted and feared the Government of Vietnam and its military forces."<sup>22</sup>

Both III MAF and the 1st Marine Division kept the same G-5 officers for most of the year. At III MAF Headquarters, Colonel Clifford J. Peabody, who came to Vietnam from the Operations Branch, G-3 Division, at HQMC, headed the G-5 office from September 1969 through September 1970, when Major Donald E. Sudduth replaced him. The 1st Marine Division G-5, Colonel Louis S. Hollier, Jr., held his position for 11 months of 1970.\* Since the division controlled most of the Marine units directly involved in security and pacification and was roughly equivalent in the chain of command to QDSZ and Quang Nam Province, Colonel Hollier became the principal liaison officer between the Marines and the GVN and CORDS authorities. According to Colonel Hixson, "Most of the work between the 1st Marine Division and the Province Senior Advisor in Quang Nam . . . is accomplished by G-5 — some G-3 work, too."<sup>23</sup>

In February 1970, to improve coordination with other allied commands on a wide range of matters including pacification, the 1st Marine Division instituted a weekly conference of commanders and principal staff officers of the division, Quang Da Special Zone, and the 2d ROKMC Brigade. The conference, which met at each headquarters in rotation, had as its purpose "to ensure thorough coordination and mutual understanding in planning and execution of operations and to determine procedures for approaching other areas of common interest."<sup>24</sup> Besides military problems, the meetings dealt with pacification-related matters such as security during GVN elections, protection of the rice harvest, military support for refugee resettlement, and plans for civic action. The assistant division commander of the 1st Marine Division recalled that the meetings were "useful but required constant re-energizing as Vietnamese commanders changed and interest lagged."<sup>25</sup> With the exception of a six-week

period during July and August, meetings were held almost every work day during 1970.

Besides the regular forces of the ARVN, III MAF, and the Korean Marine Brigade, the allies in Quang Nam had at their disposal the whole range of military and civilian agencies which had evolved to conduct pacification. The province and district governments were active and relatively efficient. A province Pacification and Development Council met monthly, bringing together all GVN officials concerned with the effort. The district chiefs met regularly with their village chiefs to coordinate activities. At the beginning of the year, Colonel Tin had under his command about 14,000 men of the RF and PF, organized in 52 RF companies and 177 platoons. In the judgement of their American advisors, the RF and PFs were improving steadily in military effectiveness, but they still did not have enough competent small-unit leaders, and too many of them were tied to static defensive positions. The People's Self-Defense Force boasted over 73,000 members, about 14,000 of whom were armed. In April, the Province Senior Advisor reported of the PSDF: "I have seen this program develop from nothing to a formidable, potential element . . . . In many incidents, the PSDF have been instrumental in driving the VC/NVA out of their hamlet areas."<sup>26</sup> The province's 4,500 members of the National Police Field Force (NPF) and national police, formerly concentrated in the province capital and the larger towns, were now moving out into the countryside to relieve the militia in maintaining public order. By late April, each district had its NPF platoon, and the national police had 68 village substations in operation.

In addition to the territorials, PSDF, and police, 50 Revolutionary Development Cadre (RDC) groups were working in Quang Nam's hamlets. In units of four to eight men, these youths, recruited and trained by the central government, were supposed to help the people organize themselves for defense and for political, economic, and social self-help. Under the operational control of the village chief, the RDC served as one of the GVN's political extensions into villages and hamlets, providing a bridge between the people and their government. The cadres varied greatly in ability and motivation, and in some parts of Quang Nam animosity existed between the RDC and the RFs and PFs, but American advisors considered the cadres generally helpful in bringing government programs to the people.

\*The 1st MAF during 1970 did not have a G-5 officer, although aviation units conducted civic action.

Quang Nam by the beginning of 1970 possessed an active Phoenix/Phung Hoang program organized at province, district, and village levels and had exceeded its VCI neutralization quotas for both 1968 and 1969. The province maintained a Chieu Hoi center at Hoi An for reception, training, and indoctrination of Communists who voluntarily surrendered. Four resettlement hamlets for former VC in the province contained over 400 families. Two GVN Armed Propaganda Companies kept teams in the field seeking out VC and relatives of VC in an effort to encourage additional desertions. To further spread the GVN's message across the province, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), an agency under CORDS, and the Vietnamese Information Service (VIS), were attempting to expose more Vietnamese to television, both by distributing government-purchased sets to the villages and by encouraging private buying of receivers. A relay station at Hai Van Pass allowed Quang Nam to receive broadcasts from the Vietnamese Government studios in Hue.<sup>27</sup>

Yet for all the efforts of all these agencies, Quang

Nam in 1970 was still far from completely pacified. Of its 950,000 people, about 830,000 lived in communities rated secure or semi-secure under HES-70. Another 50,900 resided in areas considered "contested." The rest were under Viet Cong domination or in localities "not rated," which meant about the same thing. Thus, 86.7 percent of the people were supposedly under GVN control, but this figure was deceptive. Marine intelligence officers were convinced that a clandestine VC government continued to operate, even in areas relatively free of overt Communist political and military activity, and that many Viet Cong had infiltrated GVN agencies. Especially in the heavily populated districts south of Da Nang, VC guerrillas, while probably less numerous than they had been earlier in the war, still remained active and tenacious.<sup>28</sup>

GVN social and economic improvement efforts still left much to be desired. About 44 percent of the province's school age children, in late April 1970, were enrolled in primary schools, and the government was training new teachers and (with much help from the

*Army LtGen James W. Sutherland, left, discusses with South Vietnamese pacification officials the Go Noi Island Refugee Resettlement Program. Go Noi Island, a long-time enemy strongpoint, had been cleared out and made into a refuge for displaced villagers.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection



Marines) building new schools about as rapidly as additional villages were being protected from the VC. The secondary school system, however, remained ill-organized and ineffective. The province government annually announced ambitious public works plans, but delays in release of funds by the national ministries and shortages of construction equipment and skilled workers prevented completion of many projects. The amount of land under cultivation in the province had increased during 1969, with about 70 percent of the acreage devoted to rice, but land reform had made little progress due to a lack of trained administrators in the villages and hamlets. Quang Nam's social welfare program, according to the PSA, was:

. . . very poor. Little has been accomplished in care of the needy or in caring for war victims, widows, orphans, and disabled soldiers. The program in this province consists mainly of feeding the orphans, war victims, blind, and widows  
 . . . In the past this has been a token program at best. . . .<sup>29</sup>

Quang Nam's most distressing social problem was its large refugee population, probably the largest single refugee concentration anywhere in South Vietnam. The exact number of refugees was obscured by the peculiarities of GVN reporting. Colonel Hixson explained:

The refugee figures that are shown as refugees . . . are official refugees who have not been paid their [GVN] refugee allowances. Once they have been paid their refugee allowances, they go in a refugee camp. They are still not back in their home. They're still a "social welfare problem. . . ."<sup>30</sup>

To keep the number of officially recognized refugees awaiting payment constant or declining and thus show progress to their superiors, GVN officials habitually paid some their allowances, taking them off the rolls, and then added controlled numbers of actual but hitherto unacknowledged displaced persons. As

a result, while estimates of the "official refugee" population in Quang Nam ranged from 75,000 to 100,000, Colonel Peabody, the III MAF G-5, estimated the actual number of refugees as nearer 200,000.<sup>31</sup> GVN policy called for returning refugees to their home villages, or for upgrading long-inhabited refugee camps into permanent hamlets and villages. The allies in Quang Nam would launch ambitious resettlement projects during 1970. Even so, the size of the problem would continue to dwarf the efforts toward a solution.

In the struggle for the allegiance of the people, accurate information about how many people there were and where they lived was vital for success. In Quang Nam, the GVN lacked such information, not only about refugees, but about permanent residents. Late in 1970, in connection with the 1st Marine Division's effort to reduce harassing and interdiction fire in populated areas, Colonel Paul X. "PX" Kelley reported that in the 1st Marines TAOR:

. . . Maps currently available are outdated and do not represent a reliable picture of local habitation. . . . The migratory habits of many Vietnamese civilians are such that they move constantly from place to place, more often than not without the knowledge of any GVN officials . . . . Many district officials can provide only vague, inconclusive estimates relative to the location of civilians, theoretically under their political cognizance.<sup>32</sup>

The most severe deficiencies in the pacification effort were rooted in the character of the GVN and the nature of South Vietnamese society and hence beyond III MAF's authority or capacity to remedy. Nevertheless, insofar as they could, Marines throughout Quang Nam worked to strengthen and extend pacification. Throughout 1970, with men and material diminishing as redeployment proceeded, the Marines continued and further refined pacification programs and techniques they had developed earlier in the war.

## CHAPTER 8

# The Struggle for Security: Combined Action

*Combined Action Platoons—Reducing the Combined Action Force  
Building on Success: The Combined Unit Pacification Program*

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### *Combined Action Platoons*

As a military force, the Marines concerned themselves primarily with the security aspect of pacification. They devoted most of their activity to keeping enemy military units out of the villages and hamlets and to assisting the GVN in eradicating the VCI. While almost all Marines directly or indirectly took some part in this effort, those involved in the Combined Action Program had protecting the villages and hamlets from local guerrillas as their sole mission.

The Combined Action Program originated with the Marines in Vietnam and was unique to them. It had begun in 1965 when III MAF, in trying to secure the heavily populated area around Hue/Phu Bai, discovered a potential ally in the then disparaged and neglected Popular Forces. Platoons of these parttime soldiers, under command of the district chiefs, guarded particular hamlets and villages. If their deficiencies in training, weapons, and morale could be overcome, they could relieve regular Marine units of many static defensive tasks and help tear out the local roots of enemy strength.

To work with the PFs, III MAF instituted the combined action platoon (CAP), consisting of a 15-man Marine rifle squad paired with a 15- to 30-man PF platoon to defend one particular village. Each element of the team strengthened the other. The Marines contributed firepower, training, and access to American medical evacuation and artillery and air support. The PFs furnished intimate knowledge of the terrain, the people, and the local VC. In the villages where they were stationed, CAPs won fights against local guerrillas and small main force detachments and drove out or killed the VC political cadres. Then, unlike conventional American and ARVN units which swept an area and moved on, the CAPs stayed and furnished the people continual protection against Viet Cong terrorism, recruiting, and taxation. As the Marines won the confidence of the villagers, the CAPs became a major source of allied intelligence, and behind the security shield they afforded, the GVN could reestablish its authority and undertake social and economic improvements. With proven success, the number of

CAPs grew, and during 1966 III MAF extended the program to the Marine TAORs around Da Nang and Chu Lai. To administer the CAPs and to coordinate their activities, III MAF created combined action companies (CACOs) and then combined action groups (CAGs).

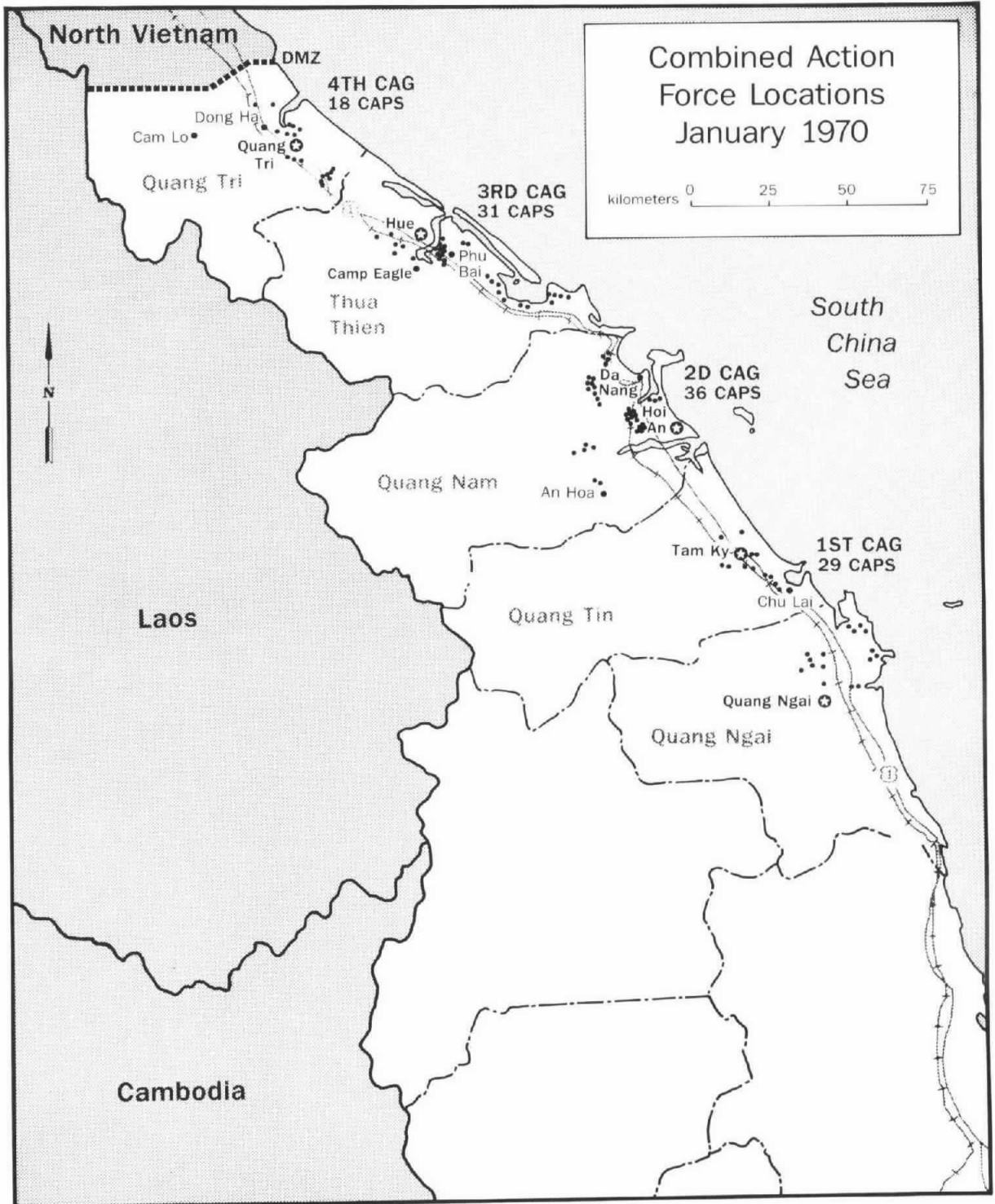
At the beginning of 1970, Marine strength in the Combined Action Program had reached its peak. Four CAGs were in operation: the 1st, under Lieutenant Colonel David F. Seiler, in Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces; the 2d, under Lieutenant Colonel Don R. Christensen, in Quang Nam; the 3d, under Colonel John B. Michaud, in Thua Thien; and the 4th, under Lieutenant Colonel John J. Keenan, in Quang Tri.\*

In January 1970, the four CAGs consisted of a total of 42 Marine officers and 2,050 enlisted men, with two naval officers and 126 hospital corpsmen. Organized in 20 CACOs and 114 CAPs, these Americans worked with about 3,000 RF and PF soldiers. The 2d CAG in Quang Nam, largest of the four, consisted of eight CACOs with 36 CAPs and almost 700 Marine and Navy officers and men, while the smallest, the 4th in Quang Tri, had three CACOs and 18 CAPs.<sup>1</sup>

Until January 1970, III MAF exercised command over the four CAGs through an Assistant Chief of Staff and Director, Combined Action Program. To improve coordination and administration of the program, Lieutenant General Nickerson late in 1969 requested permission to establish a Combined Action Force (CAF), with its own headquarters under III MAF. Lieutenant General Buse, Commanding General, FMFPac, approved his request on 8 January. Three days later, III MAF formally activated the CAF, to consist of a headquarters, staffed from the combined action section of the III MAF staff, and the four CAGs with their subordinate CACOs and CAPs. The existing III MAF Direc-

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\*The CAGs underwent relatively few changes of command during 1970. On 5 February, Lieutenant Colonel Claude M. Daniels took over 3d CAG from Colonel Michaud, and on 18 February Major Robert D. King relieved Lieutenant Colonel Keenan at 4th CAG. Major King was relieved by Major Willis D. Ledebor on 27 June. On 1 July, Major George N. Robillard, Jr., took over 1st CAG. CAF ComdCs, Jan-Sep70.







Marine Corps Historical Collection

*LtGen Henry W. Buse, Jr., Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific inspects Marines and Popular Force troops of Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, one of the newly formed integrated CUPP (Combined Unit Pacification Program) companies.*

tor, Colonel Theodore E. Metzger, became commanding officer of Headquarters and Service Company, III MAF, which continued to provide administrative and logistic support, while the 5th Communications Battalion handled the CAFs communications needs. Colonel Metzger was also charged with conducting the CAF School for training new CAP Marines and the CAF Vietnamese Language School.<sup>2</sup>

On 26 March, after XXIV Corps became the senior U.S. headquarters in I Corps, III MAF transferred operational control of the CAF to XXIV Corps, while retaining administrative control. Since the CAF still had CAPs deployed throughout ICTZ, this change was necessary to assure effective support of the CAPs by the U.S. Army and ARVN. The shift of command had little effect on the day-to-day operations of CAP Marines and PFs. Indeed, Lieutenant General Zais, the XXIV Corps commander, on 3 May, declared that the "organization, deployment, training, administration, and combat operation of the CAF were to continue as previously ordered by CG, III MAF . . . ." Colonel

Metzger remained in command of the CAP until 9 July, when he was replaced by Colonel Ralph F. Estey, who had just completed a tour as commanding officer of the 5th Marines.<sup>3</sup>

In the field, the CAPs operated under a complex chain of command which reflected their unique character and mission. The Marines assigned to CAPs were commanded by the CAF through the CAGs and CACOs, while the PFs were responsible in theory to their village chief but in practice usually took orders from their district chief and through him from province and I Corps. Each CAG headquarters, usually located near a province headquarters, provided administrative support to the CACOs under it, trained both Marines and PFs, and, in consultation with province chiefs and regular unit commanders, assigned CAP areas of operation. The CACO headquarters, the counterpart of the Vietnamese district in the command structure, arranged for artillery and air support, evacuation of casualties, and reinforcement for its CAPs with the district and with the U.S., ARVN, or

Korean infantry battalion in its vicinity. Operational control of each CAP unit of Marines and PFs rested with the Vietnamese district (subsector) commander.

By mutual agreement, the province chief, the CAG commander, and the commander of the regular battalion operating in the area assigned each CAP a tactical area of coordination (TAOC), normally encompassing a single village. The TAOC was considered the exclusive territory of the CAP, and non-CAP units were not supposed to enter it without previous permission of the district and CACO commanders. Within each CAP, the Marine squad leader and the PF sergeant, or *trung-si*,\* neither of whom had command over the other, directed operations by consultation and agreement.

If a dispute arose which the Marine squad leader or *trung-si* could not resolve, each had to refer it to a higher level of his own chain of command. This awkward system depended for effectiveness almost entirely on trust and respect between the Marines and PF leaders.<sup>4</sup> While the system worked well generally, Marine small-unit leaders did not hesitate to take charge. Looking back on his experience as commander of the CAF, Colonel Metzger observed that "when push came to shove, the Marines had to assume direct command and frequently did so, particularly when critical situations developed . . . the agreed chain of command was not often a major problem." Metzger suggested that in most cases Marines asserted themselves with the compliance of the Vietnamese. He emphasized, however, that when Marines had to, "at all levels," they took command.<sup>5</sup>

In mid-March, just before XXIV Corps took operational control of the Combined Action Force, a CORDS study group which had been reviewing the Combined Action Program proposed to Lieutenant General Zais that the CAPs be "integrated into CORDS." The study group claimed that at the village level, the CAP PFs' tendency to look to the district for direction undermined the authority of the village chief, and that the CAF, CAGs, and CACOs duplicated many functions of province and district senior advisors, thus weakening single management of American support for territorial security. Colonel Metzger in reply argued against transfer of control of the CAPs to CORDS. He pointed out that the CAPs

still were tactical units engaged in combat operations and the CORDS "possesses no . . . capability to direct or support military operations." His view prevailed. The CAF remained separate from CORDS under overall control of XXIV Corps.<sup>6</sup>

During 1970 the CAF received most of its Marines directly from training centers and staging battalions in the United States, although it continued to accept a few volunteers from other Marine units in Vietnam. Most Marines assigned to the CAF from the United States were not volunteers, but they had to have high general classification test scores and records free of recent disciplinary action. In Vietnam, the CAF Headquarters possessed and exercised the right to screen and reject incoming replacements. Those rejected were sent to other III MAF units. In some drafts, the CAF refused up to 50-55 percent of the men, most of them for medical or disciplinary reasons, but the usual rejection rate was 20-25 percent.

Colonel Metzger gave particular care to the selection of NCOs for the critical position of CAP squad leader. He said:

. . . I personally interviewed every sergeant that came in to the CAF. I would say that the majority—and I'm making a conservative estimate—the majority we rejected. We rejected them usually because they simply did not, based on interview, have the leadership . . . capabilities. This would be evidenced in terms of record, in terms of motivation, in terms of their own willingness to make the effort . . . .<sup>7</sup>

Once they had arrived in Vietnam and been accepted by the CAF, CAP-bound Marines spent about two weeks at the Combined Action Force School in East Da Nang before joining their units. There they received refresher training in basic infantry weapons, small-unit tactics, first aid, and map and compass reading. They attended classes on the use of war dogs, and learned how to request and control artillery fire, air strikes, and medical evacuation flights. They also studied Vietnamese language, history, and culture, GVN politics, and the history and organization of the PF, and received about six hours of instruction in VC and VCI organization, weapons, and tactics. During the two-week school, CAP Marines received 53 hours of instruction in general military subjects and 38 hours in Vietnamese subjects. Another 18 hours were consumed with examinations, critiques, and reviews. For practical experience, CAF school students, with local PFs, conducted night security patrols around the CAF Headquarters compound. Many Marines returned to Da Nang during their CAP tours for 28 days of in-

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\*PFs had no formal rank structure, and their leaders were simply designated by village and district chiefs. No organization for the PF existed beyond the platoon, which theoretically numbered 30 men.

tensive instruction in Vietnamese at the CAF Language School.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout most of the year, as redeployments and changes in the flow of replacements disrupted the personnel "pipeline," the CAF operated at less than full strength. According to Colonel Metzger:

Our T/O [for a CAP] was 15 to include a corpsman. Much of the time I was there we operated at about a 9.5 level, which meant that we were at least a third understrength, continually, and which meant more specifically . . . that instead of, say, putting out three night activities, or three night ambushes in each CAP, we could only put out two, or maybe one . . . While I was there, no solution was found.<sup>9</sup>

The manpower shortage created a number of interrelated problems for the Combined Action Force. Even to keep nine men per CAP in the field, the CAGs often had to reduce their already inadequate headquarters staffs and rotate men between CACOs. Lacking enough qualified senior NCOs, in early 1970 the CAF had to place over one-third of its CAPs under corporals or lance corporals, some hardly out of their

teens and few with previous Vietnam combat experience. Because few Marines could be spared from the field for the extra training, the CAF had a chronic shortage of men fluent in Vietnamese. Fortunately, enough PFs had learned some English during five years of contact with Americans to permit at least basic communication within the CAPs.<sup>10</sup>

During 1970, the CAPs continued to perform the seven missions assigned them in earlier years. These were: to neutralize the VCI in the village or hamlet; to provide security and help maintain law and order; to protect local GVN authorities; to guard important facilities and lines of communication within the village and hamlet; to conduct combined operations with other allied forces; to participate in civic action and psychological operations; and to assist in economic and social development. The Marine element of the CAP had the additional mission "to provide military training to the PF soldiers in order to prepare them to effectively perform the [seven regular] missions . . . when the Marine element is relocated."<sup>11</sup>

*A Marine member of Combined Action Platoon 2-5-3 demonstrates to his Vietnamese counterparts the breaking down of an M60 machine gun. The training of the Popular Force troops was one of the primary missions of the Combined Action Marines.*

Abel Papers, Marine Corps Historical Center





Abel Papers, Marine Corps Historical Center

*Members of a mobile combined action platoon have stopped in a friendly village where they are the dinner guests of one of the village elders. The platoon does not remain in any one hamlet but moves throughout its assigned area from village to village.*

Throughout 1970, the CAPs accomplished their security mission primarily by continual day and night patrolling and by setting ambushes in and around their assigned villages. By the middle of the year, almost all units of the CAF had adopted the "Mobile CAP" concept of operations. This meant that the CAPs abandoned the fortified compounds from which they usually had worked in the past. The compounds, Marines had found, tied down too much of the combined platoon in defending a fixed position, thus weakening the screen around the village and offering the VC comparatively easy access to the people. Also, the compound itself offered enemy local and main forces an attractive target for attack, and several "compound CAPs" had been overrun and all but annihilated.\*

Colonel Metzger recalled that after he was assigned as commander of the CAF several CAPs were either overrun or badly mauled. In some cases the losses resulted from Vietnamese treachery. At this point he realized that a static CAP compound was too easy a

target, and the decision was made to go "mobile." Metzger said, "It was darned tough on the CAP Marines, but it saved many lives and greatly enhanced our security capability. Under this regimen, CAP Marines literally went to the bush for their entire tours." When the change was made, only a couple of CAPs remained in compounds and then only because of the necessity to safeguard radio gear which "would only operate from certain terrain features."

The CAPs now moved daily from place to place among the hamlets, keeping no position more permanent than a patrol base. During May and June, the 4th CAG abandoned even those; its CAPs kept their radios and other heavy equipment at village chiefs' headquarters, or non-CAP territorial force compounds. As far as possible, all the Marines and PFs remained continually active on patrols or night ambushes. This tactic allowed a CAP to screen a larger area more effectively with the same number of men, and it kept the VC uncertain of the CAP's whereabouts and hence less likely to try to enter the village to attack the CAP or to extort supplies and recruits from the people. It also conformed to the GVN policy of assigning a more mobile, aggressive role to the RF and PF while the PSDF took over the task of guarding bridges, village

\*For a vivid description of a VC/NVA assault on a CAP compound see Francis J. West, Jr., *The Village* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 105-127.

offices, and other installations. Colonel Metzger summed up:

... With its mobility, the CAP can keep the VC guessing ... They don't like to come after you unless they've had a chance to get set and do some planning. Mobility throws this off. It ... means that the CAP can be found anywhere outside a village or hamlet, and they don't like this when they're trying to come in for rice, or money, or recruits, or just plain coordination.<sup>12</sup>

While patrols and ambushes occupied most of their time, CAP units also took part in other types of operations. They often worked with Regional and Popular Forces or with U.S. or ARVN regular units to cordon and search villages. Sometimes, one or more CAPs conducted an offensive sweep outside their TAOCs. During April, for example, units of the 1st CAG began sweeping areas which Americal Division or ARVN units had just left, in order to engage enemy units coming back after evading the earlier allied operations. CAPs relied for protection primarily on their organic weapons and on their mobility, but they could and did call for artillery and air support when they needed it. During March, for example, units of the 2d CAG called in 23 artillery fire missions and seven mortar fire missions. They used helicopter gunships twice and requested and controlled 26 medical evacuations for Vietnamese civilians, PFs, and wounded Marines.<sup>13</sup>

When General McCutcheon assumed command of III MAF and was briefed on the CAF situation, he expressed concern to Colonel Metzger over the casualties the CAF had sustained through 1969. "I answered by saying that our experience had taught us that to survive in many CAP TAORs, CAPs had to patrol aggressively," said Metzger, adding, however, that General McCutcheon had an arguable point, given the casualty figures. In 1969, the CAF had killed 1,952 VC/NVA, took 391 POWs, and captured 932 weapons. CAP losses included 111 Marines and 6 Navy corpsmen killed and 851 wounded, over 50 percent of whom were evacuated for wounds. The CAF, nevertheless, remained committed to an aggressive operational mode.

The CAPs' mobile tactics produced results. Throughout most of the year, units of the CAF conducted an average of 12,000 to 14,000 patrols and ambushes per month, about 70 percent of them at night. They took a steady toll of enemy dead and prisoners in brief firefights, over two-thirds of which, according to Colonel Metzger, were CAP-initiated. In the first three months of 1970 alone, the CAF accounted for

288 enemy killed and 87 prisoners, rounded up 487 VC suspects, received 82 Hoi Chanhhs, and captured 172 weapons. In the same period, the CAF lost 22 Marines and 42 PFs killed and 165 Marines and 122 PFs wounded. The 1st and 2d CAGs in southern I Corps, where VC guerrillas were both numerous and active, had most of the contacts and inflicted and absorbed most of the casualties. The 3d and 4th CAGs, in more thinly populated northern I Corps where the main enemy threat came from the NVA, saw less action.<sup>14</sup>

CAF units devoted much attention to training the PFs working with them. In the field, most training occurred during combat operations, with the PFs learning from the example and the informal instruction of their Marine counterparts. As a CAF fact sheet put it, the CAP Marine's "classroom was in the 'bush' where the VC provide necessary training aids."<sup>15</sup>

Each CAG also provided formal instruction for both Marines and PFs. The 4th CAG, for example, brought two entire CAPs each week from their villages to the CAG Headquarters compound. There, the members, Marines and PFs together, received a one-day marksmanship course followed by a medical examination and, if necessary, treatment, a hot dinner, and a movie. The 3d CAG conducted similar refresher training for individual Marines and PFs. When a shortage of Marines forced cancellation of this program in March, 3d CAG established a mobile training team of one Vietnamese lieutenant and one Marine sergeant which travelled from CAP to CAP for the rest of the year.<sup>16</sup> To further assist the Marines and Vietnamese in forming more proficient CAPs, General Lam began phasing some CAP PFs through the full ARVN basic training program at the ARVN training base near Hue.

The CAGs provided periodic refresher courses for the CAP Marines about particular weapons or tactics. They paid careful attention to the Marine CAP leaders because, as Colonel Metzger put it:

... If you have a good, strong CAP leader—strong in all respects, you have a good, strong *trung-si*, because they learn by sort of a process of osmosis, and observation, and emulation, and I saw this happen time after time. We all commented on this. This isn't to say that a weak CAP leader couldn't start with a strong *trung-si*, but it wasn't long before he was down to ... the Marine's level ...<sup>17</sup>

With so many inexperienced young corporals and lance corporals leading CAPs, CACO and CAG commanders had to spend much time, in the words of one of them, "establishing a close relationship with this kid and checking him daily, and I don't mean inspect-

ing him. I mean visiting him and finding out what his problems were . . . .”<sup>18</sup> Both to train and to counsel squad leaders, the 3d CAG during May instituted monthly CAP leaders’ seminars. At these sessions, CAP NCOs, brought to CAG Headquarters from the field, spent most of a day undergoing instruction in various subjects and talking over common problems. They also enjoyed lunch and an opportunity for “a little socializing with contemporaries.”<sup>19</sup>

In both formal and informal training, the Marines emphasized PF self-sufficiency. All the CAGs tried to teach PF leaders and selected soldiers such skills as use and care of the M60 machine gun, 60mm mortar, and AN/PRC-25 radio. They attempted to qualify PFs to act as artillery forward observers and to call for and direct artillery fire missions, air strikes, and medical evacuations. Modifying a long-standing requirement that all CAP operations involve both Marines and PFs, the Marines encouraged PF *trung-sis* to plan and execute their own all-PF patrols and ambushes.<sup>20</sup>

The success of this training in enabling the PF to fight their own battles varied from province to province, even from CAP to CAP. By early 1970, many CAPs in Quang Tin, where the Americal Division,\* 2d ARVN Division, RFs, and PFs now formed a relatively strong military network, had worked themselves out of a job. In this province, an increasing number of village chiefs had begun asserting effective control over PF operations. Many PFs, according to Lieutenant Colonel Seiler, the 1st CAG commander, were showing “interest and ability” in the use of 60mm mortars and M60 machine guns. Seiler reported that in some CAPs, the PFs “do not want the Marines to go on patrols and ambushes, but rather want them to stay in the patrol base or night defensive positions as a react[ion] force or fire support and medevac coordinators.”<sup>21</sup>

In Seiler’s opinion, Vietnamization in the province was working fairly well and the local forces increasingly wanted to assert themselves. This, as Seiler pointed out, restricted the CAP Marines’ role to the degree that they weren’t permitted to perform as their chart-

er directed, hence necessitating Seiler’s decision to encourage the progress of Vietnamization, and to move CAP Marines to areas where they were more needed. He characterized this important change in Quang Tin Province in a 1st CAG letter in April 1970:

... CAPs in Quang Tin Province are developing a go-it-alone capability. The Marine squad leaders have been taking a less dominant role in operations and have been emphasizing Vietnamese capabilities. The major problem occurs when the CAP passes the line of equal partnership in a joint venture and it becomes a predominantly Vietnamese operation. We are faced with a paradox of encouraging Vietnamese participation and control but still requiring Marines to follow certain operating principles such as mobility, active patrolling over a wide area, a specific number of activities and a minimum size of forces. These are all sound procedures and must be adhered to for U.S. units but are considered less important in the overall scheme of operations for Vietnamese units. It is not desirable to attempt to have Vietnamese forces conform to our operating principles after they have demonstrated their ability to handle their own security problems. Rather, it is recommended that the Marine component of the CAP continue to be withdrawn when the need for its services has diminished to the point that the Vietnamese forces can satisfactorily do the job on their own. It should not be a CAP mission, however, to remain in the AO to serve primarily as fire support coordinator.”<sup>22</sup>

In other provinces, where the Regional and Popular Forces were less assertive and the VC stronger, the Vietnamese remained more dependent on their Marine counterparts, but throughout I Corps CAP training improved PF performance. During the first quarter of 1970, for example, the CAP PF platoons, representing about 12 percent of the total number of PFs in I Corps, accounted for about 29 percent of the enemy killed by PFs and 40 percent of the weapons captured.<sup>23</sup>

During daylight hours, CAP Marines spent much of their time on civic action—helping the villagers to improve their daily lives. The Navy corpsmen assigned to the CAPs held periodic sick calls, known as “medcaps.” They gathered the people together for treatment of minor hurts and illnesses, examined the more serious cases, and when possible called for helicopters to take them to U.S. or Vietnamese hospitals. The corpsmen also taught personal hygiene, and trained Vietnamese volunteers in basic first aid and sanitation. CAP riflemen distributed food, clothing, building materials, and school supplies obtained from the U.S. and Vietnamese Governments and from private charities. They also helped the villagers repair and construct dwellings, roads, paddy dikes, schools, public showers, toilets, bridges, and other facilities for com-

\*Years later, Major General Lloyd B. Ramsey, USA, who commanded the Americal Division until the spring of 1970, discussed the success in Quang Tin Province containing the VC: “The weakness of the VC was a direct result of the Americal Division, 2d ARVN Division, RFs, PFs, Province Chiefs, CAPs, all under the supervision of III MAF and supported by Marine, Navy, and AF air support. A fine team effort. Also, we received outstanding support from naval gunfire.” MajGen Lloyd B. Ramsey, USA, Comments on draft ms, 2Jun83 (Vietnam Comment File).

munity betterment. In all such projects, the Marines were supposed to emphasize local self-help, with the villagers identifying the needs to be met and providing most of the labor while the Marines furnished additional workers, materials, and technical skill. Nevertheless, as they had throughout the existence of the Combined Action Program, CAPs continued to give civic action second priority to combat operations. They did so on the theory that the people would be won to the allied cause primarily by providing security rather than through charitable works. Benevolence without protection would not produce real pacification.<sup>24</sup>

Civic action activities during 1970 as conducted by CAPs were given even less priority because of the effects of redeployment. "As in-country U.S. units in I Corps had to extend their TAORs to compensate for redeployment of the 3d Marine Division and the 26th Marines in late 1969," recalled Colonel Metzger, "the job of village security became much tougher for the CAPs. . . . I remember by early 1970 that we had CACOs in 2d CAG in contact every night as the VC and NVA tried to exploit the reduced major units' presence. For this reason, our civic action efforts were much reduced. The troops simply couldn't do both as the threat intensified."<sup>25</sup>

By 1970, the Combined Action Program had been in operation for five years. While most observers agreed that it was succeeding in its primary mission of improving local security, the program did have problems and shortcomings, some inherent in its nature, others the result of current circumstances. For example, Colonel Metzger complained that the CACO headquarters needed two officers rather than the one usually assigned. He explained that "One officer simply cannot hack it, not when it comes to investigations, resupply, tactical supervision of the CAPs, fire support coordination. Then you lay all this on top of the time-space factor, and he just can't hack it."<sup>26</sup>

Marines in and out of the CAF agreed that the requirement that line units obtain both CACO and district approval before entering a CAP TAOC often prevented allied battalions from effectively exploiting current intelligence. In an effort to solve this problem, Lieutenant Colonel John J. Tolnay, who took command of the 2d CAG late in September, reached an informal agreement with Colonel Kelley of the 1st Marines, in whose TAOR most of Tolnay's CAPs were located. Tolnay recalled:

We got this straightened out pretty well with the 1st Marines. Colonel Kelley and I sat down and talked . . . and

I said, "Welcome aboard. Any time you want to come through, just let us know because we do have to coordinate just like any other infantry unit."<sup>27</sup>

In a further effort to improve working relationships with the 2d CAG, the 1st Marines began assigning its rifle companies to operate regularly with particular CACOs and designating particular squads to cooperate with individual CAPs.<sup>28</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Tolnay felt that much more could have been done in exploiting the CAPs as intelligence sources:

. . . We had a great intelligence-gathering potential that was not exploited efficiently. Because we were co-located with the district, we maintained a joint COC with the district headquarters, we were privy to all the intelligence that they gathered . . . and we had the pulse of the people. . . . We tried to feed this information up to battalion, but the communication links weren't that good because it meant having to wait till the next day to get it to them because we weren't on the same net and we didn't have telephone communication.<sup>29</sup>

CAP Marines were generally able to establish at least minimally harmonious working relationships with the PFs, but difficulties remained. Many of the PFs were reluctant to attend formal training sessions, particularly classes held during the day after they had spent the night patrolling. Some PFs had to be coerced to operate outside villages and hamlets at night. Sergeant Tom Harvey, who commanded CAP 3-3-5 located just west of Hue, years later remembered the frustration of trying to motivate the PFs to patrol outside of their fixed positions, especially at night. "Our PFs still refused to have the main body of their platoon in a night position outside of the hamlet," said Harvey. Only his Hoi Chanh, who had been abducted by the VC when he was 15 and who hated the VC, readily participated.<sup>30</sup>

The PFs, and the village and district chiefs who controlled them, also responded unenthusiastically to Marine efforts to introduce mobile\* tactics. Often, when CAP Marines were shifted to other villages, the PFs

\*"I think nearly everyone interested in the matter now recognizes the advantages of the mobile CAP, as opposed to those bound to fixed bases or compounds," said Sergeant Tom Harvey, leader of CAP 3-3-5. "I would certainly agree, and can only surmise that we would have been much more effective at Delta-1 in 2d CAG [the CAP in which Harvey served in 1968] if we had been mobile. The area was much more heavily populated with several hamlets in our AO, and would have been better suited to a mobile mode of operation than our AOs in 3d CAG. . . ." Tom Harvey, Comments on draft ms, 16Jan84 (Vietnam Comment File).



would return to their old habit of staying in compounds or other fixed positions. The general lack of mobility by PFs usually resulted from "village pressure to keep the PFs close in to afford maximum personal security for the village and hamlet officials."<sup>31</sup>

Occasionally, CAP Marines became embroiled in local Vietnamese feuds. During February, for example, Marines of CAP 4-2-1 in Quang Tri had a firefight with a non-CAP PF platoon guarding a bridge at the edge of their TAOC. The non-CAP PFs, strangers to the district, continually harassed and abused CAP PFs and villagers. On 21 February, when the Marines intervened to protect a soft-drink vendor, the hostile PFs opened fire on them, slightly wounding the CAP leader. The Marines returned fire, and a noisy exchange ensued, although a 4th CAG investigation later concluded that "both sides used restraint in the firing, since at the short range involved great harm could have been inflicted if the volume of fire was heavy or aimed accurately." The only casualty besides the CAP leader was a PF wounded in the chin by a grenade fragment. The CACO commander and the Vietnamese district S-3 hurried to the scene and stopped the firing, and the district soon moved the offending PFs to another village. "Fortunately," the 4th CAG report of the incident concluded, "the friendly relations between the CAP Marines, CAP PFs, and villagers in the CAP 4-2-1 AO were not harmed . . . ."<sup>32</sup>

More menacing to CAP Marines than such sporadic hostility was the possibility that their Vietnamese counterparts were actually VC or had reached an accommodation with the VC. More than one CAP found itself trying to defend a village where the chief or the PF *trung-si* was working for the enemy. On 12 January, for example, the Marine squad leader of CAP 4-1-5, located in a village northwest of Dong Ha in Quang Tri Province, observed the PF platoon leader "apparently disclosing information about night locations to unauthorized individuals." The Marine summoned other Vietnamese authorities, and they arrested the PF, whom they had suspected for some time of being a Viet Cong.<sup>33</sup>

A CAP in the 2d CAG had a worse experience. At 2015 on 8 July, Marines on watch at the CP of Company H, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, heard an explosion and small arms fire from the nearby village of Binh Ky. Located about a mile and three-quarters south of Marble Mountain, Binh Ky was defended by CAP 2-7-5. The Marines at the CP of Company H tuned in on the CAP's radio frequency and heard a

call for a medical evacuation helicopter and a report that the CAP was in heavy contact. The company at once sent a squad to aid the CAP. By the time the squad reached the CAP's position in Binh Ky, the fight had ended and the Company H Marines found five dead and four wounded Marines from the CAP squad, along with four wounded PFs. The CAP had exhausted its ammunition, and the surviving PFs, completely demoralized, refused to join the Company H squad in a sweep of the village. The area of the fight contained a number of craters, all of which were later determined to have been caused by buried, command-detonated mines. The Marines from Company H helped the remnants of the CAP guard the village for the rest of the night.

Later, the 1st Marines' intelligence officer pieced together the story behind these confused events. He reported:

. . . Binh Ky's village chief was a VC and had been prosecuted a couple of times and exonerated. The Vietnamese RF or PF there we felt sure had reached some sort of agreement with the VC, if they weren't in fact VC themselves. The hamlet chiefs there were VC or at least frightened by the VC to the point where they'd do anything the VC told them to do. The Marines in the CAP were in a difficult situation. Their activities each night . . . tended to establish a pattern and they never made contact. We never had any trouble with Binh Ky. The reason we never had any trouble was because they [the VC] wanted to keep it quiet. One night the CAP commander was able to break the pattern of activity with his Vietnamese counterparts and get them to set up ambushes on the other side of town in sort of an unknown pattern. . . . They got hit . . . a couple of Marines were wounded and some PFs were killed. It was sort of a slap on the wrist . . . .<sup>34</sup>

In spite of continuing problems, most Marines in 1970 remained convinced of the overall success of the Combined Action Program. In Thua Thien Province, for example, Sergeant Tom Harvey later observed that "we managed to keep the VC out of all the hamlets in Phu Thu District, in which six CAPs operated, with a force of probably no more than 75 Marines, including our CACO headquarters."<sup>35</sup>

Evidence was plentiful that in most villages where they were stationed, the CAP Marines enjoyed a large measure of acceptance, even trust and affection, from the Vietnamese. Time after time, villagers volunteered information which led to the capture of enemy soldiers and equipment. The enemy seemed to avoid CAP-protected villages. In the 2d CAG AO, for instance, it became possible in many hamlets to hold GVN political rallies at night, a thing unheard of in earlier



years. At times, the Vietnamese openly expressed appreciation for the Marines. During the flood in October, the CAPs and their Vietnamese counterparts, as well as the villagers themselves, were evacuated to LZ Baldy. Lieutenant Colonel Tolnay recalled that the Vietnamese returned to CAP villages about two days before the Marines, then added:

When the Marines returned by helicopter, the village elders and the people were there to greet them and lead them back into their houses where they had food prepared for them, because they really appreciated the fact that Marines were coming back to protect them . . . .<sup>36</sup>

Since the inception of the program in 1965, a total of 93 CAPs had been moved to new locations from villages and hamlets deemed able to protect themselves. Of the former CAP hamlets, none ever had returned to Viet Cong control, at least not as measured in the American HES. Some former CAP villages had achieved a measure of prosperity and stability.<sup>37</sup>

The village of Binh Nghia, a seven-hamlet complex about four miles south of Chu Lai, by 1970 offered a striking example of CAP success. A CAP had been established there in 1966, finding the community under strong VC influence and its GVN leaders and PFs demoralized. For two years, the CAP Marines, aided by increasingly aggressive and confident PFs, fought a savage battle against local guerrillas. During the struggle, the CAP compound was overrun and half the Marine members of the combined platoon killed. The survivors, their ranks filled by replacements, held on and gradually gained the military upper hand and the respect of the villagers. By 1970, the VC rarely entered Binh Nghia, either to fight or to collect taxes. The Marine CAP had moved elsewhere, and the GVN, which regarded the village as pacified, had even transferred the PF platoon to another village. Binh Nghia, now protected by a 100-man People's Self Defense Force, had an active, elected local government and a flourishing economy (by Vietnamese village standards). It seemed to an American visitor who knew the village well that "the war had passed Binh Nghia."<sup>38\*</sup>

\*For the earlier fight for Binh Nghia, see Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966: An Expanding War* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, 1982), pp. 241-43. and West, *The Village*. It should be noted that from the start Binh Nghia had contained a large pro-GVN element and had had a strong local GVN leader. Much of the rest of the population had been willing to support whomever seemed to them the winning side. It had never been a hardcore VC village, but hardcore VC villages were comparatively few in most areas, and communities like Binh Nghia provided much of what the VC needed to maintain and expand their strength.

### *Reducing the Combined Action Force*

Beginning in late 1969, the question of when and how rapidly to reduce the Combined Action Force came under consideration in Marine Corps redeployment planning. The Marines decided early that the CAF should be reduced—by deactivations of platoons and redeployment of personnel—at a pace roughly proportional to that of the withdrawal of other Marine units.

This stand was based on several considerations. The number of Marines in the CAF counted as part of the total number of men III MAF could have in-country. Hence, as the authorized manpower ceiling was lowered by redeployments, failure to reduce the CAF would force a too-rapid decrease in conventional strength. Combined action units depended on conventional forces for artillery and air support and reinforcement against major attacks, and the Marines preferred not to have to rely entirely on the U.S. Army and the ARVN for such assistance. Accordingly, as other Marine units came out, III MAF decided the CAPs they supported should also come out. Finally, Lieutenant General Nickerson, the III MAF commander, emphasized the need for close and constant supervision of the CAPs by higher Marine headquarters. Without such supervision, Nickerson feared, discipline in these isolated, independent small units would decline and with it effectiveness. As he bluntly put it, "these damn Marines, they go bamboo on you, . . . unless you can get out there and kick ass, take names, and be sure they're up to snuff . . . ."<sup>39</sup>

On the basis of these considerations, the Marines wanted to begin reducing the CAF early in the deployment process. They held to this position in spite of the fact that the U.S. Army had no comparable organization\* with which to replace the CAPs and in spite of great ARVN reluctance to lose these particular Marines. Typifying the ARVN reaction to possible CAP deactivations, General Ngo Quang Truong, the competent commander of the 1st ARVN Division in Quang Tri, accepted the inevitable redeployment of

\*The U.S. Army and the ARVN never formed CAP-type units. The closest U.S. Army equivalent was the Mobile Advisory Team (MAT), of which the Army would have 487 in operation by late 1970, 88 of them in I Corps. Each MAT consisted of two American officers, three enlisted men, and a ARVN interpreter. Each team was assigned a specific working area throughout which it travelled giving small-unit training to RFs and PFs. MACV ComdHist, 70, II, Ch. 7, p. 67; Gen W. C. Westmoreland, USA, and Adm U. S. G. Sharp, USN, *Report on the War in Vietnam* (Washington, DC.: GPO, 1968), p. 215.

Marine units but pleaded with Brigadier General Dulacki, Nickerson's Chief of Staff, "I don't care what else you do, but please don't take the CAPs."<sup>40</sup>

The Marines still intended to take the CAPs and sought and obtained MACV's permission to do so. On 31 December 1969, Lieutenant General Nickerson requested guidance from General Abrams on redeployment of the CAPs in Phase IV, which at that time was expected to remove all Marines but the residual MAB. Abrams, in reply, left it to III MAF to determine how many CAP Marines to withdraw in Phase IV and how many to retain with the MAB and he promised to send more MATs to I Corps to take over part of the CAPs' training task. Nickerson, on 28 January, with the approval of FMFPac and HQMC, proposed to MACV the deactivation of the 1st, 3d, and 4th CAGs during Phase IV. The 2d CAG in Quang Nam, reduced to about 600 Marines, was to remain until the MAB pulled out. MACV approved the proposal. Even though the total number of Marines to be withdrawn in Phase IV was later reduced, this plan for cutting down the CAF remained in effect. Throughout 1970, the CAF gradually reduced its manpower and the number of its units in the field and concentrated its forces in Quang Nam.<sup>41</sup>

Consolidation of the CAF began on 9 February, when the 2d CAG deactivated the headquarters of CACO 2-5 and distributed its remaining two CAPs to CACOs 2-1 and 2-7. On 28 April, Lieutenant General Lam and Lieutenant General Zais, at the recommendation of Lieutenant General McCutcheon, the new III MAF commander, agreed to move five CAPs from the 3d CAG and two from the 4th CAG to 2d CAG. CAF Headquarters had been urging this shift of strength for some time, but General Lam, who had to give final approval to any CAP relocation, had been unwilling to act until the threat of a Communist 1970 Tet offensive had abated.\* The seven CAPs were withdrawn from the field on 29 April. Between 3 and 5 May, they occupied new TAOCs in Hoa Vang, Dien Ban, and Hieu Nhon Districts in Quang Nam. This reinforcement enlarged the 2d CAG to over 700 Marines.<sup>42</sup>

\*The procedure for moving a CAP from one village to another was laborious and highly centralized. Approval had to be obtained from every level of Vietnamese officialdom up to I Corps, and requests for transfers required elaborate documentation and certification that the local forces could take care of themselves. See Consul Francis T. McNamara, Political Advisor to CG XXIV Corps, ltr to LtGen Melvin Zais, dtd 14Mar70, in CAF SOP & HistoryFldr, Box 2, Pacification Study Docs.

In mid-April, while plans for reducing the 3d and 4th CAGs were being completed, Lieutenant Colonel Seiler of the 1st CAG suggested to Vietnamese officials in Quang Tin that four CAPs be deactivated. General Lam, the ultimate authority agreed. The Marines of these CAPs, stationed in areas where the PF were now operating independently, had been reduced to the the roles of mobile reserves and fire support coordinators. The four CAPs were disbanded during the last days of May in the first actual deactivation of CAP platoons since 1967. During May, the the 1st CAG obtained permission to deactivate nine more CAPs and the two CACOs controlling them, again because the PFs no longer needed their support and because no other villages in Quang Tin could make use of them. Accordingly, between 24 and 29 June, CACOs 1-1 (four CAPs) and 1-2 (five CAPs) were disbanded.<sup>43\*</sup>

Reduction of the CAF speeded up in July, spurred by an almost complete halt of the flow of replacements for CAP Marines.\*\* Between 7 and 30 July, the CAG deactivated the group headquarters, four CACOs, and 16 remaining CAPs of the 4th CAG, thereby terminating the Combined Action Program in Quang Tri. During the same period, it deactivated two CACO headquarters and 14 CAPs from the 3d CAG and five more CAPs from the 1st CAG. Most of the Marines from deactivated units in 3d and 4th CAGs were transferred within the CAF. The CAF thus lost more units than men in this reduction. Nevertheless, by the end of July, the total number of Marines in the CAF had declined to about 1,700.<sup>44</sup>

During July and August, as an increasing number of line units stood down for redeployment in Keystone Robin Alpha, the CAF deactivated the remaining CACOs and CAPs of the 1st and 3d CAGs. The last company of the 1st CAG disbanded on 24 August, followed on 28 August by the last CACO of the 3d CAG. Marines from these units returned to the United States or joined other commands in the Western Pacific. On 7 September, 3d CAG Headquarters closed down, and six days later 1st CAG headquarters ended operations. The 2d CAG meanwhile deactivated

\*Since the Combined Action Force was not part of the regular Marine Corps T/O, its units were deactivated rather than redeployed. Marines from CAPs either returned to the U.S. with other redeployed formations or were shifted to other CAGs.

\*\*The halt was the result of deployment-related upheavals and disruption in the manpower "pipeline" to the Western Pacific. For further details on manpower problems in 1970, see Chapter 19.

one CACO and five CAPs during August and redistributed the Marines from them to other units. On 1 September, the 2d CAG discontinued still another CACO and four more CAPs. These reductions left the 2d CAG with about 650 Marines and 50 Navy corpsmen in five CACOs and 34 CAPs, all located in Quang Nam and working with about 800 PFs and RFs.<sup>45</sup>

American and South Vietnamese authorities made elaborate efforts to prevent the development of a sense of insecurity among the villagers the deactivated CAPs had protected. Psychological warfare teams saturated each TAOC with posters and leaflets and sent loud-speaker trucks to forewarn and reassure the people. In written and spoken words, they continually emphasized two themes: that the Marines were leaving because they were needed more elsewhere and that the local RFs and PFs could now defeat the Communists without American help.

A formal ceremony preceded each deactivation. In the 4th CAG, for example, each CAP conducted a farewell parade in its village, attended by the district chief, the village chief and councilors, and as many villagers as could be persuaded to appear. The American side was represented by the CAP Marine squad, the 4th CAG commander, the district senior advisor, the CAC commander, and sometimes other distinguished guests. American and Vietnamese leaders made speeches, the Vietnamese thanking the Marines for their aid, and both Americans and Vietnamese again expressing confidence in the fighting prowess of the PFs. Villagers and CAP Marines exchanged small gifts. Often, according to the 4th CAG report, "social gatherings [were] held at the conclusion of the ceremony." The 1st and 3d CAGs held similar deactivation ceremonies, frequently including the presentation of Vietnamese decorations and awards to CAP Marines. How effective all this was in reassuring the people that they were not being abandoned was hard to determine. American and Vietnamese alike realized that, in the end, only combat successes by the RFs and PFs would maintain the people's sense of security.<sup>46</sup>

On 1 September, after deactivation of all CAPs outside Quang Nam, XXIV Corps returned operational control of the CAF to III MAF. The CAF itself, with only one CAG still in operation, had outlived its usefulness. The force headquarters ceased operations on 21 September, and two days later it was formally disestablished in a ceremony attended by Lieutenant Generals Sutherland, Lam, and McCutcheon, and other distinguished guests.<sup>47</sup>

After 21 September, direction of combined action operations rested with the 2d Combined Action Group, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Tolnay, who had previously been executive officer of the CAF. The 2d CAG, with its headquarters at Hoi An, the capital of Quang Nam Province, constituted the "residual force of the III MAF Combined Action Program."<sup>48</sup> Under III MAF, it would coordinate combined action activities with Quang Nam Province, the 1st Marine Division, and the 2d ROKMC Brigade.

Soon after disestablishment of the CAF, CORDS again sought authority over the CAPs. Lieutenant Colonel Tolnay recalled:

The Army advisors and the CORDS setup at province initially tried to assume some control over the combined action program, and we had a meeting of the minds there where it was determined and agreed to that it remained essentially a Marine program and that any dealings with CAPs, any dealings with CAP Marines and Vietnamese would be handled between the CAG commander and the Province Chief, and there was no difficulty after that.<sup>49</sup>

The 2d CAG took over the CAF School, which had moved in mid-September from East Da Nang to Hoi An. By the end of November, the school had resumed full operation. It trained the replacements who were coming in again from the United States and also Marines from line companies assigned to the Combined Unit Pacification Program.\* To replace the CAF Language School, which had closed in September, the 2d CAG added more Vietnamese language training to the regular school curriculum and used one of the CAG's ARVN interpreters as an instructor. The CAG also established a Mobile Training Team which gave CACOs supplementary instruction in the field.<sup>50</sup>

Within Quang Nam, CAP and CACO operations continued with little change during the remaining months of 1970. The CAPs kept up their routine of patrols and ambushes except when the floods in late October forced many of them temporarily to evacuate their TAOCs. The CACOs continued to depend for artillery support on neighboring U.S., ARVN, or Korean Marine battalions, but they acquired their own 81mm mortar sections.<sup>51</sup> As CAP operations were winding down in the fall of 1970, one operation demonstrated the progress that district level authorities and PFs in combination with CAP Marines had made.

\*In this program, ordinary rifle companies were broken down into squads, each of which was paired with a RF or PF platoon and operated like a CAP.

On 9 September 1970, elements of CACO 2-3 conducted a heliborne assault on a suspected VC rendezvous in Tanh Quit (4) Hamlet. The target area was three miles north of Dien Ban in rice paddy terrain bounded by Route 1 to the west and the Vinh Dien River to the east. Acting on intelligence given to the CACO, the district operations officer and the company commander shifted the adjacent CAP (2-3-8) into blocking positions in preparation for the assault. In order to make it appear like normal daily activity, members of CAP 2-3-7, the assault element, moved to the district headquarters in twos and threes during the afternoon.

"At about 1630 four helicopters landed at the compound, loaded the assault force under the command of the CACO and the district S-3 [operations officer] and flew to the targeted area," recalled Colonel Don R. Christensen, commander of the 2d CAG at the time. "Their operation achieved complete surprise as the assault force landed in the suspected hamlet while 14 VC cadre were meeting." Immediately after insertion, CAP 2-3-7 became engaged in a firefight. Aided by the blocking force, CAP 2-3-8, which now closed on the VC from the west, by the 15th PF Platoon, and two Huey gunships, the Marines concentrated devastating fire on the fleeing VC, killing 14 without sustaining any friendly casualties. Searching the area, the Marines captured one AK-47, two SKS rifles, three 9mm pistols, numerous grenades, and assorted documents and medical supplies.

The operation demonstrated the capabilities of CAP Marines and their counterpart Popular Forces when reacting rapidly to good intelligence. Using the Impact Awards procedures established by XXIV Corps, the CAG commander recognized the performance of the district S-3, the PF platoon commander, and three of his PFs at a ceremony at district headquarters three days later. This timely acknowledgement of performance contributed greatly toward raising the morale and esprit of the local forces at a time when CAP Marines were gradually being withdrawn, leaving the burden of the fighting to the Popular Forces.<sup>52</sup>

Although CAP units had been much reduced through redeployment by September 1970, the 2d CAG inherited many of the problems that had plagued the CAF during the year. The manpower shortage continued, especially at group headquarters. Lieutenant Colonel Tolnay explained:

... The T/O for this 2d CAG was woefully inadequate in terms of the dispersion of forces and the fact that I had to maintain a compound. The 68 personnel that I had in

my ... headquarters would have been sufficient had I been a tenant activity with some other organization, but having to maintain my own security and conduct all the functions of an infantry battalion outside of actually controlling the operations ... I just didn't have enough people ...<sup>53</sup>

The CAG managed to keep an average of 10 Marines in the field per CAP, a number which Lieutenant Colonel Tolnay deemed barely adequate to cover a TAOC of the usual size.

The 2d CAG encountered difficulties in dealing with the ARVN high command. Whereas the CAF had had direct contact with the Deputy for Territorial Forces on the I Corps staff, the 2d CAG had to channel all of its communications with the corps through III MAF or Quang Nam Province. As a result, according to Tolnay, communication "was not too satisfactory."

A change in the type of Vietnamese forces working with the CAPs compounded the CAG's liaison difficulties. During late 1970, the Vietnamese began assigning Regional Force platoons rather than Popular Force platoons to some of the CAPs. Unlike the PF platoons, which had no higher military organization and were answerable directly to the district chief, the RFs had their own companies, groups, and battalions, the commanders of which were not controlled by the district chiefs but were controlled by the province chief. This fact greatly complicated the resolution of tactical disputes between RFs and Marines. Such disputes were frequent, as the RF persistently refused to follow what the Marines considered sound tactics or declined to assign the minimum of 20 RFs the Marines deemed necessary to conduct operations. The RF organization deteriorated early in 1971 to the point where Lieutenant Colonel Tolnay began withdrawing CAPs from the field until the RFs responded to American requests for more men or changes in tactics.<sup>54</sup>

By the end of 1970, the Combined Action Program had shrunk to the 2d CAG in Quang Nam. This group would continue operations until the withdrawal of the 3d MAB in June of the following year. Combined action had been one of the Marines' most notable contributions to the pacification effort, a daring and generally successful attempt to engage the Viet Cong on their own ground among the people. Probably more effectively than any other American military force, the CAP Marines had done what had to be done to win the war: they had broken the connection between the guerrillas and the peasants. Unfortunately,



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A 373446

*Marines from a CUPP unit and a Popular Force soldier, who serves as their interpreter, question a woman suspected of providing assistance to the Viet Cong. The woman was detained and sent back to the district headquarters for more detailed interrogation.*

there were many more villages in I Corps, not to mention Vietnam, than there were CAPs.\*

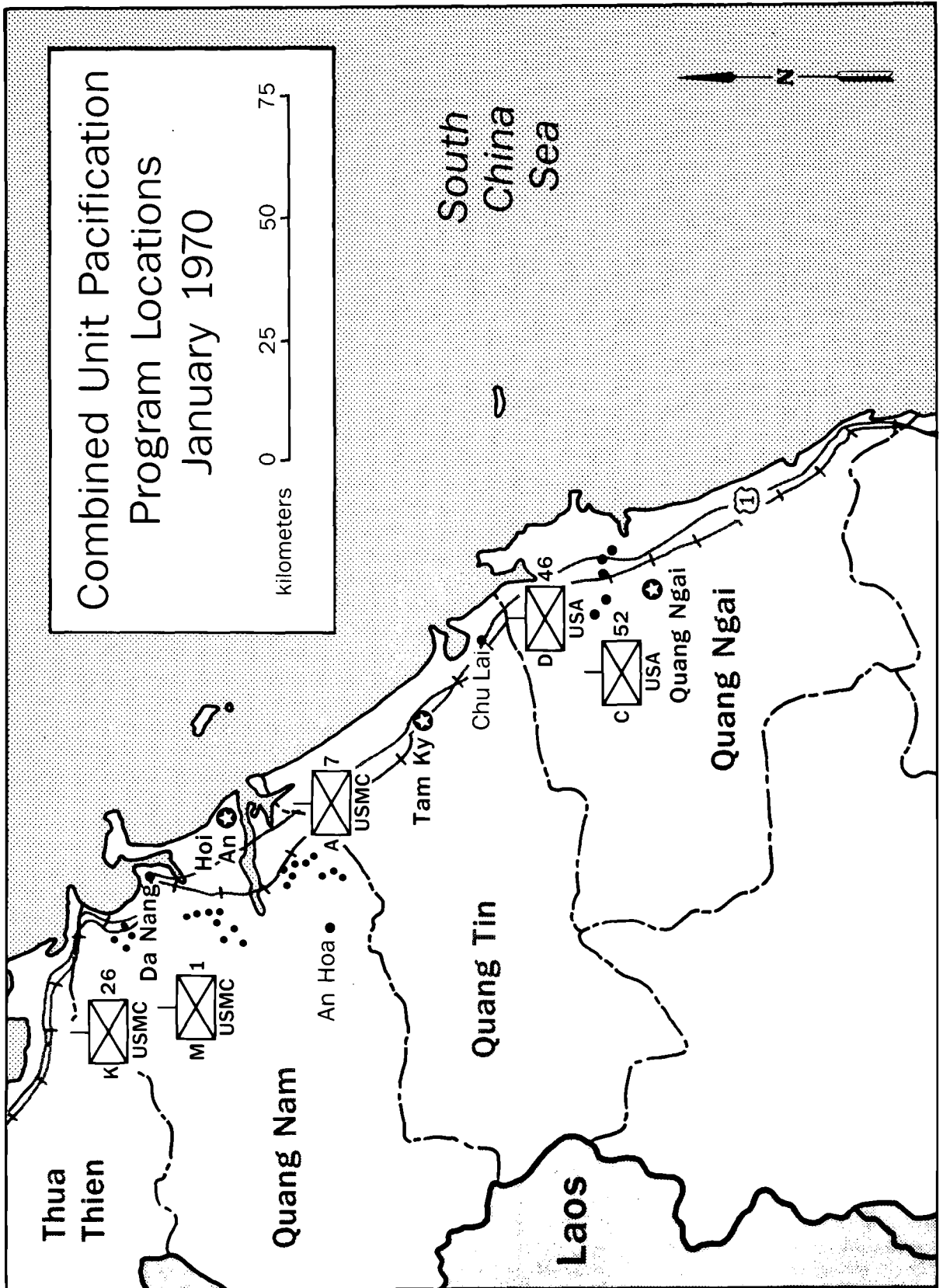
*Building on Success: The Combined Unit Pacification Program*

The effectiveness of the CAPs, combined with the diminution of contact with enemy main forces and the continuing guerrilla threat, led III MAF late in 1969 to institute the Infantry Company Intensified Pacification Program (ICIPP), in January 1970, redesignated the Combined Unit Pacification Program (CUPP). Much of the impetus for this new program came from Lieutenant General Nickerson. Brigadier General Dulacki, the III MAF Chief of Staff, recalled that Nickerson "was . . . quite impressed with . . . what the combined action units were doing. And . . . he felt pretty strongly that perhaps what we should do is start

taking battalions and employing them in a similar fashion." Still inclined towards conducting larger scale offensive operations the Army and Marine infantry divisions under III MAF proved unwilling to commit entire battalions to such an unconventional mission and III MAF "didn't want to force the idea on them." Responding to this reluctance, however, III MAF developed a plan for using companies, which the divisions accepted. Divisions were then directed to assign companies based upon their current employment and geographic locations.<sup>55</sup>

The Americal Division, then still under operational control of III MAF, assigned the first two companies to CUPP, or at that time ICIPP, duty in October 1969, deploying squads from them in five hamlets in Quang Ngai. The 1st Marine Division joined the program the following month when Company M of the 1st Marines placed three squads in contested villages around Hill 55. By the end of the year, Company M had squads in eight hamlets, and the 5th and 7th Marines were preparing to establish their own CUPP units.<sup>56</sup> III MAF found that the success of these activities gradually began to instill confidence in the program within the 1st Division.

\*According to Colonel Theodore E. Metzger, General Lewis Walt wrote the CAF commander a letter following a tour of CAF units in December 1969, saying, "In the end, I firmly believe this program will be the most important innovation of this war." Col Theodore E. Metzger, Comments on draft ms, 22Mar83 (Vietnam Comment File).



As in the CAP program, CUPP companies broke down into squads, each of which was paired with a RF or PF platoon to protect a particular village. The company headquarters, usually located near the headquarters of the district in which its squads were stationed, performed many of the functions of a CACO. Each CUPP squad had the same seven missions as a CAP, centering around territorial security and training the RF/PF, and the aim of the new program, as of the Combined Action Program, was to merge Marine firepower and military skill with the militia's intimate knowledge of the local people and terrain.

The CUPP, however, differed from the Combined Action Program in two ways. First, unlike CAP Marines, CUPP Marines were not specially selected or trained. They were regularly assigned members of a rifle company which had been given a special mission. Second, a CUPP company, and the Marine members of its combined units, remained under the operational control of their parent regiment and usually were deployed within that regiment's area of operations. CUPP units requested air and artillery support and medical evacuation through the same channels used by an ordinary rifle company, and the regiment could regroup them into a conventional company when necessary. As the Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, of III MAF put it, "It's a way to take forces and make [them] much more effective by multiplication . . . without destroying the infantry unit itself. . . . As long as you're got them in a CUPP, you can always bring them back together if you had to."<sup>57</sup>

Beginning with the early months of 1970, the CUPP program was expanded and pushed vigorously by both Lieutenant Generals Nickerson and McCutcheon. The latter, according to his Deputy G-3, Colonel John W. Haggerty III, was "very much interested in CUPping the whole outfit [1st Marine Division] in order to maximize the . . . Vietnamization process."<sup>58</sup>

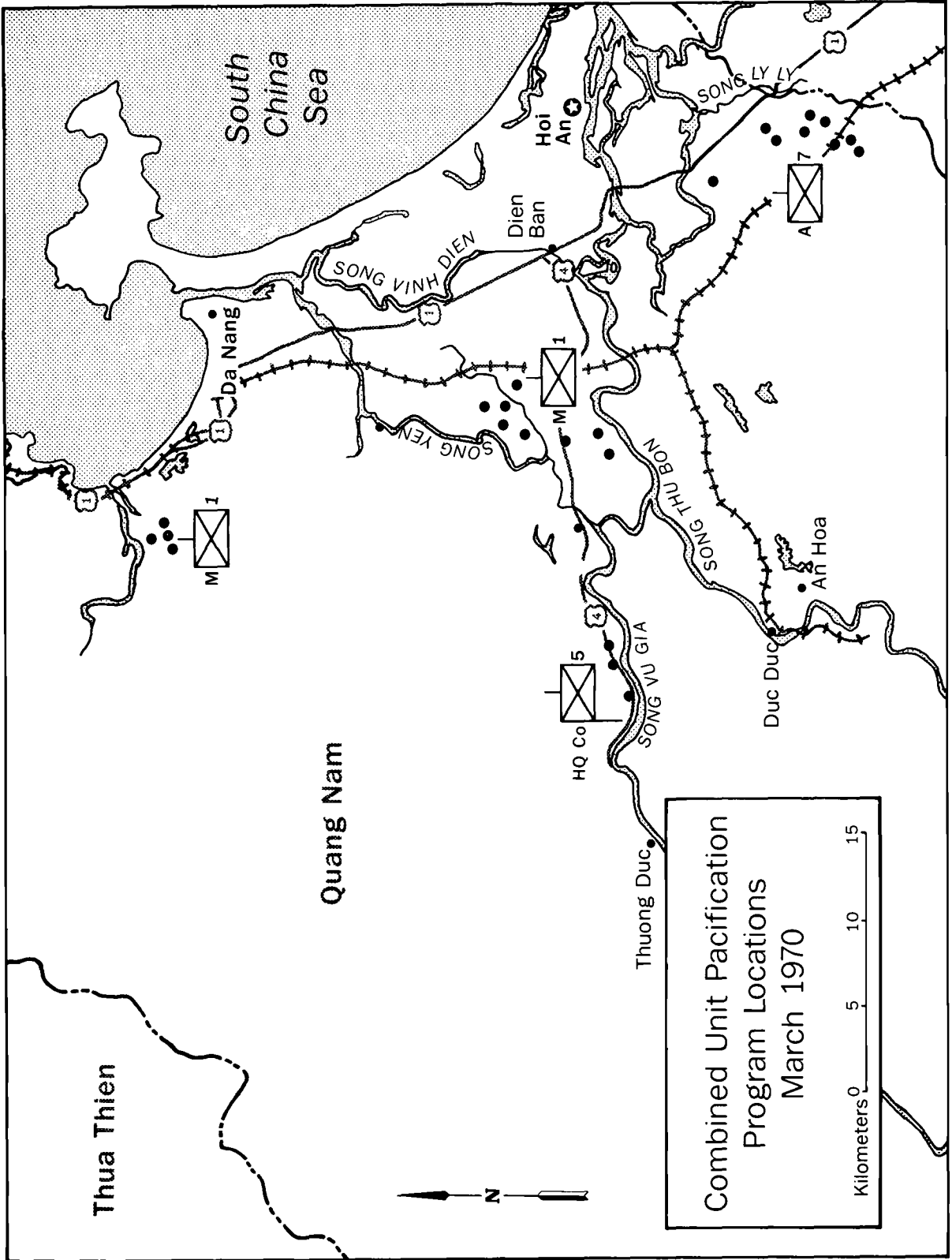
The program never approached divisional size, but during the year every regiment of the division committed at least a company to combined action. The 1st Marines' Company M continued combined operations throughout the year. During January, the 26th Marines inserted elements of its Company K in four hamlets just south of Nam O Bridge. On 15 January, Company A of the 7th Marines started combined operations in nine hamlets along Route 1 north of LZ Baldy and along Route 535 between Baldy and FSB Ross. The 5th Marines initially did not designate a full CUPP company, but early in February organized a

combined action platoon under its headquarters company. The three squads of this platoon established themselves in villages along Route 4 where it passed by the foot of Charlie Ridge.<sup>59</sup>

In March, the redeployment of the 26th Marines and its accompanying realignment of regimental TAORs brought changes in CUPP organization and control. The 1st Marines on 6 March transferred operational control of its Company M to the 5th Marines, which had expanded its AO to include the villages around Hill 55 where most of the company's squads were stationed. At the same time, the 1st Marines absorbed the personnel of the 26th Marines CUPP squads and concentrated them for defense of two of the four hamlets initially protected by the departing regiment. These rearrangements left the 1st Marines with three CUPP squads under its direct control: the two inherited from the 26th Marines and one squad from Company M in the AO of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. The 5th Marines now had its own Headquarters Company CUPP Platoon and Company M from the 1st Marines, while the 7th Marines continued operations with its Company A.

By the end of April, the 1st Marine Division had 22 CUPP squads protecting some 23,000 villagers and working with 16 PF and 7 RF platoons and over 500 armed PSDF. Most of the CUPP teams were located in villages along Routes 1, 4, and 535 or around major allied bases, such as Hill 55 and LZ Baldy. Unlike CAPs, which usually protected villages more or less friendly to the allies, most of the CUPP squads occupied communities under strong Viet Cong influence. Of the nine hamlets held by the 7th Marines' CUPP company, for instance, eight had C and D ratings under the Hamlet Evaluation System and the remaining one was acknowledged to be VC controlled.<sup>60</sup>

The combined unit pacification companies underwent another reorganization in September, as the 7th Marines redeployed in Keystone Robin Alpha and the 5th Marines took over its TAOR. On 7 September, Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines relieved Company A of the 7th Marines in its hamlets along Routes 1 and 535. The 5th Marines' company incorporated over 50 percent of the men of the 7th Marines CUPP unit. Two weeks later, as the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines turned the Thuong Duc corridor over to the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, the latter regiment resumed operational control of its own Company M and also of the three 5th Marines headquarters CUPP squads along Route 4. The 1st Marines then turned opera-





tional control of the combined unit squads over to its 1st and 2d Battalions. On 1 December, in the final expansion of CUPP for the year, the 5th Marines created a new CUPP platoon to protect Hoang Que Hamlet just north of LZ Baldy. Created at the request of the South Vietnamese district commander to work with a newly formed PF unit, the new 5th Marines platoon completed a solid network of CUPP hamlets along Route 1 from Baldy to the southern boundary of the Korean Marine TAOR.<sup>81</sup>

Establishment of a new CUPP company required detailed planning by both American and South Vietnamese forces and thorough training and indoctrination of the company itself. The 7th Marines, for example, began preparing for insertion of its CUPP company in early December 1969. Planning began with meetings between staff officers of the regiment and GVN officials of Quang Nam Province and Que Son District. At these meetings, Americans and Vietnamese by mutual agreement selected the nine target hamlets. Each hamlet had to meet two requirements. It had to have a HES rating of C or lower, and it had to have been selected for improvement

in the Quang Nam Province Pacification and Development Plan for 1970. Once the hamlets had been chosen, Que Son District gave the 7th Marines detailed information on them, including lists of known and suspected VC, population figures, and designations, leaders' names, and manpower strengths of the RF or PF units defending them.

Meanwhile, the regiment had selected Company A, commanded by Captain Delbert M. Hutson, for the CUPP assignment. Early in January, the company assembled at FSB Ross to prepare for its new mission, its training period enlivened by a sapper attack on Ross on 6 January. All members of the company underwent intensive refresher training in infantry weapons and small-unit tactics by a Division Mobile Training Team, and they received instruction in various aspects of their mission from the Vietnamese district chief, the U.S. province advisors, a division psychological warfare team, and their own company and battalion officers. They also had sessions with a division Personal Response team, the members of which sought to prepare the Marines to live and work with the Vietnamese. To gain practical experience in working in the field

*Marines of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines search a grassy site near Hill 55 south of Da Nang. The 1st Marines took over control of the CUPP companies from the 26th Marines, who were about to redeploy from Vietnam. The CUPP program expanded during 1970.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A 373979



with PFs, the company conducted combined day and night patrols in Que Son District with local RFs and PFs.

Key officers and Marines of the company received additional training. During January, all the platoon commanders and squad leaders of Company A attended the CAF School in East Da Nang, and 15 Marines went to Vietnamese language school. A total of 24 Marines from the company spent three or four days on-the-job training with 1st Marines CUPP units, and six others did the same with elements of the 2d Combined Action Group. Captain Hutson spent a day with leaders of a CACO of the 1st CAG. As the final step in preparation, the Que Son District Chief and his American advisor held meetings at which they introduced the Marine squad leaders to the chiefs of the villages and hamlets in which they would be working.

Between 15 and 31 January, the 7th Marines installed its combined action squads in their hamlets. Except for the insertion in VC-controlled Phu Trach, which took the form of a cordon and search by the combined unit and other RFs and PFs, all the insertions occurred at a simple but dramatic ceremony. Each ceremony followed the same pattern, the American part coordinated by the 7th Marines and the Vietnamese part by the district chief. It would begin with the Marine squad and the RF or PF platoon lined up facing each other in front of a speaker's platform. The district chief presided for the Vietnamese and Colonel Gildo S. Codispoti, the 7th Marines commander, for the Americans. (Colonel Cadispoti made a point of attending every insertion after the Que Son District Chief commented that his presence impressed the villagers, who seldom saw a high-ranking U.S. officer.)

After 10-15 minutes of music by a section of the 1st Marine Division band, the district chief, Colonel Codispoti, the village chief, and the hamlet chief, in that order, made brief speeches. Then the Marines marched over to the RFs or PFs and joined them in their ranks. A period of informal handshaking and picture taking followed. The 7th Marines report noted that "Pictures taken using a Polaroid camera [were] found to be very effective. These pictures were immediately presented to various hamlet and village officials with very favorable responses."<sup>62</sup>

In February, the 5th Marines inserted its CUPP platoon in a different manner. The regiment used elements of two rifle companies to surround and screen the targeted hamlets. While this was being done, the three Marine squads and their counterpart RF platoons

held a single joint ceremony at Hill 25 and then moved into their hamlets to begin combat operations.<sup>63</sup>

Once established in their hamlets, CUPP units, like CAPs, spent most of their time on patrols and ambushes. The combined units of all three regiments employed "mobile CAP" tactics, constantly shifting position with their AOs. A squad leader from Company A, 7th Marines reported in May:

... We run approximately two or three ... ambushes a night and ... one day patrol. Every night, just as it starts getting dark, we move to a night POS [position], and every day as it starts getting light we move to a day POS. We were constantly on the move. We never stay in one place more than once a week, or sometimes even once every two weeks.<sup>64</sup>

CUPP platoons often moved outside their AOs for joint operations with other CUPP platoons and Marine and Vietnamese regular units. They participated in cordon and search operations and provided blocking forces. Their activities could easily be coordinated with those of line companies and battalions. A 7th Marines report noted:

The success in coordinating and integrating CUPP activities with regular infantry units has been outstanding. CUPP Marines have acted as guides; furnished tactical and intelligence information; and provided other support for various units operating in the vicinity of CUPP AOs. The enemy has lost large quantities of supplies and personnel as a result of these operations.<sup>65</sup>

All the combined pacification squads emphasized training of their Vietnamese counterparts. Informally during operations and through regular classes, they tried to increase the militia's proficiency with infantry weapons and in patrol and ambush tactics, and they instructed some RF and PF soldiers in the use and care of the M60 machine gun and in requesting and controlling artillery and air support. As did the CAPs, the CUPP Marines increasingly encouraged RF and PF platoon commanders to plan and lead their own operations.<sup>66</sup>

In November, in probably the most ambitious training program launched by a CUPP company, Company G, 5th Marines paired each individual Marine with a RF or PF soldier deemed a likely candidate for platoon leader. Each Marine was to work with his counterpart in formal training sessions and in developing "mutual trust and exchange of ideas." The program culminated in a school held at LZ Baldy from 28 to 30 December and attended by 10 Marines, each of whom brought along his RF or PF counterpart. Together, Marines and Vietnamese took instruction in



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373820

*CUPP Marines and South Vietnamese Regional Force troops from Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines and the 306th Regional Force Battalion form the cordon in a cordon and search mission in sandy terrain near the coast, 20 miles southeast of Da Nang.*

map and compass reading, defense against mines and boobytraps, and patrolling tactics, and they spent a full day on the rifle range. The instruction was "well received by the surprisingly attentive Popular Forces."<sup>67</sup>

When not on operations or engaged in training, CUPP units, again following the example of the CAPs, tried to improve the daily life of the villagers. Each CUPP squad had a Navy corpsman attached to it, who regularly assembled the inhabitants for medical examinations and treatment of minor hurts and ailments. The riflemen worked with the villagers on local improvements. During April, for instance, one of the 5th Marines squads along Route 4 helped the farmers of Lam Phung village build an irrigation canal to carry water to their paddies from the Thu Bon River. The Marines provided rock fill and material for culverts, and the Vietnamese furnished most of the labor, a pump, and a motor. During the October and November floods, CUPP Marines helped evacuate endangered hamlets and then joined the people in relief and reconstruction. In December, Company G, 5th Marines launched a farming project in which each squad and a Vietnamese family together planted and culti-

vated a plot of vegetables. The Marines hoped by this to improve the farmers' diet and to introduce a new cash crop.<sup>68</sup>

The line companies engaged in combined action, and like their counterparts in the CAF, suffered from a manpower shortage during the year. Many CUPP squads, which were supposed to be reinforced to 15-18 men, had to operate with as few as seven or eight Marines, and they often found themselves paired with understrength RF or PF platoons. A member of a 7th Marines CUPP squad said in May that "We get anywhere from 7 to 8 to 10 PFs a night, and the largest majority of them stay down at the PF compound on the hill which is not needed. We could really use some more men down here."<sup>69</sup>

Morale among CUPP Marines, as a platoon commander pointed out, "is a very touchy subject. Being out here by themselves, working a squad with a platoon of PFs, especially in areas where the PFs are new and are not quite so militarily proficient as one might like, the morale of a CUPP unit can deteriorate very quickly." In the 7th Marines, the CUPP company, un-

like the line companies, was not sent to rear areas periodically for rest and recreation.\*

To compensate the men for this extra hardship, the regiment made an effort to send hot food to the units in the villages and assigned individual Marines to various schools "to get them out of the bush for a while."<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, for many of the Marines, combined action service constituted an interesting change from routine duty. For junior officers, a platoon commander in the 1st Marines commented, the CUPP program:

... gives ... an opportunity to command rather large bodies of men, up to 200 ... , and that's almost a company-size unit, in fact, the way most companies run, it is. This is an opportunity that most junior officers don't have. And if they're going on with a ... career in the Marine Corps, this is very good experience ... .<sup>71</sup>

The Combined Unit Pacification Program tested the ability of ordinary Marines, not specially selected or motivated, to live and work with Vietnamese PF soldiers and civilians. Marine squads often found the PFs initially unpromising as military allies. PFs assigned to the 1st Marines' CUPP units "were a little raw, to say the least. They didn't exactly know their weapons to start with, and they had very little idea ... of tactics."<sup>72</sup> The 7th Marines CUPP squads found the PFs initially reluctant to patrol aggressively and prone to steal small pieces of personal property. On the positive side, differences of language proved to be less of a hindrance to communication than many Marines had expected. The Marines found that in most PF platoons, the leader and at least one or two of his men could converse in broken English. A radio operator in the 7th Marines CUPP said, "These people have an unbelievable knowledge of the English language, which surprised me. I only wish that I could pick up their language just as fast."<sup>73</sup>

If the PFs had their deficiencies as military partners, the Marines quickly found that they had their virtues as well. A squad from Company K, the 26th Marines CUPP unit, found this out on 29 January while moving to a night ambush position in the countryside northwest of Da Nang. According to the patrol report:

The PFs suddenly refused to go any further. Upon questioning, the PFs stated the enemy was waiting to ambush the patrol at the proposed ambush site. The patrol set into

a position about 100 meters from the proposed ambush position and began to conduct reconnaissance by fire. The patrol received 30 rounds of small arms fire in return with no friendly casualties ... .<sup>74</sup>

CUPP Marines in other regiments had similar experiences. A squad leader in the 7th Marines CUPP company, for example, said in May that he and his Marines had "learned quite a bit from the PFs ... as far as trying to tell where the VC are at. They can tell us where the VC are at without seeing them. ... On dark nights when you can't see anything, they can smell them out."<sup>75</sup>

To direct operations and resolve individual disputes among Marines and PFs, CUPP units followed the CAP principle of the dual chain of command. The Marine squad leader gave orders only to his Marines and the PF leader only to his PFs. If a Marine had a complaint against a PF, he took it to his squad leader. The squad leader passed it to the PF *trung-si*, who dealt with the offending PF. The same procedure, in reverse, applied to PF grievances against Marines. If the two small-unit leaders could not agree, each would refer the issue to the next highest level of his own chain of command. For example, in the 7th Marines combined unit program:

On two occasions ... PFs did not want to go out on night patrols with Marines. The district chief was consulted and the problem was immediately rectified by his action. No Marine leaders attempted to act directly themselves. They instead called upon the district chief through the proper chain of command to assert his influence and power to attain the desired results.<sup>76</sup>

In moments of crisis, CUPP Marines sometimes resorted to rough-and-ready methods of persuasion. A corporal in the 7th Marines recalled that initially in night firefights:

... you'd look around and ... there wouldn't be no PFs there. They'd be hidin' behind gullies, bushes, trees, anything you could find down on the ground, in a hole. After a while they'd see that we was gettin' up, was goin' into it. 'Course you had every once in a while to knock a few heads and put a few rounds over the top of 'em, but they finally got to where they started to go with us ... .<sup>77</sup>

The CUPP Marines learned during the year that improving the PF troops was a slow process, but that it could be done. As a platoon leader in the 1st Marines summed it up, it "takes a lot of work, a lot of coordination, a lot of training, and primarily just a lot of running these activities with the PFs, showing them that indeed, ... as a platoon, as a squad, they are

\*During 1970, the regiments, under the "stack arms" program, took each company out of the field in rotation and sent it to a service cantonment where the men could spend several days drinking beer, cooking steaks, swimming, watching movies, reading, or sleeping.

militarily capable of closing with and destroying the local VC."<sup>78</sup>

Marines in the combined unit program had to win the confidence of the villagers as well as the soldiers. This also took time, but signs of success became apparent during the year. Even in strongly VC-influenced villages, initial shyness and suspicion gradually gave way to curiosity and cautious friendliness. Everywhere, the Marines found that medical evacuation of sick and wounded civilians earned them almost instant acceptance. As the CAPs had learned earlier, the Marines observed that the simple fact of their continuing presence, their "belonging" to a particular village, favorably affected the people's attitudes. The Que Son District Chief, for example, reported to the 7th Marines that village and hamlet chiefs were asking him for "their own" CUPPs.<sup>79</sup> Sergeant William A. Dignan of the 1st Marines, stationed with his squad in a hamlet north of Hill 55, had his own measure of the degree of village acceptance of himself and his men:

We have no trouble with stealing down there at all, and prices . . . for laundry and different things like this, which the people usually have set, they've dropped . . . to just about rock bottom because they know we are living out there with them . . . .<sup>80</sup>

Living among the villagers changed attitudes among Marines also. Corporal Mitchell Y. Jefferies, an assistant CUPP squad leader in the 7th Marines, recalled that when his unit entered its assigned area, "we didn't know any of the people, know their ideas. And we was all more or less against the idea; we didn't give a heck whether they all lived, died, or what happened to 'em." After operating in the village for a while, "we kinda' see how the people work, and they put their backs into what they do and they earn a livin'. When they earn some money, they know what money is. They sweat and work hard to get it." By mid-1970, Jefferies felt that he had learned at least one important thing about the Vietnamese: "These people are smart, and they can get around you. . . . They ain't dumb."<sup>81</sup>

By the end of 1970, the Combined Unit Pacification Program had demonstrated to the satisfaction of

Marine commanders that ordinary rifle squads, paired with RF or PF platoons, could perform a CAP-type mission. In the areas where they operated, the CUPP companies were contributing to improved security. Each month, they accounted for a small but steady toll of enemy killed and weapons captured. During March, for example, the 7th Marines CUPP company killed five Viet Cong, three North Vietnamese, and one member of the VCI. The unit collected eight Hoi Chanh and captured an M1 carbine, an SKS rifle, an M16, and two AK-47s. In the same period, the CUPP company and its attached PFs lost six Marines and three PFs seriously wounded and one PF killed.<sup>82</sup>

In villages occupied by combined units, Viet Cong influence appeared to be declining. In July, for example, 16 VC surrendered in Phu Trach, the hamlet in the 7th Marines AO rated VC-controlled at the start of the year. By the end of November, six CUPP hamlets in Quang Nam showed improved HES security ratings.<sup>83</sup> Civilians were reported to be moving into CUPP villages from enemy-dominated areas. On Routes 4 and 535, along which many CUPP units were deployed, the number of mine incidents declined significantly. Colonel Edmund G. Dering, Jr., who replaced Colonel Codispoti in February as commander of the 7th Marines, reported that when he took over the regiment:

Route 535 . . . was being mined every day, almost—heavy mines. We were losing vehicles and people. That was in February. And when I left that regiment [in August], there hadn't been a mine in that road in over 130 days [or] a mine casualty, which is phenomenal. . . . And we had our CUPPs along the area, and one of their major missions was to observe the road.<sup>84</sup>

As 1970 ended, redeployment had left the future of the Combined Unit Pacification Program uncertain. The 2d CAG, with its separate T/O of 600 Marines, was assured of survival as long as the 3d MAB remained in the country. The CUPP companies, on the other hand, were subject to redeployment with their parent regiments; and as total Marine strength dwindled, the tactical situation could force the combined unit companies to revert to conventional infantry roles and missions.

## CHAPTER 9

# The Spectrum of Pacification and Vietnamization, 1970

*Line Units in Pacification—Kit Carson Scouts in 1970—Targeting the VCI—Civic Action, 1970  
Communist Counter-Pacification Efforts—Vietnamization—Results, 1970*

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### *Line Units in Pacification*

While their primary mission was to attack enemy military units, Marine rifle companies and battalions often conducted operations directly aimed at improving population control and security. Usually cooperating with Vietnamese police and Regional and Popular Forces and sometimes with CAP and CUPP units, Marine infantry participated in cordon and search operations, protected rice harvests, and furnished security for GVN elections. In addition to these long-standing activities, during 1970 some units began trying to reorient their entire scheme of operation toward protecting the people and eradicating the VC underground.

Cordon and search operations, varying in size from a surprise raid on a hamlet by a platoon searching for a single Viet Cong agent to a two- or three-day sweep of a village complex by a battalion, remained a frequently employed, productive tactic. In the larger cordon and search operations, referred to as County Fairs, several companies of Marines worked with RF or PF units, Vietnamese national police, and U.S. and Vietnamese intelligence and counterintelligence teams. Moving in before dawn, the infantry surrounded the target area, allowing no movement in or out. Then Vietnamese troops and police, occasionally aided by Marines, collected all the civilians at a prearranged spot outside the village. Here each person was questioned and his or her identity checked against lists of known or suspected local VC. At the same time, teams of Vietnamese troops and police searched each house for concealed arms, food, and equipment and combed the village for VC hidden in tunnels and holes.

While the search went on, the Americans and Vietnamese entertained the assembled villagers with motion pictures, plays, and comedy skits by GVN propaganda teams, and often a concert by Marine bandmen. Whenever possible, the Marines sent in a medical team to treat minor illnesses and injuries and give advice on health. These activities gave the operation its "County Fair" aspect and nickname. By means of them, the allies hoped to win the allegiance

of the villagers or at least to make less irritating the disruption of their daily routine.<sup>1</sup>

Late in 1970, the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines began adding a population census to the usual cordon and search. In the villages of Ap Quan Nam and Kim Lien north of Da Nang, the battalion, aided by RF and national police, kept its cordon around the village long enough for the police to conduct a detailed census. The police listed and photographed every inhabitant of each house. They also made a complete inventory of the contents of each dwelling and a drawing showing the building and all objects and structures around it. The troops and police would then leave, only to return a couple of weeks later and compare people and buildings to the earlier lists, pictures, and diagrams. If a young man of military age whose name and picture were not on file, appeared in a house he was taken away for questioning. If a haystack was found where none had been, the searchers tore it apart looking for arms or food, often finding them. The Marines and their allies hoped that this technique, used earlier by the French, would make it easier to detect VC infiltration and VC supply caches in the hamlets.<sup>2</sup>

During the year, the Marines began conducting fewer large County Fairs and more surprise small-scale cordon and search operations. These operations, the S-2 of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines recalled:

. . . were very short, lasted two or three hours. We just dropped out of the sky with the helicopters with the cordon and then moved in with the A[rtillery] P[ropaganda] T[eam], a C[ounterintelligence] sub-team, an ITT [Interrogation and Translation] sub-team to support us, and whatever informants we happened to have that prompted the operation, scoff up the people we wanted and go, all within three hours . . .<sup>3</sup>

By moving quickly with minimal advance planning and coordination, the Marines improved their chances of surprising VC or VCI in the hamlets. The short duration of the actual search meant less inconvenience for the villagers and hence, Marines hoped, less resentment of the government.

Aided by increasingly large numbers of RFs and PFs, the Marines continued their effort—called Operation Golden Fleece—to keep the twice-yearly rice harvest



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373324

*After a government informant revealed the location of a hidden Viet Cong rice cache, local villagers and their children dig up the rice for their own use.*

from being seized by the Viet Cong. Before the harvest periods, which occurred in April and May and again in September and October, each regiment launched attacks on known enemy base camps and cache areas and arranged its daily patrols to block infiltration routes into rice-growing areas. During the harvest, all units increased the number of patrols and ambushes around the rice paddies. After the harvest, Marines helped guard mills and storage facilities and with the Vietnamese used highway check points to control the movement of the foodstuffs. By 1970, Operation Golden Fleece had merged into the broader continuing campaign to disrupt the enemy's supply system, a campaign which Hoi Chanhs, POWs, and captured documents indicated was keeping the NVA and VC hungry and demoralized.<sup>4</sup>

The Republic of Vietnam held elections in June for village and hamlet officials and provincial and municipal councils. In August, the people went to the polls again, this time to choose members of the National Senate. In Quang Nam, the 1st Marine Division cooperated with provincial and district authorities to protect polling places and voters from VC terrorism.

The Marines left actual guarding of the polls to the RFs, PFs, PSDF and national police. They deployed their own forces in the countryside to block likely enemy paths of approach and to deny the Communists access to mortar and rocket launching sites. The Marine regiments also kept platoons on alert for rapid helicopter movement to reinforce localities under attack. All Marine plans and orders for election security repeatedly instructed troops to avoid entering populated areas unless an attack took place and to refrain from any action that could be construed as an American attempt to influence the voting.<sup>5</sup>

Behind the shield thus provided, the elections went forward on schedule, almost unmarred by terrorism and with no major enemy interference. Voter turnouts in Quang Nam, as elsewhere in South Vietnam, were encouragingly large. In the June provincial and municipal elections, for example, 83 percent of the eligible voters in Quang Nam Province and 73 percent of those in Da Nang City cast ballots.<sup>6</sup>

The 7th Marines in mid-April put into effect an ambitious pacification plan. The plan, developed by Colonel Derning after he took command of the regiment in February, was aimed at denying the VC access to the many Communist-dominated villages in the Que Son Valley. These villages had long furnished supplies and recruits to main forces operating in the Que Son Mountains and had served as way stations on infiltration routes between the enemy base areas and Da Nang. Derning's plan also recognized that conventional infantry operations were producing less and less contact.

Responding to what appeared to be a change in enemy focus in the 7th Marines' area from conventional operations to guerrilla warfare, the 7th Marines also refocused, gearing their tactics to population control. The 7th Marines commander, in consultation with Que Son District Headquarters and its CORDS advisor, selected a target list of D- and C-rated hamlets for each of the participating battalions. Derning also arranged to attach a RF or PF platoon, three national policemen, and a team of CORDS advisors to each rifle company. Under the plan, each company was to devote its daylight operations to maintaining a permanent cordon around one or more hamlets. The civilian inhabitants were to be allowed in and out through checkpoints manned by PFs and police who would examine GVN identification cards and search the people for food and other contraband. This was intended, according to Derning, to assure that when

a farmer went out to his field or paddy "he could only take his spade, could only take his little bag of rice." The villagers were also cautioned to avoid even incidental contact with the VC/NVA. Medical and propaganda teams were to work among the villagers, seeking to explain to them the requirements of the program and to win their support for the GVN. Throughout, the plan emphasized humane but firm treatment of the people.<sup>7</sup>

Only the 2d Battalion, operating around FSB Ross, fully implemented the plan. On 15 April, the battalion deployed three of its companies, each with a PF platoon and police and CORDS detachments, to cordon nine D- and C-rated hamlets west and south of FSB Ross. The companies set up their checkpoints, and the PFs and police searched the hamlets for caches of arms and supplies. Each inhabitant received a pamphlet in Vietnamese explaining movement and curfew restrictions, promising rewards for information on the location of enemy troops, caches, and boobytraps, explaining how to obtain medical aid from the teams working in the hamlet, and offering families the chance to resettle in government-controlled areas. Those willing to move, the pamphlet promised, could take all their household goods and property with them. The Marines reinforced the pamphlets with air-dropped leaflets, MedCaps, and frequent visits by GVN propaganda and political drama teams.<sup>8</sup>

The program soon produced results. Within 15 days of the establishment of the cordons, according to the 2d Battalion's report, 350 civilians requested resettlement in GVN-controlled villages. In several target hamlets, people pointed out alleged members of the VCI. The military proficiency and self-confidence of the RFs and PFs working with the Marines improved. Most important, the cordons physically separated the VC and NVA from what had been their supply sources and rest areas. Colonel Darning said:

. . . We cut Charlie right off his hot chow, and we cut him right off his conjugal visits. He couldn't get in or out of the ville. If he got in, he was had; if he got out, he couldn't get in. Naturally we cut the NVA off also. And early in this game we caught quite a few of them drifting in and out of the ville, not knowing we were there . . .<sup>9</sup>

Operating under this altered approach, those units of the 7th Marines involved were able to efficiently control their areas of operation, minimizing enemy movement among the people. The Marines were briefed and rested during the day in the relative safety of the occupied villages and sought the enemy at

night. "The fact was we had an advantage because at night under these circumstances anything moving was, in fact, an enemy force," said Darning, "so that we had not much problem then in identification and not much opportunity to injure or to kill innocent people."<sup>10</sup>

While apparently effective, the program was limited in scope and lasted only a short time. The 7th Marines' 1st Battalion operating around LZ Baldy, and scheduled to take part, did not fully apply the concept, although it did increase its operations with RFs and PFs. Most of the 3d Battalion, operating against base areas in the Que Sons, never participated. The 2d Battalion kept three of its companies on cordon operations during April and May, but in June it diverted one of them to other activities. In July, the entire battalion left the Que Son Valley for Operation Pickens Forest. In August, it moved into the mountains on Operation Imperial Lake, and in September it stood down for redeployment with the rest of the regiment.<sup>11</sup>

Other infantry units had their own special pacification efforts. The 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, for example, formed a combined Marine-PF unit to control Nui Kim Son, a small village at the gates of Camp Lauer, the battalion's headquarters cantonment just south of Marble Mountain. The Viet Cong had strong influence in Nui Kim Son. Repeatedly they put up NVA propaganda posters, and occasionally they set a mine or boobytrap. The GVN village chief refused to stay in the village, living instead in a hut in Camp Lauer. Nui Kim Son acted as a staging point for Communists infiltrating toward Marble Mountain and Da Nang East, and it also harbored prostitutes, drug peddlers, and black marketeers.

On 2 September, the 2d Battalion established a squad of 12 enlisted Marines selected from throughout the battalion for CAP experience and Vietnamese language proficiency. Under operational control of Major John S. Grinalds, the battalion operations officer, the unit was stationed permanently in Nui Kim Son to work as a combined force with the local PFs. The Marines, reinforced to 13 men in November, set up checkpoints to control movement through the village and tried to curtail vice. In their first two months of operation, Marines and the PFs captured 24 confirmed Viet Cong agents trying to pass their checkpoints. Nevertheless, the 2d Battalion, according to Major Grinalds, never fully pacified Nui Kim Son, a fact attested to by the continued refusal of the village chief to live there.<sup>12</sup>



*Kit Carson Scouts in 1970*

During 1970 III MAF continued to support the Kit Carson Scout program and to benefit from it. The Marines had initiated this program back in 1966 by hiring six Hoi Chanhs—former Viet Cong guerrillas—as combat scouts. Lieutenant General Nickerson, then a major general commanding the 1st Marine Division, gave the former VC their name, in memory of the American scout and Indian fighter. When the program proved successful, MACV extended it to all U.S. commands in Vietnam. Throughout the war, the scouts had rendered loyal and invaluable service in the field while teaching American troops VC methods and tactics.

At the beginning of 1970, over 2,300 Kit Carson Scouts (KCS) were serving with American units, 650 of them under III MAF. III MAF had responsibility for administering the program throughout I Corps until March, when XXIV Corps took it over, leaving III MAF in charge only of the scouts with Marine units in Quang Nam. As Marines redeployed, the scouts attached to them were reassigned within I Corps. From 111 scouts in July, the number working with the Marines fell to 95 in December.

By 1970, III MAF had a well-established procedure for recruiting, screening, and training Kit Carson Scouts. Potential scouts came from the Chieu Hoi centers in Da Nang and Hoi An. There, a team headed by a Marine NCO, experienced in working with KCS, carefully investigated the motivation and background of each candidate. An ex-guerrilla who passed this first screening went to the KCS Training Center west of Da Nang for 28 days of instruction and further evaluation. Classes at the center were small, numbering usually no more than eight men. A typical class, Number 5-70, which graduated on 21 August 1970, consisted of seven trainees, ranging in age from 17 to 32. All had been born in Quang Nam, lived there, and fought there as Viet Cong for periods of three months to six years. Only one of them was married. Most gave as their reason for changing sides: "Fed up, not enough supplies."

KCS candidates at the school received military training from instructors, most of whom were themselves senior scouts. The instructors worked with the candidates day and night, watching them carefully for any sign that they might still be loyal to the VC. Trainees learned such skills as field sketching and the use of sensors. They acquired the rudiments of English, both

in formal classes and by viewing English language feature films.

After graduation from the training school, scouts were hired as indigenous employees of the American military.<sup>13</sup> For especially meritorious service or bravery in battle, a scout could receive Vietnamese military decorations or the United States Navy Commendation Medal, Bronze Star Medal, or Silver Star Medal. In the field, as a 1st Marine Division report put it, "Employment of Kit Carson Scouts is limited only by the imagination of their unit commander." Scouts guided Marine patrols, made propaganda broadcasts, directed Marines to supply and equipment caches, and helped identify members of the VCI. Many conducted courses for Marines in Viet Cong mine and boobytrap techniques and other enemy methods and tactics. During 1970, Kit Carson Scouts attached to Marine units conducted over 9,000 patrols and were credited with killing 43 enemy; rounding up 313 prisoners, suspects, and Hoi Chanhs; and capturing 96 weapons.

*Targeting the VCI*

Main force units and guerrillas were the visible manifestation of the enemy threat to South Vietnam, but the Communists had another, hidden, equally dangerous dimension. This second dimension was the Viet Cong's clandestine political and administrative apparatus, called by the allies the VCI. The VCI extended its tentacles into every hamlet, village, and city, and even into the GVN itself. Its influence reached into the most militarily secure areas, often literally to the very gates of American cantonments. During 1970, as overt military activity declined, the Marines joined other allied forces in an intensified attack on this concealed element of Communist power.

The VCI, according to the MACV command historians, "was not a defined Communist organization; it was a working concept for the GVN, uniting as one target the variety of organizational and political efforts the Communists carefully compartmented and manipulated separately."<sup>14</sup> More specifically, the III MAF/ICTZ Combined Campaign Plan for 1970 defined the VCI as "The political and administrative organization through which the Viet Cong control or seek to control the South Vietnamese people" and as "Those individuals who constitute the command and control element of the communist politico-military organization which exists overtly and covertly throughout RVN."<sup>15</sup>

As the allies understood it, the VCI included the Communist People's Revolutionary Party (PRP), through which North Vietnam directed the entire enemy war effort; the PRP's public political arm, the National Liberation Front (NLF), ostensibly a coalition of nationalist parties including the Communists; and a range of specialized organizations for farmers, workers, women, youth, and other groups. Each of these entities had branches at every level of government, from the nation down to the hamlet. The Communist armed forces—the People's Army of North Vietnam (NVA) and the South Vietnam Liberation Army (VC main and local force units and guerrillas)—operated under the direction of the VCI. Members of the VCI, living among the people, sought to control the people through propaganda and terrorism; provided intelligence, supplies, and recruits for the insurgent armed forces; and, in fact, constituted an alternative government throughout most of South Vietnam. Allied estimates of the total number of VCI members varied greatly depending on what categories of active Communists were included on any one list. Reports of VCI strength and VCI losses could easily be inflated by adding in peasants caught carrying rice into the hills, women and children found planting booby traps, and other low-level functionaries. To assure uniform reporting and to focus effort on the most significant elements of the enemy, the U.S. and the GVN had by 1970 narrowed the definition of VCI to officials and members of the PRP and high-ranking leaders of the NLF and other Front groups (Category A) and to individuals in any enemy organization trained to assume leadership positions (Category B).<sup>16</sup>

In Quang Nam, the local VCI, like the enemy armed forces, was directed by *Front 4*. A political as well as a military headquarters, *Front 4* had three staff sections, labelled by allied intelligence 70A, 70B, and 70C. *Section 70A*, under the North Vietnamese General Nguyen Chanh Binh, controlled the NVA and VC main forces in Quang Nam, while 70C had charge of military administration, finance, and logistics. Both of these sections took orders from *Section 70B*, the Political Section, often called by the Communists the Current Affairs Section. This section, headed by a civilian PRP member, dictated enemy political and military strategy in Quang Nam, subject to instructions from *Military Region 5*, the Communist headquarters for all I Corps south of the DMZ.\*

\*For details of the Communist military chain of command, see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

Under *Front 4* each district in the province had its own VCI organization which in turn controlled village and hamlet units. At each level, a military affairs committee conducted minings, boobytrappings, assassinations, and terrorism. A political, or "current affairs" committee established overall policy and coordinated nonmilitary activities and supply efforts. Most district and local committees also had security sections. Members of these groups forged GVN identification cards and other documents, provided bodyguards for important Communists passing through their areas, and when necessary directed main force units preparing attacks in their localities to hidden tunnels, supply caches, and assembly points.

In early 1970, according to allied intelligence, about 7,600 identified Category A and B VCI members were active in Quang Nam. Most of them were South Vietnamese born and raised in the province, although the VCI now contained a growing leavening of North Vietnamese, usually attached to the security sections. Evidence from prisoners and captured documents indicated that VCI strength in the province had declined as a result of continuing allied pressure. The VCI now often had to place ill-qualified people in important jobs or require one individual to perform the tasks of two or three.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the infrastructure remained ubiquitous and threatening. Major Grinalds, the S-2 of the 1st Marines, reported that as late as mid-1971:

[As] near as I could tell, . . . every political entity in Quang Nam Province—from the province level right down to the lowest hamlet—shared with GVN or at least had tight alongside GVN a . . . VC government of its own. . . . The degree to which they were visible, in any one hamlet or village, was sort of in direct relationship to our presence in the area. [If] we were there all the time, they generally tended to work at night and they were less obvious but . . . they were powerful . . . .<sup>18</sup>

Besides politically undermining the South Vietnamese government, the VCI contributed directly to the ability of enemy main forces to attack allied military units. Major Grinalds explained that the "VCI . . . are not a separate entity from the main force . . . they are part and parcel of the conventional force operation in the lowlands. They're not something that can be left alone because the main force looked to the VCI for several things. First, for intelligence. That's their primary intelligence collection-evaluation agency. They also looked to them for supplies." Most important, they relied on the infrastructure to guide their

clandestine movement from their mountain bases to attack positions in the lowlands. The VCI directed the units to tunnels and hidden rest areas and pointed out the paths through boobytrapped sectors. Without the VCI the NVA, strangers to the southern provinces, would face most of the operational handicaps that hindered American units in the Vietnamese countryside.<sup>19</sup>

In the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Program, the Americans and South Vietnamese tried to bring together under one organization the anti-VCI activities of all GVN agencies concerned with pacification and security. By pooling information, the agencies would identify the individual members of the VCI in each locality and then coordinate civilian and military efforts to kill or apprehend them. The national pacification plan for 1970 assigned five Phoenix/Phung Hoang goals for the year: improvement of the organization; enlistment of popular support through publicity; involvement of village and hamlet officials in the effort; improvement of the training of personnel; and an emphasis on "fair, correct, and humane" treatment of VCI suspects.<sup>20</sup>

The Phoenix/Phung Hoang organization in Quang Nam conformed in structure to national guidelines. Province and district Phung Hoang committees, chaired respectively by the province and district chiefs, were composed of representatives of the national police, the military staffs, the Revolutionary Development cadres, the Chieu Hoi program, and other pacification and security agencies. These committees were supposed to develop detailed plans for attacking the VCI in their areas of responsibility. The committees also oversaw the work of the Province Intelligence Operations Coordinating Center (PIOCC) and the District Intelligence Operations Coordinating Centers (DIOCCs). These centers, staffed primarily by the police and the military, were to assemble information from all agencies into dossiers on individual VCI members and then plan and coordinate operations against them. The American province senior advisor had a Phoenix coordinator on his staff to assist the Vietnamese agencies, and the PIOCC and DIOCCs had U.S. advisors, usually Army intelligence officers, assigned by CORDS. Each American district senior advisor acted as Phoenix coordinator for his district.<sup>21</sup>

In its achievements and failures, Phoenix/Phung Hoang in Quang Nam mirrored many features of the nationwide program. The effort gave rise to much activity. Colonel Tin, the province chief, took strong interest in it. In June, he called a special province-wide meeting of Americans and Vietnamese involved in Phoenix/Phung Hoang to discuss accomplishments and deficiencies and exhort them to further action and improvement. Following the national plan, the authorities in Quang Nam used leaflets, wanted posters, and even radio and television spots, to enlist citizen support, and they began organizing intelligence coordinating centers in the villages.<sup>22</sup>

All this activity, while impressive on paper, added up to much less than the intensive, coordinated campaign envisioned in Phoenix/Phung Hoang plans and directives. While Colonel Tin supported the program with apparently sincere enthusiasm, all too many of his GVN subordinates gave it little more than lip service. In most of the districts, according to an American advisor, the district chiefs visited their DIOCCs "only to escort visiting US VIP's who express an interest in Phoenix/Phung Hoang."<sup>23</sup> Some of the Vietnamese officials were preoccupied with conventional military operations; others seemed to the Americans to be restrained by taut live-and-let-live arrangements with high-ranking VCI; still others were themselves secret VC agents or sympathizers.

Partly as a result of this lack of continuing command interest, the DIOCCs often were short of trained personnel. The staffs of many centers acted more as keepers of archives than as directors and coordinators of active operations. They diligently assembled and filed dossiers, but rarely used them to mount hunts for particular VCI members. Further weakening the DIOCCs, the national police force, which was supposed to coordinate all anti-VCI operations, was undermanned, low in status among GVN agencies, and heavily VC-infiltrated. The GVN member agencies of the DIOCCs often withheld vital information from them in order to assure themselves credit for successfully exploiting it. Vietnamese administrative habits further compounded the program's difficulties. The principal objective of Phoenix/Phung Hoang was to secure cooperation between the lower level military and civilian officials who knew most about the VCI and could go after them most effectively. This entire concept ran counter to the strictly vertical and hierarchical Vietnamese administrative tradition, under which any dealings by a subordinate with anyone but his su-

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\*Initially, most U.S. funding and support came from the CIA, but in 1969 CORDS took responsibility for financial support and the provision of advisors in the field while the CIA continued to work with the program at the national level. IDA Pacification Study, 2, pp. 91-95.

perior, and indeed any taking of initiative by a subordinate, were regarded at best with suspicion.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of these limitations, Phoenix/Phung Hoang did involve most elements of the GVN in Quang Nam to some degree in the fight against the VCI. The Marines, when they could, tried to assist and often to intensify the campaign. In doing so, they acted in accord with the III MAF/ICTZ Combined Campaign Plan for 1970, which required allied regulars and RFs and PFs to assist Phoenix/Phung Hoang both in intelligence gathering and in apprehending suspects. Free World military forces, including the Marines, were to station liaison officers at the PIOCC and DIOCCs and were to transmit to the intelligence centers any information they acquired on the VCI. They were to provide troops for operations against the VCI "to the maximum consistent with the tactical situation" and to give the cam-

paign against the infrastructure equal priority with attacks on enemy main forces and base areas.<sup>25</sup>

Marine units sometimes went after the VCI directly in specifically targeted operations. During the summer and fall of 1970, for example, the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, which had no enemy main forces to fight in its heavily populated TAOR south of Marble Mountain, directed much of its effort against the VCI. The battalion emphasized surprise attacks and imaginative tactics, with significant results. In August, elements of the battalion, in a quick helicopter raid, captured or killed most of the VCI leadership of the enemy's *District III Da Nang*. Three months later, following up a lead acquired from the girl friend of a Regional Forces intelligence sergeant, Marines of the battalion ambushed and destroyed a veteran VC

*As part of the civic action program two Marines struggle to throw a bull so that a Navy corpsman can give a shot of penicillin to the animal which is suffering from pneumonia. Usually the corpsmen are more concerned with the health of the villagers.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A194695



propaganda team which had long eluded allied pursuit.<sup>26</sup>

Operations against enemy military forces and base areas also yielded incidental gains against the VCI. Cordon and search operations led to arrests of suspected VCI agents as well as to the death or capture of enemy main force soldiers and guerrillas. Even sweeps of mountain base areas occasionally resulted in damage to the VCI. On 13 July, for instance, Company H of the 7th Marines, during an operation in the Que Son Mountains, trapped a group of enemy in a cave and captured or killed all of them. The group turned out to have been the entire Communist leadership of a village, who had gone into the hills for an indoctrination meeting. Operation Imperial Lake, besides accomplishing its main purpose of disrupting enemy base areas and infiltration routes, also hurt the VCI. On 5 November, Company B, 5th Marines discovered in a cache of documents the central files of the Viet Cong Security Section for Quang Nam Province. These files, supplemented by interrogation of a high-ranking VC official also captured during Imperial Lake, produced the names of Viet Cong who had infiltrated the GVN in Da Nang. Government authorities as a result arrested many well-placed enemy agents.<sup>27</sup>

Late in 1970, the 1st Marines staff, at the instigation of the regimental S-2, Major Grinalds, who earlier in the year had served as S-3 of the regiment's 2d Battalion, developed an ambitious plan for a combined attack on the VCI by all military and civil elements in Quang Nam. The plan called for immediate formation of a joint intelligence center for the province to supplement and practically replace the PIOCC. Located at Hoi An, the center would contain liaison officers and communication teams from the 1st Marine Division, the 2d ROKMC Brigade, the 51st ARVN Regiment, QDSZ, Phoenix/Phung Hoang, and the CIA. Here, the 1st Marines staff hoped, "the information would develop on the VCI, the targets would be put in front of the commanders, and they could go." The 1st Marines' plan envisioned a concentrated drive against the infrastructure by all military forces in the province during the first four months of 1971. This effort, it was hoped, would temporarily cripple the enemy command and logistic system and prevent the Communists from taking the offensive after most

of the Marines withdrew in the spring and early summer. The plan urged general adoption of tactics used profitably during 1970 by the 1st Marines. These included small-scale, surprise cordon and search operations, establishment of checkpoints on all major roads, and census operations like those conducted by the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines north of Da Nang.

After Colonel Paul X. Kelley, the 1st Marines commander, approved the plan, the regimental staff, in a series of briefings, tried to persuade the other American and Vietnamese headquarters in the province to adopt it. Results were meager. During December, the allies in Quang Nam did establish a Combined Intelligence Conference which brought together representatives from all allied intelligence agencies in the province at periodic meetings. The Phung Hoang organization acted as the permanent secretariat of the conference. Beyond this, most commands were too preoccupied with other missions and commitments to support the total anti-VCI campaign proposed by the 1st Marines. After initial expressions of interest, they allowed the plan to die of neglect.<sup>28</sup>

Marines trying to operate against the VCI and to persuade the GVN to make a greater effort against the underground faced many obstacles and frustrations. The continuing shortage of Vietnamese-speaking Marines, especially in units in the field, hampered the gathering of information. Under the rules of engagement, Marines could not arrest civilian suspects. Hence any unit going after VCI had to have Vietnamese police or Regional or Popular Forces attached. This in turn required consultations and arrangements with Vietnamese headquarters during which information about the forthcoming operation all too often leaked to the VC. The Vietnamese persistently ignored American suggestions that they establish more checkpoints to prevent the enemy from moving men and equipment along the allies' own lines of communication, and they resisted as politically unpopular the adoption of effective controls over private distributors of food, medical supplies, and other material needed by the enemy. Major Grinalds reported that:

There's a man named Nom Yu, who works on the People's Revolutionary Party of *Quang Da Zone*, a very important man, who drives up and down Highway 1 on a red Honda, and he's been stopped on numerous occasions at checkpoints and bluffed his way through, either as a district chief or a village chief. He's got about six sets of ID cards he carries. The point I'm trying to make is our attempt to monitor the VCI traffic of both their ordnance, their supplies, and their people through our own means of communication is very, very poor . . . .<sup>29</sup>

\*See the description of this incident in Chapter 6 together with statement by Lieutenant General Bernard E. Trainor in the informational footnote.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A194078  
*BGen Mauro J. Padalino, Commanding General,  
 Force Logistic Command presents a plaque to the  
 Marine-sponsored Hoa Khanh Children's Hospital.*

Even with conventional military contact declining, both American and ARVN military commands proved reluctant to reorient their operations toward eradicating the VCI. Marines, Koreans, ARVN, and militia alike thought in terms of engaging large units and taking a measurable toll of dead, prisoners, and captured material. Anti-VCI operations involved slow, careful stalking of individuals and often produced no immediately visible result. Coordinating intelligence collection and the response to it was a continual struggle, explained Grinalds:

The problem was somehow getting the folks who had the information about the VCI together with the folks who had the forces to operate against them, and it's amazing how often these two groups operate without ever coming together. . . . Every once in a while they will find a certain community of interest which allows them to come together and the forces to operate against the VCI, but it's unfortunately too seldom . . . .<sup>30</sup>

#### *Civic Action, 1970*

Almost as soon as Marines arrived in I Corps in force in 1965, they began trying to help the civilians among whom they were fighting. The Marines acted from a number of motives, and these same motives in 1970 continued to impel the III MAF civic action program. From the beginning, Marines had believed that by providing food, relief supplies, and medical care, they would win friends and gratitude among the Vietnamese, and that from friendship and gratitude would

flow information about the Viet Cong and increased support for the GVN. As pacification programs developed, civic action contributed to them by promoting economic and social improvement, thus giving more people a stake in the existing system. Further, as a III MAF staff officer put it, "Civic action also can be useful as an outlet for the energies of U.S. troops. In a counter-guerrilla war such as this, much time is spent in pre- and post-combat conditions. . . . In this environment civic action . . . can serve usefully to expend excess time and energy."<sup>31</sup>

By 1970, the III MAF civic action program had grown from sporadic acts of charity into a large-scale effort, coordinated by the G-5 and S-5 staffs and closely integrated with GVN pacification and development plans. The G-5, like his tactical partner, the G-3, coordinated his activities with numerous other organizations and agencies, both U.S. and foreign. He maintained close working relationships with four separate U.S. Army organizations, two U.S. Air Force organizations, CORDS advisors, ARVN, the province and district officials, III MAF, and numerous free world and Vietnamese civilian agencies.<sup>32</sup>

The civic action program which the G-5 conducted, emphasized helping the Vietnamese to help themselves. Villagers in Marine areas of operation were supposed to determine their own needs, whether they be a new school, a well, a market place, or an irrigation ditch. Then the Marines would furnish supplies—drawn from their own resources, from AID, or from private charities Marines would also provide technical assistance and some labor. The villagers would furnish most of the labor and as much of the material as they could. As Vietnamese local governments developed, the Marines tried to involve them in every project, often restricting their own efforts to helping villagers obtain aid from the GVN.

G-5 operations ranged far beyond helping the Vietnamese to help themselves with American material and technical assistance, however. Through the "Save the Leg" program, dud rounds and unexpended explosives were purchased from the Vietnamese civilians in an attempt to reduce the incidence of Marine patrols encountering mines and boobytraps. The Voluntary Information Program encouraged the populace to provide information about the enemy for a price, the dollar value of which was made proportionate to the importance of the intelligence provided. The G-5 taxed the capabilities of the 7th Psychological Operations Battalion, USA, employing

its leaflet drops, airborne public address missions, and HB (ground broadcast) and HE (audiovisual) means to undermine the activities of the enemy. The Personal Response section of the G-5 conducted varied activities to foster better relations between Vietnamese and Marines through language classes, symposiums, and cultural tours. Psychological operations relied heavily on Vietnamese capabilities: Armed Propaganda Teams; Cultural Drama Teams; and Political Warfare Teams. The G-5 was also supported by two platoons of the 29th Civil Affairs Company, USA, in his wide-ranging activities.

In addition to the numerous on-going tasks assigned the G-5, he responded to requests from province officials to coordinate military involvement of refugee resettlement, such as at Nhon Cau, Tu Cau, Phu Loc (6), and Go Noi Island, and he also coordinated American support for natural disasters which struck within the province. During the catastrophic flood which occurred from 29 October to 3 November 1970, for example, the G-5 coordinated American efforts in the relief operations. From the rescue and evacuation of Vietnamese to delivery of food and clothing to beleaguered areas, the G-5 coordinated all support. In the first few days alone, 190,000 pounds of foodstuffs were distributed outside the Hoi An area. Another 5,000 pounds of clothing and cloth for clothing and some 4,000 paper or canvas blankets were distributed in this same area. The Vietnamese later lauded the support provided by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and the 1st Marine Division under the supervision of the G-5.<sup>33</sup>

In 1970 III MAF, in keeping with the general emphasis of redeployment and turning the war over to the Vietnamese, concentrated on reducing its civic action program. It did so partly as a matter of policy and partly because available manpower and resources were diminishing. The III MAF/I Corps Combined Campaign Plan for 1970 restricted Marine civic action to assisting the Vietnamese Armed Forces in aiding the people. It authorized direct American participation only when a project exceeded the technical capabilities of the RVNAF, when a project "is essential to the success of a tactical operation . . . or is required for humanitarian reasons and cannot be accomplished by the RVNAF," or when a useful project had been started before implementation of the plan.<sup>34</sup>

During the year, the manpower, funds, and materials available to III MAF for civic action steadily declined. Troop redeployments led to the termination

of unit civic action projects, and the withdrawal of the force engineer battalions in Keystone Robin Alpha curtailed road improvement and other large-scale activities. U.S. aid agencies, as their own budgets were reduced, correspondingly reduced the money and material allotted to III MAF. Throughout the war, the Marines had relied for school and medical kits, scholarship funds, and other civic action resources on money contributed by members and friends of the Marine Corps Reserve. This money went to the established relief agency, CARE, which purchased the commodities and shipped them to Da Nang for the use of III MAF. As troops redeployed and American public interest in the war waned, these contributions also declined. Partially compensating for these losses, redeploying units often left material behind which could be salvaged for civic action.<sup>35</sup>

As the III MAF G-5, Colonel Clifford J. Peabody, put it, "the name of the game was to phase down, so we did it with somewhat of a vengeance."<sup>36</sup> On 30 May, for example, III MAF ended, for lack of funds, the General Walt Scholarship Program under which it had helped finance the secondary and college education of Vietnamese youths. The Force Logistic Command on 30 June transferred administration and operational control of its largest civic action project, the Hoa Khanh Children's Hospital near Da Nang, to the World Relief Commission. Built with thousands of man-hours of volunteer labor by Marines and sustained by over \$300,000 in contributions from servicemen and concerned persons in the U.S., this hospital by mid-1970 had grown from a small roadside dispensary into a fully equipped, modern 120-bed pediatric facility. The hospital even had a dental clinic, the equipment for which had been donated by dentists in the United States. "The personnel were mostly young native women who had been trained by Navy dentists for several years," recalled Captain Meredith H. Mead, USN, commander of the 1st Dental Company. "An oral surgeon from the 1st Dental Company went out there one day per week to perform cleft palate and hare lip operations."<sup>37</sup> The World Relief Commission would operate the hospital until its eventual transfer to South Vietnamese management, and Force Logistic Command would provide limited support as long as it remained in-country.<sup>38</sup>

The story of a second major Marine hospital project, the 3d Marine Division Memorial Children's Hospital in Quang Tri, ended less happily. Early in 1969, the 3d Marine Division had developed plans for

this hospital, a 10-building, 120-bed facility which would meet a significant need in northern I Corps and stand as a memorial to Marines and sailors who had died in Vietnam. Through friends and organizations in the United States, the Marines had begun collecting funds for the hospital. The 3d Engineer Battalion and Naval Mobile Construction (Seabee) Battalion 128 were supposed to do the actual building, aided by the government of Quang Tri Province, which would provide bricks and much of the labor.

Evaluating the failure of the project years later, Colonel Peabody said, "Here was a project conceived in the loftiest humanitarian ideals but in violation of all rules for effective civic action. The end speaks for itself." According to Peabody, the GVN opposed the project and recommended that the money collected be invested, as the Vietnamese desired, to upgrade or add to the present province hospital. Peabody added that the "3d Marine Division committed the Marine Corps to this project knowing, as a minimum, that the Vietnamese were less than enthusiastic and that the more knowledgeable advisory personnel recommended against it. FMFPac recommended that it not be undertaken until positive arrangements had been made for staffing."<sup>39</sup>

When the 3d Marine Division withdrew late in 1969, it left responsibility for completing the project to III MAF. Colonel Peabody soon found that with the departure of the Marine division, support for the hospital had disappeared. The U.S. forces left in northern I Corps lacked resources to complete it. The Quang Tri Province Government informed III MAF that it would not be able to staff or maintain a children's hospital and would like to use the six partially completed buildings for other purposes. Only \$135,000 of the estimated \$470,000 needed to complete the project as a children's hospital had been collected in the U.S. In June, because of the hospital's uncertain future, the Commandant of the Marine Corps prohibited any solicitation of additional funds for it.

On 20 August, Colonel Peabody met at Quang Tri with the G-5 officers of XXIV Corps and the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division, the Quang Tri Province Chief, and representatives of the provincial health service, the Red Cross, and the Buddhist social services in an effort to salvage as much of the project as possible. The American and Vietnamese officials agreed that the existing structures should be finished for use as a combination orphanage, maternity clinic, and dormitory for secondary school students. During the rest

of the year, III MAF used the money in the children's hospital fund to prepare and equip the buildings for these purposes and to improve the pediatric wing of the existing Quang Tri Province hospital. III MAF used an additional \$3,500 per month of its dwindling civic action funds to pay the salaries of Vietnamese doctors and nurses at a temporary children's hospital in Quang Tri, also started by the 3d Division and now being partially supported by elements of the 67th U.S. Army Medical Group. XXIV Corps provided Army engineers to help finish the buildings at the former children's hospital, and U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang allowed III MAF to purchase the necessary lumber. By early 1971, the orphanage/clinic/dormitory was nearing completion. While III MAF thus had been able to salvage something beneficial from the 3d Division's aborted plans, Colonel Peabody justifiably concluded that "a project which was outstanding in its humanitarian idea of providing help . . . has proved to be a real albatross in the long run."<sup>40</sup>

In spite of the emphasis on reducing civic action commitments, Marine units continued helping the Vietnamese who lived in their TAORs or near their camps and bases. Typical of the efforts, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, during April, began turning surplus lumber over to the Dai Loc District Chief, who distributed it to villages and hamlets for self-help projects. Companies of the battalion stationed at Hills 65, 25, and 52 gave empty ammunition boxes to the people of Loc Quang village to construct desks for their new school and furnished school supply kits and a blackboard. The Marines also helped the villagers of Loc Quang build a culvert to carry irrigation water under Route 4. Three times a week, members of the battalion taught English at Dai Loc District High School. The battalion sponsored an interscholastic volley ball game and gave 250 books to a Catholic priest, Father Huong, who planned to open a public library in Dai Loc. The battalion aid station routinely conducted two MedCaps a week, each usually attracting about 50 patients, most of them children.<sup>41</sup>

Civic action was not confined to infantry units. Besides sponsoring the Hoa Khanh Children's Hospital, the Force Logistic Command at various times aided 32 hamlets and helped support 11 schools, 6 orphanages, and 3 churches. The 1st MAW maintained a demonstration chicken farm with a flock of White Leghorns that by September 1970 had grown to 225 hens and 40 roosters. The Marines sold hatched chicks to Vietnamese farmers at half the going local price in



the hope of encouraging more villagers to raise poultry. Each of the air wing's aircraft groups had its own education, health, and construction projects in hamlets around the fields at Marble Mountain and Da Nang.<sup>42</sup>

Just before the Keystone Robin Alpha redeployments began, the 1st Marine Division joined the Quang Nam Province Government in an effort to resettle Go Noi Island. Located about 15 miles south of Da Nang and the channels through which the Thu Bon River (there known as the Ky Lam) meandered toward the sea, Go Noi, before the war, had been a fertile rice, cotton, and silk producing area inhabited by some 27,000 Vietnamese. As the war expanded, the Viet Cong honeycombed the area with caves and tunnels and used it as a base of operations against Da Nang. VC depredations, allied sweeps, and a series of floods soon drove most of the residents of Go Noi into Quang Nam's growing refugee camps. Between May and November of 1969, in Operation Pipestone Canyon, the 1st Marines, assisted by elements of the 51st ARVN Regiment and the 2d ROKMC Brigade, expelled most of the NVA and VC from Go Noi Island. Then the allies brought in heavy earthmoving equipment which swept 6,700 acres clean of underbrush and crushed or buried the Communists' network of tunnels and fortification.

During Operation Pipestone Canyon, the 1st Ma-

rine Division proposed a plan for resettling Go Noi Island after it had been cleared of the enemy. The plan had obvious advantages. Repopulation of the area with pro-GVN civilians protected by adequate territorial forces would make Communist reinfiltration more difficult. The area could provide homes and livelihoods for thousands of refugees, and resumption of agriculture there would contribute to economic revival in Quang Nam. CORDS at regional and national levels took an interest in the Marine plan and further studied and refined it. The concerned GVN ministries indicated interest. Then, as so often happened in Vietnam, activity on the project temporarily ceased.

In the spring of 1970, Colonel Tin, the Quang Nam Province Chief, revised the idea. He began a small resettlement project with assistance from the 1st Marine Division and the Korean Brigade. Late in May, Colonel Tin abruptly decided to expand this modest effort into the full-scale resettlement campaign originally contemplated. He proposed to move 17,000 people into three new villages on Go Noi Island before the end of the summer and asked XXIV Corps for aid. Even though most of Go Noi Island lay within the Korean Marines' TAOR, Lieutenant General Zais, then the XXIV Corps commander, directed the 1st Marine Division, as the major allied ground command in Quang Nam, to coordinate American assistance for

*An aerial view of the new refugee resettlement village on Go Noi Island. Go Noi, a former bastion of the Viet Cong, was one of the most fought-over areas south of Da Nang. This was an attempt to bring new residents into the area loyal to the government.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection



the project. Major General Widdecke in turn placed his assistant division commander, Brigadier General William F. Doehler, in charge. Making much use of the Quang Da Special Zone weekly conferences, the 1st Marine Division quickly worked out with the Korean Marines, the ARVN, and the province government detailed plans for a large-scale civil and military effort.<sup>43</sup>

Construction of the new villages began in May, with most of the available Marine engineer units and Navy construction battalions committed to the task. By the time the Marine engineers were withdrawn for redeployment on 21 July, they had ploughed 800 acres of farm land and wholly or partially constructed 8,000 meters of road and two fortified village compounds. To improve the settlers' access to markets, the Marine engineers installed a 346-foot pontoon bridge connecting the island to the main highways, and the Seabees improvised a 440-foot permanent bridge from salvaged materials. III MAF contributed an assortment of building supplies to the project including 351 3,000-foot rolls of barbed wire, 16,000 engineering stakes, 30,000 sandbags, a 55-foot aluminum watchtower, 26 tons of gravel, and two flagpoles. To help the settlers construct their own houses, the Marines salvaged over 400,000 board feet of dunnage\* lumber and set up a mobile sawmill to cut it into usable sizes. From this wood, each family purchased enough for their home from the village council, which retained the money for use in local projects.<sup>44</sup>

To defend the settlers against the Viet Cong, the 2d CAG organized a new oversized CAP (22 Marines and a PF platoon) to work with a three-company RF group and elements of the Korean brigade. Plans called for the CAP, formed with Marines from deactivated units of the 1st CAG, to conduct mobile operations on the edges of the inhabited areas while the RF units provided close in protection and the Koreans continued their usual patrols and ambushes.<sup>45</sup>

By the end of August, the Go Noi settlements appeared to be well established, although the results had fallen far short of the ambitious goals of the original plan. Phu Loc, the first of the three villages to be founded, had over 1,500 inhabitants (most of them prewar residents of Go Noi) and 300 homes. Nine wells were producing "excellent" water, and the inhabitants had begun building their community hall, school, dispensary, and market place. The second village, Phu Phong, had almost 200 houses under con-

struction and 40 families in permanent residence. The October floods slowed work on these two villages and prevented establishment of the third, but by the end of the year about 2,000 people were living on Go Noi Island. They had begun farming and were planning to organize a cooperative to build an irrigation system. Encouraged by the results of the Go Noi project, the province government had begun resettling more refugees in new communities along Route 4. Neither of these projects by itself came near solving Quang Nam's refugee problem, but they did indicate what could be done by a determined, unified allied effort. Unfortunately, the 1st Marine Division, which had provided much of the impetus and coordination, did not have long to remain in Vietnam.<sup>46</sup>

As the Marines came to the end of their last full year of civic action, many problems remained unsolved and questions unanswered.<sup>47</sup> In spite of the emphasis in plans and directives on helping the Vietnamese do what the Vietnamese wanted done, many Marines, with their American aggressiveness and desire for accomplishment, still tried to impose their own projects on the villagers. Even the CAPs sometimes erred in this manner. In July, the 2d CAG reported that:

Efforts such as building bulletin boards . . . and programs for trash collection and general police of hamlet areas continue, but [meet] with limited success at best due to no real interest by local populace. Herein lies a major problem . . . that continues to plague civic action projects. CAP Marines with limited assets continue to push projects through without thorough integration (via the Village/Hamlet Officials) with the immediate needs and desires of the people they serve. 2d CAG efforts to educate and improve continue.<sup>48</sup>

Overeager Marines sometimes committed themselves to projects which they and their Vietnamese hosts lacked the resources to finish. In the 3d CAG, for example, members of a CAP squad in a coastal hamlet near Hue decided their hamlet should have a dispensary. Colonel Peabody described the results of their effort:

. . . They've written to their friends back in the States and their friends had started donating money, and they hired Vietnamese labor and they started building a dispensary . . . about three times larger than was needed, but they were going to go first class, and the people back in the States were donating hospital beds and end tables and so forth . . . Well, . . . the hamlet got upgraded [on the HES] to an A or a B hamlet, and the CAP was pulled out, and so when we finally sent somebody up there to find out what had happened to this thing, here was four more or less incomplete walls, and that was it. And the local people wanted to know, "Well, whatever happened to our dispensary?"<sup>49</sup>

\*Dunnage is scrap lumber used in bracing cargo in ships' holds.

Colonel Peabody's office, after consultations with the Vietnamese province and district authorities, the CORDS advisors, and the XXIV Corps staff, developed a plan under which the Vietnamese would finish building the dispensary.

. . . But they asked us for . . . basically \$1,000 worth of gear to finish it up, primarily lumber . . . . So everything was all laid on and we bought the supplies and got them shipped up there, and that's been about three months ago. And the supplies are in the warehouse and nothing has moved since . . . .<sup>50</sup>

Beyond the practical problems, the question remained of how effective civic action had been in winning civilian support for the South Vietnamese government and acceptance for the Marines. Limited benefits could be observed. Frequently, after a Med-Cap or other project that had helped them immediately and personally, villagers would point out boobytraps to the Marines or warn them of impending enemy attacks. Major Grinalds, S-2 of the 1st Marines, for example, found MedCaps\* "very effective" in producing intelligence. "We always had an intelligence man sitting by the dentist or the doctor when he was working on somebody," Grinalds recalled, "and in gratitude for a tooth pulled . . . or something like that, sometimes they'd give some information about VCI or VC in their area."<sup>51</sup>

But had five years of civic action really overcome the inevitable hostility of the peasants to foreign troops in their midst or won their loyalty for a government that still often seemed less concerned for their welfare than were the Marines. Knowledgeable Marines could give no definitive answer to this question. Some, including Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, the assistant division commander of the 1st Marine Division during its last months in Vietnam,\*\* expressed

\*The dental officers and technicians of the 1st Dental Company, which operated 12 clinics throughout the Da Nang TAOR, supported Marine civic action efforts. Even the dental officers who were assigned to the 1st Marine Division command post went to the field on occasion. "All dental officers and techs operated from time to time in MedCAP or DentCAP endeavors. These were carried out in orphanages, schools or small villages. We always took a translator and armed guard," recalled Captain Meredith H. Mead, Commanding Officer, 1st Dental Company. "I personally went on several of these expeditions . . . . One trip I remember well: we set up our chair in the small village square and the chief (village chief) climbed a tree and announced with a big megaphone that the tooth doctor had arrived. Our treatments were mostly for relief of pain." Capt Meredith H. Mead, USN, Comments on draft ms, 8Jun73 (Vietnam Comment File).

\*\*Simmons replaced Brigadier General Doehler as assistant division commander on 16 June 1970.

"serious doubts" whether civic action had won many "hearts and minds" for the government and regarded such activities as "a poor substitute for more positive forms of civil affairs/military government."<sup>52</sup>

#### *Communist Counter-Pacification Efforts*

While large-unit combat diminished during 1970, the Communists, in keeping with their renewed emphasis on guerrilla warfare, continued without let-up their effort to disrupt pacification by terrorism. This small-scale but often vicious campaign took three main forms: direct attacks on CAPs, CUPPs, and RF or PF units; kidnapping and assassination of GVN officials, PSDF members, national policemen, RD cadre members, and other pacification functionaries; and general attacks on the people and their property in GVN-controlled areas.

Especially during the first half of the year, detachments of VC and NVA repeatedly attacked CAP units. On 1 February, for example, 30-40 NVA and VC trapped and overran a patrol from CAP 1-1-3 in Quang Tin Province, killing four Marines and one PF and capturing a radio, a M60 machine gun, a grenade launcher, and five M16s. The enemy also took losses. A sweep of the scene of the fight by elements of CAP 1-1-2 disclosed five enemy dead, three abandoned AK-47s, and a Chinese Communist machine gun.<sup>53</sup> During March, the 2d CAG in Quang Nam reported "constant" small attacks by fire on its units. On one occasion, the enemy disguised themselves in captured ARVN uniforms, 48 of which were found after the engagement, the Communists having stripped them off and discarded them as they fled.<sup>54</sup>

Periodically, enemy infantry or sappers tried to overrun a CAP patrol base. Almost invariably, they failed with substantial losses. On 27 May, in a typical contact, 30-50 NVA attacked the night patrol base of CAP 4-2-1 near the Quang Tri-Thua Thien border with small arms, grenades, and RPGs. The CAP Marines and PFs, supported by 81mm mortar fire, helicopter gunships, and flareships, held off the enemy with small arms, grenades, and Claymore mines. Sporadic fighting continued from 0125 until daylight, when the NVA withdrew. They left behind two dead, an AK-47, and five blood trails. The CAP suffered one Marine seriously wounded and one PF dead of wounds. During the last half of the year, the enemy launched fewer such attacks and relied increasingly on mines and boobytraps to inflict casualties on the CAPs.<sup>55</sup>

Enemy pressure on CUPP units intensified late in the spring as the combined units began improving

their effectiveness. On 10 May, for instance, the Communists attacked two separate 7th Marines CUPP teams near FSB Baldy, mortaring one and assaulting the compound of the other. In the ground attack, Marines and PFs drove back about 60 sappers who temporarily broke into their perimeter. This day's action cost the enemy 12 dead; The two CUPP units lost between them one PF killed and 20 wounded.<sup>56</sup>

On 13 June, the enemy inflicted a major setback on the 5th Marines' CUPP platoon. At 0200, about 60 NVA and VC attacked two ambushes set up by this unit near Route 4 about a mile southwest of Hill 25. Concentrating first on the westernmost position, the Communists assaulted with small arms and machine gun fire, RPGs, grenades, and thrown satchel charges. All the RFs in the ambush, members of a platoon from the 759th RF Company, fled at the first shots, leaving six Marines to fight alone until they were overrun. Three of the Marines were killed and another wounded; the survivors made their way to safety.

The enemy then moved eastward and attacked the second ambush. Here, all but five of the RFs fled, but here the Marines and the RFs who stayed, supported by 81mm mortar and artillery fire, stopped the Communists. The enemy disengaged and withdrew around 0430.

For the 5th Marines' CUPP platoon, it had been a costly action. Besides a total of three Marines and one RF soldier killed and five Marines and one RF wounded, the unit had lost in the overrun position a PRC-25 radio, an M60 machine gun, two M14 and two M16 rifles, and a .45-caliber pistol. A patrol from Company I, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines searched the area the next morning and found two blood trails but no other sign of enemy casualties. The most important casualty of the engagement was the relationship between the CUPP Marines and their RF counterparts. As the official report of the fight put it: "The rapport between RFs and Marines was impaired by the performance of the RFs during these contacts." Nevertheless, the 5th Marines at once set to work rebuilding the unit and improving its training.<sup>57</sup>

Throughout the year, Communist terrorists took a steady toll of GVN officials and ordinary civilians. In May, one of the periodic high points of guerrilla activity, the VC in Quang Nam, according to a CORDS report, killed 129 civilians, wounded 247, and kidnapped 73.<sup>58</sup> Many such kidnappings in fact were forceable recruiting. The VC took the victims into the hills and by persuasion or coercion induced them to

join their ranks. The GVN, as it did with the number of refugees, understated its casualties from terrorism. Major Grinalds reported that "government officials get a target number of harassing or terrorist incidents that are allowed in their province each year, [it] might be 75, might be 85. When they reach that number they stop reporting the excess, because it looks bad."<sup>59</sup>

District and village officials lived under constant danger of abduction or death. On the night of 20-21 March, for instance, a band of VC kidnapped a hamlet chief in the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines TAOR. They took him up onto Charlie Ridge about 1,500 meters north of his hamlet, told him "to quit his job or he would be killed," then released him and retreated further into the mountains.<sup>60</sup>

On other occasions, the enemy struck to kill. On 19 September, in a type of incident which occurred again and again during the year, two Regional Force soldiers died less than half a mile from the headquarters compound of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines when "an unknown number of VC/VNA detonated one Claymore type mine and then shot them in the head." Eight days later, also in the 2d Battalion's TAOR, Viet Cong grenades killed two Revolutionary Development team members in a refugee hamlet and wounded four civilians. In the Que Son Valley on 14 November, two or three VC with AK-47s ambushed and killed the hamlet chief and hamlet security chief of Lanh Thuong (5), a community close to FSB Ross. Higher ranking officials also fell victim. On 18 December, in mid-afternoon, the assistant chief of Dai Loc District was killed on Route 4 by two Vietnamese boys who threw a grenade into his jeep.<sup>61</sup>

The enemy reinforced his terrorist campaign with continuous propaganda to further intimidate the Vietnamese population, and occasionally he leveled his propaganda at the American forces. A typical propaganda leaflet said, "GIs, unite! Oppose the dirty American war of aggression in Vietnam! The American people are waging an active struggle to support your anti-war (sic) activities and demand that the American government end immediately its war of aggression in Vietnam and take you out of South Vietnam immediately." Further on in the leaflet it appealed for racial dissidence against the war: "Black GIs, refuse to fight against the South Vietnamese people struggling for their independence and freedom. For black GIs, the battlefield is right on American soil, where they must fight against poverty, hunger and barbarous racial discrimination." While the propaganda



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373320

*South Vietnamese troops from the 101st Regional Force Battalion deploy from an American helicopter in an operation south of Da Nang. As the Marine forces began to withdraw from Vietnam, they turned over their tactical areas to the South Vietnamese.*

had little or no impact on Americans, the enemy's propaganda and terrorism often stifled the Vietnamese.<sup>62</sup>

Any Vietnamese who supported the government or associated with Americans in any way was a potential victim of Communist terror. Early in 1970, a CAP from the 1st CAG, while on a routine patrol, found a dead man on the trail they were following. According to the patrol report:

The dead VN was the father of a young boy who frequently performed small chores to assist the CAP Marines. A note in Vietnamese attached to the body read, "If you support the Americans, this will happen to you."<sup>63</sup>

To the north, in Quang Nam, a group of school children learned the same lesson. On 19 January, while Marines from CAP 2-3-7 were playing volleyball with the children in their schoolyard, a Vietnamese youth threw two grenades into their midst. The grenades killed four of the children and wounded four others and six Marines. The youth who threw the grenades escaped. These and innumerable other such small

tragedies conveyed the same message: it is dangerous to aid and associate with Americans.<sup>64</sup>

During the spring and summer, the VC escalated their terrorism from acts of violence against individuals to full-scale attacks on progovernment villages. The most severe of these attacks occurred on 11 June at Phu Thanh. This village, a complex of several hamlets, straddled Route 1 about three miles north of FSB Baldy. Just to the north of the village, the highway crossed the Ba Ren Bridge, one of the vital links on the land lines of communication between Baldy and Da Nang.<sup>65</sup>

Phu Thanh had a reputation among the Marines as a friendly village. It contained the homes of many RF and PF soldiers and GVN officials, and its people were a reliable source of information about the VC in their area. Because of its nearness to the important bridge, Phu Thanh had strong security forces in and around it. CUPP Team 9—a squad from the 1st Platoon of Company A, 7th Marines—was stationed in the village with PF Platoons 144 and 171. Phu Thanh

also contained a 22-man Revolutionary Development team and a PSDF unit of 31 members, eight of whom had weapons. Near the south end of the bridge lay the compound of the 323d RF Company, which had as its main mission protection of the span. The CP of the 1st Platoon of Company A, which had charge of several CUPPs along the highway north of LZ Baldy, was located near the RF compound.

For several weeks, rumors had circulated in the village that the Viet Cong were planning to attack the Ba Ren Bridge, but neither Marines nor Vietnamese saw any reason to expect an assault on the hamlets themselves. On the night of 10-11 June, the CUPP unit had taken up a night position within the village. The RF troops, following their usual practice, remained in their fortified compound watching the bridge.

At 0200 on the 11th, the enemy, later identified as elements of the *V-25th Main Force Battalion* and the *T-89th Sapper Battalion*, launched a thoroughly planned and coordinated attack. It began with a barrage of 60mm and 82mm mortar fire. The mortars, located north and south of Phu Thanh, dropped a total of 200-250 high explosive and white phosphorus rounds on the village. They concentrated on CUPP 9, the bridge, the 1st Platoon CP, and the RF compound. Simultaneous with this barrage, the enemy attacked two other CUPP teams in hamlets south of Phu Thanh on Route 1, engaging them with small arms, RPGs, grenades, and mortars and preventing them from maneuvering to reinforce Phu Thanh.

Under cover of the mortar fire, two groups of sappers entered the village, one from the east and one from the west. Armed with grenades and satchel charges, a few rushed the RF compound and the 1st Platoon CP and were cut down by the defenders' fire. Most began burning houses and hurling their grenades and satchel charges into family bomb shelters filled with civilians who had fled to them for protection from the shelling. A Marine recalled:

The enemy ran through the village, ordering people out of their bunkers. When they did [come out], they were shot, or else [the enemy threw] chicoms [grenades] into the bunker, killing the men, women, and children in them. . . . Very many civilians [were] killed just inside their bunkers, if it wasn't from shrapnel wounds it was from fire where they were burned to death from the satchel charges used. . . .<sup>66</sup>

The defenders fought back as best they could, but the continuous mortar barrage prevented them from counterattacking to save the village. At the bridge, the RF company beat back a minor probe of its compound.

CUPP 9 had 10 Marines wounded in the initial shelling, including the squad leader, the assistant squad leader, the radioman, and the corpsman. Nevertheless, the Marines and PFs managed to form a perimeter in the blazing village and hold their position. When it became evident that the enemy were concentrating their attack on the civilians and bypassing the CUPP, the PF *trung si* let most of his men go home to try to protect their families, but he himself stayed with the Marines, as did the PF radioman and mortar team.

At the 1st Platoon CP, Marines and PFs repelled a rush by a few of the sappers and answered the mortar barrage with their own 81mm and 60mm mortars. The platoon commander, First Lieutenant Thomas S. Miller, kept the 7th Marines Headquarters informed by radio of the progress of the battle and called for artillery and air support. The first rounds of friendly artillery began falling on suspected Communist positions 20 minutes after the attack started.

At about 0315, the enemy mortar fire temporarily slackened as the sappers began to withdraw from the village. Lieutenant Miller took advantage of the lull to send a squad from his CP into Phu Thanh to find and assist CUPP 9. To reach the CUPP, the squad had to work its way through a part of the village already devastated by the sappers. One of the Marines, Corporal Robert M. Mutchler, reported that "It was mostly on fire, the wounded were all over the area, screamin' and hollerin'."<sup>67</sup> The squad reached the CUPP team and in two trips brought the wounded Marines and PFs to the bridge to be picked up by helicopters. Then, accompanied by the platoon's Vietnamese interpreter, the squad plunged back into the burning hamlets and began urging the people to bring their wounded to the bridge. At the bridge, the interpreter and the Marines, "working very hard," separated the more severely injured and made the people understand that the more seriously hurt would be taken out first. By this time, the enemy mortars had resumed firing slowly to cover the retreat of the sappers.

The first medical evacuation helicopter from MAG-16 landed on the bridge around 0330 and lifted out all the Marines, PFs, and RFs wounded in the attack. Thereafter, a steady stream of helicopters came in, covered by two Cobra gunships, to take out the civilian wounded. According to Corporal Mutchler, "we medevaced some 60 to 70 civilians, and . . . more than half of them was emergency medevacs, amputees and half burnt to death." Lieutenant Miller said that:

The pilots who came in to do the medevac did the most outstanding job of any Marine pilots I've seen yet. They were coming in, some pilots came in, picked up part of a load and started to leave. When more came they sat back down, even when the zone was still relatively hot. . . . As one would pick up and leave another one would land . . . . I'm sure that they saved many lives that night.<sup>68</sup>

The mortar bombardment ended at about 0400, and by daylight all the severely wounded civilians had been evacuated and a team of doctors and corpsmen from LZ Baldy had reached Phu Thanh and had begun treating the minor casualties, over 100 in all. Colonel Dering, the 7th Marines commander, arrived at 0810 to assess the damage, followed at 1020 by Major General Widdecke. Within hours, the 1st Marine Division and the province government had emergency relief and reconstruction under way. The GVN, aided by the Marines, distributed food and supplies to meet the survivors' immediate needs and later provided tons of lumber and tin to rebuild the village.

There was much rebuilding to be done. The VC had destroyed 156 houses and damaged 35 more, most of them in Thanh My, the hardest hit of the village's hamlets. The attack had cost the Marines 10 men wounded, one of whom later died. Four Regional Force and two Popular Force soldiers had been wounded. Civilian casualties totalled 74 dead, many of them women and children; 60 severely injured; and over 100 lightly wounded. After the fight, the defenders found four dead VC in the wire around the RF compound and the 1st Platoon CP, and they rounded up one prisoner and one *Hoi Chanb*.

Soon after the attack, the Communists began spreading the report that their objective really had been the Ba Ren Bridge and that Phu Thanh and its people merely had been caught in the crossfire. Marines who had been there, however, had no doubt that the enemy deliberately had attacked the village. Lieutenant Miller summed up:

There was no military objective involved in this attack. I say this because first of all there was only light enemy contact directly at the compound. The mortars were fired in such a manner as to restrain any military contact. The VC stayed pretty much out of the area CUPP 9 was operating in. . . . Also, the Ba Ren Bridge, which is a major line of communications on Route 1 was not hit; there was not even an attempt to blow this bridge up.<sup>69</sup>

On 30 August, the enemy launched a similar attack on a Buddhist orphanage and German hospital south of An Hoa. Again, the attack began with a mortar barrage. Then an estimated 30 NVA sappers "in

full uniform" swept through the grounds hurling grenades and satchel charges and withdrawing before allied troops could arrive. They left behind 15 Vietnamese dead, many of them children, and 51 wounded.<sup>70</sup> The enemy, however, as their attempts to disavow the massacre at Phu Thanh indicated, evidently found such attacks politically embarrassing. During the autumn and winter they reverted to smaller scale and more selective terrorism.

Marines found Vietnamese civilian reaction to this violence varied and difficult to measure. At Phu Thanh, for instance, members of the CUPP felt that the attack of 11 June merely strengthened the villagers' loyalty to the GVN and friendship for the Marines. "They always gave us good intel [intelligence] before," one Marine observed, "and they're still giving us good intel now that it's over. . . . I just feel they [the enemy] turned the villagers against them, a lot more than they were before."<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, Major Grinalds concluded that the civilians in the 1st Marines' TAOR "have a high limit of tolerance to terror because, from what I've seen, they aren't ready yet to acknowledge that the threshold of pain had been reached and now they're ready to get rid of the VC."<sup>72</sup>

#### *Vietnamization*

"Vietnamization" entered the official vocabulary of U.S. military planning in November 1969, but the policy it denoted had been put into effect about a year before that. Essentially, Vietnamization involved enlargement of the size and improvement of the equipment, leadership, and training of the Vietnamese armed forces (RVNAF) to the point where they could defend their country with minimal U.S. support. This effort went forward under a series of RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Plans prepared by MACV and the JGS and approved by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and Department of Defense. The initial plans in 1968-1969 emphasized expansion of ground force manpower, with training and equipment receiving secondary priority, while the plans in effect during 1970 stressed improvement of Vietnamese air, naval, artillery, and supply capabilities so as to produce balanced regular and Regional or Popular Forces of 1,100,000 men by the end of Fiscal Year 1973.<sup>73</sup>

Beyond development of the RVNAF, the definition of Vietnamization often included the whole range of efforts to turn more of the war over to the Vietnamese. The 1st Marine Division, for example, defined Vietnamization as "the process by which the United States assists the GVN in strengthening its government, econ-

omy, and military and internal security forces in order to permit the United States to reduce its military and civilian involvement." The division included in Vietnamization most military and pacification activities, and it enjoined every unit and staff section to pay continual attention to the Vietnamization aspects of their missions.<sup>74</sup>

In Quang Nam, the military Vietnamization effort during 1970 centered on expansion and improvement of the RFs and PFs and on transfer of the defense of bridges, cantonments, and other vital installations from the Marines to the RVN, RF, and PF. The Marines also tried to persuade the ARVN to take over a TAOR of their own, replacing one of the redeploying Marine regiments.

No increase in regular forces was scheduled in Quang Nam for 1970, but by June the JGS had authorized recruitment in the province of 16 additional PF platoons and four more RF companies. By the end of the year, most of these units had been raised and were completing their training. Besides organizing these new units, QDSZ and Quang Nam Province authorities throughout 1970 tried to enlarge the military capabilities of the RFs and PFs so that they could defend populated areas largely independently of support from the regular army. The ARVN then could replace the redeploying American units in offensive operations. Accordingly, the province instituted classes for RF and PF artillery forward observers and began training one of the Regional Force battalions, the 101st, in battalion-size operations so that it could act as a mobile reserve for the Quang Nam Regional and Popular Forces.

III MAF took a major part in this training effort. The CAPs and CUPPs provided continuous instruction, both formal and informal, for their counterpart PF platoons. Between January and June, 75 PF NCOs graduated from the 1st Marine Division's NCO school. The division conducted quick-fire marksmanship courses for RF and PF soldiers and trained others, as well as men from the 51st ARVN Regiment, in minesweeping and electric generator operation (important in bridge and cantonment security to maintain power to searchlights and other defense devices). The Marines also began instructing ARVN and RFs and PFs in reconnaissance operations and the use of sensors.<sup>75</sup>

Throughout the year, the 1st Marine Division continually pressed Quang Da Special Zone and Quang Nam Province to take full charge of the protection of bridges, cantonments, and other vital installations



Marine Corps Historical Collection

*ARVN soldiers with their young mascot participate in an operation near Da Nang. The Vietnamese, however, are reluctant to take over the Marine areas.*

guarded wholly or partially by Marines. The division also tried to transfer to the Vietnamese responsibility for the daily minesweeping patrols designed to keep the major highways safe for traffic. These negotiations, largely conducted in the QDSZ/1st Marine Division/2d ROKMC Brigade weekly conferences, proved slow and frustrating. The Vietnamese repeatedly urged postponements of their assumption of responsibility, pleading lack of men, equipment, and training. They often forced delay in removal of Marines from defense positions, and they fell weeks behind the schedule to which they had agreed for taking over the minesweeps.<sup>76</sup>

The transfer of defensive tasks to the Vietnamese went forward inexorably nevertheless, kept in motion by the steady diminution of U.S. Marine manpower as regiments redeployed. In February, Quang Nam Province forces replaced elements of the 1st Marines guarding four bridges south of Da Nang. During March, elements of the 51st ARVN Regiment assumed formal responsibility for the security of Hills 37 and 55, although Marine units continued to operate from both. On 21 June, the 1/25 RF Group took over defense of the Esso oil depot on the coast north of Da



Nang, replacing a company of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines. The Vietnamese assumed responsibility for the Cobb and Cau Do Bridges; major spans on the highways south of Da Nang, on 15 and 20 July, and on 1 August, the Regional Forces took full charge of the defense of Hai Van Pass. In September, RFs and PFs relieved elements of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines at Nam O Bridge, where Highway 1 crosses the Cu De River north of Da Nang. After long negotiations and many delays, a battalion of the 51st ARVN occupied what was left of An Hoa combat base in mid-October while Quang Nam RFs and PFs assumed security of Liberty Bridge.<sup>77</sup>

The Marines had less success in persuading the ARVN to assume an independent TAOR in Quang Nam. As a result of the divided command of the ARVN units in the province, III MAF had to deal with I Corps on this issue. Lieutenant General McCutcheon repeatedly pressed Lieutenant General Lam, the I Corps commander, to establish an all ARVN TAOR. In response, the I Corps staff late in July proposed that the corps reserve units in Quang Nam, the 1st Ranger Group and the 1st Armored Brigade, assume the 7th Marines' TAOR when that regiment redeployed. The same ARVN units were to replace the Marines at FSBs Ross and Ryder and LZ Baldy. McCutcheon welcomed this suggestion as a "big step forward in the Vietnamization process" and expressed the hope that it would lead to the 51st ARVN taking over the 5th Marines' TAOR as that regiment withdrew. The Vietnamese, however, in the end backed away from this drastic expansion of their responsibility. They preferred to keep the 51st in its area of operations with the 5th Marines and to maintain the freedom of action of the Rangers and the armored brigade. Eventually, the 5th Marines had to take over the TAOR of the 7th while the 51st ARVN would accept only a portion of An Hoa and a small area around it.<sup>78</sup>

The year ended with encouraging indications of progress in Vietnamization, but with the process far from complete. From Lieutenant General McCutcheon on down, most Marines and other Americans who worked closely with the ARVN agreed that the units in Quang Nam—the 51st Regiment, the 1st Ranger Group, and the 1st Armored Brigade—"were aggressive and competent." MACV, in its nationwide rating of the effectiveness of Vietnamese units, placed the 51st Regiment third in the country in number of enemy killed per battalion and second in weapons captured per battalion. The rangers and armored troops,

although rarely committed in Quang Nam, fought well when they were.

The Regional and Popular Forces continued to vary in quality from unit to unit, but overall appeared to be improving. Continuous emphasis on aiding the RFs and PFs by III MAF and to a lesser extent by I Corps and XXIV Corps at last seemed to be producing results. In Quang Nam, the Regional and Popular Forces had become more aggressive during the year. Now, they frequently left their fortified compounds at night to patrol and ambush. By December, according to the province senior advisor, they were conducting almost 300 activities every night and averaging four to five contacts.<sup>79</sup>

Nevertheless, crucial deficiencies remained, most of which were representative of problems plaguing the RVNAF throughout South Vietnam. Quang Da Special Zone, like other Vietnamese higher commands, still was short of competent high-ranking officers. This problem became critical in August, when the able QDSZ commander, Colonel Nguyen Van Thien, died in a plane crash while flying to Saigon to receive a long-overdue promotion to brigadier general. Vietnamese military politics and bureaucratic inefficiency kept Thien's post unfilled for weeks, leaving no officer in the province able to deal authoritatively with III MAF and the 1st Marine Division.<sup>80</sup>

The ARVN division- and corps-level staffs left much to be desired. General McCutcheon complained in August that they had "little appreciation for the time and space factors involved in an operation, nor of the logistic effort required to support one."<sup>81</sup> Shortages of specialized equipment and people trained to operate it prevented Vietnamese assumption of road minesweeping and other tasks now performed by Americans. Quang Da Special Zone possessed no supply organization of its own, and logistic support at corps level suffered from division of authority between Lieutenant General Lam and the various staffs in Saigon. Most serious, the ARVN throughout I Corps, indeed throughout the country, lacked sufficient fixed-wing and helicopter squadrons to furnish their own air support.\* MACV planners expected this deficiency to persist, even with accelerated expansion of the Vietnamese Air Force, until mid-1972.

The Regional and Popular Forces also had persistent weaknesses. Particularly at district and company

\*As of 1 January 1971, the RVNAF possessed only five operationally ready helicopter squadrons, four equipped with UH-1s and one with H-34s. MACV ComdHist70, III, ch. 7, p.13.

level, they still lacked enough first-rate leaders. Further, in spite of their increased aggressiveness, they had yet fully to grasp the American concept of maintaining continuous pressure on the enemy.<sup>82</sup> Their efforts too often were sporadic. Their aggressive forays were interspersed with long periods of relative quiescence. Major Grinalds said that RFs and PFs:

... sometimes ... like medieval forces, ... stay in their compounds ... for weeks at a time. Then suddenly their ramparts go up and they all go sallying forth on an operation and run out and get 15 VC on the basis of some good tip ... And then they go back into their fort and stay there for another six months.<sup>83</sup>

As 1970 ended, Vietnamization clearly was working, but it was working very slowly. With additional major Marine redeployments scheduled for early 1971, Americans and South Vietnamese alike were running out of time to finish the job.

#### *Results, 1970*

Throughout South Vietnam, pacification progress during 1970 failed to match the dramatic gains of the previous year. American advisors attributed this slowdown to South Vietnamese complacency over past successes, to diversion of GVN attention and resources to the operations in Cambodia, and to increased Viet Cong and North Vietnamese antipacification activities during spring and early summer.

To revive the lagging effort, President Thieu on 1 July promulgated a Special Pacification and Development Campaign to run until 31 October. He followed that with a Supplementary Pacification and Development Campaign, announced on 23 October, which was to begin on 1 November and continue through 28 February 1971. In theory, this fall and winter renewal of effort would establish momentum for the 1971 Pacification and Development Program, which would start on 1 March. The plans for these supplementary campaigns for the most part restated the goals of the 1970 Pacification and Development Plan, with emphasis on improving security and intensifying the attack on the VCI.<sup>84</sup>

By the end of the year, in spite of these plans and exhortations, the allies had fallen short of their goals on most of the Eight Objectives. Plans had called for bringing hamlets containing 100 percent of the population to at least the C level of security. According to the HES, 95.1 percent of the people lived in such hamlets in late 1970, while 84.6 percent, as opposed to the objective of 90 percent, enjoyed A- or B-level secu-

rity. The allies had exceeded their goal of VCI neutralized (22,341 vs 21,600), but efforts to expand the national police had failed, leaving the force still 30,000 men under its planned strength. The arming and training of the PSDF combat force had gone according to schedule, but formation of the support force had lagged. Development of local government had gone well; as planned, about 3,000 villages and 14,000 hamlets had elected or reelected their officials. The *Chieu Hoi* program, on the other hand, had fallen 8,000 short of its target of 40,000 Communist defectors. Over 139,000 refugees, 70,000 fewer than planned, had received resettlement payments, and 388,000, which was 15,000 more than the goal, had received return-to-village assistance; but most of these in fact remained refugees and would require additional aid. Social and economic progress, as always, was slow. Only 50,900 hectares of land had been redistributed under the Land-to-the-Tiller Law, as against a goal of 200,000, and rice cultivation and expansion of rural banks had not met planned quotas.<sup>85</sup>

Pacification results in Quang Nam closely paralleled the national trends. With 68.2 percent of its population living in A- or B-rated hamlets, Quang Nam in December was one of the 10 lowest provinces in the nation in security.\* On the positive side, it led all other provinces in VCI eliminated during the year, with 2,437 (III MAF figure) or 2,675 (the CORDS figure) dead, sentenced, or defected. This accounted for about 40 percent of the estimated VCI members in the province at the beginning of the year, but the enemy were believed to have replaced some of these losses by recruiting. How many of these enemy casualties could be credited to Phoenix/Phung Hoang remained questionable.<sup>86</sup> The conclusion of a MACV review committee on the nationwide anti-VCI program applied as well in Quang Nam:

The reduction of overall VCI strength has been a result of the entire GVN and allied war effort. This had included the military success against the VC/NVA, the pacification program as a whole, the constitutional political structure and the economic revival in the countryside of Vietnam. Phoenix had to date contributed little to this reduction, although it has been an element of the overall program and during the past year had substantially increased its role against the VCI target.<sup>87</sup>

\*Of the other provinces in I Corps, Quang Tri (93.5 percent) and Thua Thien (98.1 percent) were in the top 10 for security, while Quang Ngai was in the bottom 10 with 66.5 percent of its people in A or B hamlets. Quang Tin was in the middle group.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A373322

*Men of the 7th Marines in the Combined Unit Pacification Program escort a Vietnamese Chieu Hoi to their platoon command post in a village 22 miles south of Da Nang.*

Elections for province, village, and hamlet governments during the year had produced real political contests for many posts and a large voter turnout, but fewer officials than planned had taken advantage of GVN training programs to improve their administrative skills. According to the province senior advisor, rapid turnover in the post of province training director, inadequate stipends for individuals travelling to the principal GVN training center at Vung Tau near Saigon, and the lack of either rewards for officials who took courses or demotions for those who did not had hindered instruction.<sup>88</sup>

During 1970, a total of 411 Viet Cong guerrillas, 45 North Vietnamese soldiers, and 600 nonmilitary Communist functionaries surrendered in Quang Nam under the Chieu Hoi program. This number represented a marked decline from the 2,000 defections reported in 1969. The reduced intensity of military contact during the year accounted for much of the drop, and, according to Colonel Hixson of the I Corps CORDS staff, "We're starting to get down to the hard core people now. . . . We've gotten all those that were easily swayed."<sup>89</sup>

The refugee situation showed little improvement during the year. In July, CORDS reported that 95,000 refugees in Quang Nam still had not received their basic benefit payments, and in September, the Ministry of Resettlement in Saigon, which had overspent its budget, cut off further funds to Quang Nam. In spite of the promising beginnings on Go Noi Island, actual return of refugees to their villages continued to be a slow, difficult process. Many areas still were not militarily secure enough for their people to return home, and some allied military forces, notably the Korean Marine brigade, actually discouraged refugees from resettling in their TAORs which complicated their defense problems. Even if security could be provided and they were permitted to go home, many of the people who had moved into the environs of Da Nang showed little desire to return to their original communities.<sup>90</sup>

In spite of these continuing frustrations, the allies in Quang Nam and throughout I Corps had made progress in pacification, but qualified observers disagreed on how much had been achieved. As early as May 1970, Lieutenant General Nickerson, recently returned from his tour in command of III MAF, told a briefing at HQMC:

. . . [the Viet Cong] had lost the people war, as far as I'm concerned. People's war, the war of liberation, by definition and practice, is . . . where they can make a pass at a

hamlet and the people inside in the infrastructure uprising and cause a change—boot out the good guys and take over with the bad guys. Well, in the north [of I Corps] that . . . infrastructure is mostly in the hills, in the two northern provinces. In the three southern, there's a little more present every day, but it has to be very careful when it surfaces because of the increase in territorials and confidence of the people that they're going to win. . . . In short I'm confident that we've . . . got 'em right where you want 'em . . . .<sup>91</sup>

Later in the year, Sir Robert Thompson, one of the architects of the successful British counterinsurgency campaign in Malaya, and long a critic of American conduct of the war in Vietnam, visited many parts of the country including Quang Nam. He concluded from what he observed that "it was quite clear that continued progress had been made in both the Pacification and Vietnamization programmes during the year, so that the 1969 gains were expanded and consolidated."<sup>92</sup>

Lieutenant General McCutcheon took a more cautious view, particularly on the question of whether the allies were winning the people's loyalty for the GVN. In a report to Lieutenant General Sutherland, he evaluated conditions in Quang Nam:

Despite election turn-out and improved ratings in the Hamlet Evaluation System, we must accept the fact that a large portion of the Quang Nam people are apathetic toward the GVN. For that matter they would be equally apathetic toward any government, free or Communist. Their lives are simply devoted to existing. I doubt that many people, not directly involved in government or military business at a relatively high level, are aware of Vietnamization. Those who are aware of it almost certainly consider it a euphemism for U.S. withdrawal.<sup>93</sup>

After five years of large-scale American involvement in the war, by the end of 1970 the allies had put into effect a broad pacification strategy that appeared to be succeeding, but with painful slowness in difficult areas like Quang Nam. Security efforts had reduced Communist control of the villages and hamlets and with it the enemy's ability to draw support from the people. The South Vietnamese, at national, province, and local levels, had begun to establish a stable, elected non-Communist regime. Yet for the Marines and South Vietnamese in Quang Nam, as for allied forces all over the country, time was running out. Redeployments during 1970 had diminished American ability to assist in pacification as in other aspects of the war effort. These redeployments would continue and accelerate during 1971, and the South Vietnamese, ready or not, would soon have to assume a much larger share of both combat and pacification.