



USMC Photo A801148

Marines move through a Vietnamese village in Operation HARVEST MOON. Each of the riflemen is carrying two 60 mm mortar rounds in addition to his own weapon and ammunition.

then called in Marine air support. Skyhawks from MAG-12 at Chu Lai attacked the Communist positions, while Marine helicopters evacuated many of the casualties. The 1st ARVN Battalion attempted to reinforce the rangers, but was unable to cross the road because of enemy mortar fire and U.S. air strikes. Later in the afternoon, General Lam, using 10 UH-34Ds from Lieutenant Colonel Rex C. Denny, Jr.'s HMM-161, moved the 1st Battalion, 6th ARVN Regiment from Tam Ky to reinforce the surviving rangers. This battalion replaced the rangers and established a night defensive perimeter.

The next morning, the 5th ARVN Regiment command group and its 1st Battalion bore the weight of the VC attack. Although the battalion had been

probed during the night, it had not seen heavy action. On 9 December, about 0645, the 60th and 80th VC Battalions struck. In the heavy fighting that followed, both the 1st Battalion and regimental command group were overrun. The ARVN regimental commander was killed and the ARVN force was scattered to the south and east. At about the same time, another VC battalion attacked the 1st Battalion, 6th ARVN Regiment to the northeast, but this ARVN unit managed to hold its ground.

At that point, General Henderson decided to commit his Marines. At 1000, UH-34Ds from Denny's HMM-161 and Lieutenant Colonel Lloyd F. Childers' HMM-361 lifted Utter's 2d Battalion from Tam Ky to a landing zone 5 1/2 miles west of the



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General Jonas M. Platt (second from the left) discusses plans with III MAF staff officers and officers from the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines. The objective areas are outlined on the map overlay.

ARVN troops. After the landing, the battalion moved northeast, securing a hill mass 2,500 meters from the landing zone by late afternoon. Utter's Marines encountered only a few Viet Cong and one of his platoon leaders later complained: "The enemy always seemed one step ahead of us."¹⁰ The same afternoon, General Henderson directed Dorsey's 3d Battalion, 3d Marines to land 1 1/2 miles southeast of the 5th ARVN Regiment's 1st Battalion and then move to link up with the shattered South Vietnamese unit.

Lieutenant Colonel Dorsey's Marines had left Da Nang by motor convoy that morning and were at the

logistics support area (LSA) on Route 1, three miles north of Thang Binh. Lieutenant Colonel Mervin B. Porter's HMM-261, the SLF helicopter squadron on board the LPH *Valley Forge*, was assigned the mission of ferrying the battalion into a landing zone southeast of the 5th ARVN Regiment's command group and its 1st Battalion. The 3d Battalion landed at 1400, and an hour and half later, the battalion's lead unit, Company L, made contact with elements of the ARVN battalion and then pushed northwestward toward Hill 43, 1 1/2 miles from the landing zone. Before the Marines could reach the hill, they ran into a force of 200 VC. The firefight raged into the early

evening. Supported by Marine air and artillery, Dorsey estimated that his battalion had killed 75 VC. Eleven Marines were dead and 17 wounded. The VC broke contact as darkness fell and the battalion established night positions. The next morning, the Marines took Hill 43, where they joined 40 South Vietnamese soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment.

On the 10th, General Henderson ordered Utter to drive east and Dorsey to push northwest to compress the enemy between them. The avenue of escape to the south was to be closed by Lieutenant Colonel Robert T. Hanifin Jr.'s 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, the SLF battalion which would be lifted into the area by Porter's HMM-261.

At 1100, 15 UH-34Ds from the *Valley Forge* lifted the assault elements of Company F to a landing zone near the hamlet of Cam La, five miles southeast of Que Son. As the helicopters landed they came under heavy 12.7mm machine gun fire from emplacements on Hill 407, 2,000 meters to the south. The intense, heavy caliber enemy fire surprised the Marines. Colonel Michael R. Yunck, the 1st MAW G-3, who had volunteered to act as Tactical Air Controller (Airborne) for the assault mission, remembered: "We thought the LZ was far enough from the hill to the south to nullify effective fire from that distance and had pretty well scrubbed the immediate area of the LZ." As the assault helicopters lifted off, Yunck maneuvered his UH-1E over the landing zone to locate the enemy gunners, but in the process was wounded by a 12.7mm round. His co-pilot, Major Edward L. Kuykendall, took control of the air operation and directed the remaining helicopters carrying Lieutenant Colonel Hanifin's command group and Company G to land in another landing zone further west.^{*11}

Company F at the first landing site was in trouble. The enemy kept the Marines under continuous machine gun fire and then opened up with mortars and small arms fire. The company took what cover it could in the open rice paddies and waited for reinforcements. Since the rest of the battalion had landed to the west, the task force commander ordered a company from Lieutenant Colonel Utter's battalion

to move south to aid the hard-hit unit. Company E, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines pushed southward towards Hanifin's Company F, but was hit on its right flank by enemy fire. With some difficulty, Company E reached an area from which it could support the stranded company. Company F began withdrawing under the relief force's covering fire. Ten hours after the first helicopter had landed, Hanifin's battalion command group, Companies G and F, and Company E from Utter's battalion joined forces. Both companies E and F had suffered substantial casualties during the day, 20 dead and over 80 wounded.**

As darkness fell on the battlefield that day, General Walt relieved General Henderson. Brigadier General Jonas M. Platt became head of Task Force DELTA. General Platt, appraised of the battle situation, ordered another of Utter's companies to reinforce the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. Company G, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines arrived at Hanifin's position at 0300 the next morning.

The Search of the Phouc Ha Valley

On the 11th, Task Force DELTA maneuvered to consolidate its position and General Platt, airborne in a helicopter, studied the terrain from which the Marines of Company F and helicopters of HMM-261 had received such extensive fire on the 10th. The general, surprised that his craft did not draw enemy fire, surmised that the Viet Cong must have abandoned their positions on Hill 407 during the night. Platt, therefore, ordered Lieutenant Colonel Utter to seize the hill, a task which the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines accomplished without opposition.¹²

In the interim, Lieutenant Colonel Dorsey's 3d Battalion searched the area to the north of Hill 407, while the remaining two companies of Hanifin's 2d Battalion, 1st Marines were helilifted from the ARG ships to join the battalion.*** By the end of the day,

** One of the casualties was Captain James E. Page, Company F commander, who had been pronounced dead on the battlefield. The next day medical personnel checking the bodies detected a faint heart beat and evacuated Captain Page to a hospital. The captain recovered.

***When the SLF was assigned to HARVEST MOON on 7 December, Companies E and H on board the APA *Montrose* were en route to Okinawa and the ship had to be diverted to Vietnam. It arrived offshore from the objective area at about 1600 on the 10th.

* Colonel Yunck was the 1963 Marine Aviator of the Year. He was awarded his second Silver Star for his actions during HARVEST MOON. His leg had to be amputated as a result of the wound he suffered during the battle.



USMC Photo A186243

Lieutenant Colonel Joshua W. Dorsey III (left), Commanding Officer, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, confers with Brigadier General Jonas M. Platt (right), Commanding Task Force DELTA. Dorsey's battalion is about to enter the Phouc Ha Valley, a known VC main base area.

it was apparent that the enemy, except for a few snipers, had vanished. General Platt suspected that the regiment had retreated into the Phouc Ha Valley, a smaller valley paralleling the Que Son Valley, five miles to the southeast. The Phouc Ha Valley was a known VC base area. When General Thi was questioned about going into the valley after the Communists, the I Corps commander replied, "be very, very careful."¹³ On the afternoon of the 11th, Brigadier General Platt was visited by Brigadier General William E. DePuy, USA, General Westmoreland's J-3, who suggested that USAF B-52 Boeing Stratofortresses from Guam could strike the objective area before the Marines entered. General Platt accepted the offer and the first of several B-52 raids occurred on the morning of the 12th.

General Platt, on board a UH-1E piloted by the Assistant 1st MAW Commander, Brigadier General

Carl, observed the first strike and directed Lieutenant Colonels Dorsey and Hanifin to move their battalions in to exploit the bombing mission. During the afternoon, Hanifin's battalion deployed south of the valley, while Dorsey moved along two ridges, Hills 100 and 180, overlooking northern entrances to the Phouc Ha Valley. During the night of 12 December, General Platt ordered Dorsey to move 1,000 meters to the north so that the USAF B-52s could strike the valley again.*

* General Platt had received a message from General Westmoreland's staff that ground troops should be no closer than 3,000 meters from a B-52 strike, the reason for Dorsey's move. *Platt interview, Jan 70*. General Platt observed in his comments on the draft that General DePuy had previously told him "1,000 meters off the line of flight." MajGen Jonas M. Platt, *Comments on MS, dtd 7Oct76 (Vietnam Comment File)*.

The next morning, after the second B-52 strike, the two Marine battalions entered the valley from both the north and south. While searching the target area, Dorsey's battalion did not find the *1st VC Regiment*, but discovered large amounts of enemy supplies and equipment. The two battalions remained in the valley for the next few days, but encountered little organized resistance.

The Fight at Ky Phu

While the two Marines battalions were operating in the Phouc Ha Valley, Lieutenant Colonel Utter's battalion sought the VC along the northern bank of the Song Chang, also known as the Khang River, seven miles south of Que Son. The battalion then turned eastward toward Tam Ky, sweeping the southern boundary of the HARVEST MOON objective area. The Marines had more trouble with the weather than the enemy. Except for occasional snipers, the enemy could not be located, but the monsoon rains harassed the Marines' every step. During the prolonged search, the battalion slogged over 20 miles through extremely rugged terrain, varying from flooded rice paddies to jungle-covered hills.

On 18 December, the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, on the last leg of its long trek, encountered the *80th VC Battalion* in strength. Earlier that morning, after evacuating 54 Marines suffering from immersion foot,* the battalion had moved out in a column formation with Company G in the lead, followed by Company F, Headquarters and Service Company, and Company H, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines.** The Marines moved along a narrow road which wound through hedgerow-bordered rice paddies. The Viet Cong allowed the lead company to pass through the village of Ky Phu, four miles from Route 1, before opening fire on the Company G advance guard. At

* Immersion foot is an extremely painful foot condition, a symptom of which is swelling which takes on a puffy, wrinkled look. This malady was caused by prolonged wear of wet footgear and continued to plague the Marines throughout the war.

** Company H, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines had been attached to Utter's battalion on 13 December, replacing Company E which had taken heavy casualties. Company H, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines was not with the column. It was providing security for the 107mm Mortar Battery, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines.

first, Lieutenant Colonel Utter thought that the enemy force consisted only of a few snipers, and ordered Company G to clear the area south of the road and moved Company F forward.

Company F had just passed through the east end of Ky Phu when enemy mortar rounds dropped on H&S Company, still in the open paddies west of the hamlet. Two Viet Cong companies tried to enter the gap between Company F and H&S and envelop Utter's command group and the H&S Company. First Lieutenant Nicholas H. Grosz, Jr., the commander of H&S Company, recalled that he crossed the area between his company and the battalion command group and told Lieutenant Colonel Utter of the "H&S deteriorating situation." Realizing that he was engaged with a major enemy force, the battalion commander ordered Company F to turn and attack the "main VC positions on the H&S right flank."¹⁴

Supported by "Huey" gunships and accurate artillery fire from Battery M, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines, the Marines counterattacked. Company F rolled up the VC from the rear while H&S Company fought its way into Ky Phu. According to Grosz, who accompanied the lead elements of Company F in the attack, "Once we got them going, the VC just broke and ran. It was just like a turkey shoot."¹⁵

At the rear of the column, Company H remained in contact with the enemy; a VC company struck the Marines from both flanks and the rear. Both the company commander and his radio operator were mortally wounded. First Lieutenant Harvey C. Barnum, the attached artillery forward observer, did what he could to save the two dying Marines, strapped the radio on his back and assumed command. The young officer rallied the company and the Marines established a defensive position on a small hill north of the road. After four hours of heavy fighting, Barnum led Company H into Ky Phu and rejoined the battalion.***

By nightfall the fight at Ky Phu was over. The *80th VC Battalion* broke, leaving 104 bodies on the

*** Lieutenant Barnum was performing temporary duty in Vietnam from his permanent duty station at Marine Barracks, Pearl Harbor. He had volunteered for 60 days of "on-the-job" training under the FMPac combat indoctrination program. For his heroic exploits in this engagement, Lieutenant Barnum was awarded the Medal of Honor.



USMC Photo A186280

Marines from the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines move along a dike across a flooded rice paddy during HARVEST MOON. The battalion suffered several cases of immersion foot during the operation.

battlefield, 76 of them killed by the artillery fire.* Lieutenant Colonel Utter's command had sustained 11 killed and 71 wounded.

The Wrap-Up

The next day, the 19th, all three of the Marine battalions completed their movement out of the operation area. For all practical purposes the operation was over, but Operation HARVEST MOON/LIEN KET 18 ended officially on the 20th when all allied forces returned to their enclaves. The combined USMC-ARVN operation had accounted for 407 enemy killed, 33 captured, and 13 crew-served and 95 individual weapons seized. In addition, 60 tons of food and ammunition were taken in the Phouc Ha Valley. Marine casualties were 45 killed and 218 wounded. General Lam's forces suffered 90

killed, 91 missing, and 141 wounded, most occurring during the first two days of the operation.

Despite the poor flying conditions, airpower played a major role in the outcome of the battle for the Nui Loc Son Basin. The F-4 Phantom pilots from Colonel Emmett O. Anglin, Jr.'s MAG-11 at Da Nang and A-4 Skyhawk pilots of Colonel Brown's Chu Lai-based MAG-12 flew numerous tactical support missions under marginal flying conditions.** During the 12-day operation, Marine F-4 pilots (Lieutenant Colonel Clyde R. Jarrett's VMFA-115 and Lieutenant Colonel Andrew W. O'Donnell's VMFA-323) logged 227 flight hours on 205 sorties, striking enemy targets with 215 tons of bombs and 628 rockets. The A-4 pilots from Lieutenant Colonel William E. Garman's VMA-211, Lieutenant Colonel Keith O'Keefe's VMA-214, and Lieutenant Colonel Thomas E. Mulvihill's VMA-224 delivered another 235 tons of ordnance in support of HARVEST MOON/LIEN KET-18. During the operation, Marine attack aircraft were credited with killing 95 of the enemy.

*Lieutenant Grosz observed that, "we counted 76 enemy KIA in the arty impact area to the H&S right flank (south)" but believes that a portion of the number must be credited to the Marine ground attack. Maj Nicholas H. Grosz, Jr., Comments on draft MS, dtd Dec76 (Vietnam Comment File).

** Colonel Anglin had replaced Colonel Conley as CO, MAG-11 on 3 November.

Marine helicopters made an equally important contribution to the operation. The seven helicopter squadrons of Colonel O'Connor's MAG-16 and Colonel Johnson's MAG-36, and Lieutenant Colonel Porter's HMM-261 flew 9,230 sorties, carried 12,177 troops, and transported 638 tons of supplies.* Besides providing battlefield mobility to the infantry, the pilots of these aircraft accomplished medical evacuation, reconnaissance, resupply, and other operational and administrative missions. The UH-1Es of Marine Observation Squadrons 2 and 6, armed with 7.62mm machine guns and 2.75-inch rockets, provided valuable close air support when fixed-wing aircraft could not attack targets due to low visibility. These Huey gunships also served as escorts for truck convoys and UH-34D helicopters and performed a number of medical evacuations. Lastly, these squadrons provided the airborne "eyes" for the commanders of HARVEST MOON; two UH-1Es were continuously assigned to the Task Force DELTA commander for command and control purposes.

The six-plane detachment of Sikorsky CH-37C heavy-lift helicopters attached to Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 16 proved invaluable for lifting 105mm howitzers into the battle area. Two U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopters, "on loan" to the Marines from the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), supported the operation by retrieving several downed helicopters. During the course of the operation, Marine helicopter pilots reported over 100 occasions in which they received enemy fire. Fifty-three helicopters sustained battle damage, and the Marine crews suffered 1 killed, 12 wounded, and 2 helicopters destroyed.

A significant contribution to the success of the operation was the establishment of a logistic support area near Thang Binh on Route 1. Truck convoys from Da Nang and Chu Lai brought in supplies which could then be quickly helilifted to the using units. A company from the 3d Engineer Battalion, attached to Task Force DELTA, had the mission of

keeping Route 1 open and trafficable. Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas J. Dennis, commander of the 3d Engineer Battalion, later wrote:

Culverts, bridges, earth fill, and equipment were transported in daily convoys down Route 1. We repaired many road cuts or sites where the road was blown. I visited the task force CP daily, and performed helicopter recons.¹⁶

Artillery also was moved out of the TAORs into the battle area to provide support for the infantry units. Five Marine artillery batteries fired 6,386 rounds during HARVEST MOON.** The mortar battery, using helicopter mobility, deployed to hilltops in a leapfrog manner.*** HARVEST MOON furnished reinforcing evidence that Marine artillery could both move and be resupplied by rotary wing aircraft.

HARVEST MOON was not without its problems. The hastily established provisional headquarters, the fast moving ground situation, poor weather conditions, and the large number of tactical aircraft operating over the Que Son Valley caused coordination and control difficulties. Colonel Leslie E. Brown, who had relieved Colonel Noble as commander of MAG-12 on 19 September, believed that better advance planning prior to the operation could have alleviated some of the problems encountered by his pilots. His group operated throughout HARVEST MOON "with practically no coordination with supported units except that which was accomplished in the air over the target area." As an example, on 10 December his group launched 32 sorties under an alert declared by Task Force DELTA, but when the attack aircraft arrived over the objective area, control was so poorly synchronized that many of the aircraft were unable to drop their ordnance.¹⁷ At other times, fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft maneuvered at the same altitude in the same general area. Still, even with these difficulties, Marine aviation significantly influenced the results on the battlefield. Through these

* MAG-16 squadrons participating in HARVEST MOON were Bauman's VMO-2, Denny's HMM-161, Clark's HMM-263, and Childers' HMM-361. MAG-36 squadrons were Lieutenant Colonel Robert J. Zitnik's VMO-6, Lieutenant Colonel James Aldworth's HMM-362, and Lieutenant Colonel William R. Lucas' HMM-364.

** Artillery support was furnished by Batteries A, 1/11; F, 2/12; M, 4/11; L, 4/12 (from 11 December); and 107mm Mortar Battery (only three tubes), 1/12.

*** According to General Platt, the displacement of artillery units during HARVEST MOON was "a crude forerunner of the fire base concept" in that the deployed units were always in range of some form of artillery. *Platt PhonCon, Jun71*.

problems, Marines learned valuable lessons in air-ground coordination for future operations.*

HARVEST MOON/LIEN KET 18 was the last of the Marines' big battles in 1965. These large-scale

*Colonel Roy C. Gray, Jr., who relieved Colonel Yunck as G-3 of the 1st MAW, agreed with Colonel Brown's remarks on coordination. He later wrote: "The Wing G-3 Section subsequently assigned a senior experienced aviator to TF headquarters on operations such as HARVEST MOON and Air/Ground preplanning and coordination was given greater emphasis." Col Roy C. Gray, Jr., Comments on draft MS, dtd 31Oct76 (Vietnam Comment File). Although agreeing with Colonel Brown's observations, Colonel Peatross attributed the lack of coordination to too much secrecy and inexperience on the part of the HARVEST MOON planners, stating "there could be no better advance planning without experience on the part of the planners." MajGen Oscar F. Peatross, Comments on draft MS, dtd 26Oct76 (Vietnam Comment File).

efforts had become a regular feature of the war for General Walt's forces. During the last half of its first calendar year in country, III MAF conducted 15 operations of battalion-size or larger. American intelligence agencies indicated that during 1966, General Walt's forces would face even larger enemy forces as North Vietnamese troops entered South Vietnam to join their Viet Cong comrades. The big unit actions were only one aspect of the Marine war, nevertheless, in I Corps. According to General Krulak:

... we cannot be entrapped in the dangerous premise that destruction of the VC organized units *per se* is the whole answer to winning the war, any more than we can accept the erroneous view that pacification and civic action will solve the problem if major enemy forces are free to roam the countryside.¹⁸

PART III
THE CONTINUING WAR

CHAPTER 8

Defending and Expanding the Base Areas

The Evolution of a Strategy—Further Deployments and Realignments—Refinement of Command Relations—Expanding the TAORs—Attacks on the Airfields and Hill 22—Base Defense—Extended Patrolling

The Evolution of a Strategy

During the second half of 1965, the American command in Vietnam began to formulate basic operational concepts for fighting the Vietnam War. With President Johnson's approval of General Westmoreland's request for U.S. reinforcements and for an expanded role for U.S. ground troops, the MACV commander had completed his overall plan for the employment of these forces by the end of August. He divided the war into three phases. The first, to end in 1965, was simply "commit those American and allied forces necessary to halt the losing trend." Beginning in 1966, the second phase, allied forces were to take the offensive in selected high priority areas. At an undetermined date, the allied forces were to begin phase three, the total destruction of enemy forces and base areas. For the remainder of 1965, General Westmoreland planned to employ American combat troops "to protect developing logistical bases, although some might have to be committed from time to time as 'fire brigades' whenever the enemy's big units posed a threat . . ."¹

Based on general directives from ComUSMACV and its own experience gained during this period, III MAF developed a concept of operation for I Corps. Essentially, the Marines stressed the "oil spot" approach, in which III MAF was to secure its coastal enclaves and gradually extend them as manpower and material became available. The 21 November MACV Letter of Instruction, which superseded the amended 6 May directive, prescribed five missions for III MAF. These were: to defend and secure its base areas; to conduct search and destroy operations against VC forces which posed an immediate threat to these bases; to launch other search and destroy operations against more distant enemy base areas; to

extend clearing operations in selected areas contiguous to the major bases; and finally to execute any contingency plan in I Corps or elsewhere in Vietnam as directed by ComUSMACV.² Given these all encompassing objectives, the Marines produced what they called the "Balanced Strategy" to fight the war. Basically it consisted of a counter guerrilla campaign within the TAORs, search and destroy operations against enemy main force troops outside the TAORs, and a pacification campaign within the hamlets to eradicate the VC "infrastructure" and win the loyalty of the people to the government's cause.*

Although both MACV and III MAF used the same terminology in defining their strategies, by the end of 1965 there was a decided difference in perception as to where the enemy posed the greatest danger. Confronted with the pervasive VC guerrilla strength, especially in the rich and heavily populated rice lands south of Da Nang, General Walt insisted that his first priority was to clear out this region. He recognized the threat of the VC main force units, but he wanted good intelligence before denuding his base area defenses to go after them. General Westmoreland, on the other hand, perceived the growing NVA and VC main force to be the main target for U.S. forces. Brigadier General Karch, General Walt's assistant division commander, recalled that

*General Westmoreland has stated that the term search and destroy "has been fully distorted." He explained that he adopted the term in 1964 as a "teaching aid to the South Vietnamese" when he believed the South Vietnamese Army "was static and the enemy was taking full advantage of the situation." Search and destroy simply meant offensive operations against enemy main force units. The former MACV commander observed that he dropped the terminology in 1968 when he "realized that it was being distorted." Gen William C. Westmoreland, Comments on draft MS, dtd 5Nov77 (Vietnam Comment File).



USMC Photo A185832

General Walt speaks to the men of the newly arrived 1st Battalion, 1st Marines at Da Nang. The III MAF commander tells the troops: "We need you here; our job is just beginning."

this difference in priorities was evident as early as July when MACV required the Marines to report "Battalion Days in the Field." Karch remembered that he first heard of this report, "at the usual morning briefing for General Walt." When the III MAF commander asked the reasons for the "disparity of Army versus Marine 'Days in the Field,' the briefing officer explained that battalions engaged in pacification operations were not counted as battalions in the field."³

General Westmoreland reiterated his emphasis on the big unit war, on 10 December, in a letter to a subordinate commander. He wrote: "I am increasingly concerned about the fact that we are not engaging the VC with sufficient frequency . . . to win the war in Vietnam." Although relatively satisfied with the American counterinsurgency effort, he believed, "we have not yet proved that we have mastered the art of finding and destroying major VC forces through sustained campaigns against them in a given area." The MACV commander recognized the validity of the Marines' concern with

pacification, but he wanted General Walt to create a two- or three-battalion force capable of moving quickly into enemy-dominated regions, to join with the ARVN in operations of sufficient size to punish the enemy's big units and disrupt bases and supply caches. In his memoirs, General Westmoreland declared that he had no desire "to precipitate an interservice imbroglio," and recognized that:

General Walt had a mission-type order which by custom afforded him considerable leeway in execution. Rather than start a controversy, I chose to issue orders for specific projects that as time passed would gradually get the Marines out of their beachheads.^{4*}

Lieutenant General Krulak claimed that the difference between what was called at the time "the Army Strategy" and "the Marine Strategy" was more a matter of emphasis than of substance; both formulas were sound. Krulak believed that the "Army maneuver technique" was correct in the area around Plei Me in the Central Highlands, but observed, "You cannot shoot anything that moves in the rich area south of Da Nang, where the population runs as high as 1,000 per square mile." The FMFPac commander argued that in I Corps the enemy was mixed in with the civilian population and "we have to root him out, and separate him from the people; which is to say, fight a guerrilla/counterinsurgency war, and clean the area up a bit at a time." In any event, to fight both the big unit war and the war in the enclaves, the Marines needed more men.⁵

Further Deployments and Realinelements

In the summer of 1965, General Walt informed MACV that III MAF required a force of two Marine

*General Westmoreland qualified his views in the following comment: "There was a recognized difference in the deployment of troops between the I and the II Regions because of terrain, roads, population dispersion, Vietnamese political and psychological considerations. To try to make a big point of a difference in strategy is to take an unreasonable and narrow view In the final analyses, the strategy and tactical operations of the war obviously required both pacification and military Main Force units. The degree of emphasis between these two types of operations varied as a function of the local situation." The former MACV commander observed "The I Corps Region was more vulnerable to attack by Main Force units than any other region because of its proximity to North Vietnam." Gen William C. Westmoreland, Comments on draft MS, dtd 22Jul77 (Vietnam Comment File).



USMC Photo A185789

A South Vietnamese interpreter questions a farmer and his wife about the VC as Marines watch. The hamlet is located in the heavily populated area south of Da Nang.

divisions supported by a reinforced Marine aircraft wing to carry out its mission in I Corps. Furthermore, the III MAF commander stated that if he were to be responsible for the entire area from Quang Ngai Province to the DMZ, he would need three more battalions.⁶

These new force requirements would have repercussions throughout the Marine Corps. In August, the Marine Corps was authorized a 30,000-man increase, for a total strength of 223,000, to support the Vietnam effort. By October, HQMC furnished the Secretary of Defense with plans for obtaining another 55,000 Marines to allow for the formation of the 5th Marine Division in California, 18 infantry battalions in Vietnam, and 3 battalions on Okinawa. This plan was approved and funded by the end of the year.⁷

The reinforcement of III MAF during this period caused continuing realignment and readjustment of personnel and units in the Western Pacific. On 24 August, the 1st Marine Division, under Major General Lewis J. Fields, established its CP on Okinawa, as did the 1st Marines. Only one regiment of the division, the 5th Marines, remained at Camp Pendleton. As noted earlier, one battalion of the 1st

Marines, Lieutenant Colonel Hanifin's 2d Battalion, relieved BLT 3/7 as the SLF battalion of the Seventh Fleet, and at the end of August Lieutenant Colonel Bodley's 3d Battalion rejoined its parent regiment, the 7th Marines, at Chu Lai. At the same time, Lieutenant Colonel Donald V. McCloskey's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines arrived at Da Nang and relieved the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, which returned to the United States. Another battalion from the United States, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, was moved to Okinawa to become the new 1st Battalion, 3d Marines. This relief ended the intertheater battalion transplacement system.

The end of the battalion rotation between East Pac and West Pac caused the institution of an individual personnel replacement system for all units of III MAF. Under the designator Operation MIXMASTER, Marines in Vietnam were transferred between units so that everyone in each unit would not have the same overseas tour expiration date. This homogenization process involved thousands of Marines and took place over several months.*

With the termination of the intertheater transplacement system in September 1965, FMFPac immediately began planning for the rotation of battalion landing teams from Vietnam to Okinawa, then to the Seventh Fleet, and back to Vietnam again. This program was designed to allow BLTs to refit and retrain in a non-combat environment where emphasis could be placed on training rather than operations. The intratheater rotation began in November when the new BLT 1/3 relieved the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines at Da Nang. The latter unit

*This process did not always go smoothly. In November 1965, the 9th Marines regimental commander stated that there was a lack of replacements which resulted in a personnel shortage throughout the regiment. 9th Marines ComdC, Nov65, p. 1-1. The following excerpt furnishes an example of how Operation MIXMASTER worked: "On 19 November, Company E, 2/7 was exchanged with Company A, 1/4 and on 30 November Company A, 1/7 was exchanged with a company from 3/4." 7th Marines ComdC, Nov65, p. 3. Colonel Nicholas J. Dennis, who at the time commanded the 3d Engineer Battalion, wrote that MIXMASTER "was a two edged sword for my battalion, We could only infuse with the 7th Engineers and the 1st Engineers. In the case of the 7th, except for 'Charlie' company, the rest had arrived in RVN on the same date. The mixing with the 1st Engineer Battalion was more practical, however, it provided a one on one situation." Col Nicholas J. Dennis, Comments on draft MS, dtd 3Nov76 (Vietnam Comment File).

reformed as BLT 2/3 and became the Seventh Fleet SLF ground force in late December, replacing BLT 2/1 which replaced the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines at Phu Bai.

There were other reinforcements and readjustments in Vietnam during this period. In August, the 7th Engineer Battalion and the rear echelon of the 3d Division headquarters battalion arrived, as well as the 7th Marines. During September, MAG-36, a helicopter group, and the 2d LAAM Battalion were established at Chu Lai. In November, Lieutenant Colonel Utter's 2d Battalion, 7th Marines left Qui Nhon to reinforce Colonel Peatross' 7th Marines at Chu Lai. The return of Utter's unit to III MAF control allowed General Walt to reinforce units at Da Nang by transferring the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines there from Chu Lai.

By the end of December, there were six infantry

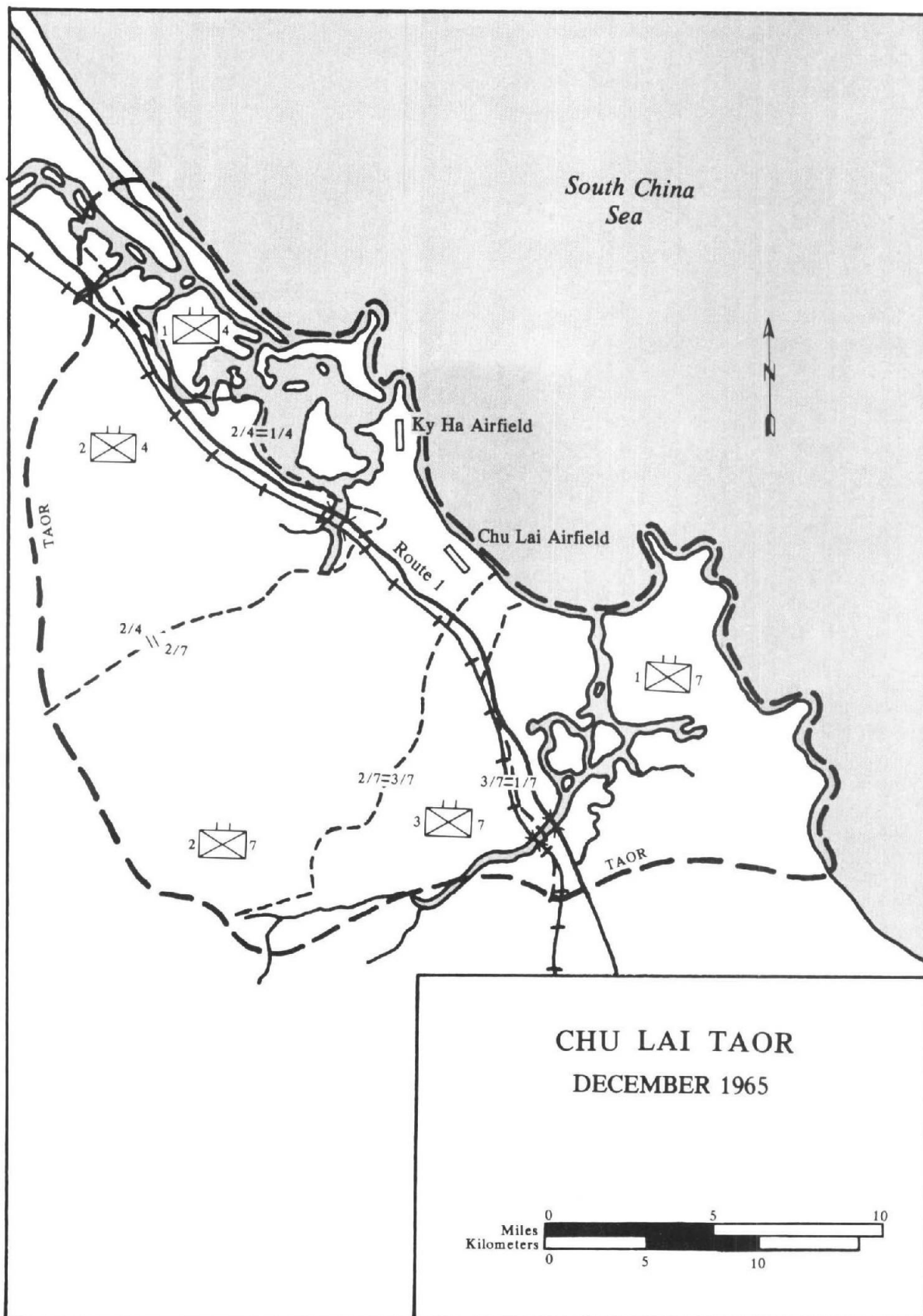
battalions at Da Nang, five at Chu Lai, and one at Phu Bai. At Da Nang, the 9th Marines controlled the southern and southeastern sectors of the TAOR with four battalions, all three of its own battalions and the attached 3d Battalion, 3d Marines. The 3d Marines was responsible for the western and northern portions of the TAOR with two battalions, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines. The battalion at Phu Bai also reported to the 3d Marines. At Chu Lai the TAOR was divided between the 4th and 7th Marines. The 7th Marines controlled the southern sector with its own three battalions while the 4th Marines operated to the north with its 1st and 2d Battalions.

In addition to the infantry units, by the end of the year III MAF had a reinforced artillery regiment, eight fixed-wing squadrons, and eight helicopter squadrons. Since the beginning of July, III MAF had



USMC Photo A184953

The village chief of Thuy Phu points out to General Walt an artillery-targeted impact area in the Phu Bai TAOR. Lieutenant Colonel William W. "Woody" Taylor (left) looks on.





USMC Photo A185897

Marines from the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines move through a village south of Da Nang. The Vietnamese farmer continues with his hoeing, apparently ignoring the Marines.

received over 25,000 reinforcements for a total of approximately 45,000 Marine and Navy personnel.

Refinement of Command Relations

With the buildup, command relationships became increasingly important; any conflict of interest had to be resolved. For III MAF, this applied not only to its association with MACV, but with the U.S. Army in II Corps, civilian and military Vietnamese authorities in I Corps, the U.S. Navy, and the U.S. Air Force's 2d Air Division.

General Walt was well aware of the possible pitfalls that lay before him in this sensitive area. When he split his division staff and established the coordinating headquarters at Chu Lai under General Karch on 5 August, part of the rationale was:

. . . to anticipate and alleviate actual possible conflicts of interest before irreversible action, plans, or commitments are taken that would adversely affect: A. Another command or commands. B. Relationships with the Vietnamese Government. . . .⁸

Until August General Walt had dealt with the Vietnamese only in relation to Marine operations, but the 6 August MACV amendment to the III

MAF Letter of Instruction also made General Walt the Senior U.S. Advisor to I Corps, responsible for the U. S. military advisory effort in the five northern provinces. The significance of this authority is indicated in the following excerpt pertaining to the responsibilities of the I Corps Advisory Group:

To advise, assist and support the RVN military and para-military units and staffs in all combat, support, and combat service support operations and training; to assist the RVN in developing and maintaining an effective conventional and counter-insurgency military capability; to exercise operational control of all assigned U.S. units; and to perform liaison among U.S., RVN, and international Military Assistance (third country) Force Commanders.⁹

On 7 August, General Walt assumed his new responsibility and Colonel Howard B. St. Clair, USA, the former senior advisor, became his deputy.

The influx of large numbers of U.S. Army forces caused General Westmoreland to reexamine the basic command structure within MACV. He told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he desired the option of placing III MAF under Field Forces, Vietnam if the war escalated to the proportions of the Korean conflict, but saw no advantage to changing the



USMC Photo A423023

An aerial view of the Da Nang Airfield looking north. The airfield and the buildup of III MAF forces at Da Nang made the airbase a prime target for VC hit-and-run attacks.

present command relations as long as the Marines operated only in I Corps. In October, the MACV commander established an interservice steering committee to study the problem. The committee reported on the 19th and recommended that the command structure remain basically the same; General Walt, as Commanding General, III MAF would report directly to General Westmoreland for operations in I Corps while General Larsen would retain a similar responsibility in II Corps.¹⁰

Command relationships with the South Vietnamese were just as sensitive. Here, too, no basic change was made in the fundamental understandings that had been worked out with the South Vietnamese. In the new Letter of Instruction furnished to subordinate commands in November, Westmoreland continued to stress coordination and cooperation. The MACV commander told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that any mention of a combined headquarters was politically infeasible at the time. Colonel Wyckoff, the 3d Division G-3, recalled that after briefing General Westmoreland on one occasion, the general

... gave quite an extensive rundown on his feeling regarding the conduct of the war where his major thrust was getting the GVN and the ARVN on their own feet with the proper leadership and the proper attitude so they could carry on the war more as a unilateral thing, rather than depending on the support of the United States.¹¹

Under the guidelines furnished by ComUSMACV, III MAF developed its own special expedients for operating with the South Vietnamese. The Marines made few formal agreements with their Vietnamese counterparts, but, on the other hand, several informal understandings emerged. There was nothing in the MACV directives that prevented temporary "tactical direction" of Vietnamese forces by U.S. commanders under certain circumstances. One of the more important ingredients of the Marine relationship with the Vietnamese authorities of I Corps was the mutual understanding and friendship which formed between General Thi and General Walt. The Marine general realized that the ARVN desired American assistance and cooperation, as long as the Vietnamese retained their pride and face. The Marine Corps concept of operations was based on these factors.¹²

Expanding the TAORs

An indication of the growing coordination between the III MAF and the I Corps commands was the

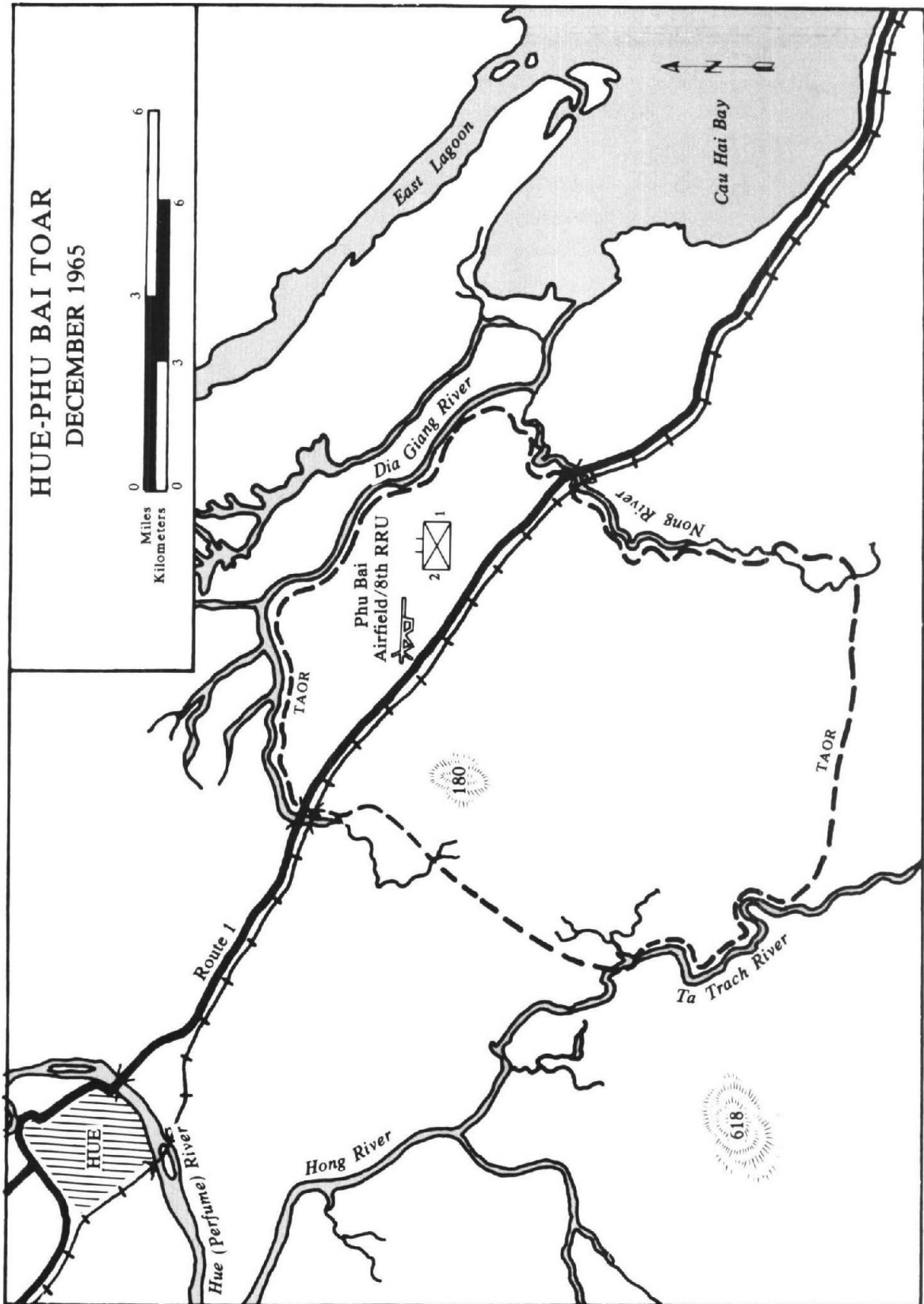
continued extension of the Marine tactical areas of responsibility. From the eight square miles around the Da Nang Airbase that constituted the Marine area of operations on 8 March, III MAF had extended its influence into the rich coastal plain in all three enclaves, containing a total area of 804 square miles. This area was populated by 506,732 people living in more than 100 villages which included nearly 550 hamlets. Most of this population lived in the fertile farming area south of the Da Nang Airbase.

By the end of August, the 9th Marines had completed its TAOR extension south of the Cau Do according to the terms of General Thi's letter of 20 July.* On 13 September, General Walt asked the I Corps commander for a further extension of the Marine Da Nang TAOR. This time Walt requested that the Marine area of operations be extended to the La Tho and Thanh Quit Rivers, three kilometers south of the former boundary. Walt pointed out that the Marines would have the advantage of a natural boundary and would be in position to help the South Vietnamese drive the Viet Cong out of the rice-rich region.¹³ Eight days later, General Thi granted permission for the larger Marine TAOR, but cautioned General Walt to closely coordinate his forward movement with local Vietnamese authorities and forces. The I Corps commander noted that the area was densely populated and he wished to "avoid deplorable incidents to the local people."¹⁴

Anticipating the enlargement of its TAOR, the 3d Marine Division began an adjustment of lines. In August, the 3d Marines, now under Colonel Norman R. Nickerson, the former III MAF G-4 who assumed command on the 16th, positioned the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines to cover the movement of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines south of the Tuy Loan River. The following month, the 9th Marines, now under Colonel John E. Gorman,** began Operation RICE STRAW, which was the first of a three-phase move in which the regiment eventually planned to reach the Ky Lam River. It was during this operation

* See Chapter 6 for the details of this letter.

** Colonel Nickerson recalled that he and Colonel Gorman were platoon leaders of sister platoons in Company A, 1st Parachute Battalion in the capture of the island of Gavutu during World War II and now some 23 years later, "both officers were in command of sister regiments at the same time." Col Norman R. Nickerson, Comments on draft MS, dtd 27Oct76 (Vietnam Comment File).





USMC Photo

Marines clean up the debris after the sapper attack on Marble Mountain. Helicopter parts are being salvaged.

that Lieutenant Colonel Muir, whose 3d Battalion, 3d Marines had arrived at Da Nang from Chu Lai to act as a blocking force, was killed on 11 September.*

By the middle of November, both regiments had made appreciable advances to the south. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines established defenses 3,500 meters south of the Tuy Loan and its combat patrols covered over 13,000 square meters. The 9th Marines' forward battalions had formed a defensive line roughly five miles south of the Cau Do River. On the 20th, the Marines incorporated the former reconnaissance zone, the three-mile area between the La Tho and Ky Lam Rivers, into the TAOR. The 9th Marines then established new defenses along the line of the La Tho and Thanh Quit Rivers and made plans to advance to the southern boundary of the TAOR.

At Chu Lai, the Marines also expanded their TAOR, but to a more limited extent. On 8 October, General Thi approved an extension of approximately six square miles to the northwest, and Colonel McClanahan moved his 4th Marines into this area. There was no further expansion of the TAOR in 1965, but Colonel Peatross prepared plans to extend

the frontline of his 7th Marines southward to the Tra Bong River.**

A different situation existed around the northern enclave at Phu Bai, where the one battalion, the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, was spread very thin. The Marines had incorporated the populated area immediately north and south of the base into the battalion's TAOR by the end of September. The terrain to the west consisted of rolling hills with very little vegetation or population; both aerial and ground observation were excellent.

Lieutenant Colonel Sumner A. Vale, who assumed command of the battalion on 1 October, later commented:

... gradual increases were made as the result of a cat and mouse game played between the Marines and the VC. The VC would determine the general boundaries of the TAOR by plotting the sites where they were engaged by Marine ambushes. Then the VC would move their

** Since 13 September, one company of 1/7 already operated south of the river, maintaining a combat base on the Trung Phan Peninsula. General Peatross stated that the lines of the 7th Marines were on the Tra Bong in October, but after the attack on the Chu Lai airfield (see next section), "the lines of the 7th were pulled back by General Walt." MajGen Oscar F. Peatross, Comments on draft MS, dtd 26Oct76 (Vietnam Comment File).

* See Chapter 6.

avenue of approach to north and south to avoid the TAOR. The Marines countered by setting up ambushes outside the TAOR (with the permission of the CO, 3d Marines and the CG, 1st ARVN Division). The CG, 1st ARVN Division would then arrange to have the TAOR enlarged to encompass these "new operating areas."¹⁵

Attacks on the Airfields and Hill 22

Despite the Marines' extension of their TAORs, the enemy still had the ability to mount well-coordinated hit-and-run attacks, similar to the 1 July Da Nang raid. On the evening of 27-28 October, the VC struck the newly built Marble Mountain helicopter facility on the Tiensha Peninsula and the Chu Lai SATS field.

At Chu Lai, the infiltrators entered the Marine base from the northwest and split into two groups. According to the MAG-12 commander, Colonel Leslie E. Brown, the first knowledge the Marines had of the attack was when they heard machine gun fire and satchel charges blowing up. Brown recalled:

. . . a couple of the airplanes were on fire, and the sappers had gotten through intact . . . they were barefooted and had on a loin cloth and it was kind of a John Wayne dramatic effect. They had Thompson submachineguns and they were spraying the airplanes with the Tommy guns and . . . throwing satchel charges into tail pipes . . . Some went off and some didn't, but the net effect was that the machine gun fire caused leaks in the fuel tanks, so that JP fuel was drenching the whole area . . . and in the middle of that, the airplanes were on fire.¹⁶

The Marines killed 15 of the force of 20 VC, but not before the attackers had destroyed two A-4s and severely damaged six more. General Karch, the Chu Lai Base Coordinator, remembered that when he arrived "Les Brown . . . was on the scene [and] the armament crews were going up and down the flight line disarming bombs . . . I couldn't give Brown too much credit for the job he and his crews did there that night—it was fabulous."¹⁷

The Communist attack on Marble Mountain was larger and better coordinated. A VC raiding party of approximately 90 men quietly assembled in a village just to the northwest of the Marble Mountain Air Facility. Under cover of 60mm mortar fire, four demolition teams struck at the Marble Mountain airstrip and a hospital being constructed by the Seabees. At least six of the enemy, armed with bangalore torpedos and grenades, reached the MAG-

16 parking ramp. Colonel O'Connor, the MAG-16 commander, remembered:

I awoke to the sound of explosions shortly after midnight . . . arriving at the group command post, I received a phone call from General McCutcheon. He was warning me that the airfield at Chu Lai had been attacked and to be on the alert. I told him no one was asleep at Marble Mountain, as we had also been under attack for about 15 minutes.¹⁸

After leaving the command post, Colonel O'Connor drove to the aircraft parking ramp where "Helicopters were burning all over . . . VMO-2 was practically wiped out." Before the VC could be stopped they destroyed 19 helicopters and damaged 35, 11 of them severely.* Across the road, much of the hospital, which was nearing completion, was heavily damaged. After 30 minutes, the Viet Cong withdrew, leaving behind 17 dead and four wounded. American casualties were three killed and 91 wounded.¹⁹

During the attack, Lieutenant Colonel Verle E. Ludwig's 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, south of Marble Mountain, came under small arms fire, but apparently this was a feint designed to fix the unit in its defensive positions. All units at Da Nang went on full alert, but the damage had been done.

The VC attacking forces at both Chu Lai and Da Nang were not ordinary guerrillas. There were indications that these troops were from hardcore main force VC units, although the VC unit which attacked Marble Mountain was better trained than the one which hit Chu Lai. Captain Hoa, the Hoa Vang District Chief, believed that the enemy group which attacked Da Nang was North Vietnamese, but the four prisoners captured by the Marines there came from small hamlets in Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces.²⁰

The enemy had been well equipped for the mission. At Marble Mountain, Marines recovered a considerable stock of fragmentation, concussion, and thermite grenades, as well as three bangalore torpedoes, several Chinese Communist B-40 antitank rockets, and miscellaneous ammunition. The American troops also captured several weapons, a

*Colonel O'Connor observed that the destruction of the helicopters at Marble Mountain resulted in "a 43 percent loss of division mobility" and that it "put a crimp in division plans for several months afterward." Col Thomas J. O'Connor, Comments on draft MS, dtd 27Nov76 (Vietnam Comment File).



USMC Photo

An aerial view of the damage caused by the VC sapper attack on Marble Mountain. Nearly one-third of the Marine helicopters were destroyed or damaged during the attack.

7.62mm AK assault rifle, two .45 caliber automatic weapons, and a 7.62mm Tokarev automatic pistol.²¹

One of the more significant aspects of the events of 28 October was an attack which did not occur. The enemy had also planned to hit the main airfield at Da Nang. Two separate occurrences may have frustrated this attack. General Walt's staff received word on 27 October that a VC main force battalion was moving out of its base in "Happy Valley," 10 miles south-

west of Da Nang, and heading towards the base. At 1930, division artillery fired 680 rounds into the area. Later intelligence reports indicated that the shells hit the VC unit, forcing it to disperse.

Shortly afterward, a 9th Marines squad ambushed a strong VC force near the An Tu (1) hamlet, five miles south of Da Nang. The Marine patrol, 11 Marines and a Navy corpsman from Company I, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, had arrived at the ambush



USMC Photo A185986

Sergeant John A. Anderson describes his squad's patrol action. His squad was credited with preventing a major attack on the Da Nang Airbase.

site after dark. By 1945 they had established their positions; only 15 minutes later the Marines heard movement along the trail. The squad leader, Sergeant John A. Anderson, ordered his troops to hold fire until the enemy was at pointblank range. Seven VC had passed the site of the most forward Marine before Anderson triggered the ambush. At this moment, the VC were only six to seven feet away from the Marine's M-60 machine gun position. The machine gunner initiated the engagement with a long burst, followed by heavy fire from all the

weapons of the rest of the squad. This volley killed all seven VC.^{22*}

The seven dead were only the advance party for a larger enemy force which moved forward to engage the Marines. Sergeant Anderson fired several M-79 rounds at the muzzle flashes of the approaching VC. The firefight continued for another minute, but then the enemy began to disengage. Sergeant Anderson realized that his troops had to get out of the area; he was outnumbered. The squad leader ordered his men to count the dead VC before leaving; they counted 15. The Marines moved out to their battalion's position, but during the return two squad members were wounded by Viet Cong firing from a dike. Anderson called for fire support and after 60 rounds of 81mm mortar fire hit on the enemy position, the VC stopped firing. At first light the next day, 28 October, Company I sent two platoons to search the ambush site more thoroughly. Of the 15 known VC dead only two bodies were found.²³

General Walt and his staff believed that Sergeant Anderson's patrol probably had foiled an attack on the airbase. Apparently the patrol had intercepted a VC company from the same unit that carried out the Marble Mountain attack:

This belief is supported by the fact that the company was moving in the direction of the Da Nang base, and time and distance being considered, the time of the attack on the Marble Mountain Air Facility.²⁴

Two days after the airfield attacks, the Viet Cong attempted another probe of the Marine defenses, not at the base area, but against the defensive perimeter on Hill 22, south of the Tuy Loan River, manned by the Marines of Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. The action began at 0100, 30 October,

*Captain Charles Ward, at the time the 9th Marines S-2, debriefed the Anderson patrol. He recalled that the VC advance party had been preceded by a point element carrying candles and flashlights to give the appearance of villagers returning home. According to Ward, Anderson's men had seen the point men but "were uncertain as what to do—after all, the men wore villagers' clothing, held lighted candles, and the ambush location was on a well-travelled trail leading to Highway 1 only 200-250 meters away and was only 100 meters from occupied huts. The question became academic when the main body traipsed into the squad's position. So surprised was Anderson by the unexpected appearance of the column of men on the trail, he almost forgot to give the order to the machine gunner." Ward concluded his remarks with the observation that "reportedly this was Sgt Anderson's first combat patrol." LtCol Charles Ward, Comments on draft MS, dtd 27Oct76 (Vietnam Comment File).

when 10-15 VC walked into a squad ambush 1,000 meters south of the hill. The Marines opened fire and killed three of the enemy, but the squad had not been able to maintain communications with the company and was unable to notify the company commander of the contact. All was quiet for about two hours, when suddenly approximately 25 enemy enveloped the Marine squad, killing three and wounding six.²⁵ At 0315 the rest of the VC force attacked the main Marine positions on Hill 22. Enemy troops, supported by two recoilless rifles, penetrated about a third of the northwestern perimeter, capturing three M-60 machine guns, two 3.5-inch rocket launchers, and one 60mm mortar. They also gained access to the company's ammunition bunker.

Lieutenant Colonel Harold A. Hatch, who had assumed command of the 1st Battalion on 27 September, immediately sent reinforcements and ammunition to Company A. One resupply helicopter was "so fully loaded that it barely could get off the

ground" and its "rotor wash blew the supply tent down." The battalion commander also called for supporting artillery fire and close air support.²⁶

About 45 minutes after the enemy had launched the main attack on Hill 22, three UH-34s landed Sergeant Russell L. Kees' 13-man squad from Company C on the hill. Kees stated, "The VC were everywhere; in the tents, on the tents, and in the trenches."²⁷ Supported by air, artillery, and mortars, the Company A commander, Captain John A. Maxwell, rallied the Marines; they counterattacked and drove off the enemy. Marine casualties were 16 dead and 41 wounded, while the Communists left behind 47 bodies and one wounded.²⁸

Marine air accounted for a few more enemy when the VC unit tried to cross the eastern bank of the Song Yen three miles south of Hill 22. The Marine pilots reported destroying 10 boats and seeing 10 bodies in the water.²⁹ Villagers in the area told the American troops that the Viet Cong forced them to



USMC Photo A184893
Two young Vietnamese boys assist a Marine in directing traffic through a checkpoint. The boys are the sons of a South Vietnamese Air Force sergeant.



USMC Photo A185921

A Marine from the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines mans a defensive position on top of an old French fort in the Marble Mountain area. The Marines used the fort to store supplies.

bury several bodies, apparently casualties of the Hill 22 fight.³⁰

The VC had planned the operation thoroughly. They hit the critical portions of the perimeter and knew exactly which bunker contained ammunition. American intelligence sources discovered that the VC unit involved in the attack was the *R-20 Battalion* which had just completed training. The Hill 22 attack was apparently its final training exercise.^{31*}

Base Defense

The enemy attacks on the airfields and on Hill 22 gave added impetus to the improvement of base defenses. After the dissolution of the provisional defense battalion in August, one Marine infantry battalion was kept on the Da Nang Airbase as the airfield defense battalion. On 21 August III MAF assumed direct control of the airfield defense bat-

tion, Lieutenant Colonel Robert J. Tunnell's newly arrived 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, which relieved the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines on the airfield. Lieutenant Colonel Clark still retained the position of base defense coordinator. His job, according to his successor, was to collect statistics on Marine "saturation-type patrolling" and to inform the battalion commander "where to alternate the emphasis" in the airfield defense battalion's patrolling effort.³²

The main physical security problem of the airfield, other than keeping the Viet Cong out, was overlapping American and Vietnamese authority. There was a heterogeneous mixture of U.S. and Vietnamese units at Da Nang, each responsible for its own internal security. The 41st Fighter Wing, VNAF was responsible for its defensive perimeter, while U.S. Air Police and Vietnamese MPs controlled the main gate. This situation was further complicated when the Marble Mountain Air Facility east of the main airfield opened in September. At Marble Mountain, MAG-16, the Seabees, and support troops provided their own security. The various security forces both at Da Nang and Marble Mountain integrated their efforts as much as possible with the plans of the airfield defense battalion. General Walt exercised "a sort of prescriptive authority over the tenants."³³

Obtaining a clear decision for relations between the various commands was a continuing problem. On 4 October, the III MAF staff proposed that General Walt ask ComUSMACV for permission to activate a base defense command to exert "coordinating authority over the internal security provided by the various commands and units at Da Nang."³⁴

General Walt expanded the authority of the base defense coordinator and appointed Colonel George W. Carrington to this position in place of Lieutenant Colonel Clark. After the enemy attacks at the end of October, the new coordinator visited the Da Nang airfield tenants to ensure that an integrated defense did exist. He also planned the trace of a fence around the airfield. Carrington's duties also included advising, coordinating, and drawing together the defensive measures of the other two Marine enclaves.

According to Colonel Carrington, his responsibility extended to and:

. . . included field artillery battery positions (but I could not infringe upon command responsibilities of the artillery regimental commander), water points, bridge and

*The enemy battalion also was known as the *Doc Lap Battalion*. According to General Simmons, it was not "a new battalion, but one which had just been filled up with new recruits, most from the city of Da Nang, and retrained." BGen Edwin H. Simmons, Comments on Shulimson, "USMC Ops RVN Jul-Dec65," dtd 12 May 71 (Vietnam Comment File).