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NAVMC HQ 335h (REV. 3-67)

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 MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
 FPO. SAN FRANCISCO 96602

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IN REPLY REFER TO:

6/hjp
 6 April 1970

0028370

SECRET (Unclassified upon removal of enclosure)

From: Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force
 To: Commandant of the Marine Corps

Subj: Preliminary Inquiry into the alleged failure of the
 1st Marine Aircraft Wing to provide support for an
 operation scheduled on the 22nd of April 1969
 involving 4/2 ARVN

Encl: (1) Official file of the subject inquiry

1. Enclosure (1) has served its purpose as far as this
 command is concerned and is forwarded for permanent retention
 in the files of Headquarters Marine Corps.

KEITH B. MCCUTCHEON

SECRET (Unclassified upon removal of
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6:CJQ:twl
5830
4 May 1969

FIRST ENDORSEMENT on BGen H. S. HILL's Preliminary Inquiry
HSH/jdt over 5830 of 4 May 1969

From: Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing
To: Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force

Subj: Preliminary Inquiry into the alleged failure of the
1st Marine Aircraft Wing to provide support for an
operation scheduled on the 22nd of April 1969
involving 4/2 ARVN

Ref: (g) C/S III MAF Memorandum 38/jfb of 25 April 1969

1. Forwarded in accordance with instructions contained in
reference (g).

C. G. Quilter
C. G. QUILTER

7 May 1969

*1. Prepare message to inform CG III MAF
of results of this investigation and his
allegations. [Short, personal, final message.]*

*W. J. ...
Lt Gen, USMC
CG III MAF*

HEADQUARTERS
III Marine Amphibious Force
Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
c/o FPO, San Francisco, California 96602

HSH/jdt
5830

4 MAY 1969

From: Brigadier General H. S. HILL 01 09 31/9903, U. S.
Marine Corps

To: Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force,
Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, c/o FPO, San
Francisco, California 96602

Via: Commanding General, First Marine Aircraft Wing, FPO,
San Francisco, California 96602

Subj: Preliminary Inquiry into the alleged failure of the
1st Marine Aircraft Wing to provide support for an
operation scheduled on the 22nd of April 1969 involving
4/2 ARVN

Ref: (a) CG, III MAF verbal directive of 25Apr69
(b) JAG Manual
(c) LtGen STILWELL's message, undated and unsigned, to
LtGen NICKERSON, received on AM 24Apr69 at III MAF
(d) CG, 3dMarDiv message 191530Z Apr69 to XXIV Corps
(e) 1stMAW Order P3310.14A
(f) FMFM 3-3

Encl: (1) Chronology of events of 20, 21, 22 and 23Apr69
(2) Statement of LtCol H. L. COOK dtd 28Apr69
(3) Statement of Maj J. M. COYKENDALL dtd 28Apr69
(4) Statement of Col E. PARNELL dtd 28Apr69
(5) Statement of Col H. K. JOBE dtd 28Apr69
(6) Statement of Maj J. S. LOOP dtd 27Apr69
(7) Statement of 1stLt J. E. WARD dtd 25Apr69
(8) Statement of LtCol F. H. HAUSER dtd 28Apr69
(9) Statement of 1stLt J. J. JONES dtd 28Apr69
(10) Helo Director's Log, Dong Ha DASC of 22Apr69
(copy of)
(11) Statement of Col M. J. SEXTON dtd 28Apr69
(12) Statement of Capt F. A. PENNING dtd 27Apr69
(13) Statement of Col E. H. FINLAYSON dtd 28Apr69
(14) ZIPPO FRAG NUMBER DH-109 for 21Apr69
(15) FRAG NUMBER DH-402 for 22Apr69
(16) Statement of 1stLt J. J. SULLIVAN dtd 25Apr69
(17) Statement of Capt J. E. BROWNE dtd 27Apr69
(18) CG, 3dMarDiv SECRET message 191530Z Apr69 (P250810Z
Apr69)
(19) Map, Cam Lo, Vietnam, Sheet 63421, series L7014
(20) Statement of Maj E. E. CLANTON dtd 29Apr69
(21) Statement of 1stLt J. A. LAWRENCE dtd 28Apr69
(22) Estimate of enemy situation in Junior, Sparrow, and
Bangkok LZ areas on 21Apr69
(23) Statement of Maj A. A. YATSKO dtd 28Apr69

- (24) Statement of Capt W. M. GIBBONS, undated
- (25) Copy of after action report of LtCol P. C. WITHERS dtd 23Apr69
- (26) Statement of Maj T. W. THORNTON, undated
- (27) Statement of Capt K. CHIEN, undated

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. In compliance with reference (a), and in accordance with reference (b), a preliminary inquiry has been conducted into the alleged failure of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing to provide support for an operation scheduled for 22 April 1969 involving 4/2 ARVN.

2. During the morning of 24 April 1969 an unsigned and undated message (reference (c)) was delivered by LtGen STILWELL to LtGen NICKERSON. This message claims some serious charges concerning lack of support by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing for 4/2 ARVN on 22 April 1969.

3. Reference (d) is the 3d Marine Division notice on 19 April 1969 to the Commanding General, XXIV Corps of the proposed ARVN 4/2 operation. Reference (e) is the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing SOP for helicopter operations. Reference (f) contains U. S. Marine Corps doctrine on helicopter operations.

4. On 27 April 1969, I proceeded to PMAG-39 at Quang Tri to interview witnesses and obtain statements from personnel of the helicopter squadrons supporting 4/2 on 22 April 1969. On 28 April 1969, I proceeded to the 3d Marine Division Headquarters at Dong Ha where 3d Marine Division and U. S. Army witnesses involved with the 4/2 operation were interviewed and their statements obtained. On the afternoon of 28 April

1969, I returned to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing Headquarters at Danang and obtained statements and interviewed personnel from Headquarters, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing who were associated with the subject operation. Finally, on 4 May 1969 I proceeded to LZ Eagle, and the 101st Airborne Headquarters, where I interviewed witnesses and took statements from the Army Airborne personnel who were connected with the ARVN lift.

5. All reasonably available witnesses and evidence was examined. With some exceptions, as later noted, all interested parties and witnesses who made statements concerning this investigation were cooperative and made statements to the best of their ability and stated that their statements were true and factual to the best of their knowledge. One witness LtCo. F. H. HAUSER, the senior advisor of the 2nd ARVN Regiment, 1st ARVN Division was interviewed, however, because of a combat operation in progress, a signed statement could not be obtained from this officer. As a substitute his oral testimony has been reduced to writing and is appended as an enclosure. Some Army witnesses were unable to recall the events of 22 April 1969. These were the personnel of the 101st Airborne, specifically, Major THORNTON and Captain CHIEN. Although statements were obtained from these witnesses it was obvious to the investigating officer during his interviews and after reading the resultant state-

ments, that the witnesses were avoiding key issues. For example: times were forgotten and the passing of orders could be recalled but the names of those giving such orders could not be remembered. After giving careful consideration to the possible results of further pursuit of the foregoing, it was decided to depart with the information that had been provided. It may be noted that LtCol. WITHERS, Commanding Officer, 158th Avn Battalion, 101st Airbourne elected to provide a copy of an after action operational report rather than submit a statement as requested.

6. The investigation revealed certain information which was not consistent with the statements or allegations of non-feasance made in reference (c). These statements or allegations are summarized as follows:

a. "After some difficult negotiations on Colonel GIAI's initiative, arrangements were made to C/A that battalion (4/2) on to Bangkok (XD 999639) at 1430 hours." (Paragraph 1 of reference (c)).

b. "I received word via radio that MAG-39 considered it impossible to increase the number of lift helicopters operating into LZ Bangkok. Since there were no Marine Aviation representatives at the PZ, I sent back a message that I disagreed and inferred somebody should come down to discuss the matter." (Paragraph 2 of reference (c)).

c. "At 1430 hours, when the last fixed wing air strike went in and the first wave of ARVN infantry should have been approaching the LZ, the CH-46s had not yet reached the PZ. Fifteen minutes later Colonel JOBE was unable to get assurance that they would in fact arrive." (Paragraph 3 of reference (c)).

d. "It was understood among Colonel JOBE, Major THORNTON and me that, when and if the CH-46s arrived, they would be fed into the stream. Colonel JOBE took off with Major THORNTON in a C&C ship and I got airborne with General TRUONG to watch the assault." (Paragraph 4 of reference (c)).

e. "A few minutes later, I observed the CH-46s lift off from the PZ and fly away. I contacted the ground to find out what the score was; and was informed by a Captain advisor that he was under the mistaken impression that the five 101st HUEYS would handle the entire lift and had so informed the Marine airlift commander." (Paragraph 5 of reference (c)).

f. "I therefore passed a secure radio message to the Chief of Staff, 3d Marine Division asking him to have the CH-46s return to the PZ, per the original instructions." (Paragraph 5 of reference (c)). "The CH-46s never did return to the PZ despite the fact that Colonel SEXTON immediately transmitted my request, through proper channels, to MAG-39." (Paragraph 6 of reference (c)).

g. "I am informed that MAG-39 sought guidance from Headquarters, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and it was decided to ignore the request because the overall operation was inadequately planned." (Paragraph 6 of reference (c)).

h. "In any case, the Commanding Officer, 2d ARVN Regiment was not informed until hours later that the ships on which he was counting would not be available." (Paragraph 6 of reference (c)).

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154

i. "The agreement was that it would task the 101st to move one battalion while helos in support of the 3rd Marine Division would move the other. That was a valid and important commitment; it went unfilled. Had the CH-46s returned to the PZ, the commitment would still have been filled even though the alternative LZ had to be abandoned. (Paragraph 7,a of reference (c)).

j. "If MAG-39 had had a representative at the PZ (a rather fundamental need) he would have understood the situation." (Paragraph 7,b of reference (c)).

k. "It seems highly unusual that the MAG-39 airlift commander would have accepted as authoritative the comments of an uninformed advisor that Marine assets were no longer needed; five UH-1Hs, with an ACL of 6 are patently not going to move a battalion in short order." (Paragraph 7,b of reference (c)).

l. "The command group of the 2d ARVN Regiment and Colonel JOBE did their level best to compensate for some rather gross deficiencies in the preparation for and conduct of the operation which, as I understand it, was principally within the purview of MAG-39." (Paragraph 7,c of reference (c)).

m. "One rather major deficiency was last air strike at 1430, arrival of CH-46s at PZ Circa 1500 and no provision

for artillery fire to cover the resultant extensive interval." (Paragraph 7,c and d of reference (c)).

7. To provide clarity and ease of reading of this investigative report, under "Findings of Fact", this report will repeat the summarized statements or allegations made in reference (c) and each statement or allegation will be specifically addressed by factual information gained during the course of the investigation. Additionally, enclosure (1), a chronological explanation of relevant facts is furnished for ease of understanding the events made the subject of reference (c).

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Allegation #1 - "After some difficult negotiations on Colonel GIAI's initiative, arrangements were made to C/A that battalion on to Bangkok (XD 999639) at 1430 hours."

FACTS:

a. After the crash of the CH-46 in LZ Junior at about 1020 hours, Colonel GIAI and his advisor, LtCol F. H. HAUSER, USA proceeded to G-3, 3d Marine Division at approximately 1200, 22 April with a proposed alternate LZ (XD 999639) Bangkok. (Enclosure (2)). Shortly after arrival at G-3, Colonel GIAI obtained approval of his proposed alternate LZ. This was

accomplished after a brief discussion and without difficulty.
(Enclosures (2) and (3)).

2. Allegation #2 - "I received word via radio that MAG-39 considered it impossible to increase the number of lift helicopters operating into LZ Bangkok. Since there were no Marine representatives at the PZ, I sent back a message that I disagreed and inferred somebody should come down to discuss this matter."

FACTS:

a. A suggestion was passed to MAG-39 for use of the Army UH-1Hs along with the six scheduled CH-46 helicopters of MAG-39 for the assault into LZ Bangkok. Major SIMPSON, Assistant Operations Officer, MAG-39 computed the time, space and other factors and determined it would be safer to not move the Army UH-1H helicopters into the lift, particularly since the Army pilots had not been briefed. (Enclosure (4)).

b. Colonel JOBE, 3d Marine Division Air Officer, was approached at Cam Lo by LtGen STILWELL on the use of the Army UH-1H helicopters in the LZ Bangkok lift. (Enclosure (5)).

3. Allegation #3 - "At 1430 hours, when the last fixed wing strike went in and the first wave of ARVN should have been approaching the LZ, the CH-46s had not yet reached the PZ. Fifteen minutes later Colonel JOBE was unable to get

assurance that they would arrive."

FACTS:

a. The last fixed wing strike into LZ Bangkok was made at 1455. (Enclosure (9)). Additional fixed wing air for Bangkok was still on station at 1500. (Enclosure (7)).

b. The air lift commander (Colonel PARNELL) was not notified until 1300 of the new LZ, Bangkok. (Enclosure (4)).

c. With the new LZ, previously unbriefed, unplanned and not coordinated and situated in an area known to be heavily infested with the enemy, Colonel PARNELL used precautions by making a personal reconnaissance flight and checking out the proposed assault into Bangkok. (Enclosures (4) and (7)).

d. As a result of this reconnaissance effort Colonel PARNELL could not make the previously established 3d Marine Division/2d ARVN L-hour of 1430. (Enclosure (4)).

e. At 1425 Colonel PARNELL returned to Quang Tri, announced the time he could make a new L-hour and briefed the CH-46 flight crews. (Enclosure (4)).

f. At 1431, MAG-39 informed Dong Ha DASC that a new L-hour had been set at 1500. (Enclosure (10)).

g. The gunship escort and CH-46s departed Quang Tri for the PZ (Cam Lo) at 1435 and 1440, reporting into the PZ controller "Borax Labor Echo" at about 1440. (Enclosure (4), (6), (7) and (24)).

4. Allegation #4 - "It was understood among Colonel JOBE, Major THORNTON and me that, when and if the CH-46s arrived, they would be fed into the stream. Colonel JOBE took off with Major THORNTON in a C&C ship and I got airborne with General TRUONG to watch the assault."

FACTS:

a. The air lift commander (CO, MAG-39) was not a party to this agreement. When the proposal referred to was passed to the MAG-39 assistant operations officer -- he expressed the non-concurrence of MAG-39. (Enclosure (4)).

b. Colonel JOBE stated that it would be preferable not to use the Army UH-1Hs but if the situation later indicated the desirability, the UH-1Hs could be fed into the stream. (Enclosure (5)).

c. The persons privy to this "agreement" became airborne shortly before the CH-46s arrived. (Reference (c)).

d. The senior advisor of the 2d ARVN Regiment, LtCol HAUSER, understood LtGen STILWELL to direct that the lift would be conducted by Army UH-1H helicopters. LtCol HAUSER

so directed the U. S. Army 4/2 advisor, Captain GIBBONS. This was the information passed to the air lift commander (Colonel PARNELL) by Captain GIBBONS. (Enclosures (4), (6), (8) and (24)).

5. Allegation #5 - "A few minutes later, I observed the CH-46s lift off from the PZ and fly away. I contacted the ground to find out what the score was; and was informed by a Captain advisor that he was under the mistaken impression that the five 101st HUEYS would handle the entire lift and has so informed the Marine airlift commander."

FACTS:

a. LtCol HAUSER stated to the investigating officer that there was no question in his mind who LtGen STILWELL wanted to conduct the lift -- the Army UH-1Hs, and LtCol HAUSER so advised Captain GIBBONS when he called for instructions upon arrival of the CH-46s at the PZ. (Enclosures (4), (6) (8) and (24)).

b. The lead MAG-39 gunship escort pilot and the airlift commander (Colonel PARNELL) were told upon checking in with "Borax Labor Echo", Captain GIBBONS the PZ commander, that Marine CH-46s would not be used on the lift. (Enclosures (4), (6), (7) (8) and (24)).

c. As a precaution, the airlift commander landed at

the PZ and personally checked with "Borax Labor Echo" to be sure that the CH-46s were not needed. (Enclosure (4)).

6. Allegation #6 - "I therefore passed a secure radio message to the C/S 3d Marine Division asking him to have the CH-46s return to the PZ, per the original instructions. The CH-46s never did return to the PZ despite the fact that Colonel SEXTON immediately transmitted my request through proper channels to MAG-39."

FACTS:

a. There was no communication between LtGen STILWELL and the C/S 3d Marine Division and MAG-39. (Enclosure (11)).

b. The Assistant Division Air Officer called MAG-39 and asked that the CH-46s be returned to the PZ. (Enclosure (12)).

7. Allegation #7 - "I am informed that MAG-39 sought guidance from headquarters, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and it was decided to ignore the request because the overall operation was inadequately planned."

FACTS:

a. Upon receipt of the request by MAG-39 that the CH-46s were desired back for the ARVN 4/2 lift; and although the CH-46s had been diverted to make emergency rescue of the Army UH-1Hs, MAG-39 attempted to find out the details of the assault LZ and of the lift. This information was not available at the 3d Marine Division at Dong Ha. MAG-39

then called the G-3, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing to find out the details of the requested lift. After some difficulty G-3, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing determined, from the 3d Marine Division, the LZ would be Sparrow. MAG-39 proceeded to launch for this lift but before getting airborne the 3d Division cancelled the lift because of impending darkness. (Enclosures (3), (4), (12) and (13)).

8. Allegation #8 - "In any case, the Commanding Officer, 2d ARVN Regiment was not informed until hours later that the ships on which he was counting would not be available."

FACTS:

a. The airlift commander (Colonel PARNELL) after being told by radio that Army helos would make the lift, landed in the PZ to double check with the PZ commander to be sure his CH-46 helicopters were no longer wanted on the 4/2 ARVN lift. After being told personally by the senior advisor of ARVN 4/2 that the Army UH-1Hs would conduct the lift and the CH-46s were not wanted, Colonel PARNELL and the CH-46s departed the PZ. Shortly thereafter, the airlift commander and his helos were diverted to make the emergency rescue of an Army UH-1H who approached the wrong LZ and was destroyed. (Enclosures (4), (6), (7), and (8)).

b. The advisor of ARVN 4/2 advised the Marine helicopters that the lift was being conducted by Army UH-1Hs and that the Marine CH-46s were not needed. (Enclosure (8) and (24)).

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9. Allegation #9 - "The agreement was that it would task the 101st to move one battalion while helos in support of the 3d Marine Division would move the other. That was a valid and important commitment; it went unfilled. Had the CH-46s returned to the PZ, the commitment would still have been filled even though the alternative LZ had to be abandoned.

FACTS:

a. MAG-39 was fragged for the lift of ARVN 4/2 on 22 April 1969 and started conducting the lift at about 1000 into LZ Junior. The lift was suspended when the LZ was closed by an exploded helo. (Enclosures (14), (15), (16), and (17)).

b. Since there was no alternate LZ, the lift was delayed until the afternoon and until a suitable alternate LZ could be selected and agreed upon by the principal parties concerned. (Enclosures (3), (4) and (5)).

c. Upon approval of the alternate LZ, MAG-39 helos proceeded to continue the lift of 4/2 ARVN by reporting back to the PZ commander, Captain GIBBONS at about 1450, where they were told they were not needed. (Enclosures (4), (5), (7), (8) and (24)).

d. After being cancelled out and prohibited from conduct-

ing the lift, the MAG-39 helos were diverted to emergency missions. (Enclosures (4) and (12)).

e. After completing these emergency missions, and when requested to return to the PZ, there was no information from the 3d Marine Division with regard to the assault LZ. (Enclosure (4)).

f. After determining the correct assault LZ, MAG-39 helos were being launched when the operation was cancelled for the day by the 3d Marine Division. (Enclosures (3) and (4)).

10. Allegation #10 - "If MAG-39 had had a representative at the PZ (a rather fundamental need) he could have understood the situation."

FACTS:

a. In a conversation with Colonel JOBE, LtGen STILWELL asked that a Marine aviation representative come to the PZ to discuss the helicopter operations. (Reference (c)).

b. Colonel JOBE, the Division Air Officer, proceeded to the PZ and conducted aviation matters with LtGen STILWELL. MAG-39 was not informed of the conference or the requirement to appear at the PZ. (Enclosures (2), (3) and (12)).

c. MAG-39 was not consulted on future plans for the afternoon or the conference in G-3, 3d Marine Division,

where the ARVN and the G-3 plotted the new plan of operation.
(Enclosures (2), (3) and (12)).

11. Allegation #11 - "It seems highly unusual that the MAG-39 airlift commander would have accepted as authoritative the comments of an uninformed advisor that Marine assets were no longer needed; five UH-1Hs with an ACL of 6 are patently not going to move a battalion in short order."

FACTS:

a. The MAG-39 airlift commander displayed persistence in actually determining if his mission had been cancelled.
(Enclosures (4), (6), (7) and (24)).

b. The PZ commander, advisor to ARVN 4/2, was authorized by the ARVN regimental senior advisor to give orders as he understood them from LtGen STILWELL to the Marine airlift commander. The regimental senior advisor considers the ARVN 4/2 advisor to be a highly competent officer. (Enclosure (8)).

12. Allegation #12 - "The command group of the 2d ARVN Regiment and Colonel JOBE did their level best to compensate for some rather gross deficiencies in the preparation for and conduct of the operation which, as I understand it, was principally within the purview of MAG-39."

FACTS:

a. The following major discrepancies were noted in the planning and conduct of this operation:

(1) The helicopter supporting command (1st MAW) and the supporting group (MAG-39) were not notified of the details of the impending operation until 21 April 1969. (Enclosure (13)). The only official written request on this operation to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, was re-transmitted to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing three days after the operation was completed. (Enclosure (18)).

(2) The only written notification to MAG-39 of the impending operation came in a FRAG request for a ZIPPO briefing (air-ground commanders on site planning and reconnaissance of LZ) received 20 April 1969. (Enclosure (3)).

(3) There were no alternate LZs for the assault into LZ Junior on 22 April 1969. (Enclosures (3), (4) and (5)).

(4) The 0800 L-hour was changed on the evening of 21 April 1969 by the 3d Marine Division to an L-hour of 1000, 22 April 1969. (Enclosure (3)).

(5) The fixed wing prep of LZ Junior was not changed by the 3d Marine Division. Accordingly, the prep was conducted on the original schedule for an 0800 L-hour. (Enclosure (9)).

(6) After LZ Junior was blocked with the early

enemy destruction of a CH-46, and since there was no alternate plan or LZ, troops had to be returned to the PZ at Cam Lo. (Enclosures (6) and (12)).

(7) MAG-39 was not consulted or called in on the selection of the alternate LZ (Bangkok) but was given an arbitrary L-hour. (Enclosures (3), (4) and (12)).

(8) After MAG-39 determined the alternate LZ was to be Bangkok and that it was satisfactory, a newly proposed L-hour of 1500 was not immediately passed by the airlift commander to the ARVN Regimental Commander or ARVN 4/2. (Enclosures (4) and (10)).

(9) After reporting to the PZ for the lift to LZ Bangkok, at about 1450, the airlift commander was told by the PZ commander that the Marine helos would not be utilized. (Enclosures (4), (8) and (24)).

(10) Upon being recalled to return to the PZ, after being secured by the 4/2 ARVN advisor, MAG-39 was unable to determine from the 3d Marine Division the new assault LZ. (Enclosures (4) and (12)).

13. Allegation #13 - "One rather major deficiency was the last air strike at 1430, arrival of CH-46s at PZ Circa and no provision for artillery fire to cover the resultant extensive interval."

FACTS:

a. Adequate air strikes were being conducted at LZ Bangkok and the last (FW) strike on this LZ was at 1455. Other fixed wing air strikes were on station and standing by if required. (Enclosures (7) and (9)).

14. Not mentioned in reference (c), but uncovered in the course of this investigation were these significant facts:

a. The Army Cobras prepped the wrong LZ in an attempt to make the assault into Bangkok, although a Marine TAC(A) marked the LZ with several smoke rockets. (Enclosure (7)).

b. At about the same hour on 22 April that Colonel GIAI and his senior advisor, LtCol HAUSER, were at the 3d Marine Division headquarters obtaining approval for the alternate LZ Bangkok, someone at the PZ told Major THORNTON, the Army Airlift Coordinator, to take an Australian advisor (presumably from ARVN 4/2) and recon a possible landing zone for the afternoon lift. (Enclosure (26)).

c. After making this recon Major THORNTON selected LZ Squirrel for the assault. At about 1500 Major THORNTON started the assault into LZ Squirrel by directing his gunships, located at Dong Ha, and his ARA ships at VCB to proceed to the

PZ for escort of the UH-1Hs to LZ Squirrel. (Enclosures (26) and (27)).

d. One Army UH-1H was attempting a landing in the wrong LZ (Squirrel) some 1000 meters from LZ Bangkok. The UH-1H was shot down with the loss of one life (possibly three) and three wounded. A second UH-1H was damaged in the rescue attempt. Marine helos scheduled for and not permitted to make their lift, returned to the crash site and made a heroic rescue. (Enclosures (4), (7), (19), (20), (24) and (26)).

e. The fixed wing aircraft, helicopters and crewmen of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing ^{AND THE 101st AB} were placed in considerable jeopardy in making the emergency rescue of the Army personnel who were shot down and crashed in the wrong zone. (Enclosures (4), (6), (7)).

f. At approximately 1300 on 22 April 1969 and before the final plans were known for the assault on Bangkok, LtGen STILWELL was anxious to use UH-1Hs in the assault with the Marine CH-46s. (Enclosure (5)).

g. Army helicopters failed in their effort to recover two wounded men in LZ Squirrel. These men were observed apparently alive by a Marine TAC(A) who attempted to get the Army to rescue them. These two men were observed the next day in the same place in the LZ, apparently dead

when the TAC(A) flew over the LZ. The Army made two attempts on the 22nd to rescue the men in the LZ, but on the second attempt one of the crewmen was hit by enemy fire and they immediately abandoned their search and departed the LZ. No further effort was made on the 22nd to recover these men because of darkness. (Enclosures (24), (25), (26) and (27)).

h. The 3d Marine Division was the responsible command for cooperation and coordinating the operation on 22 April 1969 with the 2nd ARVN Regiment. (Enclosure (18)).

i. The proposed ARVN 4/2 operation was to be conducted into an area where increased enemy activity south of the DMZ could be expected. (Enclosure (22)).

j. Fixed wing prep aircraft was offered to the Army UH-1H helicopters in their attempted assault on Bangkok. The Army (Lancer Lead) helo declined the fixed wing support electing to use their ARA Cobras which prepped the wrong area and later the Lancer helo was shot down in the wrong LZ (Squirrel). (Enclosure (7)).

OPINIONS

1. That the 3d Marine Division and 2d ARVN Regiment had cause to suspect that the proposed operation on 22 April 1969 would be conducted in an area where intelligence gave indications of increased enemy activity, therefore excellent prior

planning was of paramount importance.

2. That adequate advance notification of this proposed helicopter assault was not made known by the 3d Marine Division G-3 and Air Officer to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing for proper planning in depth.

3. That this lack of adequate notification and in-depth planning is contrary to the Marine Corps helicopter assault doctrine contained in references (e) and (f) and the vast helicopter assault experience gained in the past in ICTZ.

4. That the changes in the L-hour of a helicopter assault must be well known in advance by the helicopter supporting unit so changes in both fixed wing and helicopter air support can be made accordingly.

5. That Marine Corps doctrine and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing SOPs (selection of landing zone) were not followed in planning this operation.

6. That the move of L-hour from 0800 to 1000 on 22 April 1969 had no effect upon the helo assault into LZ Junior since ample fixed wing prep was placed on LZ Junior during this two hour interval and prior to touch down of the first CH-46, which was shot down.

7. That the CH-46 helicopter shot down in LZ Junior blocked this LZ and caused termination of the assault since no alternate LZ had been selected.

8. That the Commanding Officer, 2nd ARVN Regiment and the G-3, 3d Marine Division were required to make a hasty decision on an alternate LZ if the assault was to be completed on 22 April 1969.

9. That after the assault into the primary LZ (Junior) failed, the supporting helicopter unit (MAG-39) was not a party to the hastily convened planning conference by the 3d Marine Division/2nd ARVN Regiment which selected a new LZ (Bangkok) in a heavily infested enemy area. There is no evidence to support the allegation that Colonel GIAI encountered any difficult negotiations in getting the new LZ and the helo lift approved.

10. That the delay on the part of MAG-39 in meeting the new L-hour of 1430 was due primarily to the fact that MAG-39 was not invited or included in the hastily convened planning conference (selection of new/alternate LZ) of the 3d Marine Division and 2nd ARVN Regiment at 1200 in the headquarters, 3d Marine Division.

11. That the airlift commander (Walnut Hill-6), (CO, MAG-39) after completing his inspection and approval of the alternate

LZ Bangkok at about 1415 should have advised an appropriate authority immediately (preferrably CO, 4/2 ARVN or CO, 2nd Regiment or Dong/^{Ha}DASC) that MAG-39 could not make the established L-hour of 1430. The airlift commander set a new L-hour of 1500, however he did not notify anyone of his recommended L-hour until he returned to MAG-39 COC bunker at about 1430. The MAG-39 COC Duty Officer then notified the Dong Ha DASC at 1431 that the new L-hour would be 1500.

12. That the Dong Ha DASC passed the new L-hour to the 3d Marine Division Assistant Air Officer who could not establish communications and relay this information to Colonel JOBE and LtGen STILWELL in the PZ at Cam Lo.

13. That LtGen STILWELL suggested to Colonel JOBE at about 1300 that the Army UH-1Hs should be used to speed up the assault lift. This suggestion was also passed to MAG-39. The assistant Operations Officer of MAG-39 and Colonel JOBE declined the use of the UH-1Hs based on safety considerations, time-distance factors and the fact that the CH-46s could easily accomplish the lift with an L-hour of about 1430. There is no evidence to support the allegation that MAG-39 considered it impossible to increase the number of helicopters.

14. That at 1430 Colonel JOBE called the Assistant Air Officer at the 3d Marine Division and received incorrect

information from the Dong Ha DASC that the Marine CH-46s were on the way.

15. That at 1445 the Marine CH-46s had not arrived at the PZ and since LtGen STILWELL was insistent on getting the lift under way, Colonel JOBE erroneously recommended the use of the Army package (ARA Cobras and UH-1Hs) waiting at the PZ.

16. That the Army pilots apparently conducted a hasty and last minute briefing of the assault at about 1445 and began to launch at about 1500 for LZ Bangkok. Although not brought out in the written statements of the 101st Airborne Officers, personal interviews with these officers indicated that the UH-1Hs were at the PZ; the gunships at Dong Ha, and the ARA ships were at VCB. The gunships and ARA ships could not have been in on the hurried planning and briefing taking place in the PZ by Major THORNTON. On signal the gunships and ARA ships met over or near Cam Lo and prepared and escorted the UH-1Hs into the wrong LZ (Squirrel). This was not the LZ (Bangkok) selected by the regimental commander; the 3d Marine Division and prepared by Marine fixed wing aircraft. Although not included in his statement in enclosure (27), Captain CHIEN, the gunship escort commander, stated that he was not privy to the planning for this operation in the PZ.

17. That LtGen STILWELL and Colonel JOBE agreed that the CH-46s would be fed into the lift when they arrived. That LtGen STILWELL did not clearly pass this understanding to the 2nd ARVN, 4/2 Advisor/PZ Commander. Furthermore, apparently the only persons privy to this understanding (Lt Gen STILWELL, Colonel JOBE and Major THORNTON) were airborne to observe the assault when the CH-46s arrived at the PZ at about 1455. Although not included in enclosure (25) LtCol WITHERS stated in his personal interview that LtGen STILWELL ordered the UH-1Hs at about 1445 to make the assault and the CH-46s would be fed in when they arrived. Lt Col WITHERS states that he advised Major THORNTON of this fact. Major THORNTON does not recall if he passed this information to anyone. It is my opinion that LtGen STILWELL, LtCol WITHERS, Major THORNTON and Colonel JOBE in an aborted on-the-scene planning meeting at the PZ, decided on this course of action and this information was not passed to the key officer in the PZ, Captain GIBBONS - the PZ commander.

18. That the following facts justified Colonel PARNELL's decision at the PZ to secure the CH-46s and return to Quang Tri Base:

- a. That the lead Marine gunship commander for the

assault, enroute from Quang Tri to the LZ, contacted the PZ commander by radio at about 1440 and advised that the Marine CH-46s were 5 minutes out from the PZ; that the Marine air lift commander contacted the PZ commander at about 1450 and advised that the Marine CH-46s were inbound to the PZ.

b. That at about 1500 the Army Cobras and UH-1Hs launched on the assault to LZ Bangkok as the Marine CH-46s were landing on the PZ.

c. That the Marine gunship commander questioned the PZ commander on two different occasions on the cancellation of the Marine lift; PZ commander advised the Marine gunship commander at about 1440 that the assault would be conducted by Army helicopters; that on the second query by the gunship commander, the PZ commander told the Marine gunship commander, "I have 13 stars down here that say we will use Army HUEYS and not the green 46s"; that the PZ commander advised the air lift commander at about 1450 that Army helos would make the lift and the Marine's helos were not needed.

d. That the Marine air lift commander doubtful of this drastic change in plans landed at Cam Lo and personally contacted the PZ commander, Captain GIBBONS, advisor to 4/2 ARVN, who informed the airlift commander that his senior advisor had confirmed the fact that LtGen STILWELL had directed the use of Army helos and Marine helos would not be used.

19. That after take off from the PZ at Cam Lo the Army Cobras and UH-1Hs flew toward LZ Bangkok. The Army Cobras proceeded to prep an area some 1000 meters east of LZ Bangkok and shortly after the prep the UH-1H lead helo attempted to land in an unprepped LZ (Squirrel) and was shot down.

20. That while the Marine airlift commander and his flight were enroute to Quang Tri, he responded to the MAYDAY call of an Army helo over LZ Squirrel and proceeded to make a heroic emergency rescue of the downed Army crew and troops in LZ Squirrel.

21. That LtGen STILWELL placed a radio call to someone in the 3d Marine Division, but not to the C/S as alleged, in an effort to get the Marine CH-46s back into the assault lift after they departed the PZ at Cam Lo.

22. That as a result of the losses during the day, of helos, crews and troops; the existing confusion at the PZ; and having been told that his helos were not required for the LZ Bangkok lift, the Commanding Officer, MAG-39 properly delayed further execution in an attempt to learn the exact details and proposed LZ of the new and continuing assault lift in order that his helo crews could be adequately briefed.

23. Since the 3d Marine Division was unaware of the details of this "new LZ" and the continuing assault, the CO, MAG-39 attempted to obtain clarifying information from the G-3, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. After considerable difficulty and delay caused by communications and lack of information from the Assistant Division Air Officer, the G-3, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing finally determined from the 3d Marine Division that the assault would be into the secure LZ Sparrow. This information and other details required by the helo crews was passed to the CO, MAG-39. The CO, MAG-39 then at about 1700 directed his helos to launch for the lift into LZ Sparrow. The delay caused by this further inquiry was based on sound judgment and completely justified. 7/

24. That the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing did not ignore the request to return the CH-46 helos to the assault as alleged. Conversely, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing was working desperately to obtain information and to clarify a confusing, cloudy situation caused by persons and events originating at the PZ at Cam Lo. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing was attempting to ensure that the CO, MAG-39 had sufficient information to avoid losing additional helos, crews and troops in a possible ill planned and unprepared operation.

25. That contrary to the allegation in reference (c), MAG-39 had an airlift commander (CO, MAG-39) in the PZ with the required helos at 1455 and was advised by the PZ commander 

that his helos were not needed or required as understood from LtGen STILWELL. However, it is acknowledged that had MAG-39 had an air officer continuously in the PZ, or had the MAG-39 helos remained in the PZ after the aborted lift into LZ Junior, some confusion may have been avoided. However, it is my opinion that if MAG-39 had been permitted to conduct the afternoon's operation with ARVN 4/2 without outside interference from other senior officers, successful results would have ensued.

26. That contrary to the allegation in reference (c), the CO, 2nd ARVN Regiment should have been informed by the advisor of 4/2, (the PZ commander) that Marine helos were not in the assault and would not be available.

27. That contrary to the allegation in reference (c), it did not seem unusual at all that the CO, MAG-39 would accept the repeated statement of the highly competent ARVN 4/2 advisor that LtGen STILWELL did not want the Marine CH-46s, especially after the Marine gunship commander and the CO, MAG-39 persisted in their efforts to clarify the situation.

28. That contrary to the allegation in reference (c), there were no gross deficiencies in the preparation for and conduct of the operation within the purview of MAG-39, except the airlift commander did not notify the interested

parties soon enough of his inability to meet the 1430 L-hour. However, it is noted that the airlift commander was not consulted on selection of the alternate LZ or given enough time to ensure the LZ was satisfactory and properly prepared before the 1430 L-hour was set.

29. That there was no major deficiency in the air strike or prep on LZ Bangkok as alleged by LtGen STILWELL in reference (c). Fixed wing air was being prepped into LZ Bangkok throughout and up to 1455 with additional and adequate fixed wing air overhead and on station to meet any contingency.

30. That a very serious deficiency occurred when Army helo crews were launched at 1500, apparently after a hurried briefing and after the Marine helos did not arrive at 1445. The fact that the Army Cobras prepped a zone some 1000 meters east of the Regimental Commander's selected LZ (Bangkok) and the UH-1H attempted to insert ARVN 4/2 in the wrong zone, gives credible evidence of lack of planning, coordination and briefing on the part of the Army helicopter commander.

31. That a Marine TAC(A), Lt. LAWRENCE and an AO in an O-1 aircraft continued to advise Army helos (working around LZ Squirrel at about 1700 and after the UH-1H crash and rescue of part of the crew and troops) that there were two men re-

maining in the LZ still alive. Rescue of these two men by the Army helos working the area was not made on 22 April 1969 despite Lt. LAWRENCE's plea and offered assistance to help make the rescue. The following day Lt. LAWRENCE flew over the LZ and saw the two men apparently dead in the same area where he had seen them alive the day before.

32. That the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing has successfully supported ARVN Forces in numerous difficult helicopter assaults in the past.

33. That MAG-39 had an excellent plan for support of ARVN 4/2 on 22 April 1969. A plan well briefed and prepared in accordance with the Marine Corps doctrine for the assault into LZ Bangkok. There is no reason to suspect that the operation would not have proven successful if the command and control functions, events and actions as planned by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and by MAG-39 had been permitted to remain in the traditional Marine Corps air-ground channels and not have been confused and diffused by persons on the scene attempting to influence the operation and insert other helicopters and unbriefed and unplanned crews into the assault.

34. In order to make joint operations with the Army/ARVN/ROK Forces most effective the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing SOP on helicopter operations should be updated to include a

helicopter representative in all combat support teams utilized for support of the mentioned forces.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force send an official message to LtGen STILWELL, informing him of the results of this investigation, which responds to certain serious allegations made concerning the lack of support by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing on 22 April 1969 for ARVN 4/2.

2. That LtGen STILWELL be advised that:

a. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and the 3d Marine Division are not aware of any difficult negotiations on Colonel GIAI's initiative with the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing or the 3d Marine Division in obtaining the approval of LZ Bangkok and obtaining the support to combat assault ARVN 4/2 into LZ Bangkok.

b. MAG-39 did not state it was impossible to use Army UH-1Hs in the Bangkok assault, but rather, MAG-39 reported to the 3d Marine Division Assistant Air Officer that it did not desire, for safety and other considerations, to intermingle unbriefed Army crews and helos into the assault.

c. Fixed wing prep was conducted on LZ Bangkok after

1430 hours. The last prep was 1455 hours and additional fixed wing air was overhead in support of the assault if required. The Assistant Division Air Officer was notified at 1430 that the CH-46s were launching from Quang Tri. The Marine gunship leader checked in with the PZ commander at about 1445, stating that the CH-46s were inbound to the PZ.

d. The understanding that when the CH-46s arrived they would be fed into the stream was apparently not directed or passed to the PZ commander, Captain GIBBONS, [REDACTED], Advisor ARVN 4/2, or to the senior advisor, Lieutenant Colonel HAUSER, USA, 2d ARVN Regiment, by anyone privy to that agreement and understanding.

e. The understanding on the part of both Captain GIBBONS and Lieutenant Colonel HAUSER was that LtGen STILWELL desired the lift be conducted by the Army helicopters.

f. The airlift commander was not privy nor was he invited to the conference on selection and approval of the alternate LZ, Bangkok.

g. The airlift commander was advised of the new LZ Bangkok about 1300 for a 1430 L-hour. In view of the previous difficulties of the morning, the enemy situation, and the

terrain involved, this gave the airlift commander inadequate time to prepare and inspect the LZ and brief helo crews for a 1430 assault. This was the primary cause for the CH-46s late arrival at the PZ for the proposed 1430 assault.

h. The Chief of Staff, 3d Marine Division did not receive a message from Lieutenant General STILWELL to have the CH-46s return to the PZ; neither did the Chief of Staff pass such a message to MAG-39.

i. MAG-39 sought guidance from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing on the required specifics of an apparently new and different assault since the 3d Marine Division was unable to provide the minimum essential information for crew briefings. This occasioned a long delay and ultimately resulted in cancellation of the operation due to the late hour of the day since no one in the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and the 3d Marine Division was being advised by personnel in the PZ of the proposed operation. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing did not ignore the request but instead was attempting, with all effort and speed, to clarify a confusing situation that was permitted to develop by individuals directing the operation at the PZ.

j. The individual responsible for removing the CH-46s

n. The Marine gunship commander and the airlift commander reported by radio at about 1435 and 1445, respectively, to the PZ commander that the CH-46s were five minutes out from the PZ. As noted in paragraph 2,c above, fixed wing aircraft ran the last prep on LZ Bangkok at 1455 with adequate fixed wing air still on station.

o. That Lieutenant General STILWELL be advised that adequate planning and planning time was not allotted for this operation to ensure success in the face of suspected heavy enemy resistance.

p. That Lieutenant General STILWELL be advised that in planning for the conduct of Marine helicopter assaults, Marine Corps doctrine in references (e) and (f) must be adhered to.

q. That Lieutenant General STILWELL be advised that the decision to use Army helo crews who had not been privy to the planning and briefing for the assault on LZ Bangkok, and the apparent last minute briefing of those crews at the PZ were undoubtedly instrumental in the wrong LZ preparation by the Cobras and UH-1H landing in the wrong area. This unfortunate event cost one UH-1H destroyed, one heavily damaged, and the lives of one man (probably two others), and injury to three crewmen/troops.

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5. That the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing include in the SOP for helicopter operations, that when planning begins for support of an Army, ARVN or ROK unit, a helicopter representative from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing will be assigned to and remain with a combat support team to work with Army/ARVN/ROK unit until completion of the operation.


H. S. HILL