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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with G. F. Squilis
Conducted by Allen B. Richardson
Transcribed by Shannon Geach**

1 Allen Richardson: This interview is being conducted with Captain G. F. Squilis
2 by Gunnery Sergeant Allen B. Richardson at the Marine Corps Schools, Quantico,
3 Virginia. The subject of this interview is MEB Operation Plan 38 Delta, and it is
4 unclassified. Captain, would you state your name, grade, and service number please?

5 G. F. Squilis: G. F. Squilis. Captain. O73955.

6 AR: What were your duty assignments while you were in Vietnam?

7 GS: I was the S-3, the operations officer, of the battalion. That's the 1st
8 Battalion, 3rd Marines.

9 AR: What period did you serve in these billets, and where were you physically
10 located within Vietnam during the period covered, sir?

11 GS: I served at Da Nang, in the vicinity of Da Nang, from the 8th of March '65
12 until the battalion was relieved on 1 September '65. The entire period alternated from
13 security around the airfield out to the 327 complex and then forward to the west of the
14 airfield.

15 AR: Captain, could you give us a little background on MEB Operation Plan 38
16 Delta, sir?

17 GS: The 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, had been the number-one air mount-out unit.
18 This meant that we had to be prepared to be deployed by air. We assumed this
19 responsibility about the 20th of January. This is all period 1965. During this time, of

1 course, we made all the plans, all the contingency plans that would be necessary
2 including the assignment of chinks, personnel to the chinks, and the gathering all of the
3 attachments—which were considerable including an artillery battery, an engineer
4 platoon, a reconnaissance platoon, and various and sundry other attachments necessary.
5 We went off this status about the middle of February and we then reverted to what we
6 call stand by for number-two surface. We were prepared to go on board the shipping of
7 Task Force 76. During this period of preparation it was evident that a decision was going
8 to be made regarding landing of U.S. forces in Vietnam. At this time, there were various
9 contingency plans that were out and the one that concerned us the most was the 38 Delta.
10 At that time, it was 38 Charlie. The 9th MEB was activated for planning and a new 38
11 Delta was made and circulated to the units, our battalion being one to receive it. Early, or
12 rather, late in January we sent a contingent task organized rifle company down to Da
13 Nang at the then known Shoofly, which was security for only the helicopters that were
14 there at the time, and some limited amount of security on the airfield. This company—a
15 reinforced company, included mortars and engineers etc.—gave us quite an advantage. It
16 became evident to us that if any unit were to be landed we would be the most logical one
17 to go because we had almost twenty-five percent of the unit already in Vietnam.

18 AR: You were physically located in Okinawa at this time?

19 GS: That's right. The battalion minus the Company D, was the company that
20 was in Vietnam. The remaining three companies were in Okinawa. As I said, we came
21 off the number-one air status, which meant we could have people on liberty. Restrictions
22 were lifted. During this period we were just completing our on-island training. We had
23 completed the cycle in Japan. We had just pushed the last company through, the counter-
24 guerilla school up at the northern training area in Okinawa. The only company that did
25 not go through that was, of course Delta Company, which was in Vietnam. About the
26 end of February the S-3 and myself and the battalion commander were called to the
27 division headquarters wherein we were made known the contents of a letter of
28 instruction. This letter indicated that a landing of Marines in Da Nang was imminent. At
29 this time, of course, we brushed off all of our plans to be sure they could be executed in
30 an expeditious manner. Discussions with the G-3 of the 9th MEB, Lieutenant Colonel
31 Omura, who had been the battalion XO, gave a little bit of a hedge because we had some

1 idea of what would be expected. I had an opportunity to talk with them on the plans.
2 Also, I had gone down to Task Force 79 to speak of what requirements we would have.
3 So as far as preparation goes, we were extremely well-prepared. We were taken off the
4 alert. Another unit assumed the responsibility for number-one air. However, in private
5 conversations with the G-3 it was quite clear that if there were an air mount-out we would
6 go. At this time, there was talk of dates. Three/Nine was going to land across the beaches
7 off from Task Force 76. We would land in eighty-three chinks at the Da Nang Air Field.
8 Our preparation then, of course, had to be absolutely certain that we had everything as we
9 wanted it, as we felt combat would be imminent. One problem that arose during this time
10 was the number of chinks was reduced. I don't remember the numbers now. I know the
11 original plan called for about eighty-six or eighty-three. I don't recall the number now.
12 This was reduced a significant number, which caused us problems. We had to realign
13 some of our chinks. There were some things in the chink assignments that we didn't like.
14 These already have been made as comments. We felt that we didn't have enough latitude
15 in loading of the aircraft. For example, the exact plane that the battalion commander
16 would be in was already designated. How our companies would be broken down had
17 already been determined. The logistics aspects were taken care of for us, which I might
18 say was an outstanding portion of it. It had always looked good on paper and I was quite
19 surprised to see that it worked extremely well. Marrying up is the portion I'm speaking
20 of. This is where the troops are alerted, brought down to the air marshalling point, and
21 from there the logistics tail is attached to it. This is the ammunition, which you do not
22 have. All the ordnance and equipment, the water, the rations, everything else that's
23 necessary. That portion there was outstanding. It was on the 7th of March that the duty
24 officer notified me. It was a Sunday and many of the battalion's officers were at a
25 religious retreat. The only two officers that were available were the XO and myself. It
26 was about one o'clock and we were told that we would leave ASAP. I went down and
27 reported by telephone to the G-3. The problems, of course, of being able to talk about the
28 operation were a problem. But finally it became clear that we were going to execute the
29 planned 38 Delta. By this time it must have been 13:30. We alerted all of our units, all
30 of our attachments. We had to recall our people from liberty. We had no method set up
31 for this. We had a method set up when we were the number-one air, but since we had

1 been taken off that, we did not have one then. Our solution was to send senior NCOs in
2 Mites through the local liberty areas and round everybody up, call all the officer clubs,
3 call the areas. Again it was remarkable. We got 100% back by about 15:30 or 16:00.
4 General Collins personally spoke with the XO and told him he would expect us to be at
5 Futima, by I believe it was 19:00. He asked, "Could this be done?" We said it would be
6 tight. In subsequent telephone calls, the time was changed to 21:00. There was a certain
7 amount of slides as far as the time to arrive. At almost exactly 20:30 we left the airfield.
8 This is the first six chinks. We had some confusion going out simply because the 3rd
9 Battalion, 3rd Marines, was returning from a field problem, hit the area almost the same
10 time as we were going out. But through a lot of competent officers and NCOs just
11 keeping their heads, we got everything going on the right way there in time. Then the
12 marrying up commenced, which I've already mentioned was a tremendous operation. I
13 was greatly impressed with our logistics capability. We then actually commenced
14 loading aircraft at about four o'clock in the morning. At that time we were told there
15 would probably be a slide. This was from the Air Force. At this time we had no more
16 contact with any Marines. We had a liaison team set up, but we were not physically in
17 the aircraft. The pilot informed us that he was told to wait until 07:00, which is what he
18 did. We landed the first six airplanes in Da Nang at about twelve o'clock local time.
19 There was some confusion on the airfield, simply because the lead aircraft, the aircraft
20 that the battalion commander and myself were riding in, lost radio communications. We
21 had some difficulty and the pilot landed on the Air Force side, which is Da Nang East.
22 This caused some confusion. Once we were on the deck, the big important thing was that
23 we had one company already there. They had already allocated tentage. We knew
24 exactly where we were going to go. We knew where the people were at. We had done
25 this during the weeks of preparation and an order had been issued. All the company
26 commanders knew their exact area of responsibility. This had been verified in the
27 briefings that we'd held with the 9th MEB. Without belaboring the point, if I could I'll
28 run over some of the things that appeared that could have been improved.

29 AR: Sir, before you do that, what was the flight time from there to Vietnam?

30 GS: I believe it was six hours. There's a time zone change. I think Vietnam is
31 India. I don't remember what Okinawa is right now.

1 AR: Were there any problems involved in-flight?

2 GS: No. No. The weather was bad. It was bad weather and they were afraid they
3 may not be able to land. It was cloudy and overcast and there was some fear of rain.
4 However, this didn't materialize.

5 AR: Sir, would you go ahead and discuss the problems involved?

6 GS: After we landed the first six chinks, I would say about five more chinks
7 landed without incident. By the time that we had enough of the battalion staff on the
8 ground, and the better part of two companies, we were then told no more landings would
9 take place. There had been some type of hold-up and some confusion, which I learned
10 later on was apparently some misunderstanding or a conflict. I don't know which it was
11 between COMUSMACV and the 9th MEB. This left us in a bad position simply because
12 water, rations, and these type of times were programmed throughout the eighty-some
13 chinks that we had. Therefore, we were now almost without water. Ammunition was no
14 problem since the troops carried their basic allowance. There was, of course, no
15 immediate engagement as we landed. But water and rations were short. We handled this
16 for about the first day with 3/9. Three/Nine had brought across the beach something like
17 fifteen days of everything. We were able to take some of their items and then the MEB
18 got resupplied, I assume, from COMUSMACV. This was a little bit of a problem in-
19 country because the logistic chain was not established in Vietnam. The idea, of course,
20 that we would come self-sufficient. The chinks didn't resume moving again until about
21 two day after that. There was a two-day gap. This caused us quite a bit pf problems. We
22 immediately had to assume our responsibility for the Da Nang perimeter. This created
23 tremendous problems since we had spread quite thin. We were very familiar with the
24 area. We had excellent coverage as far as photos and maps go. We had 1-to-25s, 1-to-
25 50. We were in fine shape there, which we had got from our unit, this is Delta Company
26 that was in Vietnam at the time. However, intelligence as of what the situation was non-
27 existent. We immediately made liaison with elements of the advisory staff that were
28 there from the Da Nang Special Sector. They gave us a high-level briefing, which sort of
29 was a thumbnail sketch of what was going on, but it had very little application to our
30 daily problems as to what we were going to confront, or be confronted with. As it turned
31 out, this was a significant thing that I found during the entire deployment was a lack of

1 intelligence. When we started to operate and meet the enemy, whatever information we
2 had, we deduced. It was very, very rarely that we were given information. We had to get
3 our own information. This, of course, now I'm emphasizing was at the early stages of
4 deployment when there was considerable lack of unity of effort. I'm sure that this has
5 been resolved to a great extent now. But at that time intelligence suffered, and to some
6 extent, logistics. But as far as the air mount-out was concerned it went perfectly except
7 for the evidently political ramifications that cut the chalks in about one-third and slowed
8 down the deployment. I'd been lead to understand that this was some type of conflict
9 between COMUSMACV and the 9th MEB. I don't really know this as a fact.

10 AR: Do you know that they were aware of the problems involved at the time, the
11 MEB?

12 GS: Oh, of course. We were in perfect communications with them. We had laid
13 wire, be "we" I mean our element, Delta Company, had laid wire. We had recoinerted
14 for a CP. We had done many of the things that you can't do unless you're in-country,
15 had been done for us. We were bringing back almost on a weekly basis, some key man
16 from the company. At that time I would talk with them, go over the photographs. He'd
17 point out areas, I'd have questions that I wanted answered by the company commander.
18 He'd take these back. It was a perfect arrangement because we were not permitted to go
19 in-country. I'm sure you understand there were a lot of numbers games that were played
20 at the time. I'm not qualified nor do I know what the significance of them were. This is
21 what gave us a tremendous edge. We were very much informed. All of our companies,
22 company commanders had been issued a complete order that had been written a day
23 before which permitted us to give very complete instruction. The only thing that went
24 wrong, and I can't really say it went wrong, was the cutting off of the chalks. As far as
25 the Marine Corps's plans for the mounting-out of units, it seemed to me extremely
26 workable. The one thing that I noticed and maybe only because of the level that I work
27 with, I believe that we should be given a little more latitude on the loading the aircraft.
28 Where are we going to place? It was similar to the way you do with a boat team.

29 AR: Thank you very much, Captain, for your interview.

30 GS: Okay.