

Chapter 5

The Advance to the Ky Lam

- I April Actions and Operation GEORGIA
- II The May Ky ~~LAM~~ Campaign
- III Operation LIBERTY

1 The spring political crisis caused a serious disruption
 2 ~~to~~ Marine offensive operations at Da Nang. With the sudden
 3 arrival of the Vietnamese Marine battalions at the Da Nang
 4 Air Base in April, the U.S. Marine regiments there suddenly
 5 found themselves with a new mission. They not only had to
 6 fight a war against the Communists but to prevent one between
 7 the government ~~forces~~ *Troops* and the ~~so-called~~ *Struggle Forces* rebels. Colonel
 8 Simmons compared the role of his regiment to that of the "ham
 9 in the sandwich," the filler to absorb the shock of the confron-
 10 tation between the two opposing sides.¹

11 This situation could only benefit the Communists. The
 12 9th Marines had to revert to the defensive because of the
 13 great holes in the security of Da Nang created behind it by
 14 the polarization of the ARVN forces into two rival factions.
 15 With the abandonment of several ~~of the~~ governmental outposts
 16 along Route 4 together with the vast amounts of ammunition,
 17 the VC not only rearmed themselves at ~~government~~ *GVN* expense
 18 but reentered the area the Marines had just cleared ~~out~~
 19 during Operation KINGS.

20 On 16 April, an old enemy, the R-20 "Doc Lap" Battalion,
 21 attacked one of Lieutenant Colonel Donahue's 2d Battalion
 22 companies north of the abandoned 39th Ranger outpost at

Phong Thu. His Company H, commanded by Captain Everett S. Roane,
 had established defensive positions north of Route 4, and

a squad ambush south of the road. Suddenly at 0400, the enemy
 opened up with 57mm Recoilless Rifle, 60mm mortar and 81mm mortar

1 fire. Simultaneously, the enemy launched two company-sized
 2 ground assaults, one from the southeast and the other from the
 3 southwest. The attack from the southwest, consisting of
 4 approximately 100 men in ~~number~~, ran into the Marine amb^{ush}
 5 and stalled. According to the Marine amb~~ush~~ squad leader,
 6 his men "shot 12-15 VC for sure--most likely more." At dawn
 7 the following morning, the squad found two enemy bodies in
 8 fr^{on} of its positions. 2

The approximately 150-man attacking ~~force~~ ^{cast} from the southwest
 reached the north side of Route 4, but ~~were~~ ^{was} unable to penetrate
 the Marine company's perimeter. As soon as the attack
 force crossed the road,

The VC were like ducks in a shooting gallery.
 Many VC were shot as they crossed the road
 and went down into the paddy in front of the
 2d Platoon. At one point, 22 VC bodies could
 be counted in that vicinity. Other VC were
 shot as they attempted to remove bodies.
 During lulls in illumination, bodies would
 be removed and more VC would cross ^{road},
 there would be more bodies. 3

Upon the arrival of Marine aerial observers overhead and
 with responding Marine artillery fire, the enemy supporting
 mortars and recoilless rifles fell silent. The VC ground
 assault ² dissipated and the attacking force broke up into
 small groups. Enemy probes continued along the Marine
 company perimeter but, "this most likely was to cover the col-
 lection of VC casualties and the withdrawal of the main force." 4

At first light, the Marines ^{counted} uncovered 12 enemy bodies,

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1 but estimated killing another 63. The Marine company had
 2 not gone unscathed. Company H suffered seven dead and
 3 37 wounded, largely as a result of the opening enemy
 4 recoilless rifle and mortar attack. ⁵

In Mid-April
 5 ~~Despite the temporary setback to its offensive,~~ the 9th
 6 Marines resumed the initiative in mid-April following the
 7 temporary ~~denouement~~ ^{stand-off in} of the political crisis. Originally,
 8 the regiment planned to follow KINGS with a one battalion
 9 operation in the An Hoa Region below the confluence of the

10 Ky Lam and Thu Bon beginning on 10 April. Thus, the Marines
 11 would carry out General Walt's promise to Mr. Can ^{the An Hoa project leader} ~~or that~~

12 ^{that} III MAF would protect the industrial complex located there.

13 Although temporarily postponing the operation, code named
 14 GEORGIA, the 9th Marines completed its revised operational
 15 order on 14 April. The mission was assigned to Lieutenant
 16 Colonel Taylor's 3d Battalion, 9th Marines. ⁶

17 With the completion of the planning, the 9th Marines
 18 battalions began the preliminary preparations ^{in support of} for the operation.

19 On 18 April, Lieutenant Colonel Kelley's 2d Battalion, 4th
 20 Marines, which had arrived at Da Nang from Chu Lai three days
 21 earlier, relieved the 3d Battalion on the ^{ca} western flank of the
 22 9th Marines area of operations. Both Lieutenant Colonel

23 Donahue's 2d Battalion and Taylor's 3d Battalion then reentered
 24 the former KINGS area of operations in conjunction with ARVN
 25 and Vietnamese militia forces. Their assignment was not

26 only to eradicate the VC but to determine suitable LVT river
 27 crossing sites ^{and} assembly and resupply points ^{for} ~~in order to~~
 28 support the forthcoming operations

1 Although the operation had not officially begun, Lieutenant
2 Colonel Taylor established a ~~forward base~~ at the An Hoa airstrip
3 on 20 April. Helicopters from MAG-16 lifted the command group
4 and Company L from Marble Mountain while Air Force C-123s
5 as in Operation MALLARD, flew in an artillery battery, Battery
6 F, 2d Battalion, 12th Marines.

7 On the 21st, the designated date for the start of the
8 operation, the rear headquarters and two rifle companies,
9 supported by Company B ~~3d~~ Amphibian Tractor Battalion and
10 a platoon of LVTHs, moved overland toward the objective area.
11 A third Marine company, Company I, arrived at An Hoa by
12 helicopter. Air force transports brought in ~~another~~ ^{a second} 105mm
13 artillery battery, Battery B, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines.
14 Both fixed-wing transports and helicopters continued to fly
15 in supplies for the An Hoa buildup. On 22 April Company
16 L linked up with the LVT convoy after the latter had crossed
17 the Thu Bon River.

18 With the establishment of the An Hoa base, the battalion
19 began the second phase of its operations. Lieutenant Colonel
20 Taylor had divided the An Hoa Region ~~into~~ ^{sized} into 20 well
21 defined company TAORs. The Marines in conjunction with
22 local ARVN and South Vietnamese Popular Forces began a
23 series of scrubbing ~~and search and cordon~~ ^{actions} tactics, similar
24 to those tactics used in Operation KINGS. Combining the
25 County Fair technique with GOLDEN FLEECE operations, the

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¹ Marines attempted to secure the surrounding hamlets ~~around~~
² the An Hoa base ^{in order} ~~so~~ that the industrial complex there could
³ become a viable reality.
⁴ Despite the fact that intelligence indicated the presence
⁵ of the VC V-25 (5th VC) Battalion in the western sector
⁶ of the GEORGIA zone of action, that area between the Vu Gia
⁷ and Thu Bon Rivers, the Marines encountered little opposition
⁸ through the end of April except in the form of har⁹assing fire
⁹ and mines. Marine aerial observers and a platoon of re-
¹⁰ connaissance Marines from the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion
¹¹ ^{supporting} ~~in support~~ of the operation, accounted for most of the VC
¹² casualties at this stage. ~~According to the 9th Marines~~
¹³ ~~Command Chronology for April, the~~ air observers and
¹⁴ Reconnaissance Marines "frequently detected movement of
¹⁵ small enemy forces at long range and directed artillery
¹⁶ fire at the VC with telling effect." ⁷ Major Samuel M. Morrow,
¹⁷ the commander of the provisional artillery group at An Hoa,
¹⁸ commented that although some "very fine targets were observed
¹⁹ and some excellent missions fired. . . there was a tendency
²⁰ on the part of these untrained observers to enter fire for
²¹ effect too early and attempt to 'chase the target' rather
²² than reenter the adjustment phase.." ⁸ Yet the reconnaissance
²³ outposts on the southern and western fringes of the GEORGIA
²⁴ operating area controlled ⁴ 36 artillery missions and six
²⁵ fixed-wing airstrikes upon targets of opportunity through the
²⁶ end of the operation. These resulted in at least 30 enemy
²⁷ dead, ⁹ ~~and possibly double that figure.~~
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²⁸ ~~through the end of GEORGIA.~~

1 The heaviest action in GEORGIA occurred on 3 May. Captain
 2 George W. Griggs' Company ~~of~~ ^{located} 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, which
 3 ~~unit~~ had just relieved another company in the operation, prepared
 4 to cross the Thu Bon. Its objective was the hamlet
 5 of Phu Long (1) ^{located} on the northern bank of the river in the
 6 northwest sector of the GEORGIA operating area. During the
 7 river crossing, an estimated ^{one} to two company enemy force,
 8 later identified as from the ubiquitous R-20 Battalion, opened
 9 fire upon the Marine company mounted in LVTs. In a four-hour
 10 ^{lasting} fire fight through the afternoon, Griggs' company, reinforced
 11 by two other Marine infantry companies and supported by an
 12 air strike and artillery, finally secured Phu Long (1). ~~LVTs~~,
 13 which accompanied the Marines in the river crossing, brought
 14 direct fire upon the enemy positions and according to the GEORGIA
 15 ~~After Action Report~~ ^{were} " ~~was~~ instrumental in neutralizing enemy
 16 fires and preventing more casualties." During the engagement,
 17 Marines suffered five dead and 54 wounded. They killed ~~15~~ ¹⁰
 18 of the VC and estimated they inflicted another 100 casualties
 19 on the enemy.
 20 Although technically ending on 10 May, GEORGIA, like KINGS
 21 before it, was in reality an extension of the Marine area
 22 of operations. Lieutenant Colonel Paul C. Trammell, who
 23 relieved Lieutenant Colonel Taylor three days earlier, continued
 24 to maintain his command post and two rifle companies reinforced by
 25 an artillery battery from the 12th Marines at the An Hoa base.
 26 The comparative box score of enemy losses ^{from 21 April - 10 May 66} as opposed to Marine
 27 casualties showed 103 confirmed VC dead at a cost of 9 Marines
 28 killed and 94 wounded.

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Section 2

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The May Ky Lam Campaign

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1 Taking advantage of the tenuous truce in the political
2 situation, Colonel Simmons, in the meantime, published on
3 4 May a plan for a renewed offensive above the Ky Lam. Named
4 after that river, the Ky Lam campaign ^{was to be} ~~called~~ a three
5 phased advance "to clear the regimental zone of action of
6 organized resistance south to the line of the Thu Bon-Ky
7 Lam-Dien Binh-Cau Lau-Hoi An Rivers." ¹¹ At the end of
8 May, the forward battalions were to reach Phase Line BROWN,
9 an ~~imaginary line~~ ^{objective area} starting from below Dai Loc in the west
10 and then largely following the Thanh Quit-La Tho Rivers
11 eastward with the exception of a 2,000 meter-wide horse-shoe
12 shaped salient, extending south 5,000 meters along both
13 sides of Route 1 to just above Dien Ban. In June,
14 the regiment would begin the second phase of the operation,
15 securing all of Route 4 west of Route 1 and extending the
16 Marine lines down to the Ky Lam. During July, the 9th Marines
17 in the final phase of the campaign would advance southward
18 in the region east of Route 1 and incorporate the city of
19 Hoi An in its area of responsibility. ¹²

20 Simmons' concept of operations for the offensive called
21 for the same "scrubbing" tactics used in KINGS and
22 GEORGIA. He furthermore directed his subordinate battalions
23 "to deploy their companies in a diamond configuration, terrain
24 permitting and to employ all supporting arms imaginatively
25 and vigorously." ¹³ Colonel Simmons later explained that the
26 failure to use air and artillery in the past had resulted in
27 needless Marine casualties. He believed that the American
28 command had to take a realistic attitude toward civilian

1 casualties. The selective employment of supporting arms
 2 did not by itself increase the number of civilian killed,
 3 and wounded but did cause the inhabitants of contested
 4 hamlets to abandon their homes, thus becoming refugees.
 5 ~~Simmons viewed the refugee, however, in one sense an asset,~~
 6 "a person who has made his election physically to move over
 7 to our side." ^{the refugees} ~~the~~ removal from the hamlets in the
 8 uncleared area made the Marine task in identifying and
 9 eradicating the VC that much easier. The cost of housing,
 10 feeding, and later rebuilding the hamlets of these
 11 refugees if necessary was considered a minimal prize to
 12 pay. 14

13 For the Ky Lam Campaign, Colonel Simmons had at the
 14 beginning of May four infantry battalions ~~with 18 infantry~~
 15 ~~companies~~ ^{included} under his direct operational control. ~~Under his~~
 16 ~~command were~~ the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines and all three
 17 9th Marines battalions including the 3d Battalion in the
 18 An Hoa Region. Lieutenant Colonel William H. Doehler's 1st
 19 Battalion, 9th Marines, which had been the Da Nang Base
 20 Defense Battalion, became available for the campaign when
 21 relieved by Lieutenant Colonel Dorsey's 3d Battalion, 3d
 22 Marines. Doehler's battalion took over from Dorsey's the
 23 responsibility for the 9th Marines western sector.

24 The heaviest fighting in the first stages of the
 25 campaign occurred in Doehler's zone of action. On 10
 26 May, he had established the battalion's forward command
 27

1 post at Dai Loc. His Company B, commanded by Captain
2 Norman E. Henry, was in position on the eastern bank
3 of the Vu Gia, 3,500 meters south of Dai Loc to provide
4 a covering force for units departing the
5 GEORGIA area of operations. That morning, Company
6 A, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, which had been under
7 the operational control of the 3d Battalion during Operation
8 GEORGIA, crossed the Vu Gia in LVTs of the 1st Amphibian
9 Tractor Battalion and rejoined its parent battalion at
10 Dai Loc. Following the river crossing, Company A prepared
11 for a clearing operation around Dai Loc District Town
12 while Henry's company made ~~the~~ preparations for a similar
13 operation in southern Dai Loc above the Thu Bon. Allied
14 intelligence indicated that the R-20 Battalion had re-
15 infiltrated this area. A report received on 11 May stated
16 that a company of the enemy battalion was located in the
17 hamlet of Do Nam near a small finger lake, approximately
18 2,000 meters northeast of Company B's positions.¹⁵

19 On the morning of 12 May, one of Henry's patrols
20 unexpectedly came upon the enemy. The 14-man squad
21 had departed the company CP at 0630, moving in an
22 easterly direction. One hour later, the patrol reported
23 that it had come under small arms fire and captured a VC
24 suspect. After encountering no further resistance, the
25 Marines continued their patrol. At 0830, the squad leader
26 radioed back that a water buffalo was in ~~the~~ path. Captain
27 Henry ordered the squad to avoid the animal, but "if threatened
28 by it, they were given permission to shoot." In the squad's

1 next report about one-half hour later, the Marines stated that
2 they had wounded the buffalo and ^{were} giving chase to finish it
3 off. Fifteen minutes later, the patrol reported receiving
4 harassing fire and seeing Viet Cong fleeing to the east
5 "and that the patrol was giving physical pursuit." The
6 patrol leader asked for supporting mortar fire. Company
7 B's mortar section fired one 81mm round but the patrol
8 was unable to observe its impact. Captain Henry ordered
9 his mortars to cease firing, fearing that they ^{might} hit
10 ~~his~~ ^{his} own men. About that time, the company lost radio
11 contact with the patrol.

12 The Company commander then sent out a second squad
13 to follow the route of the lost patrol. This second squad
14 also came under small arms fire and mortar fire itself. The
15 Marines countered with supporting mortar fire ~~from the company~~
16 base area, silencing the enemy's weapons. About 1030, the
17 ~~reaction patrol~~ ^{squad leader reported} heard a "heavy volume of small arms fire,
18 mortars, M79s, and hand grenades due east of their position,"
19 near the village of Do Nam. Believing that ~~he~~ ^{he} had found the
20 ~~missing squad~~ ^{Marines}, the patrol leader asked for an aerial observer.

21 Although no Marine observation aircraft was available,
22 "an Army AO [aerial observer] happened into the area and
23 reported an apparent firefight" near where the ~~reaction~~ ^{second} squad
24 had last radioed its position. The Army aircraft dropped
25 a red smoke grenade in the village of Do Nam and fired
26 four rockets into a trenchline in front of the Marine ~~reaction~~
27 patrol. Making another pass over the ~~reaction squad~~, the

1 Army AO threw out two messages to the Marines below, informing
2 them that there were some 20 VC in the trenchling.

3 By this time, Captain Henry decided to move the
4 rest of his company to support his embattled Marines. At
5 1145 he had established a 500 meter defensive line near
6 the village of Hoa Tay, approximately 500 meters southwest
7 of the reaction squad. The Company commander then ordered
8 the ~~reaction~~ ^{second} squad, which had suffered five heat casualties,
9 to pull back to the company lines. By 12³⁰0, the entire
10 company was heavily engaged with the VC. The company's 81mm
11 and 60mm mortars failed to silence the enemy's weapons
12 and Henry asked for artillery support and an air strike.
13 Following a ~~short~~ ^{medium} artillery salvo from the 2d Battalion,
14 12th Marines, the action died down for about 20 minutes.
15 At 1300, the enemy opened up with intensive small arms
16 and mortar fire but ~~about~~ ^{by} this time the first section
17 of F-4s from VMFA-532 were overhead. These first strikes
18 on the entrenched VC in Do Nam once more temporarily
19 stopped the enemy.

20 Following the air strike, about 1320, Captain Henry's
21 men spotted two Marines crossing an open field toward
22 their lines. Henry ordered "a base of fire and mortar fire"
23 to cover the two men. Both Marines were from the lost
24 patrol and badly wounded. The company commander asked
25 them before they went under sedation were the other members
26 of their squad were. The men vaguely pointed in a general
27 direction to the northeast and stated they were all dead.
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1 Before being overrun, the two wounded men claimed that
2 the patrol had killed 30 of the enemy.

3 Despite poor communication, Lieutenant Colonel Doehler
4 had followed the course of the Company B action. Through
5 "fragments of information which had sifted through," the Marine
6 battalion commander believed that his company had encountered
7 the R-20 Battalion. He had just received an intelligence
8 report that two companies of the R-20 had reinforced the
9 ~~one company of the enemy battalion~~ *enemies already in the area* with the mission "to ambush
10 Marine units operating in the area." Doehler ironically
11 remarked ~~in his After Action Report~~ *later* that since Company
12 B was heavily engaged at the time, "it was considered
13 to be an accurate if not timely report."

14 Shortly after 1330, the 1st Battalion commander decided
15 to reinforce his Company B. After some initial problems
16 in obtaining helicopter support, he moved ~~Company D~~ and
17 a platoon from Company A to link up with Henry's company.
18 By 1815, the three Marine units had consolidated a 360
19 degree defensive perimeter around the hamlet of Hoa Tay.

20 By this time, Marine air and artillery had broken
21 the back of enemy resistance. Fixed Wing aircraft,
22 including F-4s, F-8 Crusaders, and A-4s from VMFA -532,
23 VME(AW)-235, and VMA-211 respectively, joined UH-1E gunships
24 from VMO-2 in 27 close air support missions. Nine airstrikes
25 were run at one-half hour intervals, employing napalm, bombs,
26 rockets, and 20mm cannon. The ~~2d Battalion, 12th Marines~~ *Marine Artillery*
27 had fired 242 rounds of 105mm and 155mm rounds in support

1 of the infantry. The combination of air and artillery
 2 apparently inflicted heavy casualties on the VC. According
 3 to Doehler's ~~account~~, the supporting arms served to dis-
 4 organize the enemy, forcing him to break up his forces
 5 into small groups. Later interrogation of the villagers
 6 revealed that these small bands of VC had taken advantage of
 7 the darkness and slipped back across the Thu Bon during the
 8 night of 12 May. They had ~~pressed~~ ^{forced} several civilians in the
 9 hamlets to carry their dead and wounded.

10 On the morning of 13 May, Lieutenant Colonel Doehler
 11 moved his forward CP into Hoa Tay and prepared to
 12 conduct a two-company search and clear operation. That
 13 afternoon Company B recovered the 12 bodies of the missing
 14 Marines near the western tip of the small finger lake.
 15 For the next two days, the battalion carried out a series
 16 of cordon and searches in the 3,000 square meter area
 17 of southern Dai Loc District containing the hamlets of Hoa
 18 Tay, Giao Thuy (3) and Giao Thuy (2).

19 This entire sector consisted of a series of highly
 20 fortified ~~villages~~ ^{hamlets} interspersed with large open areas used
 21 for rice and other crops. Lieutenant Colonel Doehler described
 22 the ~~village~~ ^{village} defenses as formidable, observing:

23 A complex network of trenches
 24 surrounded each of the villages.
 25 In many cases, communications trenches
 26 extended from village to village. These
 27 trenches typically were four to six
 28 feet deep with firing positions located
 every few meters. At the bottom of the
 trenches, tunnels were dug back into
 the ground to provide overhead cover. . . .
 In some places bamboo lined bunkers were
 found, some of which were under ground
 and some above ground.

1 The Marines found the villagers of Hoa Nam and
2 Giao Thuy "cooperative and fairly talkative as long
3 as they were alone with ^{an} interpreter and an interrogator."
4 They told ~~us~~ what they knew about VC movements in the area
5 and in several cases volunteered the names of VC guerrillas
6 living in their hamlets.

7 The Marine battalion was unable to take advantage
8 of this intelligence. The renewal of the political crisis
9 on 15 May, signalled by the arrival of the South Vietnamese
10 Marines at Da Nang, forced Lieutenant Colonel Doehler
11 to cut short the operation on that date. Once more the
12 South Vietnamese ARVN units south of Da Nang became
13 polarized into opposing factions and abandoned their outposts
14 along Route 4. Lieutenant Colonel Doehler moved his
15 CP back to Hill 55 and his battalion was again on the
16 defensive.

17 During these first two weeks in May the other 9th Marines
18 battalions also conducted similar scrubbing actions in their
19 respective sectors but encountered only sporadic harassing
20 fires and mines. With the renewed political troubles in
21 Da Nang, they too returned to their former positions. The
22 regiment's offensive had ground to a halt. Nevertheless,
23 Doehler's battalion in the three day period from 12-15
24 May claimed to have killed 57 of the enemy. One later
25 intelligence source indicated that the VC casualties may
26 have been as high as a 150 dead. The Marine battalion
27 suffered 15 dead, 17 wounded, and 10 non-battle casualties.

1 With the Marines on the defensive, the enemy attempted
2 to exploit the chaotic situation south of Da Nang caused
3 by the political crisis. On 21 May, the 1st Battalion,
4 9th Marines met the R-20 Battalion again. The enemy unit
5 had infiltrated the hamlet of An Trac, a former model
6 village for Marine Corps civic action, located northwest of

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Hill 55. Beginning at 1115 as a Company C squad contact with 40 to 50 VC, 500 meters across the Yen River from

An Trach (1), the fighting escalated into a fierce engagement extending across both banks of the river.

In a seven hour battle, Lieutenant ^{Colonel} Doehler's Companies

A and C, reinforced by SPARROWHAWK squads and M-48 tanks

and supported by air and artillery, defeated two companies

of the R-20. According to the 3d Marine Division account:

In the initial stages of the contact, the Viet Cong fought from trenches until they were overrun by Marines. Later, Viet Cong were seen attempting to run from the Marines, even digging frantically, to evade contact with Marine units. During the later stages . . . the Viet Cong became very confused and appeared to be without leadership.

In that day's fighting, the battalion killed 53 of the enemy and possibly another 83x but suffered 12 dead and 31 wounded.

Colonel Simmons observed that all of the 9th regiment's significant contacts during May ^{resulted} ~~were~~ ^{from} ~~as a result of~~ VC initiative. The enemy would begin the action when the Marines were initially at a disadvantage either because of ^{numbers} ~~size~~ or terrain and in some cases because of both. The Marines, nevertheless, eventually attained the upper hand. For the entire month, the 9th Marines killed over 270 of the enemy while sustaining

75 Marines dead and 328 wounded. Over 50 percent of the

Marine casualties for ~~the month~~ ^{May was caused by} ~~were~~ ^{A result of} enemy

mines and explosive devices, ^{many of them made from} ~~much of it~~ former American

equipment abandoned by the ARVN forces south of Da Nang.

1 *at the end of*
2 The 9th ^Marines commander remarked ~~in his~~ ^{May} ~~chronology~~
3 upon the considerable increase of enemy incidents during the
4 month and ~~allow~~^{ed}, after taking into consideration other
5 factors, that this upsurge was due to "the increased
6 freedom of movement enjoyed by the Viet Cong in many
7 outlying areas as the result of diminished GVN military
8 activities during the period of political instability"
9 As a result, the regiment failed to reach Phase Line
10 BROWN on 31 May and the Ky Lam Campaign was behind
11 ¹⁸
12 schedule.
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OPERATION LIBERTY

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1 With the surrender of the Struggle Forces at Da Nang
 2 and the achievement of some stability there, the 9th
 3 Marines once more renewed its offensive in coordination
 4 with the South Vietnamese. On 2 June, Colonel Lap, who
 5 had replaced Colonel Yeu as the Quang Da Special Sector
 6 Commander, visited Colonel Simmons at the latter's CP.
 7 The South Vietnamese commander wanted the 9th Marines
 8 to ~~begin once more~~ ^{resume} COUNTY FAIR operations in the five
 9 village pacification area. He assured Simmons that at
 10 least one battalion from the 51st ARVN Regiment would
 11 be committed to the pacification campaign. Following
 12 Lap's visit, Colonel Simmons ~~made some revisions to his~~ ^{revised portions of}
 13 previous orders. On 5 June, he directed his battalions
 14 to renew COUNTY FAIR Operations in conjunction with the
 15 ARVN and extended the deadline for the attainment of
 16 Phase Line BROWN to 20 June ^{from 31 May} ~~vice 31 May~~. 19

17 At this juncture, General Kyle decided to transform
 18 the 9th Marines Ky Lam campaign into a full division-size
 19 offensive, calling for "a conventional linear type attack
 20 of all forward units to push the front lines forward . . .
 21 in a deliberate search and clear operation to include the
 22 cordon and search of every hamlet in the zone" He
 23 divided the Da Nang TAOR into three sectors; the cleared,
 24 the semi-cleared, and the uncleared. The cleared area
 25 included the main airfield, Marble Mountain, and the
 26 immediate terrain surrounding the airbase. That portion
 27 of the Da Nang TAOR that extended from the Cau Do to the

1 Thanh Quit ⁱⁿ river ~~to~~ the south and reaching three to
 2 ~~2,000~~ ^{five} kilometers into the high ground to the north and to
 3 the west of the Air Base was designated the semi-cleared
 4 area. The uncleared sector consisted of that region
 5 between the La Tho-Thanh Quit Rivers ^{and} the banks of the
 6 Ky Lam-Thu Bon. Phase Line GREEN, the final objective
 7 area, largely paralleled the line of the latter two rivers.
 8 The 3d Marine Division commander directed that only minimum
 9 forces be positioned in the rear and set the target date
 10 for reaching Phase Line GREEN as 30 June. 20

11 The continuing arrival of Marine reinforcements
 12 allowed General Kyle to make this kind of all-out effort.
 13 On 28 May, the 1st MP Battalion arrived at Da Nang from
 14 the United States and relieved the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines
 15 of its airfield security mission. The latter battalion
 16 then returned to the operational control of its parent
 17 regiment, taking over the 3d Marines western TAOR. For
 18 once, Colonel Harold A. Hayes, who had relieved Colonel
 19 Fisher on 16 April as 3d Marines commander, ^{Command of} had all
 20 three of his battalions, ~~under his command.~~ Other reinforce-
 21 ments were scheduled to arrive at Da Nang or were already
 22 in place. Colonel Bryon B. Mitchell was slated to transfer
 23 his 1st Marines headquarters from Chu Lai to Da Nang in June
 24 and in fact two of his battalions, the 1st and the 3d, had
 25 already made the move by the end of May. The 3d Battalion,
 26 1st Marines had arrived at Da Nang on 22 May while the
 27 1st Battalion arrived on 31 May. Both battalions were

1 temporarily under the operational control of the 9th
2 Marines with the 3d Battalion in regimental reserve. The
3 1st Battalion upon its arrival relieved the regiment's
4 eastern flank battalion, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines,
5 which ~~was~~ rejoined its parent regiment at Phu Bai.

6 General Kyle could expect to have at Da Nang by
7 mid-June three Marine infantry regiments consisting of eight
8 battalions. He planned to reduce the extensive 9th Marines
9 TAOR by having the 1st Marines assume control of that regiment's
10 eastern flank while the 3d Marines took over that part of
11 the 9th Marines TAOR west of the Yen River. In effect, Kyle
12 visualized almost a shoulder to shoulder advance to the
13 Ky Lam. The operation, code named LIBERTY, was scheduled to
14 begin on 7 June, with the 9th Marines bearing the brunt of
15 the campaign in its initial stages.

16 Colonel Simmons modified his Ky Lam Campaign to
17 conform with the division operation. He divided his
18 TAOR into ~~one~~ ^{sized} company objective areas. His reserve battalion,
19 the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, was to emphasize, with its
20 three rifle companies, combined operations with ARVN
21 and Vietnamese local forces in the five village pacification
22 region located in the semi-cleared area. The 3d Battalion,
23 9th Marines was to continue its two-company holding action
24 in the An Hoa Region. All ~~of the rest of the~~ ^{the remaining} infantry
25 companies were assigned to the ~~three~~ forward battalions--the 1st
26 Battalion, 1st Marines on the eastern flank; the 2d Battalion, 9th
27 Marines in the center, and the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines on the western
28 flank. Thus each forward battalion would consist of five infantry
companies instead of the usual four,

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2 Marines with the 3d Battalion in regimental reserve. The
3 1st Battalion upon its arrival relieved the regiment's
4 eastern flank battalion, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines,
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26 the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines on the eastern flank, the 2d
27 Battalion, 9th Marines in the center, and the 1st Battalion,
28 9th Marines on the western flank. Each of these battalions

20

1 ^{with} ~~was to deploy~~ three companies to the front and two to ^{deployed}
 2 the rear. The advancing battalions were to secure Route
 3 4 by 20 June and reach the Ky Lam by the end of the month.²¹
 4 Operation LIBERTY Began on 7 June as scheduled with
 5 large preparatory artillery fires. Marine artillery
 6 neutralized 35 objective areas in front of the advancing
 7 infantry. The enemy ²² ~~initially~~ countered the Marine offensive with
 8 ~~by~~ minor harassing small arms fire and ~~with~~ mines. These
 9 mines were the more deadly of the two. The most significant
 10 ~~mining~~ ^{mine} incident occurred on 11 June in the 9th Marines
 11 central sector. Captain Charles A. Reckwell's Company
 12 F, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, encountered a large minefield
 13 in a grassy plot just south of the La Tho River. In two
 14 detonations, the company suffered three killed and 21
 15 wounded. While the wounded were being evacuated, four to
 16 five additional explosions occurred and the grass caught ~~on~~
 17 fire. Fortunately there were no further Marine casualties.
 18 The following day, the artillery fired a destruction
 19 mission which resulted in seven secondary explosions in
 20 that same grassy field.²³

21 On 15 June, the division completed its planned realignment
 22 of regimental forces in the TAOR. Colonel Mitchell
 23 assumed operational control of his two 1st Marine battalions
 24 and took over responsibility for the division's eastern
 25 flank from the 9th Marines. With a corresponding
 26 reduction in the western sector, the 9th Marines' TAOR now
 27 consisted of 134 square miles, the regiment having lost nearly
 28 ¹⁰⁰ ~~100~~ square miles in the exchange. On this date as
 well, Colonel Simmons finally moved his command post to

1 Hill 55.

2 With this adjustment of forces and sectors, the 3d
 3 Marine Division ~~continued its~~ "scrubbing" actions in Operation
 4 LIBERTY. The only serious enemy opposition occurred again
 5 in the 9th Marines zone of action. On 18 June, Company
 6 C, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines operating some 2,000 meters
 7 below Dai Loc came under heavy mortar and small arms fire,
 8 suffering eight wounded. The company asked for supporting
 9 air and artillery which ended the enemy resistance. Lieutenant
 10 Colonel Donahue's 2d Battalion, 9th Marines underwent a
 11 similar attack on 22 June in the hamlet of La Hoa(1), just
 12 east of the railroad and 4,000 meters above the Ky Lam.
 13 Marines once more called upon supporting arms, including
 14 naval gunfire from the ^{*destroyer*} U.S.S. Morton (DD-432), which was
 15 offshore, to silence the enemy. By the end of the month,
 16 all three Marine Regiments reached Phase Line GREEN
 17 and the operation terminated. The VC resistance
 18 to the Marine advance had been scattered and ineffective.
 19 ^{*at the end of the campaign*} The 9th Marines observed in its ~~command chronology~~ that
 20 the lack of major enemy resistance gave "plausibility to
 21 the thesis" that the momentum of Operation LIBERTY prevented
 22 the ~~enemy/V~~ from gaining any degree of initiative and
 23 uprooted them "from what had been relatively a secure
 24 operating area." That regiment alone claimed to have
 25 recovered 40 square miles from the VC. The Marines
 26 were once more optimistic about pacifying the extensive
 27 Da Nang enclave.

NOTES

Chapter 5

The Advance to the Ky Lam

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from: III MAF Ops, Apr-Jun66; III MAF ComdCs, Apr-Jun 66; 3d Mar Div ComdCs, Apr-Jun66; 1st MAF ComdCs, Apr-Jun66; 9th Marines ComdCs, Apr-Jun66; Simmons Presentation; Shore, "Marines in Vietnam, Jan-Jun66;" Simmons, "Marine Operations, 1965-66."

Section 1

April Actions and Operation GEORGIA

Additional sources for this section are: III MAF Jnl File, Opn GEORGIA; 3/9 ComdCs, Apr-May66; 3/9 AAR, Opn GEORGIA, 20Apr-10May66, dtd 14May 66, hereafter 3/9 AAR Opn GEORGIA.

1. Simmons Presentation.

2. 2/9 AAR for Company H engagement, dtd 16 Apr66, Encl to 9th Marines Sit Rep 106, dtd 16Apr66, Tab b, Sit Reps, 9th Marines ComdC, Apr66. A

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. See 3d Mar Div OpO 368-66 (GEORGIA), dtd 1 Apr66, Encl 3, 3d Mar Div ComdC, Apr66 and 9th Marines OpO 111-66, dtd 14 Apr66, Tab H, 9th Marines ComdC, Apr66.

7. 3/9 AAR Opn Georgia pp. 2-7--2-8.

8. Artillery Supplement, Encl 1, 3/9 AAR Opn GEORGIA.

9. Reconnaissance Supplement, Encl 5, 3/9 AAR Opn Georgia.

10. Amphibian Howitzer Supplement, Encl 4, 3/9 AAR Opn GEORGIA.

11. 9th Marines ComdC, May 66, p. 3-1,

Section 2

The May Ky Lam Campaign

Additional sources for this section are: 1/9 ComdC, May66; 2/9 ComdC, May66; 2/4ComdC, May 66.

- 1 12. 9th Marines OPlan 118-66 Ky Lam, dtd 4May66, Tab h,
9th Marines ComdC, May66.
- 2
- 3 13. 9th Marines ComdC, May66, p. 3-1.
- 4 14. Simmons Presentation.
- 5 15. 1/9 AAR for unnamed opn, 9-15 May66, dtd 19May66, Tab
4, 1/9 ComdC, May66. The description of the 1/9 action below
Dai Loc in the following ~~paraphrasis~~ ^{paraphrasis} is taken from this account
6 as supplemented by the 9th Marines S-3 Jnl and Sit Reps. All
quotations are from the 1/9 AAR.
- 7
- 8 16. 3d Mar Div ComdC, May66, p. 7.
- 9 17. 9th Marines ComdC, May66, p. 2-10.
- 10 18. Ibid., p. 3-2. The comparative figures for Marine and
VC casualties for the month are found on pp. 1-1 and 2-11 ^{respectively}.
- 11 Section 3
- 12 Operation LIBERTY
- 13 Additional sources for this section are: 3d Marines ComdC,
Jun66; 1st Marines ComdC, Jun66.
- 14
- 15 19. 9th Marines FragO 153-66, dtd 2Jun66 and 9th Marines
FragO 156-66, dtd 5Jun66, Tab c, Frag Os, 9th Marines ComdC,
Jun66.
- 16
- 17 20. 3d Mar Div OpO 399-66, dtd 5Jun66, Encl 4, 3d Mar
Div ComdC, Jun66.
- 18 21. See 9th Marines FragO 157A-66, dtd 6Jun66, Tab c,
FragOs and 9th Marines OPlan 118A-66 Ky Lam, Jun66, Tab g,
19 9th Marines ComdC, Jun66.
- 20 22. 9th Marines ComdC, Jun66, p. 9-1.
dtd 11 Jun66,
- 21 23. 9th Marines Sit Rep 162-66, Tab b, 9th Marines ComdC,
Jun66.
- 22 24. 9th Marines ComdC, Jun66, p. 2-4.
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- 24
- 25
- 26
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- 28