



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370303

Bystanders cover their ears on 25 June as MajGen Donn J. Robertson, the commanding general of the 1st Marine Division, fires from a self-propelled 155mm howitzer the 30,000th artillery round shot by the 4th Battalion, 11th Marines in the Vietnam War.

dinate fire support, as well as other aspects of the operations. ARVN liaison officers performed a similar function at American headquarters.*

These operational considerations, formalized as rules of engagement, were necessary restrictions but did not deprive any American unit of the right to defend itself against hostile action. Though planning helped to avoid the problem of noncombatant casualties, sound judgment during operations by both field commanders and fire support centers remained the final determinant.

Another technique of fire coordination, the "sav-a-plane," appeared because of the crowded air space over Vietnam, particularly over Route 1 along the coast of I Corps. Any artillery unit operating near the road contended with innumerable aircraft flying through its zone of action. The competition for space to shoot and space to fly was a constant headache for both participants. The 1st MAF considered the established practice of restrictive fire planning too burdensome because of the episodic nature of artillery firing. As a result, III MAF introduced the sav-a-plane system as a technique for keeping friendly aircraft safe from allied artillery while, at the same time, permitting liberal use of both arms.

Sav-a-plane was simply a radio procedure which told a pilot where and when artillery or naval gunfire was shooting. From that point on, it was the individual pilot's responsibility to stay clear of the firing area. When a battalion or regimental fire support coordination center (FSCC) initiated a sav-a-plane, the message went to the division FSCC/DASC for broadcast to all pilots in the area. The elements of a sav-a-plane transmission included target area, location of the firing unit, time of firing, and maximum trajectory ordinate. Though the system was not foolproof, artillery and naval gunfire hit very few, if any, aircraft.*

Supplemental safeguards to the sav-a-plane system included air sentries at battery positions and, whenever possible, collocation of the artillery liaison officers with infantry battalion forward air controllers. The latter technique ensured that all

*"I don't know that any aircraft has ever been hit by artillery fire," commented Colonel Edwin S. Schick, a former commander of the 12th Marines. "There was some talk that an Army outfit did hit a plane. . . . So long as the proper fusing is maintained . . . [and the] coordination principle of the restrictive fire plan is adhered to, no harm will come to our air brethren." Col Edwin S. Schick, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 11Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) Current doctrine does not include the sav-a-plane concept. Statistical studies support the "big sky-small bullet" principle by indicating very little probability of artillery hitting an aircraft in flight.

*Forty Marines augmented the U.S. Army advisory staff with the ARVN in I Corps during 1967.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189158

Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr., the Commandant of the Marine Corps, listens as Col William L. Dick, commander of the 4th Marines, points to explosions on a nearby hill demonstrating artillery support available to his regiment from the 12th Marines. The latter was one of the largest artillery regiments ever fielded under Marine command.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370317

The fire direction center of Battery G, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines receives and computes a fire mission.

elements kept abreast of artillery firing and also permitted immediate response for lifting or shifting of fires.

The employment of individual batteries in Vietnam differed from all previous American war experiences. A single battery often provided the support normally expected from an artillery battalion. The individual 105mm and the provisional 155mm towed batteries possessed the capability to deploy to widely separated positions, each with its own fire direction and communication capability. Each battery maintained its own 360-degree (6,400 mills to artillerymen) firing capability. Often the battery fire direction center coordinated its own reinforcing fires and those of nearby ARVN artillery as well. Marine artillery batteries also made increased use of helicopter displacement. This practice required battery personnel to break down the guns, section gear, and ammunition into helicopter-transportable loads on short notice. These procedures required greater versatility of artillerymen in Vietnam than in the Korean War and World War II.

Traditional unit descriptions provided misleading indicators of artillery capabilities in Vietnam. When



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800970

A Marine M-98 107mm "Howtar," a 4.2-inch heavy mortar mounted on a 75mm pack-howitzer chassis, awaits a fire mission in support of the Special Landing Force in Operation Deckhouse VI, a subsidiary of Task Force X-Ray's Operation Desoto near Duc Pho.

the tactical situation dictated, the 3d Marine Division, for example, formed provisional batteries using a mix of artillery calibers. At times these were closer to being "mini-battalions" than conventional batteries. Such practices in task organization also affected the artillery battalions; at times they assumed the size of "mini-regiments."¹⁸

Fast and accurate response traditionally provided the measure of good artillery support. If contact appeared imminent, the infantry battalion's forward observer notified the FDC, where chart operators prepared to plot the mission while the computer stood ready to provide gun data. The artillery liaison officer in the battalion FSCC then could arrange for a sav-a-plane to avoid losing time in getting clearance to fire. As the same time, word passed to the gun crews of the impending mission. To ensure accuracy of firing data, both the battery and battalion FDCs computed the fire missions, providing a double check on the information sent to the guns.

In July 1967, a new piece of equipment, the M18 Field Artillery Digital Computer (FADC), arrived at artillery battalion FDCs. Prior to its arrival, the Marines manually computed all firing data computations. FADC was supposed to accelerate the process of providing the batteries with accurate firing data and decrease the time between the initial request

and the impact of the first round on the target.

FADC did not favorably impress either Colonel Edwin S. Schick, Jr., or Lieutenant Colonel Clayton V. Hendricks, who respectively commanded the 12th and 11th Marines. Colonel Schick noted that "a well-disciplined and trained fire direction team [would] out perform [FADC] with speed, reliability, and all-weather capability . . . and no material failures." Lieutenant Colonel Hendricks remembered that the 11th Marines continued to compute manually and used FADC only as a check on the results. However, those doing the manual calculations often had to wait on FADC. In addition, FADC depended upon electricity from undependable power generators.¹⁹

On-call fires provided another means used to reduce reaction time. When an infantry unit operated in enemy-controlled areas, preplotted on-call fires along the route of advance were common practice. To execute the mission, the artillerymen used previously prepared firing data. Last minute clearance was the only requirement before firing the mission. Marines often resolved such delays by employing a long-term umbrella or area type sav-a-plane which permitted the battalion FSCC to retain local firing control. In such cases, they did not need higher-level firing clearance. On-call preparations,

“almost instant artillery,” were particularly effective as a counter to meeting engagements and ambushes.

Other uses of artillery involved flushing the enemy from concealed positions, denying his use of escape routes, and deceiving him as to the direction of attack. Night employment included illumination of avenues of approach, harassing and interdiction fires, and navigational orientation for friendly elements. The Marines also used jungle applications dating back to the island campaigns of World War II. A lost patrol could reorient itself by requesting a marking round on a nearby grid line intersection. Another common jungle technique was the use of artillery fire to guide units toward their objectives. Following the advancing fire by only a few hundred meters, the infantry worked their way forward while the artillery forward observer adjusted the firing to suit the situation.

The Sting Ray concept represented a novel innovation which blended maximum use of supporting arms and the talents of III MAF's reconnaissance personnel. As III MAF initiated large-unit operations beyond assigned TAORs, and as TAORs increased in size to accommodate the operational tempo, reconnaissance teams operated at ever increasing ranges from their battalion command posts. The lightly

The crew of a 105mm howitzer from Battery C, 4th Battalion, 12th Marines, prepares to respond to a fire mission in support of infantrymen engaged in Operation Chinook about 12 miles north of Hue.

3d MarDiv ComdC, January 1967



armed and equipped teams usually landed by helicopter at points near their operational areas and then moved stealthily to a designated observation post. Their primary mission was to gather intelligence in areas of suspected heavy enemy movement, but the Marines was soon learned the teams could call in artillery fire and air strikes and remain undetected by the enemy. This led to the evolution of Sting Ray which caused substantial enemy casualties at the risk of a very few Marines. Enemy troops, away from the main battle areas, relaxed, and feeling relatively safe, moved with less caution and often concentrated in large numbers. Alert Sting Ray teams exacted a heavy toll on unwary Communist units by hitting them with accurate artillery fire and precision air strikes.

For the Sting Ray teams, artillery served both as a defensive and an offensive weapon. If the enemy detected the team, artillery provided a ring of fire around its position while helicopters moved in for the rescue. Though enemy units hotly contested many extractions a surprisingly large number of Sting Ray teams escaped with only minor casualties, while Communist losses multiplied greatly from the heavy concentration of fire. To overrun a Sting Ray position, the Communists had to concentrate their forces; as soon as helicopters extracted the team, the abandoned site became a killing zone.

When the North Vietnamese sent large units across the DMZ during the fall of 1966, more American artillery units moved into the region, including the U.S. Army's 2d Battalion, 94th Artillery with its 175mm self-propelled guns. These heavy weapons, with a range of 32,700 meters, added a new dimension to III MAF artillery support. By March of 1967 the 11th and 12th Marines provided artillery coverage from the Gulf of Tonkin to Laos and substantially reduced enemy freedom of movement.

The U.S. Army's 1st Battalion, 40th Artillery also arrived to reinforce Marine artillery during 1967. Its M108 self-propelled 105mm howitzers had a 360-degree traverse capability and could respond rapidly to calls for fire from any direction. In recognition of its quick response and rapid rate of fire, the 3d Division Marines called the 40th's Battery A “Automatic Alpha.”

Artillery strength further increased in I Corps during 1967 following the arrival of the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines; the 1st Armored Amphibian Tractor Company (105mm howitzers); the 5th 155mm Gun



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189143

Battery A, 2d Battalion, 94th Artillery, one of several Army units sent north to provide needed artillery reinforcements to III MAF, fires a 175mm gun into the A Shau valley in Operation Cumberland in August. The operation closed at the start of the monsoon.

Battery; a platoon from the 5th 8-inch Howitzer Battery; and another battalion of Army 175mm guns, the 8th Battalion, 4th Artillery. By the end of the year, 35 Marine artillery batteries from the 11th, 12th, and 13th Marines, as well as four separate Force Troops and 10 Army batteries supported Marine operations in I Corps.*

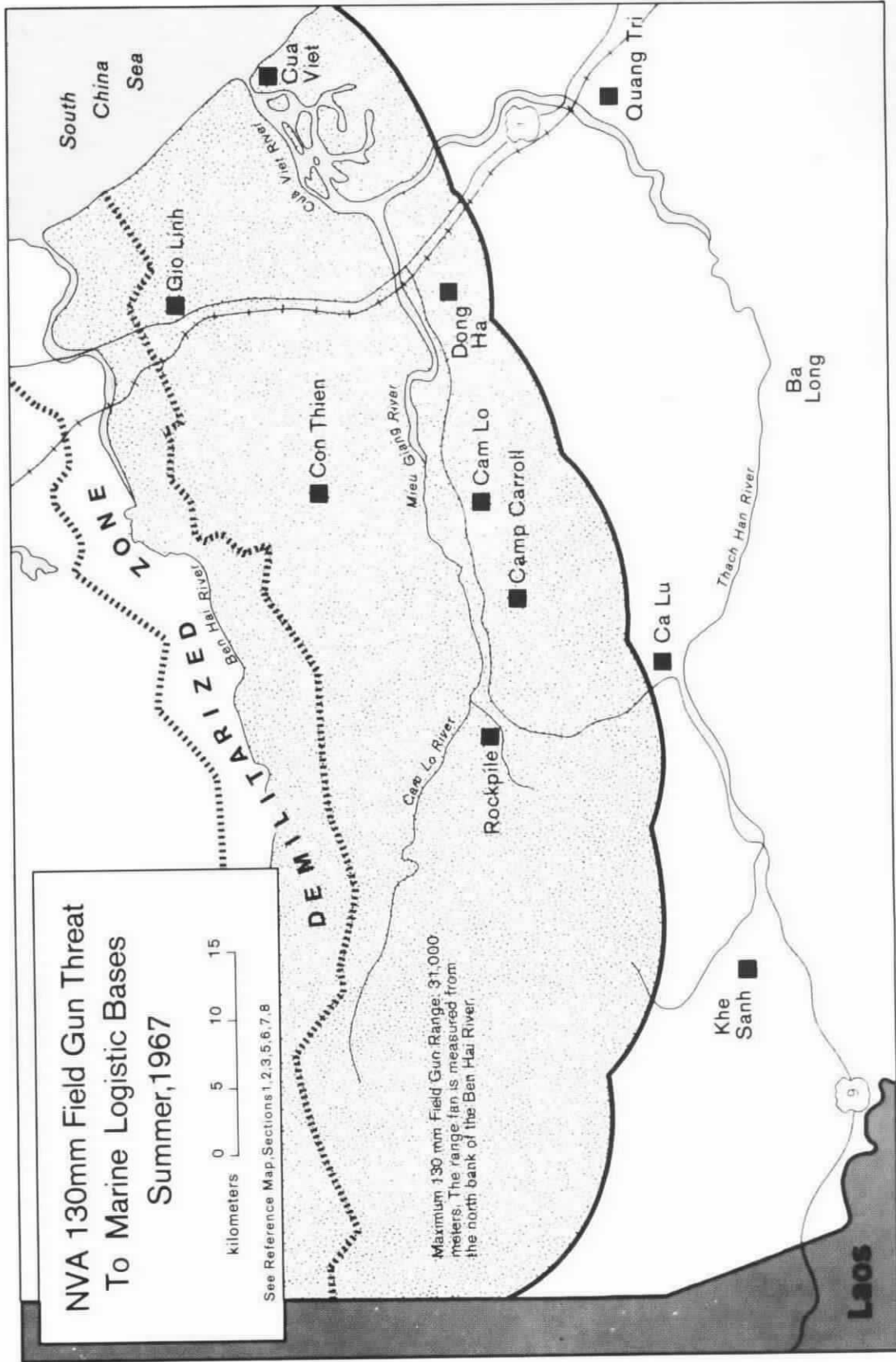
Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of the war, from an artilleryman's point of view, was the massive supporting arms effort employed to counter enemy artillery and rockets in the DMZ region. In the spring of 1967, the NVA introduced rockets as well as medium and heavy artillery to support actions there. As the year progressed, the North Vietnamese employed more and larger-caliber weapons. According to intelligence on the enemy order of battle, the North Vietnamese had approximately 130 artillery pieces in the area north of the Ben Hai River, including 152mm gun howitzers with a range in excess of 10 miles. Marine positions at Cua Viet, Gio Linh, Dong Ha, Con Thien, Cam Lo, and Camp Carroll suffered frequent attacks. These bombard-

ments threatened not only the Marine forward positions, but also lines of communication, command posts, airfields, and logistic installations.

There were many difficulties in countering the increased enemy artillery activity, but the biggest problem involved determining the precise location of the enemy weapons. The Marines had limited ground observation because of the political/military prohibition of operations in the DMZ, and NVA missile and antiaircraft fire challenged aerial observation. Intelligence and damage assessments remained, at best, skimpy. The available assessments came from diversified sources. The prolonged collecting and collating time, however, produced targeting results which often were too old to be worthwhile. Conversely, the Communists knew the exact locations of Marine forces and installations. The fact that the Marines occupied prominent terrain further simplified the enemy's observation task.

The Marines response to the expanded NVA artillery and rocket threat involved a pronounced increase in counterbattery fire, augmented by naval gunfire and aviation. III MAF increased Marine artillery along the DMZ to 84 of the 180 pieces available to the 3d Division. In August, USAF B-52s

*K Battery, 4th Battalion, 12th Marines remained on Okinawa awaiting gun repairs and equipment.





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189466

Soldiers of Battery G, 65th Artillery, equipped with truck-mounted, quad-.50 machine guns, stand by to escort a Marine "Rough Rider" truck convoy in I Corps in October.

added their immense bomb loads to the battle against the Communist artillery. The 3d Marine Division staff initiated an intensive effort to improve the counterbattery program and installed new radar and sound-flash ranging equipment at key locations. An Army unit, the Target Acquisition Battery from the 2d Battalion, 26th Artillery worked to improve target information. The Dong Ha FSCC received more personnel and communications equipment. Because the Seventh Air Force controlled fire clearances north of the DMZ, it sent an Air Force liaison officer to the Marine FSCC to speed up fire mission clearances. On 28 September 1967, the Marines established a fire support information center (FSIC) that employed data processing equipment, to speed collection and collation of target information from all 3d Marine Division, III MAF, and Seventh Air Force sources. Additional observation aircraft were made available, nearly doubling the number of hours of aerial observation over the DMZ area.

The Marines initiated large-scale, joint counterbattery and interdiction operations such as Ropeyarn, Headshed, Neutralize, and Eradicate. Artillery, naval gunfire, and air strikes blanketed all known and suspected firing and support positions north of the DMZ. For example, during Operation

Headshed, both artillery and naval gunfire hit enemy positions, and air strikes followed to catch the survivors of the earlier bombardment.

As a result of these measures, enemy fire declined steadily from a September peak, but the Communists retained their capability to disrupt military activity and cause significant allied casualties.

The DMZ experience highlighted the necessity of relying on supporting arms to offset the disadvantage of operating next to an enemy sanctuary. The problem of neutralizing enemy artillery remained one of the most frustrating dilemmas of the war. Though supporting arms eased the situation, political considerations ruled out the only satisfactory solution, seizure of the enemy guns.

For the Marines not involved in the war along the DMZ, base defense remained one of the most worrisome responsibilities. Beginning in February, the threat of rocket attack menaced all I Corps bases. At Da Nang the enemy could launch rockets from any point in a 200-square-mile belt surrounding the city. Five thousand Marines participated in the defence of this TAOR, but the high mobility of the enemy rocket enabled the Communists to maintain the threat. To combat the rockets, the 11th Marines

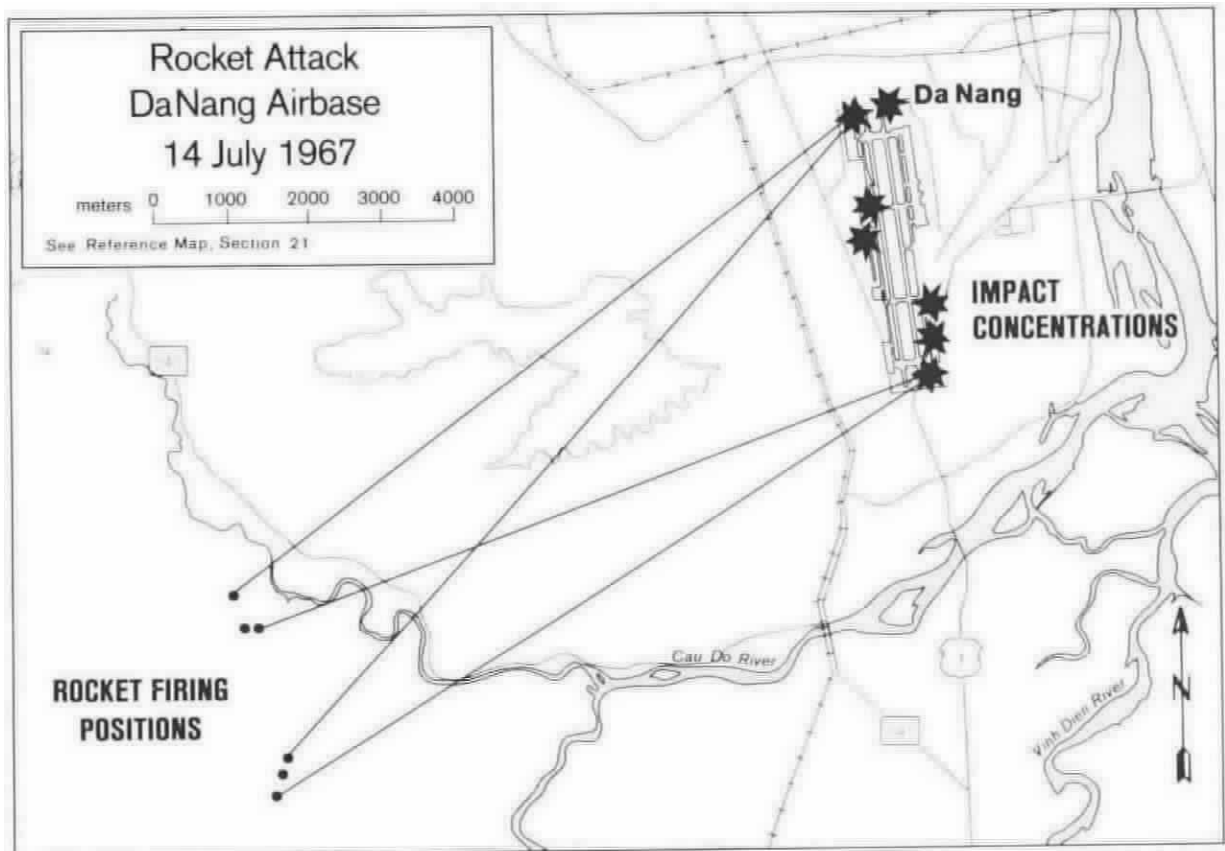


3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967

An artilleryman covers his ears and turns his back after dropping a round down the tube of a 4.2-inch mortar in a position at Dong Ha in December 1967.

repositioned firing batteries so that by July, at least two batteries covered each part of the Da Nang TAOR. Observation aircraft flew constant patrols over the rocket belt.²⁰ Additionally, artillerymen manned strategically located observation posts throughout the belt, but the threat persisted.

III MAF artillery, totaling 49 Marine and Army batteries at the end of the year, faced a vast array of tactical and technical problems. Counterbattery fire across the DMZ, neutralization of the Da Nang rocket threat; coverage of numerous, simultaneous ground operations; and countless harassment and interdiction missions provide samples of the complex gunnery problems confronting III MAF artillery during 1967. As an example of the quantity of artillery support needed, the Communists fired 42,190 rounds during the 1967 artillery duel, while the III MAF Marine and attached Army gunners replied with 281,110 rounds.



CHAPTER 14

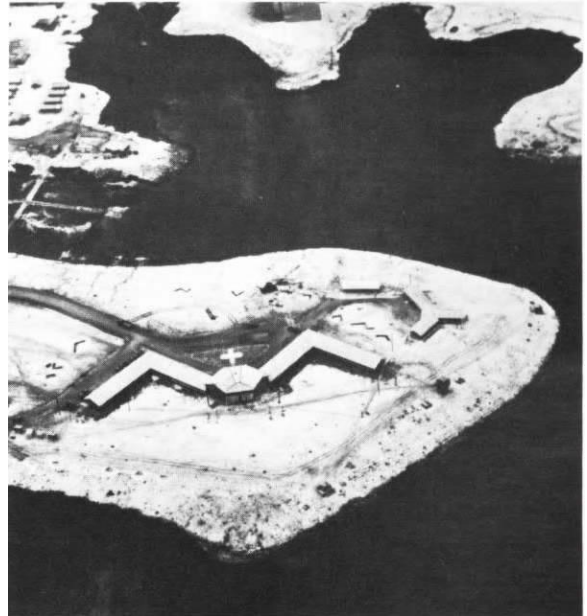
Logistics

*Upgrading the Logistics System – Problems with the M-16 Rifle
Navy Support – Marine Corps Engineers*

Upgrading the Logistics System

When 1967 began, the Marine logistics system in support of the Vietnam War was still undergoing growing pains. The means to fight were available; however, as Brigadier General Louis Metzger noted, there were many weaknesses, not excluding the provision of such necessities as socks and uniforms. "While CG, 9th MAB," he wrote, "I was appalled at the condition of the Marines and their equipment when they arrived on Okinawa [from Vietnam]. My observations in-country [as assistant commander of the 3d Marine Division] did nothing to dispel my opinion."¹

The Marines landed in March 1965 with logistic support tailored for their initial requirements; only 592 personnel provided motor transport, supply, and maintenance services. As III MAF's role in I Corps expanded, the logistic organization increased



FLC ComdC, December 1967

The headquarters of the Force Logistic Command (above) sits almost surrounded by water while (below) parts of the maintenance and storage area stretch toward Da Nang.

FLC ComdC, December 1967





FLC ComdC, July 1967

GySgt D. B. Durrell, assigned to the inventory section of Supply Battalion, checks some of the material stored by FLC at Camp Brooks in Da Nang in July.

both in scope and size and led to the creation of the Force Logistic Command. FLC realignment started with the transfer of the 1st Force Service Regiment from Camp Pendleton to Da Nang on 15 February 1967. Although only the 1st FSR headquarters colors arrived, involving no personnel or equipment movement from Camp Pendleton, this transfer permitted the FLC to restructure its elements to conform with a service regiment's table of organization and equipment provisions. The required personnel were already in Vietnam, but FLC needed a new structure to administer an inventory which had grown to more than 60,000 supply items. By 28 February the Marine logistic organization in I CTZ, which was to remain essentially unchanged until the end of the year, was:

Dong Ha: Force Logistic Support Unit 1

Phu Bai: Force Logistic Support Group Alpha, 3d Service Regiment

Da Nang: Force Logistic Command Headquarters, 1st Force Service Regiment

Chu Lai: Force Logistic Support Group Bravo, 1st Service Battalion

FLC strength totaled 5,500 men; its mission was:

To provide sustained logistical support to III MAF organizations; to provide staff augmentation and self-sustaining, balanced, mobile logistic support elements in support of III MAF units up to and including brigade size when deployed on independent missions; and to provide logistic support to other organizations as may be directed.²

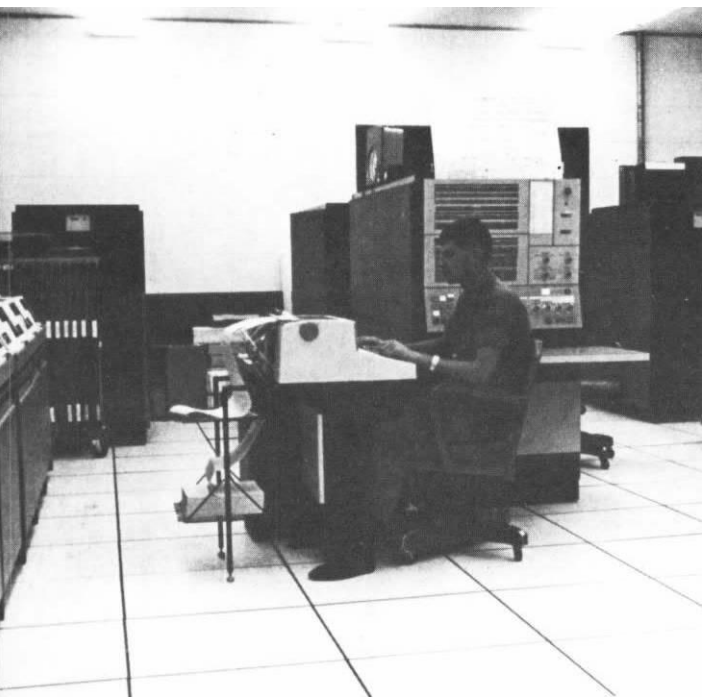
By 31 December, FLC's authorized strength had grown to 9,551 men. Elsewhere, the Marine Corps adjusted existing tables of organization and force levels to accommodate the compelling needs in I Corps. The realignment provided a III MAF "tooth-to-tail" ratio of 6.5 to 1. This ratio measured the relative numbers between Marine combat and combat support troops to combat service support troops in Vietnam.

Providing supplies and services to the Vietnam Marine was a worldwide Marine Corps logistic network which spanned the United States from Albany, Georgia, and Barstow, California, across the Pacific to Hawaii, then Okinawa, and finally to I Corps. Most of the supplies flowed directly into the combat zone; the rest stopped at the Marines' supply base on Okinawa, thus providing a "surge tank" that could respond rapidly to demands from the units in RVN. The 3d Force Service Regiment (FSR) on Okinawa remained the nerve center of the Marine logistic system in the western Pacific. Continuously exchange-

The operator of one of the most important pieces of equipment in the Marine logistics system, a rough-terrain forklift, carefully removes cargo from the rear of a KC-130F at the air freight facility at Dong Ha.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A190069





FLC ComdC, October 1967

A Marine operates the keyboard in air-conditioned comfort surrounded by other components of the IBM-360 computer used by the Force Logistic Command to fill over 63,000 requisitions each month.

ing computerized information with III MAF, this activity processed 1,333,140 III MAF requisitions between January 1966 and September 1967, filling 82 percent of them from stores on hand. The remainder passed to the Marine Corps Supply Center at Barstow, or in some cases to the Naval Supply Centers at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, or Oakland, California. During this period, the Okinawa Marines shipped 19,521 short tons of material to Vietnam by air and 78,949 measurement tons by ship.

The focal point for all logistic support flowing into III MAF was the Force Logistic Command (FLC), commanded by Brigadier General James E. Herbold, Jr. FLC handled all supplies and equipment going to, or coming from, III MAF, as well as performing maintenance of equipment and facilities.

This logistic pipeline was a two-way system; as it moved new equipment into combat, damaged and worn items headed in the other direction for repair, salvage, or disposal. The 3d FSR acted as both a coordinating agency and a rebuilding center. Work repairs occurred either in Marine shops on Okinawa, at the Public Works Center, Yokosuka, Japan, or in the continental United States. Between January 1966

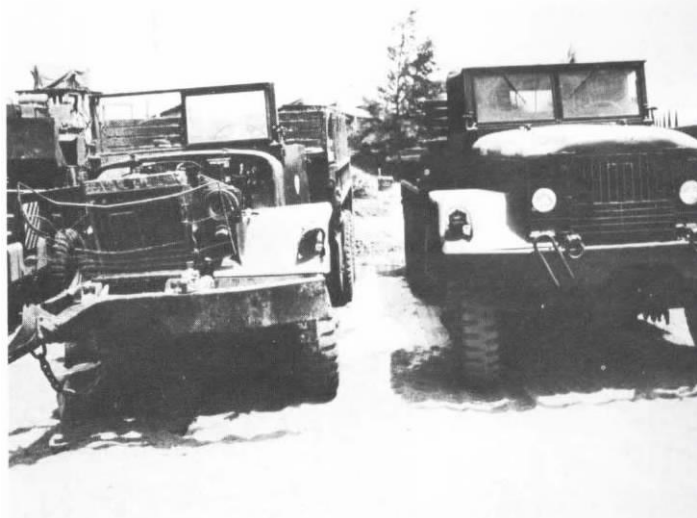
and September 1967, 3d Force Service Regiment repair facilities completed work orders on 77,286 items of combat equipment.

Frequent shifting of units to new locations, the rapid pace of the fighting, and bad weather all combined to aggravate supply problems. FLC introduced new supply management techniques to accelerate delivery of critical materials. The first of these was the Red Ball system introduced in September 1965. It sped the delivery of problem items through the normal distribution system by means of individual personal attention and continuing followup actions. When III MAF designated an item as Red Ball, FLC notified all supply agencies in Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Thereafter, designated action officers at each command level monitored the status of each Red Ball item and took every possible measure to speed delivery. By the end of September 1967, over 5,700 items had received the Red Ball treatment since the program's inception.

FLC introduced another special system in 1965 which it called the Critipac program. Under this program, each month the Marine Corps Supply Center at Barstow provided every major III MAF unit with one box of rapidly expended supplies which it required on a routine basis. Critipac eliminated the process of requisitioning and the inherent wait for the supply system to respond.

These two 5-ton trucks, one heavily damaged by an enemy mine and the other rebuilt to fully-usable condition, illustrate the heavy maintenance capabilities of FLC's motor transport repair shops.

FLC ComdC, August 1967





3d MarDiv ComdC, January 1967

A Rough Rider convoy of 150 vehicles enroute to Phu Bai moves through the Hai Van Pass, the only land route across the mountains that reached the sea north of Da Nang.

Repair parts and similar expendable items, usually in the Class II supply category, continued to be a headache during 1967. No matter how many of these items flowed into Vietnam through the supply system, the demand seemed insatiable. The explanation rests with the wide variety of items required, 86,000 during 1967, as well as the high usage rate. The increased tempo of combat operations and harsh weather conditions played a significant role in the rapid expenditure of supplies and equipment. This increased the number of requisitions submitted each month within III MAF. The number rose from only 2,500 in April 1965 to 70,959 in October 1967.

Enemy action also influenced supply levels and created sudden shortages. One of the most dramatic incidents of this nature occurred on 3 September when enemy artillery hit Dong Ha combat base, touching off one of the most spectacular series of explosions in the war. The initial blasts damaged seventeen helicopters. Force Logistic Support Unit 1's bulk fuel storage farm went up in flames. The enemy fire destroyed the main ammunition storage area; 15,000 short tons of vitally needed ammunition vanished. The explosions continued for more than four hours and people as far south as Phu Bai, more than 40 miles away, could see the enormous column of smoke.

Replacing the destroyed ammunition and the bulk fuel system while continuing normal supply operations plus providing building materials for construction of the "McNamara Line" represented monumental tasks.³ As an interim measure, the men of Force Logistic Support Unit 1 established a drum refueling point immediately after the attack. This

functioned until engineers completed another bulk fuel farm at Dong Ha a week later. The ammunition situation was better. Fortunately, two small, alternate supply points in the immediate Dong Ha area survived the attack. Quantities of artillery and other ammunition remained limited, however, until emergency sea and airlifts replenished the dangerously low stocks. Bad weather, heavy seas, and flooding of the Dong Ha LCU ramp during the period of 17-23 September complicated the resupply effort. The Marines circumvented this untimely development by offloading munitions at Hue and then moving them by truck to Dong Ha. Concur-

A forklift, mired to the axles in mud created by monsoon rains in January, sits in the Force Logistic Support Group Alpha open storage lot at Da Nang.

FLC ComdC, January 1967



rently, they started construction of new dumps at Quang Tri City, well beyond enemy weapons' range. Luckily, the Communists did not capitalize on the disaster.

Enemy artillery fire in October almost caused another serious setback to these resupply efforts. Fortunately, the immediate efforts of three Seabees and four Marines, one of whom was a general officer, prevented another disaster. "On 29 October our second and smaller ammunition dump in Dong Ha was hit by enemy fire," recalled General Metzger. "Knowing we simply could not lose it, three Marines, three Seabees, and I put out the fire."^{4*}

Another of FLC's inherited missions involved personnel management. By 1967, the task of processing personnel to and from the western Pacific had grown to prodigious proportions. Over 191,000 Marines required processing during 1967. Approximately 97,000 went by aircraft to Vietnam and 7,872 arrived in surface shipping; 82,000 flew back to the United States and another 4,276 traveled home by ship. This complex evolution required the writing of orders, rosters, and schedules; and administering physical examinations, baggage inspections, troop handling, and billeting at transient facilities and processing centers reaching from South Vietnam

*Each of the seven received the Bronze Star Medal for their efforts in saving the ammunition dump.

back through Okinawa to El Toro and Camp Pendleton in California. In addition, all Marine posts and stations faced the tasks of filling outbound quotas and absorbing returnees.

At first, the main control center for the stream of Marines flowing through the western Pacific remained at Camp McTureous, Okinawa. In mid-1966 this activity moved to Camp Hansen, Okinawa to accommodate the increasing two-way personnel flow. By early 1967, the Transient Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Donald K. Cliff, processed as many as 25,000 troops in a single month. This complicated operation included accounting for all hospitalized casualties and expediting emergency leave personnel movement by arranging for these Marines' transportation, clothing, and pay, as well as many other services. Computerization sped such involved operations as the modification of orders of personnel still in transit. By 1967, the Transient Battalion reduced the average holding time for transients at Camp Hansen to about 40 hours. The transient program also involved the classification and storage of excess baggage and clothing in 3d FSR's climate-controlled warehouse. The hard-working troop handlers and administrators of the Transient Battalion received little praise, but their long hours of demanding work were as vital to the support of the Marines in I Corps as food and ammunition.

The Air Delivery Platoon of FLC was one of the

Newly arrived Marine replacements await processing in front of a long line of tropical huts at the Force Logistic Command's transient facility in July at the Da Nang airfield.

FLC ComdC, July 1967





FLC ComdC, April 1967



FLC ComdC, July 1967

Feeding the thousands of Marines assigned to III MAF required facilities as large and efficient as many stateside commercial establishments. Some of the average of 2,592 loaves of bread provided each day by the bakery sit on cooling racks at Phu Bai. A Vietnamese civilian (right), one of 53 employed in FLC's milk plant, analyzes a sample of the more than 40,000 pints of reconstituted milk produced each day in April 1967.

more unusual Marine logistic units. The members of this specially trained 33-man platoon were graduates of the parachute school at Fort Benning, Georgia, as well as the parachute rigger school at Fort Lee, Virginia. The platoon supported requests for aerial delivery of supplies throughout I Corps. During September and October, the platoon rendered especially valuable service during the aerial resupply of the 26th Marines at Khe Sanh. Because of subsurface water damage, landing on Khe Sanh airstrip had become extremely hazardous for transport planes. Beginning in late August, the Air Delivery Platoon helped airdrop large quantities of supplies to the Marines at Khe Sanh during repairs to the runway. During the more than two months the strip remained closed, the Air Delivery Platoon made airdrops on 40 days, handling an average of 51 short tons per day, more than double its normal, rated capacity.

At the end of 1967, to improve logistic support and keep pace with the northward movement of III MAF combat elements, FLC emphasis shifted to northern I Corps. Force Logistic Support Group Bravo

moved from Chu Lai to Dong Ha, leaving Supply Company (-)(Reinforced) as the agency responsible for logistic support of Marine elements in the Chu Lai area.

Problems with the M-16 Rifle

Problems with the M-16 rifle posed a logistics burden of staggering proportions for III MAF. After the heavy fighting at Khe Sanh in April and May a furor developed over reported deficiencies in the newly issued M-16. Many Marines lost confidence in the weapon, creating a situation which had a definite impact on combat operations and morale.⁵

The issue generated considerable reaction in the American press and Congress. Some Marines contributed to the furor by spreading exaggerated accounts of problems with the M-16, as described by General Metzger:

... a congressional investigating team of two congressmen . . . arrived on the scene. It was my unhappy duty to escort them to units along the DMZ. If it weren't so serious it would have been laughable. They insisted on questioning individual Marines with no officers and NCOs present, I suppose to ensure they got the truth, without command influence. The result was that they were fed the



FLC ComdC, July 1967

Off-duty Marines watch a 20-lap race organized by the Force Logistic Command on 4 July as part of efforts to provide diversified recreation to III MAF.



FLC ComdC, July 1967

Marines enroute to the United States in July 1967 on government transportation line up at the airline ticket office at the FLC transit facility in Da Nang to buy tickets from the west coast to their homes.

Security forces' aerial flares, photographed by a time exposure as they drift over Camp Brooks, serve as a blunt reminder of the nearness of FLC's Marines to the dangers of war.

FLC ComdC, August 1967



most awful line of "hog wash" imaginable. Tall tales of heroic actions, patrols wiped out, etc., all due to the M-16 rifle, but which according to the sergeant major of one unit involved, had never taken place. The young Marines had a field day.⁶

The main criticism was that the rifle jammed; it would not extract spent cartridges. III MAF conducted numerous field tests and studies to determine if the weapon was faulty and, if so, what could be done about it. Much of the evidence pointed to the absolute necessity of keeping the weapon immaculately clean, mainly because of the extremely fine tolerances of its moving parts and the tendency of rounds to bend in the chamber. The studies cited dirty ammunition and poor cleaning methods as the major reasons for malfunctions. Commanders at every level hammered away at the traditional Marine theme of frequent weapon cleaning, which had been less important when armed with the M-14 rifle with its chrome-plated chamber and bore.

Even this was not always adequate. "The earlier [M-16] weapons—even when cleaned to usual stan-

RAdm Thomas R. Weschler, commander of the Naval Support Activity, Da Nang discusses his command and its capabilities with Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr., the Commandant of the Marine Corps, on board a small craft in Da Nang harbor in January.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188112



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189370
Two large cargo ships unload at the Naval Support Activity's deepwater piers at the Da Nang harbor.

dards (not always possible in any sustained combat) still developed microscopic 'pits' in the chamber," recalled Colonel James C. Short. "The [rifles] would then fail to extract, usually at an awkward time."⁷

When further investigation revealed that the problem could be alleviated by changing the chambers, the FLC faced the urgent task of modifying all Marine M-16s. It set up an assembly line and replaced all of the original chamber assemblies with new ones having a chrome coating. This modification reduced chamber friction, making extraction more reliable. At the same time, FLC installed a modified buffer group to reduce the cyclic rate of fire. The M-16's teething problems plagued FLC for the rest of the year, and a final solution waited until 1968.

The controversy over the new rifle had other long-term side effects that affected III MAF's combat effectiveness and logistic posture. These effects originated from the policy that each Marine would test fire his rifle before departing on a patrol. "So, obeying orders, each Marine dutifully fired his weapon regularly before each patrol," recalled General Metzger, "which depleted our ammunition supply and conditioned the Marines to shooting without aiming, so that the standard of marksmanship in combat dropped sharply."⁸

Navy Support

Throughout 1967, the Naval Support Activity



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A193811

A Navy medium landing craft (LCM-8), with folding cots on top of its improvised pilot house cover, moves a tank from the 3d Tank Battalion up the Dong Ha River on 6 July.

(NSA), Da Nang, served as the focal point for Navy activities supporting the Marines in I Corps. The Navy established NSA in July 1965 to relieve the Marines of the administrative and logistic tasks associated with an advanced naval base. During 1966 the command's responsibilities grew to the point that a flag officer, Rear Admiral Thomas R. Weschler, became the unit's commander. By the end of 1967, NSA developed into the largest U.S. Navy overseas shore command with more than 10,000 officers and men.* It provided III MAF with an average of 39,661 measurement tons of supplies per month in 1967.

Besides operating the Da Nang port facilities, sailors of NSA served throughout I Corps in several separate detachments to accomplish some rather diverse missions. Personnel of the command operated small craft on the dangerous waters of the Cua Viet to supply the fighting forces along the DMZ. Detachments at Hue/Tan My performed similar duties. At Chu Lai another detachment shared the burden of supplying all allied forces in

lower I Corps, aided by the southernmost NSA detachment at Sa Huynh. NSA built the Sa Huynh

A sailor on the Navy's Swift Boat 80, operating in the South China Sea in September, prepares to fire an 81mm mortar at enemy coastal positions two miles south of the Demilitarized Zone. The dual mount also includes a .50-caliber machine gun installed above the mortar and recoil mechanism.

3d MarDiv ComdC, September 1967



*For a fuller treatment of Navy logistics in Vietnam, see Vice Admiral Edwin B. Hooper, USN (Ret), *Mobility, Support and Endurance: A Story of Naval Operational Logistics in the Vietnam War, 1965-1968* (Washington: Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1972).



3d MarDiv ComdC, June 1967

Navy hospital corpsmen remove a wounded man from a medevac helicopter at Dong Ha for the short ride to the 3d Medical Battalion's field hospital.

facilities shortly after the arrival of Task Force Oregon in the summer of 1967.

In addition to transshipping material from Da Nang to the smaller ports, NSA performed a variety of other tasks. It provided loading and unloading services, and transient and terminal storage at these ports; operated base supply depots for supply of material common to all U.S. forces in I Corps; supplied port and harbor security; coordinated activities with RVN agencies and the U.S. Agency for International Development in support of military operations; supervised industrial relations; provided all petroleum requirements; provided public works support in secure areas; maintained airfields in coordination with III MAF; and operated in-country R&R facilities.

Another vital NSA service involved providing hospital facilities for combat troops in I Corps. The NSA station hospital opened at Da Nang in January 1966. It expanded from a 60-bed capacity to 460 by year's end. The staff included more than 500 doctors, nurses, corpsmen, and technicians. This modern hospital boasted the only frozen blood bank in Vietnam, and had competent departments such as X-ray; eye, ear, nose, and throat; neurosurgery; urology; orthopedic; research; and preventive medicine facilities. Served by a convenient helicopter pad, the NSA hospital, working with the

facilities of the 1st and 3d Medical Battalions and the 1st Hospital Company, provided III MAF with the most modern medical technology available.

In addition to the fixed medical facilities, hospital ships cruised the waters off Vietnam to receive casualties evacuated directly from the battlefield by helicopter. The USS *Sanctuary* arrived on 10 April 1967 to join her sister ship, the USS *Repose*, a veteran of almost a year's Vietnam service. In her first 50 days of action, *Sanctuary* admitted 1,200 patients. Operating from Da Nang, the *Sanctuary*, with 560 hospital beds and 27 doctors embarked, could move to Chu Lai in less than two hours and to the seaward approaches to the DMZ in less than five hours. The presence of a fully-equipped hospital ship only minutes away provided solace for many Marines as they contemplated their chances of survival.

No account of naval support would be complete without mention of the Marines' long-term friends, the Seabees. By midsummer of 1967, nine Navy mobile construction battalions (NMCBs) were in Vietnam: two at Dong Ha, one at Phu Bai, five at Da Nang, and one at Chu Lai. These formed the 3d Naval Construction Brigade, commanded by Rear

HMC Marvin L. Cunningham, Navy medical corpsman, removes mosquitoes from a trap with a portable vacuum cleaner before sending them to the Navy Support Activity at Da Nang for examination.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189498





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A369856

General purpose tents of the type commonly called "GP Medium" house a small field hospital run by the 1st Medical Battalion in support of Operation Desoto near Duc Pho.

Admiral Robert R. Wooding, CEC. His force included 7,000 officers and men.

The Seabees in Vietnam demonstrated their amazing capability and traditional versatility. One of the best examples of their ability to respond with speed and determination took place during the fall of 1967 when they built an airfield and quarters for 500 men at Quang Tri. The field served as a backup installation for the strip at Dong Ha, by then vulnerable to NVA rocket and artillery fire. Seabees and equipment converged on the site within a day of General Westmoreland's order to complete the field before the monsoon season. NMCB-10, the Pacific Fleet's Alert Construction Battalion on Okinawa, deployed immediately to take charge of the urgent project and relieve the composite force already at work. The specifications called for a 4,100-foot strip of sand cement covered with metal matting, plus 15,000 square yards of parking aprons and taxiways.

Heavy rains hit the region in late September, adding to the problem of stabilizing shifting sand in the construction area. The Seabees also faced the delicate task of negotiating and supervising the removal of approximately 11,000 Vietnamese graves located in the middle of the proposed site. The latter problem occurred frequently in Vietnam and its solution required subtle and skillful diplomacy. In

spite of these obstacles, the first KC-130 landed at Quang Tri on 23 October, nine days ahead of the scheduled completion date and only 38 days after the project started.

Concentration shows on the faces of Cdr Ronald L. Bouterie and his assistants during surgery on the hip of a wounded Marine on board the USS Tripoli.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A704398





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189992

Seabees of Mobile Construction Battalion 301 battle the mud on 29 November as they set and seal runway mats into place during the rebuilding of the runway at Khe Sanh.

Navy Seabees use special mobile equipment in September to crush rock for repairing the damage caused by heavy monsoon rains to the runway at the Khe Sanh combat base.

3d MarDiv ComdC, September 1967





Photo courtesy of Maj Henry Wayne Gardner
A Navy chaplain assigned to the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines conducts a non-denominational service in February using three C-ration boxes for an altar.

Seabees also made a major contribution by their continual struggle to maintain "Liberty Road," the route connecting Da Nang with the An Hoa industrial complex, 23 air miles to the southwest. Elements of the 3d, 7th, and 9th Marine Engineer Battalions worked with the Seabees to keep the road open as heavy two-way traffic strained its many culverts and bridges. The constant threat of enemy mines and sapper attacks added to the Seabees' and Marines' worries on "Liberty Road." Lieutenant Colonel Frank W. Harris III's 7th Engineer Battalion replaced one bridge blown up by enemy demolitions on 4 February 1967, with a 96-foot, 60-ton-limit, timber bridge in the remarkable time of only 16 days.

The Seabees, however, claimed credit for the largest single bridge building feat on "Liberty Road." NMCB-4, commanded by Commander Richard M. Fluss, CEC, built the 2,040-foot-long "Liberty Bridge" across the Thu Bon River. The bridge rested on more than 800 80-foot-long piles, each one driven approximately 40 feet into the river bed. The battalion used more than five tons of 10-inch nails and 5,000 24-inch bolts in its construction. It completed the job in less than five



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A369963
HM Andre A. Bougie, a 19-year old Navy medical corpsman in the 1st Marine Division, tries to keep a wounded Viet Cong alive in Operation New Castle.

The visiting Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr., pins a Navy Unit Commendation streamer in the colors of the 3d Medical Battalion in a ceremony at Phu Bai on 7 January 1967.

3d MarDiv ComdC, January 1967





3d MarDiv ComdC, April 1967

Two Marines from Company D, 11th Engineer Battalion perform a ritual common in the Vietnam War. PFC T. Outlaw, having located a suspected enemy mine with a mine detector during a road sweep on 12 April, watches as Pvt R. P. Dotson cautiously probes the ground with his bayonet tip.



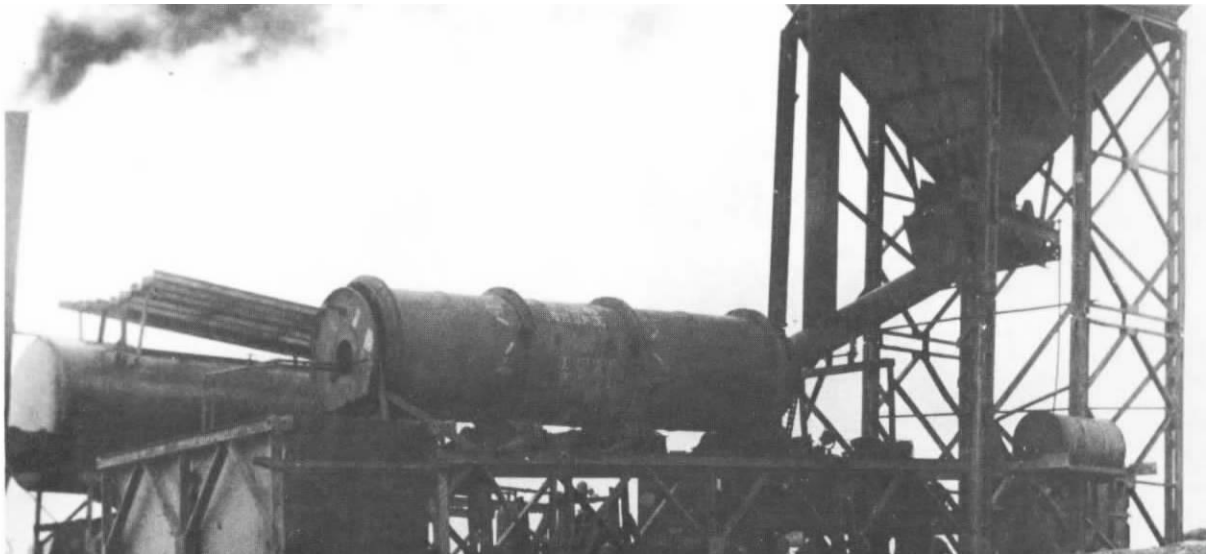
3d MarDiv ComdC, July 1967

A bulldozer pushes trees aside as the 11th Engineer Battalion completes construction on Route 561 near the strategic combat base at Con Thien in July 1967.

A pontoon ferry constructed by Company C, 11th Engineer Battalion carries several Marine vehicles across the Perfume River 15 miles west of the city of Hue on 16 May.

3d MarDiv ComdC, May 1967





3d MarDiv ComdC, April 1967

Smoke pours from the 11th Engineer Battalion's new asphalt plant constructed at Dong Ha for improving the highway network necessary to the defense of the DMZ region.

months, from 3 April to 2 September. Enemy sappers attacked the bridge during the early morning hours of 6 September and knocked out two spans. A scant 32 hours later, the Seabees had completed repairs and traffic moved once more on "Liberty Road."

For the majority of Marines in Vietnam, the most frequently encountered evidence of Navy support were the naval personnel assigned to his unit. Each battalion, aircraft group, and higher headquarters had its own Navy chaplain. Each battalion and squadron, as well as higher headquarters, had its own complement of Navy medical personnel, headed by a physician. The enlisted Navy medical corpsmen provided immediate medical care at all levels, down to the individual rifle platoon. In addition, each Marine division included a medical battalion and a dental company commanded by a Medical Corps or Dental Corps officer.

Captain John T. Vincent, MC, USN, who commanded the 3d Medical Battalion, described his unit's disposition in support of the 3d Marine Division:

During 1967 there were two essentially complete hospitals, one at Phu Bai and the other at Dong Ha which we staffed and equipped for definitive surgical treatment. In addition, two clearing platoons (essentially the equivalent of an Army MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] unit) were in the field: one at Khe Sanh and the other at a fire support base between Phu Bai and Quang

Tri. The deployment of a clearing platoon of "C" Company, 3d Medical Battalion to Khe Sanh during the fight for Hills 861 and 881 was an extremely expeditious and efficient operation and provided excellent combat support.⁹

Dental Corps personnel could be found operating with Marines under similar conditions. For example, to provide primary dental care to Marines at Duc Pho, the 1st Dental Company rigged a dental chair and other equipment in a 3/4-ton trailer. A helicopter flew the trailer from Quang Ngai to Duc Pho. When dug in and sandbagged, it allowed the provision of excellent dental care throughout the Marine stay at the base, despite such occurrences as a near miss from a mortar during the enemy attack on 24 March.¹⁰

Marine Corps Engineers

No Marines in Vietnam faced more frustrations in the accomplishment of their mission than the engineers. Organized and equipped to accomplish engineer support for short duration amphibious operation, five Marine engineer battalions, the 1st, 3d, 7th, 9th, and 11th, found themselves committed to a protracted land war in an underdeveloped country. The wide spectrum of urgent tasks, hard equipment use, torrential rains, mud, heat, abrasive dust, replacement shortages, lack of spares, and a long supply pipeline were some of the more com-

mon hindrances. Only forceful leadership, grueling work schedules, and considerable ingenuity kept the battalions abreast of mounting demands for engineering support. They met their military commitments while still managing to build dams, schools, dispensaries, bridges, and other facilities for the people of South Vietnam.¹¹

One of the most challenging tasks facing the engineers in 1967 involved maintaining and upgrading more than 2,000 miles of I Corps roads. The opening of Route 9 connecting Dong Ha with Khe Sanh in March provided a prime example of Marine engineering accomplishment. Flooding and enemy damage closed the road to vehicular traffic west of Cam Lo in 1964. This 42-mile road included 49 bridges, 27 of which occupied the 15-mile stretch between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh. Once open, the road required continuous maintenance to repair the constant ravages of flooding and enemy action. Additionally, the engineers reinforced all bridges to support 60-ton loads. The Route 9 project tied up almost a full engineer battalion for all of 1967.

Another project which tested the resolve of the battalions was the construction of the DMZ barrier system in northern Quang Tri Province. The 11th Engineer Battalion, under the successive command of Lieutenant Colonels Ross L. Mulford and Willard N. Christopher, comprised the initial project force, but by the end of the summer, the mammoth effort in-

involved 30 percent of all III MAF engineer forces.¹² U.S. Army motor transport and helicopter units were deployed from other Corps areas to help; Seabees provided additional support, especially in the construction of observation towers and bunkers; and ARVN engineers contributed their share. By the end of the year, the barrier construction effort and associated security tasks had absorbed 757,520 man days. Casualties among the engineers mounted as the enemy employed snipers, mines, mortars, and artillery to discourage them.

The generator shortage caused headaches for Marines throughout 1967. The engineers owned and operated the major share of III MAF's power-generating equipment, but they were purely expeditionary-type generators. The Marine Corps possessed only a limited quantity of garrison equipment, including power generators. The rapid construction of many new installations in I Corps, all of which required electricity, quickly depleted existing generator stocks. The engineers had the task of servicing and exchanging generators to keep up with seemingly insatiable power demands. Clubs, messes, air conditioners all demanded electricity, and the requirements often exceeded the means.

The generator situation in 1967 would have been even more acute save for actions taken in 1966 by Colonel George C. Axtell, then the commander of

Marines from the 3d Engineer Battalion use ropes and muscle power as they manhandle a dud 250-pound bomb in the mud of a farmer's paddy near Camp Evans in October.

3d MarDiv ComdC, October 1967





Photo courtesy of Col Frank W. Harris III

The 7th Engineer Battalion, in an assignment common to all engineer units in Vietnam, goes beyond its combat duties and aids the pacification program by building an irrigation dam to allow local Vietnamese farmers to grow a second rice crop each year.

the Force Logistic Command. Colonel Richard D. Taber, Sr., recently recalled:

When the shortage of generators began to be realized, Colonel Axtell personally called higher headquarters in the Pacific and United States to get all available expeditionary generators made available to III MAF. Then, following a discussion with Captain [Albert R.] Marshall (CEC) USN

[of the Third Naval Construction Brigade], joint action was taken to obtain some larger (60 kilowatts and up) Navy generators for all complexes where power grids could be built and to release the smaller expeditionary generators to more remote locations. Care and maintenance of the expeditionary generators was primarily by their "owners" (i.e., the engineers) with backup from FLC. Care and maintenance of the larger Navy generators was first by selected engineer personnel from FLC and backed up/augmented by Navy Seabees.¹³

While the Marine engineers spent much time engaged in construction and maintenance, they also devoted many hours to road clearing sweeps. Each day, prior to the departure of the first truck convoy, engineers teams, with infantry support, ensured the roads were clear of mines, booby traps, and ambushes.¹⁴ When the engineers found enemy explosives they either disarmed or blew them in place, depending upon their size and type. The slow, tedious, and dangerous sweeps were a necessary part of keeping supplies moving throughout I Corps.

The Marine engineers in Vietnam demonstrated true versatility. Not only challenged by new and demanding tasks, but they also faced vastly different physical properties of soil and rock, as well as a clever and determined opponent. Every engineering project involved constant exposure to sabotage, mining, ambush, or some other nagging threat. The dramatic aspect of combat eclipses most supporting efforts, but this was not the case of the Marine engineers in Vietnam. If nothing else, the mere physical size of their accomplishments bears witness to their contribution.

Father Nguyen Thanh Hoan, LtCol Ross L. Mulford of the 11th Engineer Battalion, and others stand in front of the school in Dong Ha partially supported by the battalion.

3d MarDiv ComdC, March 1967



CHAPTER 15

Other Marine Activities

*Marines with MACV—The Embassy Guard—The Advisors—I Corps Advisors—The Rung Sat Special Zone
The Marine Advisory Unit—Action In Binh Dinh Province—Action in the South*

Marines with MACV

The Marine Corps provided the MACV staff 72 officers and 67 enlisted men at the beginning of 1967. The assigned Marines comprised slightly less than five percent of the total MACV staff personnel. Another 25 officers and 24 enlisted Marines served with the MACV field components. The senior Marine officer on the staff was the director of the combat operations center (COC), Brigadier General John R. Chaisson. General Chaisson remained in this vital position through 1967 and up until mid-1968. Other Marine billets covered a broad spectrum of assignments which ranged from

membership in the Studies and Observation Group to duty with the radio and television staff.

Marine participation in MACV functions had a dual importance. Not only did they make Marine views readily available to the staff in Saigon, but MACV Marines clarified Saigon's decisions with their fellow Marines in I Corps. General Chaisson was himself a former member of the III MAF staff and the only Marine general out of 20 flag officers at MACV Headquarters. He had direct, personal contact with General Westmoreland and his senior staff members, as well as other senior American and

Marine BGen John R. Chaisson, the director of the MACV combat operations center in Saigon, listens as Gen Creighton W. Abrams, the deputy MACV commander, confers with III MAF's LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr., and the 3d Marine Division's MajGen Bruno A. Hochmuth during Gen Abrams' visit to the division at Phu Bai on 13 July.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188880



foreign representatives. From these associations, he gained considerable insight into the way the other services viewed Marines. None ever criticized Marines' fighting characteristics, except for the belief that Marines did not know how to dig in when occupying a defensive position, such as Con Thien in 1967. Not all the remarks were so charitable, as he recounted some years later at the Basic School:

Sometimes they made disparaging remarks about our rather casual approach to logistics and communications and these rather ancillary supporting activities. They weren't quite sure that we were up to speed in these regards. . . . I don't think they gave us credit for having too many smarts. They had a feeling that we liked to put our head down and go up the middle rather than get the least bit fancy. I can remember one day a senior officer of the Army came back [after] he'd visited a Marine battalion. He said to me, "John, you know, I met a real intelligent battalion commander up there. Real unusual guy." Now, I wasn't sure that . . . [of the Marine's] two characteristics—intelligent and unusual—whether the one followed the other.¹

Some of the other 1967 Marine MACV Staff members were: Colonel James C. Stanfield, chief of the Plans and Requirements Division (J-4); Colonel William L. Traynor, the COC air operations officer; and Colonel Joseph C. Fegan, Jr., who served as General Chaisson's deputy director of the COC. Colonel Kirby B. Vick was the deputy director of the Doctrine and Analysis Branch (J-34) until March, when his relief, Colonel David D. Rickabaugh, arrived.

Many controversial issues confronted the Marines assigned to MACV. These involved doctrinal and policy matters of direct interest to other commands, such as FMFPac, Seventh Fleet, and III MAF and its subordinate units. Marine participation in MACV functions helped in arriving at palatable solutions for many of the problems which developed during the year.

The MACV viewpoint, of necessity, covered a broader range than that of the respective corps commands. MACV maintained a fine balance between the attitudes of the U.S. participants, as well as those of Vietnamese and allied staffs. Typical of the issues which confronted MACV in 1967 was the structuring of U.S. Army participation in I Corps. The provision of Task Force Oregon represented only the beginning of the northward move of Army troops. The fact that the displacement of each unit to I Corps meant that another corps area faced a force reduction, or a postponement of force buildup, remained

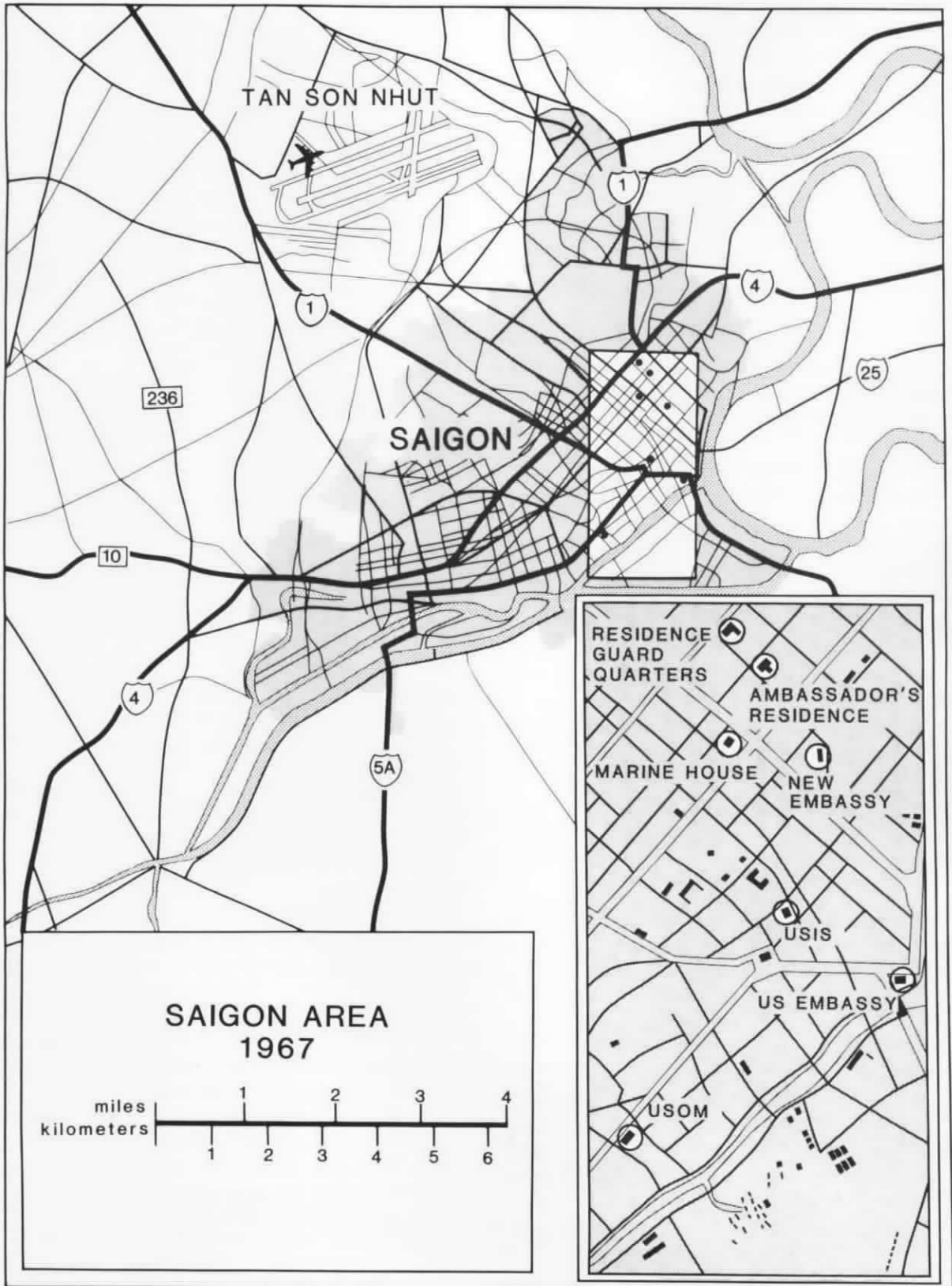
a constant staff annoyance throughout the year. General Westmoreland's continuing concern about Communist use of the A Shau valley and the protection of the remote cities of Kontum and Pleiku was another worrisome matter. The enemy rocket attacks against Da Nang posed still another dilemma. If enemy rockets could hit Da Nang, they also could hit Bien Hoa and, for that matter, Saigon. Another issue was the "barrier," or the "McNamara Line" along the DMZ. Even with the accelerated troop buildup in I Corps, the number of troops required to man, much less build, the unpopular barrier served as a continuing source of irritation. Added to this, the question arose of what to do with the left flank of the proposed barrier, an area comprising all of western Quang Tri Province. In III Corps a new threat developed. Even though Operations Cedar Falls and Junction City had badly mauled Communist formations in the "Iron Triangle" northwest of Saigon, at least three enemy divisions threatened Long Binh and Bien Hoa. To the south in IV Corps, U.S. riverine operations were expanding, but again the I Corps troop drain reduced the effectiveness of this tactical innovation.

An entirely different and equally perplexing conflict was the dispute between Marine and Air Force fire restrictions in the DMZ. The Air Force contended that it should be responsible for all territory north of the Ben Hai River, but Marine staffs demanded to be allowed to fire to the maximum range of their attached 175mm guns in order to silence North Vietnamese artillery. An interim decision limiting Marine fires to the northern boundary of the DMZ and placing Air Force control north of the same boundary, satisfied neither service, and the issue remained in contention for the rest of the year.

The year 1967 was filled with innumerable perplexing situations for the MACV staff. American troop strength increased from 385,000 to 486,000, but Communist activity also intensified. In August, the MACV Headquarters moved from downtown Saigon to a new complex at Tan Son Nhut Airbase on the outskirts of the city. The improved facilities did not diminish the number of problems, but they did improve the staffs' working conditions. The coming year proved that the move occurred none too soon.

The Embassy Guard

The year 1967 brought on expansion of the Marine Security Guard Detachment (MSGD) at the



American Embassy in Saigon. The detachment of Marines, one officer and 67 enlisted men at the beginning of the year, came under the administrative control of Company C, Marine Security Guard Battalion, headquartered at the U.S. Embassy in Manila. The parent battalion, established in February 1967, was the Marine Security Guard Battalion (State Department) located at Headquarters, Marine Corps. The Saigon detachment's chain of command consisted of one of the longest small unit command links in the world, more than 650 miles from Saigon to Manila and over 9,000 miles to battalion headquarters in Washington. At the beginning of the year, First Lieutenant Philip E. Tucker commanded the Saigon detachment; his deputy, and the only staff noncommissioned officer, was Staff Sergeant Gary G. Stoces.

The Marines assigned to the Embassy protected American lives and property within the Embassy and its associated U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and U.S. Information Service (USIS) buildings. The guard consisted of an administrative section and a watch section. The watch section broke down into three separate units: a Guard Section, charged with protection of the Embassy, USAID, and USIS compounds; an Ambassador's Residency Guard; and the Ambassador's Personal Security Unit, the bodyguard of the Honorable Henry Cabot Lodge and his wife. The Embassy Security Officer, Mr. Robert A. England, exercised operational control of the detachment through First Lieutenant Tucker. The Embassy Marines had no connection with Marines elsewhere in Vietnam.

Weapons and radio equipment for the Marines came from the U.S. Department of State. The detachment's highly sophisticated radio net consisted of extremely reliable fixed and portable units which linked guard posts, vehicles, the detachment office, and the security offices. The standard weapon for the embassy guard was the Smith and Wesson .38-caliber, 4-inch barrel revolver. However, the Residency Guard carried the 2-inch barrel Smith and Wesson .38, while the Personal Security Unit used the Colt "Python," a .357-caliber, magnum revolver. Both the Residency and the Personal Security Units had 9mm Beretta sub-machine guns, which they carried in unobtrusive attache cases. A 1966 test of some of the world's available sub-machine guns resulted in the selection of the Beretta because of its

accuracy, reliability, and light weight.* Backing up the arsenal of hand guns, each internal post possessed 12-gauge Remington Shotguns, loaded with 00 buckshot shells.

One major problem encountered by the officer in charge during 1967 was that his command expanded so rapidly that he and his one staff NCO were hard put to exercise adequate control. As a result, sergeants supervised watch sections of as many as 30 Marines, located at different posts in a potentially insecure city. This situation ceased only after Captain Robert J. O'Brien became OIC of the detachment in April and Gunnery Sergeant Alexander Morrison arrived in February.

The security guard faced an additional difficulty during the construction of a new embassy facility. During the construction period, the Marines guarded the site on a 24-hour basis and, because of security considerations, monitored the workers on the job. The Marine guard requirements constantly changed at the new building site and the contractors did not finish the new complex until the fall.

The year 1967 passed without any significant test of the Saigon MSG's mission capability. The events of February 1968 justified the long and tedious hours devoted to drills, alerts, passive defense measures, and tests of the security system.

The Advisors

Major operations such as Cedar Falls and Junction City in III Corps, the Prairie series, the Hickory sweeps, and the protracted defenses of Con Thien and Khe Sanh in I Corps served as focal points for the year 1967. Because of the tactful and often delicate nature of their missions, American advisors often found their activities in Vietnam overshadowed by these more dramatic events. The advisors' role in Vietnam, however, included every aspect of the conflict.

Following the signature of the Geneva Accords on 20 July 1954, the South Vietnamese Government requested U.S. military aid. The United States granted the request and established the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Vietnam. In February 1955, MAAG Vietnam's mission expanded to include the organization and training of the Viet-

*The weapons tested included the Thompson SMG (.45 caliber), the Swedish K, the Israeli Uzi, and the Beretta. LtCol Philip E. Tucker, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981) (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

namese forces. Continued growth of the MAAG led to the formation of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV) in February 1962 to direct the expanding effort. By the end of 1962, MACV personnel strength reached 11,000. As the level of combat increased, MACV grew accordingly, and during 1967 General Westmoreland, recognizing the value of the advisory program, requested the addition of 3,100 advisory personnel. By 31 December 1967, 7,038 U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine advisors served in the field with their Vietnamese counterparts; 76 were Marines.

Marine advisors fell into two categories. The largest contingent, 40 officers and enlisted men, served as members of the 845-man USMACV I Corps Field Advisory Element. The Naval Advisory Group (NAG) carried the other Marine advisors on its rolls. NAG Marines operated with two separate advisory components: The Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ) and the Marine Advisory Unit (MAU). The Rung Sat Special Zone was a small, joint Navy-Marine advisory unit, while the Marine Advisory Unit was directed to the growing Vietnamese Marine Corps.

I Corps Advisors

Marine advisors assigned to I Corps came under the control of the Army Advisory I Corps Headquarters, located at Da Nang, and commanded by Colonel Archelaus L. Hamblen, USA. Colonel Hamblen reported to the senior advisor; I Corps, Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt, who, in addition to commanding III MAF, wore the advisory "hat" in the Corps area.

The Marine advisors in I Corps, 20 officers and 20 enlisted men, spread throughout the entire I CTZ, but most of them concentrated in the 1st ARVN Division while the rest served with the 2d ARVN Division and the 51st ARVN Regiment. The I Corps advisory teams contained U.S. Marine and Army and Australian personnel.³

One of the major accomplishments of the Army-Marine advisory teams with the 1st ARVN Division involved the improvement of the division's firepower. During September 1967, the 1st ARVN Division took over a sector of the DMZ defenses, and to strengthen its defensive capabilities, the division received 106mm recoilless rifles and M-60 machine guns. Its mortar allocations increased, and late in the year the entire division was reequipped with M-16 rifles.



Photo courtesy of LtCol James R. Davis
Marine Capt James R. Davis (second from right), the senior advisor to a battalion of the 1st ARVN Infantry Division, and his assistants, pose with the battalion's commander (center). Comprising the team are a Marine lieutenant, an Australian warrant officer, Capt Davis, and an Army sergeant first class.

Five major ARVN actions during 1967 in I Corps demonstrated increased South Vietnamese unit combat effectiveness, the goal of the advisory effort. In February, 2d ARVN Division battalions engaged elements of the 1st VC and NVA Regiments in Quang Ngai Province, killing 813 enemy. To the north, 1st ARVN Division regulars accounted for 392 NVA killed during May as they worked with the 3d Marine Division during Operation Lam Son 54/Hickory.

Lam Son 54 provided an excellent example of the rigors experienced by advisors assigned to I Corps. On the night of 20 May 1967, Marine First Lieutenant William M. Grammar, senior advisor to the 3d Battalion, 1st Regiment, 1st ARVN Division, was with the battalion command group. Suddenly a large North Vietnamese force lunged out of the darkness, completely overrunning the group. During the confused action which followed, enemy fire hit one of Grammar's assistants. Grammar tried to carry him to safety, but the wounded American refused, saying that he would stay behind and pro-



3d MarDiv ComdC, April 1967

Marine Capt Roger E. Knapper, an advisor to the 1st ARVN Infantry Division, inspects a well-constructed bunker at one of the division's bases in April 1967.

vide covering fire. Lieutenant Grammar, with the rest of his team, fought his way through the encircling enemy to the relative safety of a nearby village. There, an enemy search party discovered them. Grammar, trying to draw the Communists away from his group of survivors, broke into the open and ran into an open field. His efforts failed and the enemy force captured him.

Meanwhile, the 4th Battalion of the 1st ARVN Regiment received orders to go to the assistance of the survivors of the 3d Battalion. By 0600 the 4th made contact with the same enemy unit that had overrun the 3d Battalion. The battle raged all morning; close air support and artillery helped the 4th Battalion to drive the North Vietnamese from their original positions. Senior battalion advisor, Marine Captain James R. Davis, directed the supporting arms effort. At 1100, the 4th Battalion located the main enemy force near a church. The South Vietnamese launched a determined assault against the enemy position at 1300 and, despite heavy NVA automatic weapons fire and B-40 rockets, the battalion carried the Communist position. The NVA

unit broke off the engagement. The 4th Battalion consolidated the church position, where they found the body of First Lieutenant Grammar. His captors had killed him before they fled.*

Later in the year, during July, the 1st ARVN Division conducted a sweep operation, Lam Son 87, north of Hue. During the operation, the division shattered the *802d VC Battalion*. The final enemy body count reached 252. The next month, in Quang Nam Province, units from the independent 51st ARVN Regiment tracked down a battalion of the *21st NVA Regiment*, and killed 197. Later in the fall, during Lam Son 138 east of Quang Tri City, a 1st ARVN Division battalion smashed another NVA battalion. At the end of the day-long battle, a total of 107 North Vietnamese bodies covered the field. Marine advisors participated in all of these actions. In I Corps during 1967, South Vietnamese large-unit actions killed more than 8,000 enemy troops, as compared to 5,271 in 1966. The advisors were accomplishing their mission.

The Rung Sat Special Zone

Since the beginning of Vietnamese history, the *Rung Sat*, literally "forest of assassins," represented a source of vexation to the rulers of Cochin China. The Rung Sat is a dense mangrove swamp covering the 400 square miles separating Saigon from the sea. Saigon's main waterway to the South China Sea, the Long Tau River, meanders through the tangle of the Rung Sat. The area served as the hideout of countless pirates and other fugitives in the past and remained ideally suited for the Viet Minh and later the Viet Cong. The only way to move in the Rung Sat is by small, shallow draft boat, and its tidal waterways challenged navigation. Only long term residents of the Rung Sat knew its secrets, and the Viet Cong were long term residents. The primary VC threat from the Rung Sat was the possibility of sinking large shipping in the Long Tau, thereby blocking the Saigon port. The VC attempted this many times and forced the South Vietnamese into an extended "cat and mouse" game of finding and expelling the Communists from their sanctuary.

As one solution to the threat posed by the Viet Cong presence in the Rung Sat, the South Vietnamese Government designated the region as a

*Lieutenant Grammar received a posthumous Silver Star Medal for this action. LtCol James R. Davis, Comments on draft ms, 14May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

special tactical operational area, thus the designation Rung Sat Special Zone. As in all other arenas of conflict in Vietnam, American advisors served there. By 1967 the RSSZ Advisory Team consisted of two Marine officers, one Navy officer, three enlisted Marines, and two sailors. The team had its headquarters at Nha Be, seven miles south of Saigon, on the west bank of the Long Tau River. The base provided an ideal operational site since it lay at the junction of the Long Tau and the Soi Rap River, the latter forming the southern boundary of the RSSZ. Boats from Nha Be could reach the entire perimeter of the swamp.

The RSSZ advisors faced multiple duties. As the resident experts, they coordinated all efforts to force the Communists out of the swamp. Initially, they worked with a meager Vietnamese force consisting only of local RF and PF units. As the year progressed the unit's advisory responsibilities increased as the South Vietnamese directed larger formations and more sophisticated equipment against the enemy in the zone. During the year, the United States improved the Nha Be base to support U.S. Navy river patrol boats, minesweepers, landing craft, and the invaluable Navy Sea Wolf helicopter fire teams. On 28 February 1967, the U.S. Navy established the Riverine Assault Force (TF 117), which represented the Navy element of a new tactical organization, the Mekong Delta Mobile Assault Force. This force made its combat debut in a joint operation with the 9th U.S. Division in the Rung Sat during March. Following this penetration, operations in the Rung Sat increased in tempo and scale through the summer and fall.

The Communists responded to the increased allied efforts. They shelled Nha Be twice during August, and during the first attack on 3 August, the Communists wounded 24 men. Enemy attacks against shipping continued. On 16 March the Communists hit the SS *Conqueror* with six 75mm recoilless rifle rounds as it sailed up the Long Tau. On 18 November they hit the SS *Buchanan* 19 times. On 22 December, a mine exploded under the SS *Seatrain Texas* while it lay at anchor near Nha Be.

The *Buchanan* shelling touched off a reaction which is an excellent illustration of advisory activity in the Rung Sat. At the time of the incident, Marine Captain Clifford R. Dunning served as the RSSZ advisor to a specially formed Vietnamese commando/intelligence unit. The unit quickly planned an operation that sent a reaction force in three

helicopters after the VC gunners. The helicopters could not land, which forced Dunning and his unit to jump into the swamp from the hovering helicopters from a height of about 12 feet. About 200 meters from the insert point, the reaction force caught up with the Viet Cong. After a sharp firefight, the enemy broke and ran, leaving behind two 75mm recoilless rifles. An air strike intercepted the fleeing VC. One enemy charged out of the swamp toward Captain Dunning. Dunning shot him. Shortly thereafter, the air strike ended and the surviving VC regrouped and counterattacked the Vietnamese commando party. Dunning's unit stopped the VC charge. Another heavy firefight developed, and once more the South Vietnamese attacked. While the South Vietnamese drove the VC back, a smoke grenade dropped from a friendly helicopter injured Dunning. Once more the Viet Cong withdrew and Dunning and his men established a night position. They counted 16 VC bodies on the battlefield. In addition, the capture of the two recoilless rifles deprived the VC of their best antishipping weapons.*

Once inside the dank, smelly confines of the swamp, the rest of Viet Nam seemed as remote as another world. The Rung Sat Advisors fought a very personal, almost private, war in the slime and heat of the Forest of Assassins.

The Marine Advisory Unit

The Marine Advisory Unit adapted its size according to the needs of the expanding Vietnamese Marine Corps (VNMC). Starting as a single battalion in 1955, by the spring of 1967 the Vietnamese Marine Corps had grown to a strength of six infantry battalions, an artillery battalion, and supporting elements. The advisory unit expanded from one officer in 1955 to 25 Marine officers, one Navy officer, and five enlisted Marines by January 1967.

At the beginning of the year, Colonel Nels E. Anderson served as the senior Marine advisor. He assigned teams of two officers, usually a major and a captain, to each battalion, while other members of the group served as technical advisors or performed the diverse administrative functions of the MAG. When the Vietnamese Marines deployed in brigade or task force formations, normally two infantry bat-

*For his actions on 18 November 1967, Captain Dunning received the Silver Star Medal.

talions and an artillery battery, an additional pair of advisors went with the force headquarters.

Both the Vietnamese Marine Brigade and the Airborne Brigade operated as the national strategic reserve. This designation was, however, a misnomer; the so-called strategic reserve seldom sat uncommitted. The units engaged in combat operations more than 80 percent of the year. The role of the Marines resembled that of a theater reserve, but the emphasis was on rotational commitment, rather than retention as a static reserve element.

All but one of the VNMC battalions had their home base on the outskirts of Saigon. The one exception was the 4th, which operated from Vung Tau, located on the sea 60 kilometers southeast of Saigon. For this reason, when a Marine battalion began a scheduled rehabilitation, it usually returned to Saigon and assumed duties in either the Capital Military District, the geographic area including and surrounding Saigon, or the Rung Sat Special Zone, (RSSZ), which also lay near the battalions' base camps.

The strategic role and high commitment rate caused the officers and men of the Marine Advisory Group to see as much, if not more, of Vietnam during their respective 12-month tours than any other group of Americans. The familiar Vietnamese verb, "Di!" (Go!), assumed a special meaning to the advisors. Not only did it raise the immediate question of where, but experience soon taught the unwary that "Di!" could mean "We're going!" for weeks—or possibly months. For example, during 1967, the 1st Battalion remained in the field in Binh Dinh Province for 117 days, from 14 July until 8 November.

Vietnamese Marine operations during 1967 fell into three general categories: security operations in both the Capital Military District and the Rung Sat Special Zone, a year-long campaign against the well-entrenched Viet Cong in Binh Dinh Province in II CTZ, and search and destroy sweeps in III and IV Corps.

One exception occurred with Operation Song Than/Deckhouse V, a joint U.S. Marine-Vietnamese Marine effort. The first large-scale USMC/VNMC amphibious operation, Song Than/Deckhouse V went after VC elements reported active in the coastal regions of Kien Hoa Province. Intelligence officers reported the Communist units there included elements of the *516th*, *518th*, and *261st VC Battalions*.

The landing force of Vietnamese Marines came from VNMC Brigade Force Bravo, consisting of the 3d, 4th, and part of the 6th Battalion, reinforced by Battery C of the VNMC Artillery Battalion. The American force came from the Special Landing Force (SLF), then consisting of BLT 1/9 and HMM-362.

Colonel Anderson recalled the problems he encountered in coordinating the command relationships of this operation:

When I learned that Deckhouse V was to be conducted in Kien Hoa Province, I seized upon the opportunity to get the Vietnamese Marines involved at last in an amphibious operation, which, after all, was supposed to be their primary mission. I knew this would involve certain risks because none of the Vietnamese Marines had had any training whatsoever in this, the most complex of all military operations. One plus factor, however, was that the field-rank officers that were to participate were graduates of Amphibious Warfare School at Quantico, and several junior officers and senior N.C.O.s had attended school at Landing Force Training Command, Pacific.

The first thing I did was to discuss the operation with the Commandant, Lieutenant General Le Nguyen Khang, at his headquarters at Bien Hoa. (Bien Hoa was the headquarters of the III Corps of which General Khang was commander at this time.) Khang, also a graduate of AWS was very enthusiastic when told about the operation. Among other things discussed were the command relations in amphibious operations as established by existing doctrine. He said he understood perfectly and that he would place the Vietnamese Marine units to be in Deckhouse V under the *command* of the Amphibious Task Force Commander. This of course would be a departure from command relationships then existing between U.S. and South Vietnamese Forces.

After embarkation, I learned that the Vietnamese Joint General Staff had disapproved of the command relationships agreed to by General Khang and that the old "cooperation and coordination" system would be in effect. I never could see the logic for such arrangement, and in my opinion the lack of unity of command between the U.S. and Vietnamese forces was a glaring weakness in the entire war.⁴

Song Than/Deckhouse V got off to a bad start. A compromise of the operation occurred even before the Vietnamese Marines embarked. Hurried planning, unclear command structures, faulty radio nets, and poor liaison compounded operational problems. Even the elements turned against the Marines. Rough seas postponed the landing for one day, and after returning to Vung Tau for ship-to-ship transfers, the Marines devised a new landing plan. The new plan called for helilifting most of the assault force. By this time, as many as 40 percent of the Vietnamese Marines had succumbed to seasickness. The landing on 7 January did not

brighten their spirits. Major Donald E. Wood, the operations and training advisor, reported:

Following the assault across Red Beach . . . Brigade Force Bravo was informed by local inhabitants in the area that VC elements had been alerted regarding the scheduled date and location of the operation three weeks prior to 1 January. The result was that very light contact was gained with VC by assault units.⁵

Song Than/Deckhouse V ended on 15-16 January as Brigade Force Bravo went through the tedious process of reloading from the shallow beaches of Kien Hoa and unloading again at Vung Tau. The week in the recently harvested rice fields and vexing mangrove swamps of the Mekong Delta resulted in five dead VC and the capture of 25 suspects, 10 of whom proved to be Viet Cong. These were lackluster results for an operation conducted by 1,750 Vietnamese Marines. One 4th Battalion Marine drowned and seven other troops suffered accidental wounds. The "lessons learned" were manifold; however Song Than/Deckhouse V represented the last operation of its type. MACV restricted the SLF to I CTZ and the Vietnamese Marines reverted to their previous landlocked role.*

During the year four Vietnamese Marine battalions participated in forays into the foreboding swamps of the Rung Sat:

*See Chapter 11 for the SLF account of Deckhouse V.

1st Battalion	2-8 February
4th Battalion	11 March-12 April
1st Battalion	11 April-12 May
6th Battalion	12 May-21 July
3d Battalion	12 August-15 September

The 6th Battalion senior advisor's report of the 12 May-21 July occupation provides an insight into the conditions in the Rung Sat. Major Robert L. Fischer reported:

The tidal range in the TAOR is 12 feet At low tide many small streams are dry and larger rivers and streams present high, steep banks. The rapid currents during filling and receding tides make small streams dangerous for troop crossing and difficult for maneuverability of small boats. At high tide it is virtually impossible to move rapidly by foot Ambushers placed along streams often found themselves waist deep in water for at least half of the ambush period.⁶

Another frustration of Rung Sat duty stemmed from the Viet Cong's ability to recognize Marine intentions, which made decisive engagements virtually impossible. Major Fischer's report revealed some of the simple but effective VC measures:

The Viet Cong utilize a simple system of early warning and signal towers. Near each active camp located in the TAOR was a tree platform or tower. On ten occasions VC were observed either in the tower or dropping from it and running into the nearest dense area. These towers are located across the Rung Sat and undoubtedly serve to signal elements crossing the Rung Sat between adjacent

A unit of Vietnamese wades ashore from a landing craft in a flooded part of the Mekong Delta during the joint Operation Deckhouse V in the Delta region in January.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A190966



provinces, as well as providing early warning and unit massing capability.⁷

Simply stated, Rung Sat duty remained hot, wet, filthy, frustrating, and dangerous. Myriad bugs, gnats, mosquitoes, and ants added to the grim atmosphere of the swamp. In spite of these obstacles, the five VNMC Rung Sat battalion-size operations in 1967 cost the Viet Cong 30 killed at a price of four Marines killed and 21 wounded.

Action In Binh Dinh Province

An area of major VNMC action in 1967 was Binh Dinh Province in northern II CTZ. After operating there since mid-1964, all Vietnamese Marines became familiar with the beautiful Bong Son plain and the seemingly endless ridge lines that extend westward to Laos. In 1965, the first U.S. ground forces moved into II Corps. The 1st U. S. Cavalry Division (Airmobile) went to An Khe with the mission of keeping Route 19 open between Pleiku and Qui Nhon. Joint U.S./RVN operations started shortly after the arrival of the "1st Cav."

For the Vietnamese Marines, operations in Binh Dinh proved different from those in III and IV CTZs to the south. The dense forest of the uncultivated areas, the concentration of the population in a narrow coastal strip, cooler weather, long periods of morning fog, and much more solid land forms, all contributed to tactical variations. Generally, the Viet Cong in Binh Dinh represented a different breed. Dominated by the Viet Minh in the Fifties, the province remained notorious for its solid Communist base. The Binh Dinh Cong were "hard core" in every sense of the term.

The terrain in Binh Dinh supports cultivation only in the coastal regions, hence the population centers there. The rest of the province, all forested, served as an enormous VC sanctuary. Only woodcutters and scattered Montagnards roamed the hinterlands; the Communists moved at will under the vast forest canopy. Operating from the spacious inland sanctuary, the VC had the enviable position of operating on interior lines against the densely populated coastal region.

The GVN forces, on the other hand, sought to protect vulnerable Routes 1 and 19, as well as the railroad and the Bong Son Airfield, all in lowland regions, except for the western end of Route 19. Similarly, most of the population requiring protection concentrated in these same lowlands. The con-

centrated population made government control somewhat easier, but the local citizens remained apathetic; the Communists long dominance made their influence strong.

Operationally, the terrain proved suitable for a different type of guerrilla warfare, unlike that experienced in the swamps and delta region in southern South Vietnam. In Binh Dinh Province the ground is hard, even during the rainy season. Cover and concealment is excellent. Seasonal, dense morning fog neutralizes the effect of air superiority. These factors provided the Communists with excellent mobility and they moved without fear of detection. Consequently, their vast natural hiding place, the inland forests, allowed the Viet Cong to operate more audaciously than elsewhere in the country.

One commodity, food, remained in short supply in Binh Dinh Province. The main cultivated areas lay along Route 1. In 1967, the government still controlled the food producing areas and the Communists wanted them. That brought the Vietnamese Marines and 1st U.S. Cavalry Division to northern II Corps.

The first major VNMC action in II CTZ during 1967 was Operation Pershing/Song Than 9, a joint operation with the 1st Cavalry Division near Bong Son. Song Than 9 was a satisfactory operation. During the period 14-22 February Brigade Force Bravo, the 2d and 3d Battalions, killed 54 Viet Cong. In return, the enemy killed three Marines and wounded 27. Remaining in the Bong Son area, the brigade force spent the rest of February, all of March, and the first part of April conducting sweep operations. They coordinated these operations with the 1st Cavalry Division's operations in adjacent areas, but the Marine sweeps remained separate operations.

On 18-19 April, Brigade Force Alpha flew to English Airfield at Bong Son where it relieved Brigade Force Bravo. On the 22nd, Force Alpha began search and destroy/pacification of a TAOR including Tam Quan on the north, Bong Son to the south, the portion of Route 1 connecting the two towns, with the South China Sea serving as the eastern boundary. Elsewhere in II CTZ, Brigade Force Bravo, under the direction of the 22d ARVN Division, conducted two major operations from 18 March through 18 April. Again, these actions paralleled but remained separate from 1st Cavalry Division operations. Brigade Force Alpha stayed in the Bong Son region until July. At the conclusion of Operation Bac Thien 817 on 12 July, Brigade Force

Alpha resumed patrolling of its TAOR until relieved by Brigade Force Bravo on the 26th. The latter unit started Operation Song Than 14 the next day. Brigade Force Alpha left II Corps in late July; Force Bravo remained until 6 November. The two units again switched places and Force Alpha remained there until well into 1968.

Vietnamese Marine operations in II CTZ during 1967 showed impressive results. Communist losses totaled 202 killed and 282 captured. Marine losses for the year's II CTZ campaign numbered 49 killed and 215 wounded.

Action in the South

Other than periodic assignments to the Rung Sat, security operations around Saigon in the Capital Military District, and rotations to II CTZ, the rest of the Vietnamese Marines' 1967 operations took place in the III and IV Corps Tactical Zones; six occurred in the former and five in the latter.

From 22 February through 11 March, Brigade Force Alpha, consisting of the reinforced 1st and 5th Battalions took part in Operation Junction City, a search and destroy operation with the 25th U.S. Infantry Division. Force Alpha became the only Vietnamese unit to participate in the largest allied operation since the beginning of the war. Marine contact was very light, but the net results of the joint operation included the seizure of more than 364 tons of rice and significant damage to enemy installations in the Communists' War Zone C. This zone lay in a triangular territory formed by Route 13, the Cambodian border, and a line connecting Ben Cat with Tay Ninh. Vietnamese Marine-U. S. relations improved further when the brigade force commander, Colonel Bui The Lan, requested that his force be granted a more aggressive role in the 25th Division's scheme of operations. The Americans granted the request and Brigade Force Alpha avoided acting as a blocking force.

In May, Brigade Force Bravo, then consisting of the reinforced 1st and 5th Battalions moved from Saigon to Vi Tanh, 45 kilometers southwest of Can Tho in IV CTZ. There, under 21st ARVN Division control, the Marine force participated in the uneventful Operation Dan Chi 287/C. On 28 May, Force Bravo left its attached artillery behind and undertook a riverine assault. This operation, Long Phi 999/N, proved unproductive and the Marine elements became the 9th ARVN Division reserve at Vinh Long.

On 7 June, Brigade Force Bravo moved to Tan

Uyen village, 13 kilometers north of Bien Hoa in III CTZ where it came under the direct control of III Corps Headquarters. On 20 June the 1st Marine Battalion left to participate with the 1st U.S. Infantry Division in Operation Billings, north of Tan Uyen. The net result of these actions for the Marines included the loss of nine killed, 34 wounded. Among the wounded was the 1st Battalion's assistant advisor, Captain Manfred E. Schwarz. Communist losses were 14 killed and one captured. Vietnamese Marine operations in III and IV Corps got off to a slow start in 1967.

When Operation Billings ended on 9 July, Brigade Force Bravo moved from Tan Uyen to neighboring Phuoc Tuy Province. There, with the 9th U.S. Infantry Division, the 1st Australian Task Force, and the 43d ARVN Regiment, Force Bravo, now consisting of the 2d and 3d Marine Battalions, joined Operation Paddington. The mission involved locating and destroying the *274th VC Regiment*. The Marines opened their phase of the operation at 0900 on 10 July with a helicopter landing in their respective zones of action. Contact continued light throughout the 10th and 11th, but at 0900 on 12 July, elements of the 3d Battalion made contact with what appeared to be an enemy battalion. Heavy fighting continued until 1600 when the VC broke off the engagement. For the next three days the Marines conducted search operations but made no contact. Finally, on the 15th, Brigade Force Bravo regrouped at Xuan Loc and motored back to its base camp at Thu Duc outside Saigon. Brigade Force Bravo reported 43 Communists dead as the result of Paddington; 11 Marines died and 31 suffered wounds during the operation.

One of the most serious problems faced by advisors in the field revolved around establishing the precise status of the advisor vis-a-vis his counterpart. Often the Americans gave advice which their Vietnamese counterparts ignored. Third parties often compounded this situation. Major Charles E. Parker, senior advisor with Brigade Force Bravo during Operation Paddington, summed up the problem when he stated:

On two occasions coordination with U.S. units consisted of the [American] unit commanding officer simply stating his intentions to the nearest USMC advisor, then leaving without waiting for a discussion with the Task Force Commander. This abruptness, however, was probably more a result of late receipt of orders rather than any obstinacy on the part of the U.S. command. As it turned out,

liaison/coordination problems were solved before dangerous situations developed.

Major Parker continued:

The U.S. Army commanders and their staffs are not aware of the organization and functions of U.S. Marine advisors. They work on the assumption that we operate with teams similar to U.S. Army advisory teams (which were larger). They also seem to forget that USMC advisors are just what the term implies, advisors, not commanders.⁸

During the last week in July, the 3d Battalion participated in Operation Concordia VII with the 2d Brigade, 9th U.S. Infantry Division. The operation produced no contacts or casualties, but the riverine landing in Long An Province proved that the Vietnamese Marines were prepared for this type of maneuver.

Intelligence sources reported a concentration of elements of at least four VC battalions in Dinh Tuong Province during late July. Accordingly, a quickly planned operation, Coronado II/Song Than 63/67 began under the control of the 9th U.S. Infantry Division. Other units assigned to Coronado II included 1st Brigade, 25th U.S. Infantry Division; 11th Army Armored Cavalry Regiment; and the ARVN 44th and 52d Ranger Battalions. Marine participation consisted of Task Force Alpha made up of the 3d and 4th Marine Battalions and Battery B from the Marine Artillery Battalion.

The first phase of Coronado II started on 30 July. Helicopters put the 3d Battalion into a landing zone north of the Mekong River. It was a bad zone. Immediately upon landing the battalion found itself in trouble. The Viet Cong occupied the heavily fortified area north of the LZ in force. The 3d Battalion could not move. To help, the 4th Battalion went by helicopters into a second LZ north of the 3d Battalion's position. The 4th Battalion moved to put pressure on the Viet Cong positions which now lay between the two Marine battalions. A prisoner revealed that elements of the veteran *263d* and *514th VC Battalions* faced the Marines. The battle raged all day in the jungle-canopied terrain as gunships, air strikes, and artillery pounded the well-entrenched Communists. At dusk the VC tried to break out, but the 3d and 4th Battalions held. Fire fights continued all night.

Captain Jerry I. Simpson, senior advisor to the 3d Battalion, spent the entire day and most of the night directing supporting arms against the tough enemy position. Enemy mortar rounds, rockets, and small

arms fire continued to hold back the Marines' advance. Suddenly, at 0500 on the 31st, a VC force of about two companies attempted a mass break-out. Their path led them directly to the 3d Battalion command post located partly in a small hut. In the confused fighting which followed, the VC overran the CP, but Captain Simpson and surviving Marines drove the VC back through the CP toward the VC's original positions. After that, the fighting stopped abruptly. The remaining Viet Cong managed to slip away in the jungle. At 1300, helicopters extracted the 3d Battalion and returned it to Dong Tam. The 4th Battalion continued sweep operations until 1500 the next day when it too withdrew to Dong Tam. On 1 August the 5th Battalion relieved the 3d and the latter moved by transport aircraft to Thu Duc.

Phase II proved uneventful and Vietnamese participation in Coronado II ended on 4-5 August. The 4th and 5th Battalions returned to their Thu Duc bases. The sharp action of 30-31 July hurt the VC in Dinh Tuong Province. The Marines killed 108 and captured six. Total South Vietnamese losses for the operation numbered 44 killed and 115 wounded. Of these, one of the dead and seven of the wounded were the result of friendly fires, an accident which provided a bitter lesson in coordination.

Task force Alpha went to the field again on 11 August. Operation Song Than 701-67, a three-phase operation in Bien Hoa Province, dragged on until 21 October. Various battalion combinations under Task Force Alpha permitted the 2d, 4th, 5th, and 6th Battalions to participate, but the results proved disappointing. They killed one VC. Coordination problems plagued the multibattalion, joint U.S./Vietnamese sweep. The most tragic error happened on 16 September. A 155mm round, fired from an improperly laid howitzer scored a direct hit on the 6th Battalion's command post and killed three Marines and wounded 11.

Credit for the most successful operational series in 1967 belongs to the 5th Battalion. During the period 9 November through 22 December, the 5th served as one of three maneuver battalions of the U.S. Mobile Riverine Force. Their operations concentrated in Dinh Tuong, Kien Hoa, and Kien Phong Provinces. The 5th Battalion took part in nine separate actions during this period. The 44 days of riverine operation netted the battalion the impressive total of 186 dead Communists and 32 prisoners, including one VC province chief.

While assigned to the Mobile Riverine Force, the battalion normally stayed in the field for three days of operations, followed by a stand down period of the same duration. Missions generally started with the battalion moving in boats of the River Assault Division to an area of operations. Once in the assigned area, the battalion moved frequently, either by boat or helicopter, depending on the tactical situation.

A classic riverine operation, executed by Major Huong Van Nam's 5th Marine Battalion, started at midnight on 3 December as the Marines embarked on assault ships at Sa Dec. Their mission: destruction of the *267th Main Force* and *502d Local Force VC Battalions*, then located in eastern Kien Phong and western Dinh Tuong Provinces. The force moved down the northern bank of the Mekong and entered the Rach Ruong Canal to make a landing on the west bank of the canal at 0800. The plan called for the Marines to land, move west, and then sweep south back toward the Mekong. Two U.S. Army battalions, one embarked, supported the operation.

The sun came up as the river craft entered the canal. All remained quiet until 0740 when the rear of the boat column came under light small arms fire from the west bank. As the column moved up the canal, heavier fire, including recoilless rifles and B-40 rockets, opened up from positions further north on the west bank. All of the boats returned fire and the South Vietnamese called in the supporting gunships. A Communist B-40 rocket hit one of the ATCs (an armored troop carrying boat), and wounded 18 Marines. The 5th Battalion continued on toward its original landing beaches. Only the end of the column came under enemy attack. The boat formation carrying the 3d Battalion, 47th U.S. Infantry, which followed the 5th Battalion, heard the enemy fire and took advantage of their warning. The 3d Battalion promptly landed on the west bank, south of the first VC firing position.

At 0800 the Communists opened fire on the 5th Battalion again, this time from another west bank position about 2,500 meters north of the last firing site. Obviously, a large VC force occupied the west bank of the Rach Ruong. Enemy B-40 rounds hit six ATCs. Major Nam ordered his battalion to land on the west bank immediately. The 2d and 3d Companies landed near Objective 18, while the 1st, 4th, and Headquarters Companies landed at Blue Beach 1.

The 1st Company became heavily engaged as soon

as it landed, while Headquarters Company and the 4th Company met much lighter opposition. Neither the 2d and 3d Companies, to the north, had any contact. The 4th Company moved 250 meters inland, stopped, and called in air and artillery. Major Nam realized that his left flank units, the 1st and 4th Companies, were engaging the northern portion of the VC formation, by then identified as the *502d Local Force Battalion*. Major Nam ordered the 2d and 3d Companies to retract and land again at Blue Beach 2, move inland, seize objectives 114 and 213, and encircle the Communists. Both companies accomplished the mission; the VC found themselves surrounded. The riverine force boats blocked escape to the east across the canal.

By this time the 4th Company had lost contact, so, on Major Nam's orders, it withdrew to the beach, reembarked, and landed again just south of Blue Beach 1. The VC greeted the company's landing with intense rocket and automatic weapons fire. The guns of the assault craft established fire superiority as the 4th Company Marines scrambled ashore and gained a foothold. The 1st Company closed the ring, moving in from the northwest. Coordinated attacks by both the 1st and 4th Companies slowly rolled up the VC position, as the other companies blocked the rest of the perimeter. Contact was too close to use supporting arms. The Marines destroyed the enemy bunkers systematically, but their progress continued slow because their 57mm recoilless rifle had little effect on the well-constructed Communist bunkers.

The senior battalion advisor, Major Paul L. Carlson, reported final stages of the fight:

By 1600 one major Viet Cong complex remained 600 meters inland and withstood all assaults. Rocket gunships peppered the bunker system. The assaulting units then stormed the bunkers using grenades to destroy the opposition and physically tore the bunkers apart with entrenching tools.⁹

The battle ended by 1630. Throughout the night and the next morning, Viet Cong survivors continued to emerge from hiding places. Some had reverted to the classic VC trick of hiding under water, breathing through hollow reeds. The Marines knew the trick, also.

Enemy casualties during the "Battle of Rach Ruong" totaled 175 Viet Cong killed by the 5th Marine Battalion. They found the bodies of the chief of staff of the *502d Battalion*, one company commander, two platoon commanders, one doctor, and

two newsmen among the dead. The Marines captured 12 more confirmed VC, including a province chief, and picked up an additional 12 suspects before the 5th Battalion withdrew at 1400 on 5 December. Battalion losses amounted to 40 killed and 103 wounded, 34 of whom did not require evacuation.

Elsewhere in the AO, other units accounted for another 91 enemy killed, at the cost of nine American soldiers killed and 89 wounded. While the 5th Marine Battalion was scoring its resounding victory, the 3d Battalion, 47th U.S. Infantry assaulted the VC positions which had fired the opening rounds. The Army assault prevented the Communists from going to the aid of their besieged comrades to the north. The Army action provided a valuable assist, but the Rach Ruong battle remains as one of the finer moments in the brief history of the Vietnamese Marine Corps.

While the 5th Battalion participated in Coronado IX, the 2d Marine Battalion, the major component of Task Force Bravo, engaged in Operation Song Than 808/Buena Vista. Operating with the 199th U.S. Infantry Brigade, TF Bravo joined Buena Vista on 7 December. The search and destroy operation covered portions of Binh Hoa and Binh Duong Provinces. During the 11-day sweep, the Marines discovered the base camp of the *VC Dong Nai Regiment* and the *Binh Duong Provincial Forces*. The Marines suffered light casualties.

The last Vietnamese Marine Operation of 1967 was Task Force Bravo's Operation Song Than 809. Lasting only three days, 29-31 December, Song Than 809 resulted in a 20-hour battle with the *261st* and *263d VC Main Force Battalions* in Dinh Tuong Province in IV CTZ. At this time TF Bravo consisted of the 1st and 2d Marine Battalions, reinforced by Battery B of the Marine Artillery Battalion; control of the operation rested with the 7th ARVN Division.

Helicopters landed both battalions in separate zones during the morning of 29 December. There was no contact. On the 31st the 2d Battalion executed a second helicopter assault. This time the battalion made contact immediately after landing.

Complications came from an unexpected quarter. At 1700 the 7th ARVN Division forward command

post, controlling Song Than 809, shut down operations in anticipation of the New Year's truce. This left TF Bravo in the field and in contact. To make matters worse, the 2d Battalion almost ran out of ammunition and enemy fire drove off a pre-dark helicopter ammunition resupply. As a last recourse, the helicopter crewmen dropped the ammunition during a low pass. Unfortunately, it fell in an open, fire-swept area between the 2d Battalion and the Viet Cong. Senior battalion advisor, Major Jon A. Rindfleisch, and a volunteer squad of Marines raced out into the drop zone, gathered up the scattered containers, and rushed them back to the battalion's lines. The supply kept the 2d Battalion going through the night.*

Meanwhile, to add to the uncertainty of the situation, the 7th ARVN Division released all of its aviation at 1800, again, in anticipation of the New Year's truce. In spite of these disquieting developments, contact continued throughout the night, finally ending at 0530, 1 January when the VC withdrew. First light disclosed 85 VC bodies. The Marines took eight prisoners during the fight and picked up 71 enemy weapons. Task Force Bravo's losses included 28 Marines killed and 83 wounded. This ended the last Vietnamese Marine action of 1967.

During the year 1967, the Vietnamese Marines participated in 24 major combat operations, 15 of which were brigade- or task-force-scale maneuvers. Total VNMC casualties included 201 killed and 707 wounded. The Communists suffered 693 killed and 342 captured from Vietnamese Marine actions. The kill ratio of 3.45:1, though not as impressive as the U.S. Marine 1967 kill ratio of 5.18:1, was a tribute to the courage of the Vietnamese Marines, as well as the dedication of their advisors. The Marine advisors were fortunate during 1967; three suffered wounds but none died. From the advisory viewpoint, 1967 represented a year of investment. The dividends included positive results; the immediate future would affirm the advisors' faith in the abilities of their Vietnamese contemporaries.

*For this and other actions during Song Than 809, Major Rindfleisch received the Silver Star Medal.

CHAPTER 16

The Situation at the End of the Year

*Operational Aspects—Personnel and Logistics—The Outlook for Victory
Enemy Dispositions—The Changed Situation*

Operational Aspects

During 1967, III MAF's concerns increasingly focused north as it shifted the bulk of its Marine units toward the DMZ to counter the continuing threat of a North Vietnamese invasion. This threat forced III MAF to change its top priorities from pacification and counter-guerrilla warfare to fighting a conventional war against regular North Vietnamese infantry units. Enemy intentions followed a similar pattern. Beginning in 1966, Hanoi referred to the conflict as a "regular-force war," with the insurgency playing a secondary role.¹

The MACV commander also recognized the DMZ threat and, in April, reinforced III MAF with the Ar-

my's Task Force Oregon at Chu Lai. General Westmoreland also planned to send the 1st U.S. Cavalry Division (Airmobile) to I Corps where it could employ its high mobility around Khe Sanh as it had in the Central Highlands. He saw the latter move as a preparatory step should Washington authorize a drive into Laos or an amphibious landing just north of the DMZ.²

Construction of the Dye Marker project continued during December, with emphasis on completing Strongpoint A-3. The North Vietnamese responded with mortar and artillery fire. Marine units conducted continuous search and destroy operations around and north of A-3 in an effort to control the high ground and avenues of approach to the construction site.

An Air Force C-123 "Provider" lands on the air strip at Khe Sanh with supplies after Navy Seabees completed resurfacing the monsoon-damaged strip on 1 November 1967.

3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967





3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967

A Marine, identified only as PFC Bola, shows the damage done to his helmet by a near miss from small-arms fire while at the Con Thien combat base.

Enemy units engaged in two types of activity during the final month of the year. In the early weeks of December, the North Vietnamese initiated a series

of limited ground attacks along the DMZ using units as large as companies. Enemy forces also overran and destroyed the Binh Son District Headquarters on 5 December. During the final two weeks of 1967, however, the enemy assumed a more defensive posture, only to sustain heavier casualties because of having to fight at a time and place not of their choosing.

The statistics from III MAF in December provided ample evidence that the enemy was not yet defeated. III MAF conducted 11 large-unit operations during the month. The Marines killed a confirmed total of 1,237 enemy soldiers and listed another 701 as probably killed. Marines also captured 77 prisoners and 362 weapons; however, 96 Marines died in December.

During 1967, U.S. forces under III MAF control killed 25,452 enemy soldiers and listed another 23,363 as probably killed. These enemy losses totaled 14,728 more than in 1966, a reflection of the increased scale of large-unit battles in northern I Corps. These forced the North Vietnamese to feed over 24,000 replacements into their units in I Corps during the year. By comparison, over 3,600 Americans died in I Corps during the same period.

There were bright spots in the picture for III MAF at the end of 1967. During the year, the North Vietnamese had attempted to conquer the northern provinces of South Vietnam only to suffer defeat each time they took the offensive. Meanwhile, the South

Men of the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines stand in a loose formation beside the air strip at Khe Sanh just after arriving in transport aircraft to reinforce the base in December 1967.

3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967



Vietnamese Army, as a whole, grew by 130,000 during the year. Its units in I Corps were at 101.7 percent strength, despite considerable losses due to desertions by former peasants unhappy with assignments far from their home villages and provinces. The arrival of U.S. Army units in I Corps for service under III MAF also eased the Marines' troop density problem.

III MAF had 79 Combined Action Platoons in operation; these killed 259 of the enemy and captured 56 during the second half of the year. Pacification appeared to be regaining the momentum it lost in 1966, which accounted for the increase in ARVN strength and the increasing difficulty faced by the Viet Cong in recruiting new members. Finally, Highway 1, the main north-south artery, was open from the DMZ to the border of Binh Dinh Province.³

Personnel and Logistics

The average strength for III MAF during December was 103,591, which was 4,203 higher than the previous month. Most of these personnel were Marines (72,782), but 27,565 were in U.S. Army units. The U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force contributed 3,161 and 83, respectively.

There were some changes underway in III MAF's force structure as the year ended. III MAF had orders to deactivate its antitank battalions and to activate another company, Company E, for the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, a unit of the 3d Marine Division.

III MAF faced several significant logistics problems in the final month of 1967, primarily from the effects of the northeast monsoon. Channel silting brought on by bad weather and high seas forced the closing of the LST facility at Tan My on 10 December. Cua Viet's LST facility also closed from 7-29 December for the same reason. Further, the rough seas prevented transshipment of materials at Da Nang for seven days. The weather also affected airlift capabilities; for example, high winds limited or curtailed C-123 flight operations for 23 days during December. However, the air strip at Duc Pho opened for C-130 use on 4 December 1967.

The M16A1 rifles continued to provide problems for Marines in Vietnam. A random inspection of rifles issued in the first increment of weapons revealed that a large number had pitted and eroded chambers. III MAF then terminated the issue of the second increment. As of 17 December, a FLC con-



3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967

Men from the 3d Engineer Battalion use a bulldozer at Con Thien in December to push aside some of the monsoon-created mud in an attempt to make it easier for Marines to walk inside the combat base.

tract team had inspected 9,844 rifles and found that 6,603 (67 percent) required replacement. At III MAF's request, Headquarters, Marine Corps initiated action to obtain chromed chambers for installation by June 1968.

Finally, III MAF logisticians were not pleased with a MACV study, published late in the year. The theme of the study was a desire for a downward revision of authorized stock levels with the expectation of reducing construction costs and achieving operating economies. In essence, the study called for fighting a war under peacetime management principles under which stock levels reflected previous usage data. Both III MAF and FMFPac took the position that any reduction in authorized stock levels would impair III MAF's operational capabilities and lower the Marines' readiness for emergencies.

The Outlook for Victory

As the year entered its last quarter, the war appeared to be going well. General Westmoreland, in his often-quoted speech on 21 September at the National Press Club in Washington expressed optimism about the future course of the war. He expressed his belief that the defeats inflicted on the enemy in the



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South Vietnam's Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky meets with LtGen Hoang Xuan Lam, the I Corps commander; LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr., the III MAF commander; and Army MajGen Samuel W. Koster of the Americal Division at Chu Lai on 28 December.

past year, plus the continued growth of the ARVN would permit phasing out U.S. units within about two years. "I am absolutely certain," he said, "that whereas in 1965 the enemy was winning, today he is certainly losing."⁴

Westmoreland's speech coincided with the Johnson Administration's highly publicized "progress" campaign in the fall of 1967. That campaign sought to show that the allies were winning the war in South Vietnam. General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., the Commandant of the Marine Corps, was, however, one of the few officials who did speak out on the problems still remaining. His statements, which received little media attention, reflected the concerns of both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and III MAF over inadequate manpower, particularly in the I Corps area. At a speech in Chicago in September, General Greene said:

In the Marines' area of South Vietnam alone, we have 1,282,000 people inside our security screen. We must double that number. This will take time—and fighting men on the ground.

We have over 2,000 square miles of territory inside the same screen of security. But we need a total of 3,000 square miles.

Again, it will take time—and fighting men on the ground to do this.

I cite these figures just to give you some idea of the problems—in the Marines' area alone.⁵

Enemy Dispositions

The number of regular NVA soldiers in I Corps numbered just over 21,000 at the end of the year. Their distribution was follows:

Quang Tri Province. The major units were the 812th and 90th Regiments of the 324B NVA Division, the 29th and 95th Regiments of the 325C NVA Division, and the 2d Battalion and regimental headquarters of the 9th NVA Regiment. Other forces in the province included the 5th NVA Regiment, the 27th NVA Independent Battalion, and four independent companies. Total: 10,805.

Thua Thien Province. The Northern Front Headquarters, the 5th NVA Regiment, four independent NVA battalions, and four independent companies operated in the province. Total: 3,645.

Quang Nam Province. This area contained the 368B NVA Artillery Regiment, four independent NVA battalions, and four independent NVA companies. Total: 2,940.

Quang Tin Province. Operating in this province were the headquarters and other support units of the 2d NVA Division, the 1st Vietcong Main Force Regi-

ment, the 21st NVA Regiment, the 3d NVA Regiment, three independent NVA battalions, and seven NVA independent companies. Total: 6,075.

Quang Ngai Province. The major units were the headquarters of *Military Region 5*, the 97th Battalion of the 2d Vietcong Main Force Regiment, six independent NVA battalions, and nine independent NVA companies. Total: 3,645.

The Changed Situation

The bright element of the tactical situation picture quickly faded at year's end in the face of mounting evidence of an impending major enemy offensive. General Westmoreland's optimistic speech at the National Press Club in September had been based upon an analysis that indicated the allies were winning the war. Hanoi read the same signs and changed its strategy.

Previously, Hanoi followed a strategy of protracted war; however, late in 1967 captured documents began containing exhortations for enemy units to make a maximum effort politically and militarily to win the war quickly. During the same period, the number of enemy defectors decreased and captured prisoners began speaking of the coming "final victory." Intelligence sources in I Corps indicated the 2d NVA Division was shifting its area of

operations in preparation for an offensive. Other sources reported the 325C NVA Division had moved back to positions near Hill 881 North, while the 304th NVA Division, which listed Dien Bien Phu among its battle honors, had moved from Laos to positions southwest of Khe Sanh.

General Westmoreland analyzed these and similar reports and detected an alteration in enemy strategy. On 20 December, he explained the changed situation in a message to his superiors in Washington. He emphasized the enemy might seek to gain a major military victory somewhere in South Vietnam, or perhaps even seek to gain an apparent position of strength before assenting to negotiations. "In short," wrote Westmoreland, "I believe the enemy has already made a crucial decision to make a maximum effort."⁶

General Westmoreland considered the base at Khe Sanh an obvious target for an enemy offensive and ordered III MAF to conduct a buildup in preparation for a fight for the base.⁷ In the last few days of 1967 he repeatedly advised reporters to expect "an intensified campaign in the coming months." The President echoed these expectations when he told the Australian cabinet about the enemy buildup. "We must try very hard to be ready," said President Johnson. "We face dark days ahead."⁸

Amid the mud, barbed wire, sand-bagged positions, and welter of supplies at the Con Thien combat base, a young Marine stands radio watch as the year 1967 draws to a close.

3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967



