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## INTRODUCTION

This book is a contemporary history of the United States Marine Corps in the Vietnamese conflict from 1962 until the 1968 Paris Peace Conference. The authors labored without benefit of that historical perspective and fine discernment that come only with the elapse of time and the cooling of passions. The volume is an authoritative work written primarily from Marine Corps classified records as well as from various secondary unclassified source materials. The authors were not privy to the sensitive Department of State, White House, and other documents that will no doubt be open for scholarly research in future years.

There was the same problem in the case of enemy documents --those of the National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese forces. In view of the bitterness and lack of communication between the Communists and Allies, and the improbability of a complete Allied victory, these documents may never be available in sufficient abundance (as were, for example, the German and Japanese records after World War II) to satisfy scholars attempting to penetrate the miasma surrounding this Vietnamese experience. So, in this sense, the story of the Marines in Vietnam may never be completely revealed.

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Despite these problems, U. S. Marines in Vietnam does represent the current distillation of much of our knowledge about the war while the impressions and insights of many of those involved (particularly of the men who withstood the heat of battle) are still fresh and uncluttered by years of introspection and, possibly, rationalization. This book and the associated research, hopefully, will also serve as a valuable point of departure for the definitive Marine Corps historical volumes on Vietnam that will be written over the next few years. Future authors undoubtedly will be able to benefit from the considerable paper-gathering and interviewing that was so much a part of the preparation of this story.

The book is structured to give the reader some background as to why and how some 85,000 U. S. Marines came to be in Vietnam by the spring of 1968, and to tell what they did while they were there. The buildup of forces was in consonance with the U. S. policy of graduated response that reflected the realities of the political and logistical situation in Vietnam. The authors have attempted to integrate and balance the major themes that characterized the Marine Corps involvement in that distant land. These included the initial occupation and enlargement of coastal enclaves; the three-pronged strategy of pacification and civic action programs, counter guerrilla activity,

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and large-unit offensive sweeps; the response to Viet Cong and North Vietnamese initiatives; the supporting arms and logistic backup; and the turning away from the battlefield toward the conference table for a satisfactory resolution of the conflict.

The focus of the book occasionally shifts from a Marine Corps view of the war to another vantage point. Even the Marine Corps portion of the Vietnam story cannot be fully understood unless the role of the Marines is seen as a part of the whole picture--including U. S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Allied, and diplomatic involvement. For example, the complex command structure operative in Vietnam had a very significant influence on the Marine Corps effort in I Corps and elsewhere. Also, one cannot begin to comprehend the scope of the logistic task if it is perceived only in terms of the activities of Marine Corps logisticians and support units. Nor does the very significant enemy TET offensive of 1968 have much meaning, even for Marines, if it is assessed only in terms of the increased action in I CTZ.

The American field commanders in Vietnam were confronted by intricate cultural, political, religious, propaganda, and military cross-currents. Not only was it extraordinarily difficult to recognize the battlefield enemy, it was also very often unclear as to what course of action to pursue to avoid aggravating

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the South Vietnamese political situation or intensifying the considerable world and U. S. domestic misunderstanding of the Allied strategy. The description of the Vietnamese political crisis during the spring of 1966 (detailed in Chapter 10) gives some indication of the turbulence in which the Marine commander and his men were forced to operate. The Marines were also very much aware of the growing international and U. S. homefront opposition to the American commitment in Vietnam. Letters from home, newspaper clippings, and magazine articles left little to the imagination on that score. This entire tangle was overlaid with a web of considerations such as: safe-havens, holiday truces, cease fires, bombing pauses, no fire zones, free fire zones, and rules of engagement.

Despite the gradual shift of opinion in the United States from the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to the 1968 post-TET disenchantment with the war, the U. S. Government kept faith with the troops in the field. America continued to pour forth her treasures and blood to support her Allies and the unfortunate South Vietnamese civilians caught in the crossfire of a very confusing war. And the U. S. Marines, as always, were very much in the thick of the action.

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## CHAPTER I

## SETTING THE SCENE

(1)

## PRELUDE

(1) Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Edmund Roberts Papers (MS Div, LC), hereafter Roberts' Papers; Commandant's Office, Letter Book of Letters Sent, v. 9, dtd 26Aug1828-25Jun1833, in Records of the U. S. Marine Corps (RG 127, National Archives); Log Books of the Peacock, 1832-34, in Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel (RG 24, National Archives); Special Agents' Reports, Edmund <sup>Agent</sup> Roberts, 1832-36, in General Records of the Department of State (RG 59, National Archives); Letters Received by the Secretary of Navy from Commanders, 1804-66, in Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library (RG 45, National Archives); Edmund Roberts, Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin China, Siam, and Muscat in the U. S. Sloop of War Peacock, David Geisinger Commander during the Years 1832-34, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1837); Maj Edwin N. McClellan, USMC, History of the United States Marine Corps, 1st ed., Part II, chap XVIII (Washington: Published in Mimeograph Form, 21Sep32); Robert W. Neeser, Statistical and Chronological History of the U. S. Navy, 1775-1907, v. 2 (New York: The MacMillan Company,

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On the morning of 7 February 1832 in Boston Harbor, a heavily laden Marine detachment of 3 noncommissioned officers and 18 privates struggled up the gangway of the U.S. sloop-of-war Peacock. Minutes later, under the watchful supervision of their detachment commander, Second Lieutenant Henry W. Fowler, the men were hard at work stowing their gear, learning their shipboard duties, and familiarizing themselves with the ship that was to be their home for many months. Four weeks afterward, the 18-gun sloop with its 166-man crew shook out her sails and slid past the tip of Cape Cod making for Cape Horn---and the distant Orient.  
(2)

The voyage of the Peacock was to be a venture in American diplomacy. An envoy of President Andrew Jackson, Edmund Roberts, who also doubled as clerk to the ship's captain, Commander/Commandant David Geisinger, was on board to negotiate treaties of amity and commerce with the eastern courts, among them the country of Vietnam. The initial American exposure to this nation was a precursor of the frustration so apparent there today.

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1909); Charles Oscar Paullin, "Early Voyages of American Naval Vessels to the Orient," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, v. XXXVI, no. 3 (Sep 1910), pp. 707-734.

(2) Entry of 7Feb1832, Log Book of the Peacock (RG 24, National Archives); LtCol Comdt Archibald Henderson ltrs to Capt William H. Freeman, dtd 4Feb1832 and to 2dLt Henry W. Fowler, dtd 26Jan1832 (RG 127, *ibid.*).

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The Peacock arrived off the coast of Vietnam on New Year's Day 1833, during the middle of the winter monsoon season.

Buffeted by high winds and strong currents, the vessel was unable to enter Da Nang harbor, its original destination. Four days later, the U. S. warship sailed into Phu Yen Bay "under top sails, jib, and spanker and stood at anchor in six and a half fathoms of water,"<sup>(3)</sup> in Vung Lam Harbor, 120 miles south-east of the Vietnamese imperial capital of Hue.

On the afternoon of the 5th, an old man came on board the ship and "though raggedly dressed and dirty [was] somewhat superior to the fishermen who brought him...."<sup>(4)</sup> He introduced himself as the Assistant Keeper of Vung Lam and Vung Chao and informed his hosts that the southernmost and principal port in the harbor was called Shandai. The Peacock was anchored off the village of Vung Lam, and the hamlet of Vung Chao lay directly to the north. Edmund Roberts asked the official to transmit a letter from President Jackson to the "King of Cochin China and Annam," which the old man agreed to do.

The American diplomat was to find his bargaining sessions with the Vietnamese as stormy as the preceding voyage. During

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(3) Entry of 5Jan1833, ibid.

(4) Journal and Conversations--Cochin China, entry for 5Jan1823 in Roberts' Papers hereafter Conversations.

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the next month, minor dignitaries and functionaries arrived at the port town amidst varying degrees of pomp and circumstance, with long trains of followers, "mounted on elephants or horses, or travelling in planquins (umbrella chairs)."<sup>(5)</sup> At first, the Vietnamese objected to the form of address of the American President's communique. They explained that the realm was called Vietnam rather than Annam and was ruled by an emperor rather than a king.<sup>(6)</sup> The delegates also questioned the rank of the American representative who deftly handled this situation. He announced himself as Edmund Roberts of the city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire and then enumerated the various counties of the state. The Vietnamese were duly impressed and one of them noted that no prince in their land could claim an equal number of titles.

The most serious incident in the extended conversations occurred on 29 January when the Vietnamese delegation handed a note to John Morrison, an Englishman from Canton who was hired as Roberts' interpreter. The Vietnamese claimed that since

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(5) Edmund Roberts draft of letter to Edward Livingston, dtd 22Jun1833 in Roberts' Papers.

(6) The name Annam meaning pacified south, came into use in the seventh century and reflects the reaction of the Chinese to repeated Vietnamese attempts at insurrection. Victor J. Croizat, *The Development of the Plain of Reeds: Some Politico-Military Implications* (RAND Publication P-3976, Dec 1968) p. 40 (U).

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"the President /of the United States/ being elected and promoted by the people and not possessing the actual title of king, it behooved him to write in a manner proper decorous and respectful...." They stressed that "it was requisite for the translation (7) to be examined in order to expunge improper words." The interpreter retorted that President Jackson was inferior to no king or emperor and left the room.

Roberts sent Morrison back to speak to the Vietnamese, this time accompanied by Lieutenant Fowler. The Americans demanded an apology from the native delegation and threatened to complain to the emperor concerning their rudeness and inhospitability. Somewhat taken aback, the Chief Vietnamese official asked for the original statement which he had written that morning, tore it up, and then denied casting any aspersions on the American Presidency.

The atmosphere of the talks with the Vietnamese did not mellow and the Americans were never granted an audience with the emperor. Roberts found it impossible to complete his mission and in the early morning hours of 7 February the Peacock left Vung Lam Harbor and sailed for the coast of Siam (Thailand). Edmund Roberts never returned to Vietnam; he died in Macao on a second diplomatic mission to the Orient in 1836. His experiences with the Vietnamese left him with the following impressions of this eastern nation:

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(7) Entry for 29Jan1833 in Conversations.

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We found there three fine harbors with a beautiful picturesque fertile country, but lying under the depressing influence of one of the vilest despotisms that disgraces the earth--the hard earnings of these unfortunate people are wrested from them by the king and nobility--almost before the harvest is ripe for the sickle--consequently the inhabitants are wretched in the extreme, excessively poor and filthy, groaning  
(8)  
under the weight of their chains.

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(8) Edmund Roberts ltr to his children, dtd 7Jun1833 in  
Roberts' Papers.

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## THE U.S. IN ASIA

The previous episode was a footnote to American history and important in retrospect only as the first official U. S. excursion in diplomacy with the Vietnamese. As an interesting sidelight, Lieutenant Fowler was in all probability the first Marine Corps officer to set foot in Vietnam.

The Roberts' expedition was an example of the American flag following the American dollar. As early as 1784, one year after American independence, the U. S. merchantman Empress of China, had sailed from New York Harbor for the Chinese port

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(9) Unless otherwise noted, the material in the following two sections is derived from: Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1958, 6th ed., rev. and enl.), hereafter Bailey, A Diplomatic History; Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam, A Dragon Embattled, 2 vols (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), hereafter Buttinger, Vietnam; Bernard B. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965, 2<sup>d</sup> ed., rev. and enl.), hereafter Fall, Two Viet-Nams; Foreign Areas Studies Division, Special Operations Research Office, The American University, operating under contract with the Department of the Army, U. S. Army Area Handbook for Vietnam (Washington: Sep 1962), hereafter Army Vietnam Handbook.

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(10)  
of Canton laden with a cargo of ginseng. By 1832, American trade with the Orient had risen to a value of over five million dollars. In 1844, the U. S. diplomat Caleb Cushing signed the first treaty with China, while Commodore Matthew Perry opened Japan to the <sup>W</sup>West 10 years later.

Except for the acquisition of the Philippines and Hawaii during the 1890s, American foreign policy was consistent throughout the 19th century with respect to the Pacific nations. The United States attempted to protect the trade of its merchants, but unlike the European powers did not create a large colonial empire.

This policy was reflected in the U.S. attitude towards China. In notes to the British, German, and Russian governments on 6 September 1899, U.S. Secretary of State John Hay announced what came to be called the "Open Door Policy." This first statement of American aims was limited and applicable only to that part of China already carved out as "spheres of influence" by foreign powers. Hay only asked that within this area, the vested interests of all nations would be protected. In July 1900, Hay expanded his original concept and declared that the American government recognized the territorial integrity of China and the right of commercial equality for all nations throughout

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(10) Ginseng was a root, "which was highly prized by the elderly Chinese gentlemen as a supposed cure for impotence." Bailey, A Diplomatic History, p. 299.

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the country. With some deviations, this continued to be American policy during the first two decades of the 20th century.

In 1922, the Open Door received recognition from the major powers (with the exception of Germany and Russia) in the Nine-Power Treaty concluded in Washington during February of that year. The signatory nations promised to uphold the principles of the Open Door and pledged themselves to respect the sovereignty and independence of China.

The traditional American insistence on the integrity of China was to set the stage for a confrontation with the ambitions of the Japanese government. Both Presidents Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt objected strenuously to the Japanese annexation of Manchuria and the invasion of China proper during the 1930s. When the Japanese Empire extended its tentacles southward and asked for base rights in French Indochina, the United States government called for an end to Japanese aggression. On 26 November 1941, Secretary of State Cordell Hull demanded the withdrawal of Japanese forces from both China and Indochina. While negotiations continued in Washington between Japan and the United States, a Japanese carrier force headed for Hawaii. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, the United States entered World War II.

After the surrender of Japan in 1945, the U.S. became the dominant Western power in the Pacific; a role which led to conflict with another Asian nation. In 1949, the Chinese Communists, under the leadership of Mao Tse Tung, seized control

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of mainland China, combining traditional Chinese nationalism with the expansionist impetus afforded by the Communist ideology. American policy makers believed that the U.S. had no choice but to oppose the spread of Communism as they feared the consequences of its extension throughout Asia. At times, the Cold War turned hot as in the case of Korea during the period 1950-53. But at no time was the situation to become more complex or more frustrating than the American experience in the former French colony of Vietnam.

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## THE FRENCH IN VIETNAM

Vietnam forms an elongated appendix underneath the belly of China. The late Bernard B. Fall portrayed the country as "two rice baskets on opposite ends of their carrying pole."<sup>(11)</sup> The rice baskets are the two river deltas---the Red in the north and the Mekong, one of the most important food production areas in all of Asia, in the south. The carrying pole is the Annamite Cordillera, whose watershed roughly corresponds to Vietnam's western borders with Laos and Cambodia. To the east, Vietnam faces the waters of the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea. Vietnam is 1,000 miles long running north and south, and varies from 25 miles to 300 miles in width. The southern mountains and highlands cover two thirds of the land mass below the 17th Parallel. Of the approximately 30 million Vietnamese (16 million in the north, 14 million in the south), nearly 29 million live on only 20 percent of the territory. The one million primitive Montagnards have the 100,000 square miles of plateau and mountain areas largely to themselves.

The initial contacts of Vietnam with the West were based on trade. The first Europeans to arrive were the Portuguese in 1535. They were soon followed by British, Dutch, and French merchants and missionaries. Because of restrictions placed upon them by the Vietnamese, the traders found very little profit and departed.

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(11) Fall, Two Viet-Nams, p. 3.

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By the end of the 18th century, only a few Christian missionaries were left in Vietnam to represent Western culture. One of these, Pigneau de Behaine, Bishop of Adran, helped one of the Vietnamese emperors to ascend the throne. But as the missionaries became more active in politics, the Vietnamese showed much less consideration for their foreign guests. The missionaries were subjected to various pressures and, by the 1840s, even persecution.

The French were quick to take advantage of the situation to serve their own ends. A French naval squadron responded to appeals from the Christian missionaries by bombarding Da Nang in 1847. The French returned to Da Nang 11 years later and occupied the city. In the 1860s, the Vietnamese emperor was forced to cede his southern provinces, comprising the region of Cochin China, to the French. By the end of the 19th century, the French had firmly established control over all of Vietnam, while still paying lip service to the authority of the emperor at Hue.

The Europeans, like the Chinese before them, however, were to discover that the Vietnamese were not an easy race to govern. Until 1898, the Vietnamese fought a spasmodic series of guerrilla wars in the northern provinces of Tonkin. Even after these bands were defeated, Vietnamese nationalists continued to agitate against the foreigners. But during the 1920s and 1930s, the French were able to suppress any expression of Vietnamese independence.

In 1941, when the French Vichy government yielded to the

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demands of the Japanese for bases in Vietnam, only the Vietnamese Communist party remained intact. Led by the revolutionary veteran, Ho Chi Minh, Communist guerrillas harassed the Japanese occupiers. Their major contribution to the Allied war effort was rescuing downed pilots. It was perhaps ironic that American advisors for the U.S. Office of Strategic Services furnished the support and assistance which sustained these groups. Ho formed the Viet Minh, Communist-led and -dominated, but still a coalition of various Vietnamese nationalist movements. With the Japanese defeat, the Viet Minh entered Hanoi and on 2 September 1945 proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.<sup>(12)</sup>

The Allied Powers, however, at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, decreed that Vietnam would be divided at the 16th Parallel with British troops occupying the south and Chinese Nationalists the north. The Allies delayed to a later date the final disposition of the occupied territory.

In discussing the future of European colonies after the war, Winston Churchill once made the statement that he had not assumed the Premiership of Great Britain to preside over the demise of the Empire. General Charles de Gaulle, the provisional President of the French Republic, had an equally ingrained sense

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(12) The opening statement of this proclamation contains these familiar words: "All men are created equal..." Buttinger, Vietnam, v. 1, p. 299.

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of the grandeur and destiny of himself and his nation. He had no intention of giving away what had belonged to France prior to the war. The French government in the late summer of 1945 immediately sent an expeditionary force under the command of the "Liberator of Paris," General Jacques Leclerc to reassert French sovereignty and relieve the British troops.

Events, however, were to overtake decisions. On 24 September 1945, a Vietnamese mob rioted in the streets of Saigon, the major city of the south, beating or killing any unfortunate Frenchman who happened to be in its path. British soldiers allied with the remnants of the former Vichy and Japanese garrisons finally were able to maintain a semblance of order. In early October, Leclerc's units arrived in Vietnam and the British forces completely withdrew by the end of the year. The Chinese Nationalist troops remained in the north, interested in the plunder they could gather from the countryside. It was not until the spring of 1946 that the Chinese evacuated Vietnam and allowed the French troops to move north.

There followed a period of futile discussion between the French and Ho Chi Minh's government in Hanoi. The French below the 16th Parallel had established a puppet regime and at one time even recognized Ho's dominion in the north. But in November 1946, the French fleet bombarded the city of Haiphong and during the next month fighting broke out in the northern city of Hanoi between the Viet Minh and the French garrison.

This action in a sense was the beginning of the Vietnamese

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war. Ho and his associates were forced to flee into the jungles of northern Tonkin and the Viet Minh guerrillas under General Vo Nguyen Giap entered their first phase in their "War for National Liberation." The French were moderately successful in the initial months of the struggle and at one time almost captured Ho and his entire staff.

The main battleground of the war was in the north, the area of Viet Minh power. The French strove to crush Giap's army before Chinese Communist assistance became a factor, but the French resources were inadequate. After 1949, the French were barely able to contain the Viet Minh despite an ever increasing commitment of men and materiel. In January 1951, General Giap gambled on a full offensive in the northern Red River Valley but in a four-day engagement, the Communist forces lost over 6,000 dead and left behind 500 men who became prisoners of the French. By June, the Viet Minh had retreated to their mountain strongholds to regroup. They were, however, far from defeated.

For the next two years, 1951-1953, the war remained in a state of flux. The Viet Minh regular forces turned their attention away from the populated areas and instead mounted attacks against isolated French outposts in the highlands. There, the superior firepower of the French was more than matched by the cross-country mobility of the Viet Minh. By the summer of 1953, the Communist forces had mounted a full offensive in neighboring Laos. The French command, in order to counter the

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Communist forces, directed the reinforcement of an outpost near the Laotian border. At 1035 on the morning of 23 November 1953, the first French parachutists landed at Dien Bien Phu. This isolated French garrison was to become the symbol of the entire French military effort.

The war was as much a political battle as it was a military struggle. Ho Chi Minh and his cohorts were well aware of this cohorts and the Viet Minh political and guerrilla apparatus extended throughout Vietnam, although more extensively in the north than in the south. The French attempted to counteract the Viet Minh appeal by making some concessions to Vietnamese nationalism. In 1949, they invited the former emperor Bao Dai to return from a self-imposed exile, who then established a government at Saigon under French auspices. Much of the French failure to reestablish control was due to the fact that they had so thoroughly eliminated non-Communist Vietnamese political organizations prior to the war. Almost by default, the Communists took over the nationalist movement. The French consideration for Vietnamese sensibilities came too late to convince the people to accept a French Union modeled on the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Even so the French could not be wished away. The French Expeditionary Corps, although overextended, was a modern American-equipped army, which fought well and hard throughout the country. By the end of 1953, the Expeditionary Corps consisted of over 235,000 men reinforced by over 260,000 troops of the

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Associated States of Indochina. One authority estimated that the Viet Minh lost three men for every French soldier killed.

In December 1953, Ho indicated a willingness to negotiate with the French government. Arrangements were made for an international conference with the British and Soviet governments as cosponsors to be held in Geneva, Switzerland during the spring and summer of 1954. But while the diplomats talked, Giap deployed his artillery on the high ground surrounding the Dien Bien Phu valley. The day before the conference took up the subject of Indochina, the French stronghold surrendered to the victorious Vietnamese Communists. It was apparent that the French could not gain a military victory and perhaps even faced further defeat. The first Indochina War was over and the Geneva Accords of July 1954 merely recognized the political and military realities.

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CHAPTER 2  
(1)  
A NEW CONFLICT

(1) Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: Defense Intelligence Agency, Military Factbook on the War in South Vietnam (Jan66) (S), hereafter, DIA, Military Factbook (S); Historical Studies Division, Historical Office, Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State, Chronology on Vietnam 1950-65 (Research Project No. 747, Nov 65) (C), hereafter Dept of State, Chronology on Vietnam (C); Maj Harvey D. Bradshaw and Jack Shulimson, Commandant's Vietnam Chronology, 1945-65 (HistDiv, HMC) (TS), hereafter Commandant's Chronology (TS); HistDiv, Vietnam Comment File, hereafter Vietnam Comment File; Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Congress, Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam, 91st Congress, 1st Session (Washington: March 1969, 5th ed., rev. and enl.), hereafter Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Background Information; Army Vietnam Handbook; Buttinger, Vietnam; Fall, Two Viet-Nams; Bernard B. Fall, Vietnam Witness, 1953-66 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), hereafter Fall, Vietnam Witness; Jean Lacouture, Vietnam: Between Two Truces, Konrad Kellen and Joel Carmichael, trans. (New York: Random House, 1966), hereafter Lacouture, Vietnam: Two Truces; John Mecklin, Mission in Torment, An Intimate Account of the U. S. Role in Vietnam (Garden City: Doubleday

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Jean Lacouture: "With its strange silhouette of a starved sea horse, its chaotic history, its ambiguous language, the seeming frailty of its children, the resignation that seems to emanate from its damp landscape, and despite the war that has crushed it for almost twenty years, Vietnam lives." Lacouture, Vietnam: Two Truces.

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and Co., 1965), hereafter Mecklin, Mission; Douglas Pike, Viet Cong, The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1966), hereafter Pike, Viet Cong.

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## GENEVA AND ITS AFTERMATH

The Geneva Convention of May-July 1954, although ending the French phase of the Indochina War, only postponed the struggle between the Communist and non-Communist forces within the divided country. There were two basic components of the agreements reached at Geneva, a cease-fire and a final declaration. The only document signed at the convention was the cease-fire and that only by the representatives of the Viet Minh and the French military.

Under the terms of the cease-fire, French troops were to withdraw south of the 17th Parallel, while all Viet Minh units were to move north of this demarcation line. A Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), approximately five miles in depth, was established running the width of the boundary which separated the opposing armies. The governments of Poland, India, and Canada furnished representatives to a three-man International Control Commission (ICC) which was responsible for seeing that the provisions of the truce were carried out by both parties.

In its final meeting on 21 July 1954, the entire conference in issued a 13-point document entitled the Final Declaration. By this device, the convention attempted to clarify the political implications of the armistice. One of the 13 points was the premise that the division of Vietnam was only a temporary feature and that the military demarcation line was not to be interpreted as a political or territorial boundary. The Declaration called for elections to be held no later than July 1956 throughout

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Vietnam "in order to insure that sufficient progress in the restoration of peace...had been made and that all the necessary conditions obtain for the expression of the national will."<sup>(2)</sup>

Two nations, however, withheld their approval of the Declaration. The Bao Dai delegation denounced the entire proceedings at Geneva. While the U.S. did not sign the declaration, it stated that it would "refrain from the threat or use of force to disturb the Geneva Agreements and would view any renewal of the aggression...with grave concern..."<sup>(3)</sup>

The immediate problem was the evacuation of French troops, equipment, and Vietnamese refugees from the north. According to the cease-fire agreement reached at Geneva, a 300-day grace period was provided for the movement of all troops and those civilians who wished to accompany them from one zone to the other. The embarkation of the troops was a relatively routine military maneuver but the transfer of civilians was another matter. Although the statistics are inexact, approximately 800,000 refugees, 85 percent of whom were Catholic, made the trek south. French ships and aircraft carried nearly 500,000 persons to their new homes in the south while the U.S. Navy, in Operation EXODUS, ferried the rest. In addition, the French

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(2) Buttinger, Vietnam, v. 2, p. 839.

(3) Quoted in Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Background Information, p. 3.

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and Americans moved 468,787 tons of equipment and some 23,000 vehicles out of North Vietnam. The division of Vietnam was complete---a Communist north and a non-Communist south.

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## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM

In June 1954, the French concluded a treaty with the Bao Dai government which recognized Vietnam as a fully independent and sovereign state. While Bao Dai remained as Chief of State, he invited Ngo Dinh Diem, one of the most prominent nationalists who had opposed collaboration with the French, to assume the premiership of the new state.

Diem clearly voiced his feelings about the results of Geneva during a radio broadcast when he protested against handing over to the Communists the entire north of the country and more than four provinces of the center. The Premier ordered the red and yellow flag of the Republic of Vietnam to be flown at half-mast and proclaimed 23 July as a day of national disgrace. Despite the fact that the South Vietnamese government refused to acknowledge the government of Ho Chi Minh in the north, it was in no position to carry on the war by itself. Diem's first concern was the preservation of South Vietnam as a viable nation.

Most of the experts expected the fall of the Diem government during late 1954 and early 1955 and predicted a period of anarchy followed by the assumption of power by the Communists. This Diem was determined not to allow, but the odds were formidable. The Binh Xuyen Sect, which controlled the outlets for prostitution, gambling, and narcotics, also exerted a strong influence over the police. In the U.S., it would be

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comparable to the Mafia being in charge of the FBI. Religious sects such as the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao maintained their own private armies and states. Even the loyalty of the Armed Forces to the central government was doubtful.

The first test of Diem's capability for survival occurred during September 1954 in a direct clash of wills between the Army Chief of Staff, General Nguyen Van Hinh, and the Premier. The religious sects and the Binh Xuyen quickly joined forces with the Army. While Army troops surrounded Diem's palace, "the warlords, gangsters, bordello keepers, and dishonest politicians demanded a new government."<sup>(4)</sup> Diem, however, demonstrated the ability to divide his enemies. At the last moment, he convinced dissident Hoa Hao and Cao Dai leaders to rally to the government cause, and the planned "Putsch" disintegrated. Hinh was one of the first Vietnamese generals to enjoy a comfortable exile in Paris.

Having finally won the confidence of the Army, Diem was ready to move against the religious sects and the Binh Xuyen in the spring of 1955. Through a complicated process of wheedling, bribery, double dealing, and a limited show of force, he defeated each of his enemies in turn. By 7 July 1955, the first anniversary of his assuming the premiership, Diem was ready to challenge Bao Dai, himself. Diem announced a national referendum to be held in October to determine if he or Bao Dai

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(4) Buttinger, Vietnam, v. 2, p. 860.

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would be Chief of State. The results of the October election, in which Diem received 98 percent of the votes cast, left him in sole control of the military and political apparatus of the state. Diem had not created a democracy, but the situation could have been much worse.

The south in no way could match the ruthless determination of the north. Some authorities maintain that Ho Chi Minh's government murdered between 10,000 to 15,000 peasants and deported or imprisoned between 50,000 to 100,000 more, in the name of land reform and redistribution of wealth. In November 1956, a series of peasant rebellions broke out. During a 10-day period, more than 1,000 peasants were killed and wounded and several thousand arrested and deported.<sup>(5)</sup> By February 1957, the North Vietnamese government had put down the peasant revolt, but the Communists retreated from their policy of agricultural collectivization. In spite of its trouble with the peasants, the north had made advances in industrialization and above all had created a government whose apparatus permeated all levels of society.

Diem was unable to do the same in the south even though great strides had been made in furthering the economic well-being of the nation. The lack of concrete progress was in the political realm. Although Diem's government had all the trappings of political cohesiveness--a constitution promulgated in 1956,

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(5) Ibid., pp. 915-916.

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a parliament, an executive--It failed the most rudimentary test of any regime which was the power to enforce its dictum beyond the cities in the countryside.

The Diem government refused to delegate authority and to bring important and diverse elements of its nation into responsible positions. Diem based his form of administration on the traditional Vietnamese Mandarin system with its emphasis on family, paternalism, and oligarchy. He was a Roman Catholic in a country that was predominately non-Christian. Catholics made up only 15 percent of the population, yet held the major positions in both the Armed Forces and civilian government. (6) The only persons who had easy access to the person of the Vietnamese President were his three brothers, especially the youngest, Ngo Dinh Nhu.

Rumblings of discontent among the military led to overt action. In 1960, airborne units surrounded the Presidential Palace in Saigon and almost succeeded in deposing Diem. But

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(6) Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak USMC (Ret), formerly Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, notes, however, "the Catholics...were better educated as a group. The Catholics were, in political and international economic affairs, more government oriented...Their eminence was not just because the President was himself a Roman Catholic." LtGen Victor H. Krulak, Comments on draft MS, dtd 11Aug69, (Vietnam Comment File), p. 2, hereafter Krulak Comments, Aug69.

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once again, he was able to divide his enemies and forestall the coup d'etat. Among the leaders of this "mini-coup" were many of the younger and more efficient officers, including Colonel Nguyen Van Thi, who was later to become commander of the South Vietnamese I Corps Tactical Zone. <sup>(7)</sup> Despite the political discontent and the coup attempt, Diem survived to further frustrate the Communist effort to take over South Vietnam.

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(7) The I Corps Tactical Zone included the five northern provinces of South Vietnam.

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## THE BEGINNINGS OF INSURGENCY

Apparently Ho Chi Minh believed that the referendum, called for in the Geneva Accords, would be held and would unite the two Vietnams under his regime. Diem, however, forestalled this hope by announcing in the summer of 1955 that the South Vietnamese had rejected a bid by Hanoi to discuss arrangements for an election which was supposed to take place by July 1956. The Diem government believed that it was impossible to hold a free vote in North Vietnam and the election would result in a victory for Communism.

Denied their objective through political means, the Vietnamese Communists decided on another course of action. As early as September 1955, one American observer wrote: "From the Communist side there has been increasing evidence of activity in the Ca Mau peninsula southwest of Saigon. The Viet Minh are showing their strength in a number of places and the population is listening."<sup>(8)</sup> Bernard Fall pointed out in an article in 1958 that Communist guerrillas in the south were actively engaged in attempting to overthrow the government. He showed that the areas of South Vietnam where the North Vietnamese

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(8) Col Victor J. Croizat, USMC (Ret), Comments on draft MS, dtd 12Aug69 (Vietnam Comment File) p. 4, hereafter Croizat Comments Aug69. Colonel Croizat was the first Marine officer to serve on the staff of the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group to the South Vietnamese government. (See Chapter 3.)

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complained to the ICC about alleged South Vietnamese violations of civil rights of "Former Resistance" members were identical to the areas of rebel activity. Fall concluded that the evidence was inescapable that there was coordination between the rebels and the North Vietnamese government. (9)

There were an estimated 2-4,000 Viet Minh cadre left in the south after the 1954 armistice. By the end of the 1950s they had succeeded in preparing their base of operations against the Diem regime. There could be no doubt that the overall direction came from North Vietnam, but "it was not military hardware that was imported at this time. It was something more valuable: expertise, doctrinal guidance, insurgency know-how." (10)

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As early as May 1959, General Giap declared that North Vietnam was the revolutionary base for the south. In September 1960, the third Lao Dong Party Congress (the North Vietnamese Communist Party) issued the statement that the liberation of the south was "a two stage affair: first the elimination of the U. S. Imperialists and the Ngo Dinh Diem clique,...then the establishment of a national democratic government that would negotiate with the north for reunification." (11)

The following December, the National Liberation Front (Mat-Tran Dan-Toc Giai-

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(9) Fall, Vietnam Witness, pp. 172-185.

(10) Pike, Viet Cong, p. 78.

(11) Quoted in ibid., p. 79.

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Phong Mien-Nam) was established. A Saigon lawyer, Nguyen Huu Nguye Tho, became chairman of the Front's central committee, which included a carefully selected cross-section of Vietnamese society. Although giving the appearance of a democratic coalition, the NLF, like the Viet Minh before it, was tightly controlled by a small group of determined Communists.

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## U.S. ASSISTANCE AND THE INTENSIFYING WAR

The South Vietnamese, however, did not face the Communist challenge alone. The United States, although it in effect accepted the Geneva compromise, was not willing to see all of Southeast Asia fall into Communist hands. Two months after Geneva, eight nations met in Manila and formed the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO),<sup>(12)</sup> which was organized to provide security against aggression in Asia. Although South Vietnam was not a member nation, the pact extended its protection over this country.

The American obligation to South Vietnam extended further than its SEATO commitments. In October 1954, President Eisenhower promised Diem the United States' continuing support of South Vietnam. The American President dispatched a special U.S. envoy in the person of General J. Lawton Collins, who arrived in Saigon on 17 November 1954. General Collins consulted both Diem and the French Commissioner to determine how the United States could best assist the country and safeguard the freedom and welfare of Vietnam.<sup>(13)</sup>

A U. S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) had existed in Vietnam since 1950 and continued to function after

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(12) The eight member nations were: the U.S., Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan.

(13) Quoted in Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Background Information, p. 120.

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Geneva. The United States at the end of 1954 agreed to support the South Vietnamese Armed Forces at a level of 90,000 men in cooperation with the French. Officers of the American MAAG were brought together with their counterparts in the French Mission into an Advisory, Training, and Operations Mission (ATQM)<sup>(15)</sup>

(14) The MAAG was organized in 1950 by President Truman, acting on the advice of Gen Graves B. Erskine, USMC, who had been sent to Indochina that year on a fact-finding mission. The MAAG had no advisory functions at that time other than those associated with turning over equipment and supplies to the French. According to the provisions of the cease-fire reached at Geneva in 1954, "the introduction into Vietnam of any...additional military personnel is prohibited." This meant that the strength of the U.S. military mission to Vietnam was frozen at 342, its strength in July 1954. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Background Information; Department of the Air Force, Office of Air Force History, Comments on draft MS, dtd 11Aug69 (Vietnam Comment File); and Croizat Comments Aug69.

(15) When the war ended in July, there were over 200,000 in the South Vietnamese Armed Forces. This meant that over 100,000 men had to be demobilized. It is interesting to note that by the end of 1955, the United States agreed to support the South Vietnamese Armed Forces at a level of 150,000. Croizat Comments Aug69, passim.; and Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Background Information, pp. 122-124.

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which was later redesignated Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM). In early 1955, the Chief of the U.S. MAAG assumed responsibility for the organization and training of the Vietnamese Armed Forces under the overall authority of the French High Commissioner. With the withdrawal of the French military from South Vietnam in 1956 and 1957 because of treaty obligations and upon the insistence of Diem, the entire advisory effort came under American auspices.

Much has been made of the fact that until 1961, the United States was training the South Vietnamese to counter only a direct thrust across the DMZ by the North Vietnamese Army. It must be remembered, however, that there were over 350,000 seasoned troops in North Vietnam, which made a direct attack a real threat. According to one observer, the threat to internal security was recognized, it was just given second priority. (16)

In 1961 priorities were to change. Since 1954, Communist guerrillas, popularly known as the Viet Cong, had killed more than 4,000 South Vietnamese civil officials. The pressing danger to Vietnam was subversion from within. The United States took up the gauntlet of Communist-inspired "Wars of National Liberation" in May 1961. President John F. Kennedy addressed a joint session of Congress and declared:

The aggression of the adversaries to freedom was more often concealed than open. They have fired no missiles...

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(16) Croizat Comments Aug69, p. 4.

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they send arms, agitators to every troubled area.

But where fighting is required it is usually done by others--by guerrillas striking at night...assassins... by subversives and insurrectionists...we do not  
(17)  
intend to leave an open road to despotism.

During the same month, the Vietnamese and American governments agreed, following a visit to Saigon by the U. S. Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson, that both nations would take whatever measures necessary to defeat the Communist-inspired insurgency. The United States doubled its military mission to South Vietnam and agreed to support the Vietnamese Armed Forces at a level of 200,000 men. In October 1961, President Kennedy sent his special military advisor, General Maxwell D. Taylor, to reexamine the U.S. effort. After the Taylor fact-finding mission, the American President ordered a massive buildup of the U.S. advisory effort.

New tactics and techniques had to be developed in order to meet this war of insurgency. Diem, with the support of his American advisors, initiated the Strategic Hamlet Program, based on the British example in Malaysia.

The hope was to separate the people from the guerrillas (the famous fish of Mao Tse Tung) by resettling the rural populace into fortified villages which could be secured from Viet Cong harassment. In conjunction with this strategy, the

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(17) Dept of State, Chronology on Vietnam, p. 23 (C).

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Diem government promised General Taylor during his visit that it would undertake certain political and economic reforms to ensure that the people had a vital stake in the existence of their government. One U. S. colonel pithily explained that counter-insurgency was not hard to understand: "The way I figure it, its mostly being nice to the goddam people."<sup>(18)</sup>

The war with the Viet Cong, however, was a shooting war as well. The arrival of two U.S. Army helicopter companies in December 1961 enhanced the mobility of the Vietnamese regular forces against their elusive foes. These Army companies were part of the vanguard of the American advisory reinforcements promised by President Kennedy. In addition to these aviation units, large numbers of newly arrived Marine, Navy, Air Force, and Army advisors swelled the numbers of the American military within the country.

On 8 February 1962, the United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) under General Paul D. Harkins was established to direct and supply the expanded American military effort. The former MAAG still retained its identity but came under the operational control of MACV. General Harkins, himself, reported to Admiral Harry D. Felt, Commander in Chief, Pacific (CinCPac). Army personnel vastly outnumbered the representatives of the other services in MACV, but this possibly reflected the fact that the Vietnamese Army represented the main

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(18) Mecklin, Mission, p. 25.

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source of military strength within the country itself. General Harkins' chief of staff was a Marine, Major General Richard G. Weede. Marines made up only six percent of the MACV staff, but as General Weede concluded: "...we are spread thinly, <sup>(19)</sup> spread but in the right places."

At the same time that he installed MACV in Saigon, President Kennedy directed the Joint Chiefs to create a special billet in Washington for counterinsurgency warfare to study the means of combatting the "Wars of National Liberation." Major General Victor H. Krulak, USMC, was appointed Special Assistant for Counter-Insurgency and Special Activities to the Joint Chiefs on 16 February 1962. General Krulak visualized his duties as not "just the plain shooting of a professional military man, but embracing diplomacy, economics, and education as well." <sup>(20)</sup> The Marine general directed the production of the document entitled "Joint Counter-Insurgency Concept and Guidance," <sup>(21)</sup> which became the basis for official doctrine on the subject.

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(19) Maj J. M. Yingling, Capt H. D. Bradshaw, Mr. B. M. Frank, "United States Marine Corps Activities in South Vietnam, 1954-63, A Study Prepared for the Secretary of Defense," p. II:15 (HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC); hereafter Yingling, Bradshaw, Frank, USMC Activities, 1954-63 (S).

(20) Quoted in San Diego Union, 18Aug62.

(21) Gen L. L. Lemnitzer, CJCS memo to Gen D. M. Shoup, CMC, dtd 10Oct62 (Krulak Biog File) (U).

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Within South Vietnam, the Viet Cong continued to expand the conflict. At the end of 1961, the U. S. command estimated the Viet Cong strength to be at least 8,000 to 9,000 main force troops while an additional 8,000 or more troops operated under the leadership of regular Viet Cong officers at the provincial and district levels. (22) More importantly, these figures did not include the thousands of porters, messengers, political cadre, special agents, and the rest of the guerrilla infrastructure.

During the next year, the U.S. and South Vietnamese effort to counter Communist insurgency showed some progress. The Viet Cong were mounting only sporadic large-unit attacks as compared to two or three a month during the previous year. The statistics of weapons lost by ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) troops declined for 1962. The 12,000 American advisors had furnished through their courage and example a new spirit to the South Vietnamese forces which could not be acquired in a training camp. (23)

Despite these signs of optimism, there were ominous deficiencies within the fabric of the South Vietnamese course of action. The Diem regime continued to extend the Strategic Hamlet Program but failed to provide the one important ingredi-

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(22) U.S. Dept of State, A Threat to the Peace, North Vietnam's Effort to Conquer South Vietnam (Washington: Dec 1961), p. 10.

(23) Mecklin, Mission, p. 65.

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ent--security. With their moats and wooden palisades, the hamlets furnished an impressive appearance, but it took more than appearances to keep the Viet Cong out. These stockaded villages proved easy prey each time the Viet Cong attacked with an incendiary device and even more significantly the walls did not prevent the enemy from infiltrating and mingling with the local populace. Bernard Fall concluded that the Diem regime had overextended the program and that the poorly defended hamlets were an invitation to disaster. (24)

Diem demanded loyalty from the population but failed to provide any inducement for the South Vietnamese to fight for his regime. This loyalty was something that the United States could not furnish but which the Diem government had to earn through its own merits. Diem remained isolated in his palace while his brother - Ngo Dinh Nhu and his wife, Tran Le Xuan, or "Madame Nhu" as the press dubbed her, became the dominant figures in the government. According to one U.S. reporter, Nhu made the statement that he considered himself "the unique spine of the anti-Communist movement." (25) But 1963, which opened up with high hopes to quash the Communist rebellion, ended in disaster for Diem and his family.

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(24) Fall, Two Viet-Nams, p. 398.

(25) David Halberstam, The Making of a Quagmire (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 51.

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The turmoil that was to rock South Vietnam began in the ancient capital of Hue, on 8 May 1963, the 2,527th anniversary of the birth of the Buddha. Diem had banned the public display of religious flags during the festivities, and the Buddhist leaders called a protest parade. The local authorities ordered the troops to break up the demonstration. In the ensuing confusion, 9 Buddhists were killed and 14 injured. Further protest riots occurred in Hue, and Buddhist monks in Saigon demonstrated before the National Assembly. On 11 June, a 73-year-old monk by the name of Thich Quang Duc calmly squatted on the pavement near the Xa Loi Pagoda in Saigon while two other bonzes (Buddhist monks) poured a can of gasoline over his head. Someone lit a match and the first self-immolation in protest against the Diem government occurred. Seven other suicides were to follow during the next few months. It was during this frantic period, that Madame Nhu supposedly made her "Marie Antoinette" statement: "...all the Buddhists have done for this country is to barbecue a monk." (26) On 21 August,

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(26) General Krulak noted: "The 'barbecue' quotation ascribed to Madame Nhu was subsequently denied by her in the United States. I asked her specifically in Washington if she had ever made such a statement, and she said vehemently that she had not. Her daughter told me, at the same time, that the quotation was fabricated by a member of the U.S. press to create an unfavorable image. She hated the Buddhist clergy, but I doubt if the word

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the government cracked down on the Buddhists as the police in Saigon and Hue entered the pagodas and arrested scores of the monks. One of the main leaders of the Buddhist movement, however, Thich Tri Quang was granted political asylum in the American Embassy by the new U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, (27) Henry Cabot Lodge.

The crisis reached a climax on 2 November, when the military overthrew the government. Diem and Nhu were killed while being transported in a military vehicle. President Kennedy perhaps summed up the situation best, when he stated that Diem had made several mistakes, but that he at the same time sacrificed much for his nation and deserved a kinder fate. The leaders of the coup, a council of generals led by Vietnamese Major General Duong Van Minh, made a public statement that they had no political ambitions and would continue the war against the Communists.

The United States recognized this new government on 7 November. American officials were hopeful that the South Vietnamese would be able to end the war successfully. President Johnson, after the assassination of President Kennedy, reaffirmed

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'barbecue' meant anything to her." Krulak Comments, Aug69, p. 4.

(27) Henry Cabot Lodge replaced Frederic E. Nolting, Jr. as Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam. Lodge arrived in Saigon on 22 August 1963.

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the intention of the United States to continue military and economic support of South Vietnam in its struggle against the Communist forces. At this time, total American strength in Vietnam amounted to approximately 16,000 troops. Even though the political structure of the Vietnamese government had collapsed during 1963, there had been progress in the war. On 3 December, the U. S. Government announced its intention to withdraw 1,000 servicemen from Vietnam and nine days later, Robert S. McNamara, the Secretary of Defense, declared: "We have every reason to believe that our plans will be successful in 1964."<sup>(28)</sup>

The Viet Cong, however, were not willing to go along with the American predictions. The Communists had stepped up guerrilla attacks on government hamlets and outposts. In November 1963, the government suffered 2,800 casualties compared to 2,900 for the Communists. More significantly, the Communists during the month captured enough weapons to arm five 300-man battalions.

The Vietnamese military situation was definitely affected by the coup in November, which drastically realigned the organization of the civil and military apparatus of the government. More than 31 high-ranking military officers were dismissed for having actively supported the Diem regime. On 6 January 1964, the provisional government appointed a three-man military junta,

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(28) Quoted in Commandant's Chronology, p. 105. (U)

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consisting of Major General Duong Van Minh, as Chief of State, Major General Tran Van Don, and Major General Le Van Kim, to run the government and the Armed Forces. Twenty-three days later a new personality, Major General Nguyen Khanh, assumed the leadership from the junta. Khanh took over as chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council and General Minh remained as the nominal chief of state. The new government started off inauspiciously on 4 February just as the Viet Cong opened an offensive in Tay Ninh Province near the Cambodian border. Hundreds of South Vietnamese troops were killed in the two-day engagement.

The objectives of the Communists continued to be to destroy or prevent the establishment of the strategic hamlets, to consolidate "liberated areas," and to insulate the countryside from government control. During 1964, the Viet Cong made gains in territory and population control in the coastal areas of I and II Corps in north and central South Vietnam, isolating (29) the government forces in provincial and district capitals. The enemy carried out several battalion-sized or larger operations with relative impunity. Much of the rural population, terrorized by the guerrillas, was either actively cooperating with the Viet Cong or at least not aiding the government effort. The Vietnamese Armed Forces suffered more than 30,000 casualties during the year, compared to approximately 21,000 inflicted

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(29) DIA, Military Fact Book, p. vii (S).

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upon the Communists.

During 1964, there were changes both in the American Embassy in South Vietnam and in MACV but the U.S. effort continued to expand. General Taylor, who as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had remarked that the Viet Cong had taken maximum advantage of the two coups, became Ambassador to South Vietnam on 23 June 1964.<sup>(30)</sup> On this same date, General William C. Westmoreland relieved General Harkins as ComUSMACV. By the end of the year, General Westmoreland had 20,000 American troops, functioning mainly as advisors to the South Vietnamese Armed Forces.

During August, in retaliation for the attack on two American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin by North Vietnamese torpedo boats, U.S. planes bombed naval facilities and an oil depot in North Vietnam. On 7 August, the U.S. Congress as a result of this incident passed the "Gulf of Tonkin Resolution" in which the Congress approved and supported "the determination of the President, as Commander-in-Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression."<sup>(31)</sup>

The main threat from the north was not so much the harassment provided by its fledgling navy, but the fact that the Communist north was the source of leadership, supplies,

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(30) Commandant's Chronology, p. 115 (C).

(31) Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Background Information, p. 156.

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and replacements for the Viet Cong forces in the south. By the end of the year, the infiltration of North Vietnamese regular troops down the Laos corridor (the Ho Chi Minh Trail) reached 1,000 men per month.

The political situation in the south continued to disintegrate. Khanh, after some progress in reforming the government and in pursuing a civil reconstruction program, overreached himself in August, when he attempted to take over complete control of the government. The Buddhists and students once again demonstrated in the streets of the major cities and called for a civilian government. On 25 August 1964, General Khanh promised a liberalization of the regime and the Military Council named a triumvirate, including Khanh, to rule for two more months. Four days later, Khanh turned the premiership over to his deputy, Nguyen Xuan Oanh, who declared that the general was still premier, but "incapacitated" by the mental and physical strain of the crisis, and was in Dalat, a mountain resort area, for recuperation. On 3 September, Khanh returned to Saigon, once again took over the government, abolished the triumvirate, and restored General Minh as Chief of State. On 13 September, an attempted military coup failed and on the 19th, the government once again made sweeping changes in the military command.

On the 26th, a National Council was formed to prepare a new constitution. The Vietnamese Revolutionary Council elected Phan Khac Suu as Chief of State, and the former mayor of Saigon,

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Tran Van Huong, as Premier. The new government, however, ran into unexpected opposition as student groups and religious factions expressed their dissatisfaction. U.S. officials met with leaders of these pressure groups, who agreed to delay any direct physical steps against the government. On 20 December, the military once again staged a coup by dissolving the civilian High National Council, although Suu and Huong remained in their respective positions. General Khanh stayed as the head of the Vietnamese Armed Forces.

This Vietnamese version of musical chairs was to continue. With the dissolution of the National Assembly, the military was in command. On 28 January 1965, the Armed Forces Council removed Premier Huong from office and appointed Nguyen Xuan Oanh as acting premier for the second time. Suu still remained as the Chief of State.

The Armed Forces Council on 15 February declared that it alone had the responsibility of selecting the premier and chief of state. It appointed Phan Huy Quat to succeed Oanh in office. General Khanh was forced to resign on 21 February as Commander in Chief. A short period of relative political stability followed.

In late 1964 and early 1965 the war took on new and ominous aspects. During the battle of Binh Gia, <sup>(32)</sup> the Viet Cong for the first time remained on the battlefield and defeated

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(32) See Chapter three for an account of the battle.

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government forces in sustained combat. Simultaneously, the enemy, also for the first time, directed his attack against American personnel. On Christmas eve, a VC time bomb exploded under the U. S. Bachelor Officers' Quarters in Saigon, killing 2 Americans and wounding 100. This incident was followed on 7 February 1965 by an enemy mortar attack on the U. S. compound at Pleiku. In retaliation, President Johnson ordered the bombing of selected targets in North Vietnam. The President declared: "We have no choice now but to clear the decks and make absolutely clear our continued determination to back South Vietnam in its fight to maintain its independence."<sup>(33)</sup>

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(33) Dept of State, Chronology on Vietnam, p. 64 (C).

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## CHAPTER 3

(1)  
MARINES IN VIETNAM 1954-1964

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(1) Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: Yingling, Bradshaw, and Frank, USMC Activities, 1954-63 (S); Maj Harvey D. Bradshaw, "USMC Ops in RVN, 1964" (HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC)(S), hereafter Bradshaw, USMC Ops, 1964 (S); LtCol John J. Cahill and Jack Shulimson, "USMC Ops in RVN, Jan-Jun65," (HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC) (S), hereafter Cahill and Shulimson, USMC Ops, Jan-Jun65 (S); Task Element, Vietnam, ComdDs, 1962-64 (S); NAVGP, MACV, Hist Review of Nav Op Activities, 1964-65 (S); SMA, MACV, Aftertour Reports, 1965 (S), hereafter SMA, Aftertour Reports (S); SMA, MACV, Organization, Employment, and Support of the Vietnamese Marine Corps, dtd 14Jul66 (C); SMA, MACV, Monthly Hist Summaries, 1963-65 (S); SMA, MACV, A/A Repts, 1964-65 (U), hereafter SMA, A/A Repts (U); Personnel Folder, Col Victor J. Croizat (FRC, St. Louis, Mo.), hereafter Croizat, Pers Folder (U); Vietnam Comment File; Taped interview with Capt Philip O. Brady, Advisor to VNMC, HistBr Tape no. 23 (U); LtCol Archie J. Clapp, "Shu-Fly Diary," USNI Proceedings, v. 89, no. 10 (Oct63) pp. 42-53, hereafter Clapp, "Shu-Fly Diary."

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## THE FIRST MARINE ADVISORY EFFORT, 1954-62

President Johnson's decision to conduct air strikes against North Vietnam would have far reaching effects. For the Marine Corps, it touched off a chain of events which eventually resulted in the commitment of two Marine divisions, part of a third, and a reinforced Marine aircraft wing to South Vietnam. But long before 1965, the Marine Corps, like the other Services, had been involved with this embattled nation.

In April 1954, Lieutenant Colonel Julius W. Ireland led Marine Attack Squadron 324 (VMA-324) onto the airfield at the Da Nang Air Base. The Marine pilots turned over their 25 A-1s (prop-driven attack aircraft) along with 59,000 pounds of spare parts to the French authorities. With this task accomplished, the American aviators went back on board the U. S. aircraft carrier Saipan anchored in the harbor for the return trip home. This was part of the last ditch effort by the U.S. government to shore up the French military effort against the Viet Minh. These planes were too little and too late, however, to change the course of the war.

Two months later, while the peace talks were drawing to a conclusion at Geneva, General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., Commandant of the Marine Corps, authorized the establishment of a Marine billet on the MAAG staff in Saigon. Lieutenant Colonel Victor J. Croizat, who had finished a tour as an instructor in tactics at the Marine Corps Junior and Senior Schools in Quantico,

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Virginia, was selected for this delicate assignment. He brought an impressive set of credentials and talents to his new mission, not the least of which were his fluency in French and his graduation in 1950 from the Ecole Superieure de Guerre (2) in Paris.

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(2) Colonel Croizat<sup>U</sup> later remarked: "As I recall, the creation of the Marine billet on the MAAG staff in Indochina was part of a plan initiated by Lieutenant General John W. O'Daniel, USA, Chief MAAG. General O'Daniel had long sought to have some voice in operational matters in the Indochina War. The French had politely refused until early 1954 when the French Commander in Chief agreed to the assignment of U.S. liaison officers to his staff. This matter was put before the JCS, where it was agreed to send one officer of LtCol/Omdr. rank from the Army, Navy, and Air Force to Saigon for this liaison duty. The Marine Corps later expressed interest in participating in the effort and, upon JCS agreement, I was notified of impending orders."

Croizat Comments, Aug69, p. 5.

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In August 1954, when the newly arrived Marine officer reported to his post in Saigon, the most immediate problem was carrying out the provisions of the cease-fire. Lieutenant Colonel Croizat's unusual background made him the ideal man to help in the coordination and planning with the Vietnamese and French authorities in the evacuation of the refugees from North Vietnam to their new homes in the south.

His first job was in Saigon, where plans for the trans-  
placement of the new immigrants were drawn up. After the course  
of action had been determined, he was assigned to the Military  
Assistance Group Indochina Detachment at the port city of  
Haiphong where the evacuation was to get under way. Lieutenant  
Colonel Croizat became the assistant commander of the Haiphong  
detachment in September 1954 where his wide acquaintance with  
both U. S. and French officials eased many a sticky situation. (3)  
On the first of December, he assumed command of the entire  
detachment and remained in Haiphong until the end of January.  
By that time, all arrangements had been completed for American  
participation in the final phase of the evacuation.

Upon his return from Haiphong to Saigon, Croizat became  
the Senior Marine Advisor to the Navy Section of the MAAG with  
the mission of assisting the Vietnamese Marine Corps. This new  
military organization had been formed in October 1954 at the

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(3) Citation Certificate for Army Commendation Medal, dtd  
19Sep56, in Croizat Pers Folder (U).

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personal insistence of Diem. Until Croizat's arrival on the scene, French naval officers exerted the sole influence on the newly organized force. The Vietnamese Corps was built around three river companies, four light companies, and a commando company in addition to one infantry battalion. The Vietnamese Marines by May 1955 numbered 1,700 officers and men.

The American officer was rather impressed with the caliber of the individual Vietnamese Marine. The units were largely understrength, but the men themselves were for the most part veterans of the war against the Communists. Much of the deadwood had been lost through desertions and attrition at the end of the war. Lieutenant Colonel Croizat also had a high opinion of the French advisors who were engaged in training the Vietnamese. These French officers and NCOs lived, ate, and slept with their Vietnamese troops and thereby gained a considerable amount of respect and loyalty. The chief of the Navy Division of TRIM was a French Navy captain who was interested in maintaining as large and effective Vietnamese Marine Corps as possible.

The headquarters of the allied training mission was in Saigon, while the bulk of the Vietnamese force was physically in Nha Trang, located on the coast, approximately 200 miles northeast of Saigon. The training facilities there included excellent beaches, islands, and sheltered waterways.

On his various inspection tours to Nha Trang, Lieutenant Colonel Croizat noted that the Vietnamese Marines had an intense

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interest in the United States Marine Corps. During one of his visits, he observed that the officers and NCOs were studying the Guadalcanal campaign. In a letter to General Shepherd, he mentioned in passing that he believed the Vietnamese would appreciate receiving several of the historical monographs covering Marine Corps operations during World War II. His chief request, however, of the Commandant was for the authorization of three additional Marines, one officer and two NCOs, to be assigned to South Vietnam.

General Shepherd thought highly of Croizat's suggestions and remarked in a memorandum to his Chief of Staff: "I feel we should give all support possible to this embryo Marine Corps --perhaps the size of the Marine Corps could be increased in view of the many rivers in Indochina."<sup>(4)</sup> After some deliberation between the Marine Corps Commandant and the Chief of Naval Operations, one additional Marine officer billet was approved for the Navy Section in Saigon. Captain James T. Breckinridge, also fluent in French and strongly recommended by Croizat, was assigned to this new post.

The American Marine advisors, although at times frustrated in their aims, attempted to mold their Vietnamese counterparts in the image of the United States Marine Corps. When the Vietnamese Corps was first established, it was charged with maintaining security along the rivers and canals and conducting

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(4) CMC memo to C/S, HQMC, dtd 21May55 (ibid.) (U).

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limited amphibious operations. The force itself was administered and supplied through the Vietnamese Naval Service. By June 1955, the South Vietnamese succeeded in organizing one Marine battalion which immediately went into the field against the dissident private armies of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai. In February 1956, the Vietnamese Marines were reorganized into two battalions totaling 1,800 men. According to Lieutenant Colonel Croizat, only the idea of a Vietnamese Marine Corps had been established in 1955. The idea became a reality in 1956 with the formation of a second battalion and a Marine (5) Corps headquarters.

In July 1956, Lieutenant Colonel William W. Wilkes relieved Lieutenant Colonel Croizat and continued his predecessor's endeavors. The Vietnamese Secretary of Defense vetoed an attempt to abolish the Vietnamese Corps and by the end of the year the organizational structure of the Vietnamese Marines stabilized. Their willingness to do battle with the foe soon became evident.

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(5) Col Victor J. Croizat, "Notes on the Organization of the Vietnamese Marine Corps," MS (Ref D to Croizat Comments), p. 7.

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The Vietnamese Marine Corps was one of the first of the Vietnamese Armed Forces to engage the former Viet Minh guerrillas. In December 1958, the 1st Battalion entered the mosquito-infested swamps of the southern Delta in An Xuyen Province. The Marines overran a Communist training center and captured significant quantities of food and ammunition as well as several VC cadre. In May 1959, the 1st and 2d Battalions returned to this area and accounted for more than 200 dead Viet Cong. Further north in Vinh Binh Province just south of Saigon, one company of Marines of the 2d Battalion killed 18 of the Communists and captured over 100. These actions must have hurt the Communist plans as can be attested by the flurry of complaints that the North Vietnamese registered before the International Control Commission about the persecution of their partisans in the south.

In June 1959, the Vietnamese Marine Corps was once again reorganized and assumed the title of Marine Corps Group. A third battalion was added and the entire Corps was enlarged to over 2,200 officers and men. For the first time, the Vietnamese Marines attained some administrative independence from the Navy with the formation of a Group Headquarters and an Administrative Company. A program had been established the previous year in which Vietnamese officers and NCOs were able to attend some of the formal U. S. Marine schools at Quantico, Virginia. This training showed immediate results when the returning Vietnamese officers began to pay more attention to basic funda-

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mentals such as marksmanship and inspections. A more professional attitude on the part of the Vietnamese officers also became apparent when stability was achieved at the top. Until Lieutenant Colonel Le Nguyen Khang became Commandant on 24 May 1960, this had been a problem. (6)<sup>d</sup>

The Vietnamese Marine Corps was once more restructured in July 1961. A fourth infantry battalion and the first artillery unit, a 75mm howitzer battery, were formed. The war with the Viet Cong had taken on much more serious dimensions and the Marine strength reached 3,000. During the next 10 months, the Vietnamese Marines more than doubled. In January 1962, the Vietnamese Marine Group became the Vietnamese Marine Brigade and added an amphibious Support Battalion to its task organization.

The visit of General Taylor in October 1961 and the resultant decisions concerning the American advisory program with the South Vietnamese also had its effect upon the Marine training

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(6) According to General Krulak, "LtCol Khang was a distinguished student at Quantico, standing out among all of his peers, both U.S. and foreign, as a military student. He had--and has exhibited subsequently--a superior mind." Krulak Comments, Aug69, p. 5.

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effort with the MAAG. Since 1955, there had been three billets on the staff, which were to be filled by a lieutenant colonel and two captains. By December 1961, the Marine Advisory Group was changed to the Marine Advisory Division operating under the U. S. Naval Advisory Group in Saigon. Eighteen billets were approved which included one lieutenant colonel, one major, and six captains. The remaining 10 positions were filled by senior NCOs. The additional Marine officers brought a varied background to their new assignments, but all had attended at least the Junior School at Quantico or the Army Counterinsurgency School. This instruction was usually supplemented by some language training in either French or Vietnamese. There was one other change at the beginning of 1962 which altered the role of the individual advisor. Secretary McNamara permitted all American advisors to go into the field with their Vietnamese counterparts. The Americans could carry arms, but could only engage in combat in self-defense.

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The increased advisory effort was to bring in the first Marine tactical unit. In January 1962, there were already three U. S. Army helicopter companies in South Vietnam with the possibility of sending an additional company to support operations in the Mekong Delta. Secretary of Defense McNamara approved the deployment of another helicopter unit in March and the only remaining question was which one to send.

While the Washington planners were mulling over the subject of the helicopters, General Harkins proposed that nine helicopter pilots from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW) be attached to the Army aviation companies for periods of 60-90 days' temporary duty (TDY). He believed that the Marines would receive valuable experience in the H-21, the Piasecki Flying Banana, flown by the Army pilots. Lieutenant General Carson A. Roberts, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, seized upon this opportunity to recommend that a Marine helicopter squadron be sent to Da Nang. He pointed out that Marine pilots were unlikely to fly the H-21s in any of their own squadrons and that the Marine UH-34s were larger and could be expected to operate more efficiently in the higher altitudes of the northern provinces. There were other reasons for sending a Marine unit to Da Nang, the most important being that it was the area where Marines would be committed if certain contingency plans were implemented.

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General Harkins was agreeable to the assignment of a Marine squadron to South Vietnam but was opposed to placing it at Da Nang. The U. S. Army 93d Helicopter Company, which was already assigned there, had just begun a series of operations in support of ARVN troops, and he believed that the redeployment of this unit to the Delta at this time would have a detrimental effect on the overall mission. General Harkins, therefore, suggested that the Marines be stationed in the Delta, until the tempo of operations at Da Nang permitted a transfer of units. He recognized that the UH-34s would perform more satisfactorily in the north, and more importantly, that the Marines could be supported logistically from the sea at Da Nang. In fact the main objection to sending the helicopter squadron into the Mekong Delta was the fear that it would introduce "another supply and maintenance feature into the III Corps area." Admiral Felt dismissed this consideration with the statement, "Logistical support is something that can be handled relatively easily by Marines."<sup>(7)</sup> On 16 March, the Joint Chiefs approved the insertion of a Marine helicopter squadron in the Delta and the implementing order went out that day.

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(7) Quoted in Yingling, Bradshaw, Frank, USMC Activities, 1954-63, pp. 66-67 (S).

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Major General John P. Condon, Commanding General of the 1st MAW received notice of the impending move while engaged in the SEATO exercise TULUNGAN in the Philippines. Unexpectedly, this facilitated the planning for the deployment of the squadron to Vietnam in that General Condon had all the elements of his ordinarily far-flung command close at hand. In his CP on Mindoro, the general and his staff nailed down the essential details of the movement without appreciable disruption to the exercise.

The commitment called for the unit to be placed at the former Japanese airstrip located at Soc Trang in the Mekong Delta. Soc Trang, in Ba Xuyen Province, lies about 86 miles southwest of Saigon in the heart of what Americans commonly referred to as "Indian Country." The government had control over the few population centers in the area, but the countryside was dominated by the VC. The Marine base would be, in effect, an island in a hostile sea. The Vietnamese 21st Infantry Division would provide an infantry battalion supported by a 4.2-inch mortar battalion to secure the perimeters of the base while the Marine cooks, mechanics, and clerks were to make up the remainder of the security force.

The Marines were to deploy and to be supplied by air. There were to be only a few exceptions to this mode of transportation. A civilian contractor, who was willing to take his chances with Viet Cong ambushes, was to provide trucks to keep the Marine aviation fuel farm filled. It was also necessary

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for Marine water trucks to make the three-mile run between the base and the town of Soc Trang, the only source of fresh water.

The Marine unit was still to be administratively part of the wing, but under the operational control of General Harkins. It was to consist of a helicopter squadron and a base-keeping element. Colonel John F. Carey was assigned as commanding officer of the task unit and he was furnished a staff of 12 officers and enlisted men to coordinate and oversee the entire operation. The 200 men and 24 UH-34Ds of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 362 (HMM-362) under Lieutenant Colonel Archie J. Clapp were designated to go to Vietnam. The squadron was augmented by 50 maintenance personnel and by three O1B observation aircraft. A subunit of Marine Air Base Squadron 16 (MABS-16), under Lieutenant Colonel William W. Eldridge with an almost equal number of people, supplemented Clapp's unit. Its duties were to run the usual airfield facilities as well as the navigation and landing control systems in order that the KC-130s of Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 152 (VMGR-152) (the Marine transport squadron in the Pacific) could get into Soc Trang with essential supplies and gear regardless of weather conditions. One C-117D transport aircraft was to remain at Soc Trang for supply runs between the base and Saigon.

On 20 March, General Condon furnished the Seventh Fleet with a detailed account of his plans. The task unit was given

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a numerical designation and dubbed SHUFLY. Colonel Carey had direct responsibility for basic administration and for establishing close and direct liaison with General Harkins, the South Vietnamese III Corps commander, and the commanding general of the Vietnamese 21st Division. This left the squadron free to concentrate on operations. General Condon ended his report by declaring that all elements except the squadron could begin to arrive on or about 9 April. He anticipated that all the field and housing facilities would be in place at Soc Trang by the 14th and the helicopter squadron could land the following day.

At 0800 on 9 April, Colonel Carey landed a C-117 transport carrying his staff at the Soc Trang airstrip. The crew of the plane parked the aircraft to one side but kept the radio "wound up" in order to furnish landing instructions to the Marine KC-130 Hercules transports which were scheduled to follow. The first of the 4-engine turbo-prop craft appeared one half hour later with General Condon sitting in the pilot's seat. Within 15 minutes this plane had landed, unloaded, and departed. Seven other transports from VMGR-152 arrived, maintaining 30-minute intervals between aircraft. Each Hercules carried more than 20,000 pounds of men and equipment--the first increments of MABS-16. During the initial buildup, 9-15 April, KC-130s from VMGR-152, based at Iwakuni, Japan, and from VMGR-352, home based at El Toro, California, flew 50 missions into the rough 2,850-foot strip at Soc Trang. Colonel Carey later commented: "I can't praise the support of Colonel Robert

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O.7 White's transport squadron enough. Their splendid support continued throughout the operation, and they never failed to deliver when called upon."<sup>(8)</sup>

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(8) Ibid., p. 86 (S).

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While the transports brought in the men and materiel, the work of setting up the field and camp had begun. Lieutenant Colonel Eldridge had the formidable mission of providing an operational airfield complete with living and working facilities within five days. Water was an immediate problem. The Marines set up a purification system within the camp, and water was brought in by truck from Soc Trang. Just two days after the arrival of the Marines, 9,000 gallons of purified water were available, and the field laundry and showers were in operation. By 14 April, the hangar had been put in shape, a communications section was set up in a small building, and everything else was in tents--some 75 of them. The base was ready for the helicopters.

Lieutenant Colonel Clapp's squadron, at the close of TULUNGAN on 1 April, immediately backloaded on the LPH Princeton (a helicopter assault ship) and headed north to carry out its new mission. The vessel made one stop at the U. S. Naval Base at Subic Bay, where 362 swapped its old aircraft for new, and then continued on to Okinawa. The Princeton, accompanied by a destroyer escort, departed Okinawa on 10 April, where the squadron had picked up the rest of its gear, and arrived off the mouth of the Mekong at daybreak on the 15th. The Navy also provided air cover but the planes remained 20 miles out to sea.

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By midafternoon, all of "Archie's Angels" had flown their aircraft from the LPH to the airstrip at Soc Trang, some 19 miles away. The only difficulty arose when one O-1B made an unscheduled return landing on board the Princeton because of engine trouble. The plane, however, was able to make the flight to the strip later that day.

By dark, the helicopter portion of the camp had been erected and HMM-362 was ready to fly missions the next day. Their services, however, were not required until the following week. The Marines spent the intervening period in briefings, familiarization flights, and generally making themselves at home in their assignment.

In a magazine article entitled "Shu-Fly Diary," Lieutenant Colonel Clapp furnished his readers some of the flavor of the experience obtained by the aviators of the squadron. In a day-to-day accounting, he related the problems encountered by the Marines in their new environment. On one of the first missions with the 21st Division, the helicopter pilots discovered that the five-foot Vietnamese troopers could not embark on the Marine helicopters in the mud of the Delta. The Marine mechanics jury-rigged some steps on the UH34s out of wood and angle iron and effectively solved this situation.

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The Marine pilots also had a chance to battle test their combat tactics. In the first week of May, the Ba Xuyen Province chief requested Marine helicopter support to help his Regional Force troops raid a VC-fortified village, located about 12 miles southwest of Soc Trang. Because of the short distance from the American base, the helicopter flight rendezvoused over Soc Trang at tree-top level and proceeded to the objective area followed by the flight leader who flew slightly to the rear. From this vantage point, he could keep the other aircraft in sight and thus was able to direct each element of the flight. The helicopters set down in their preplanned landing zones and the Vietnamese troops quickly surrounded the village. The mission was successful. Lieutenant Colonel Clapp described this procedure as "calling the plays from the grandstand" and considered it quite effective when a low-level approach was required and reference points were limited.

But not all of the operations came off so well. A few days later the helicopter squadron took part in a mission far to the southwest of Soc Trang, approximately 20 miles south of Ca Mau. The Marines received a request to pick up troops of the 21st Division at Ca Mau and land them at Cai Ngai, a well-known Viet Cong stronghold in the area. The Vietnamese Air

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Force carried out a preparatory strike against the enemy village and the helicopters followed in their wake. The Marines split their aircraft into six small flights which approached their landing zones simultaneously. As the Marine craft hovered overhead, the Viet Cong opened up with heavy small arms fire. Eight out of the 22 helicopters plus the one OlB aircraft participating in the operation were hit, most of them more than once. All of the aircraft were able to make it back to Ca Mau under their own power except for one helicopter which made an emergency landing a few miles from Cai Ngai. The Marine crewmen quickly got out, made their repairs, and returned to the base. In critiquing the day's events, the Marines asked themselves why had they encountered this heavy opposition when they were landing in the trace of an air strike. They finally concluded that the air strike had tipped their hand. Apparently as soon as the Vietnamese planes appeared on the scene, the Viet Cong grabbed their weapons and headed out of town. They deployed to the ditches and dikes where they sat and waited for the helicopters to make their approaches in the surrounding fields. The Marines were learning the lessons of counter-insurgency combat.

The environment of South Vietnam held other frustrations for the members of the task element. During another operation

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in June with the 21st Division, the aviators noticed that many people were flushed from the objective village while the helicopters made their final approaches. The civilians even caused somewhat of a traffic jam in the proposed landing sites. Suddenly somewhere from the innocent appearing crowd of men, women, and children, gunfire commenced. Two of the helicopters were hit in this mission, although the damage was not extensive. The Marines, because of the "don't shoot first policy" and more importantly because of the likelihood of hitting the innocent, could do nothing. The Viet Cong were using their old tactic of intermingling with the local population and using them as a shield to cover their own activities. The Marines found no effective method to counter this tactic and could only accept it as part of the job.

On 1 August, HMM-362 was officially relieved shortly after midnight by HMM-163, which was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert L. Rathbun. The physical transfer had proceeded gradually during the last weeks of July. Members of Rathbun's "Ridge Runners" flew missions with 362 and thus were acclimatized. HMM-362 could look back on its four-month deployment with some sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. Since April, it had flown 50 combat troop-lift missions, which had entailed

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about 130 landings against Viet Cong opposition. Of the 24 helicopters, 17 had sustained gunfire damage while two of the three small observation craft had also been hit at one time or another.

In its first month in Vietnam, HMM-163 experienced an intense baptism of fire. The squadron faced both the summer monsoons and the threat of a large Communist offensive. In helping the Vietnamese thwart the Viet Cong drive in August, the Marine helicopter pilots flew 3,650 sorties, totaling 2,543 hours in the air, and carried over 22,000 passengers. During this 31-day period, an average of 22 out of the 24 helicopters remained in commission--an almost phenomenal accomplishment considering combat damage and the normal maintenance required in South Vietnam.

Shortly afterwards, SHUFLY received orders to deploy north, despite the protests of the Vietnamese Corps commander and the Senior American Advisor in the area, who wished to retain the services of the Marine task unit in the Delta. The Marines moved to Da Nang from Soc Trang on 14 September 1962. Da Nang lay 375 miles north of Saigon and just 84 miles south of the 17th Parallel. The terrain in the area, in sharp contrast to the flat, canal-laced rice paddies of the south, consisted of rugged, jungle-covered mountains extending from the sea westward and reaching elevations of 6,000 feet and above.

The nature of the terrain in the I Corps area (the five

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northern provinces of South Vietnam) changed the complexion of Marine helicopter operations drastically. Unlike the abundant landing zones in the Mekong Delta, the north offered crude jungle clearings and small landing zones often located in steep-walled valleys and river bottoms. Most of the missions were outpost resupply sorties and some small strike operations. The Marines also discovered that the higher altitudes in the Da Nang area, coupled with the normal high temperatures and humidity, restricted the carrying load of the UH-34s. In the Delta, the Marine choppers transported 12-13 combat-equipped Vietnamese troops as a practice. In the north, this load was reduced to six-nine fully-armed soldiers.

There was another factor in the north which assumed further importance for the Marines--the weather. The monsoon came in the winter and during the months from September through March, there were low cloud ceilings, fog, high winds, and rain. In the former Imperial city of Hue, located halfway between Da Nang and the DMZ the average rainfall for a year was 128 inches. The weather conditions combined with the terrain often slowed and sometimes halted all flying, both fixed-wing and helicopter. In the south, the summer monsoon season which came between May and October, had not hampered flight operations, since the helicopters could simply pick their way through the areas of heavy rainfall or wait until the local showers moved past.

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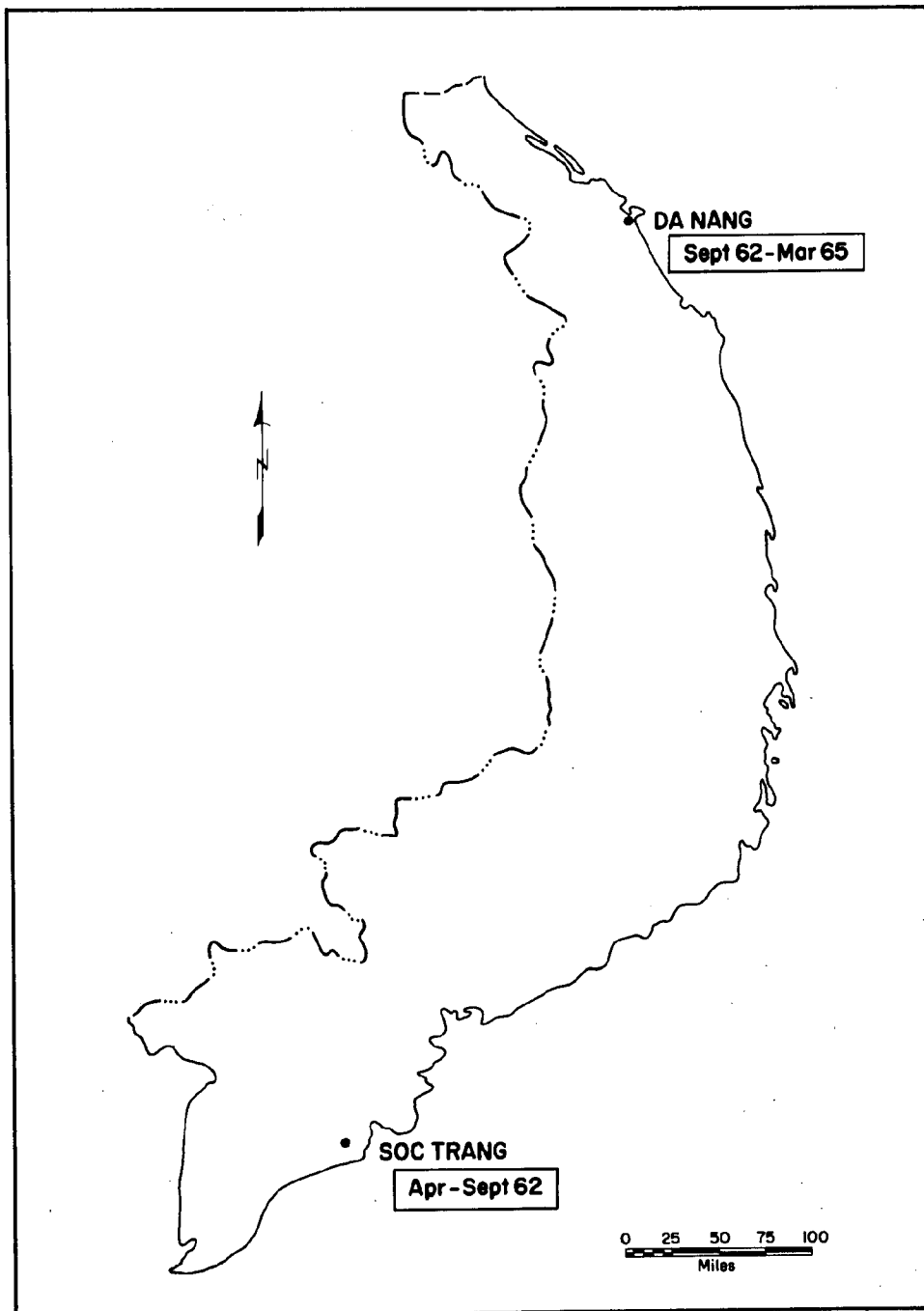
The base at Da Nang also differed greatly from the task unit's former home at Soc Trang. Da Nang boasted an 8,000-foot runway, a permanent control tower, hangars, and other facilities offered by a major installation. The Vietnamese Air Force, with the assistance of U. S. Air Force advisors, operated the entire complex. The Marines' billeting area was located in a compound built by the French, some three miles from their flight line. Three old buses brought the pilots to their aircraft.

Four days after their arrival at Da Nang, Marines flew their first combat support troop lift in I Corps. Fourteen of the squadron's helicopters participated in this operation some 35 miles south of the airfield. The following month, the Marine Corps had its first helicopter crash in South Vietnam when the craft crashed into a hill south of Da Nang near Tam Ky. The first combat loss due to enemy ground fire occurred in April 1963. The UH-34 was flying in support of a South Vietnamese operation, BLACK PHUONG XI, approximately 22 miles southwest of Tam Ky and sustained five hits in the cockpit area and crashed. Both the pilot and the ARVN helicopter team leader were slightly wounded by flying fragments. A rescue team stripped the craft of all usable parts and burned the helicopter. All the crew members and the passengers were

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evacuated to safety.

By the time this latter incident occurred, HMM-163 had rotated from Vietnam. It had been relieved on 11 January 1963 by HMM-162 commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Reinhardt Leu. Subsequent reliefs took place in June and October 1963, by HMM-261 (Lieutenant Colonel Frank A. Shook) and -361 (Lieutenant Colonel Thomas J. Ross) respectively. The task unit itself had seen several changes of command since Colonel Carey first landed at Soc Trang. He had been relieved in July 1962 by Colonel Ireland, who remained in command until November 1962, a much longer tour in South Vietnam than his first visit in the spring of 1954. Through January 1964, three other Marine officers (Lieutenant Colonel Alton W. McCully, Lieutenant Colonel Harold F. Brown, and Colonel Andre D. Gomez) served as SHUFLY commanders.

As 1963 came to a close, the activities of the task unit suddenly diminished. The Diem government fell on 1 November and the accompanying confusion and uncertainty throughout the country slowed operations to a standstill. Colonel Gomez took particular care that no Marine aircraft was involved in a flight that could be construed as having political implications. Operational flights were back to normal on the fourth day after the coup but then the monsoon season started. The rainy weather caused the cancellation of many missions and the tempo continued at a reduced rate through December.

Still, during the 20 months that SHUFLY had been in existence, the Marine aviators had compiled an enviable record.

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The helicopters had logged over 32,000 hours, an average of over 1,600 per month. The three O-1Bs flew 4,267 hours and the one C-117 in operation added another 1,516. In an average month, the UH-34s flew 2,600 sorties, lifted 7,300 passengers, evacuated 140 medical cases, and carried 500,000 pounds of cargo. The Marine helicopters had received over 220 hits by hostile fire, and yet only one aircraft had been lost.

On the ground the MABS subunit continued to support the aviators. The maintenance personnel quietly and effectively kept the helicopters flying, while other sections provided the essential ingredients in making a base a home. Security, however, at Da Nang had become a problem, mainly because of the physical distance between the billeting area and the airfield. In April 1963, a platoon of infantry from the 3d Marine Division on Okinawa had arrived at Da Nang and relieved the task unit of much of the tedious duty of standing guard. But in accordance with the 1,000-man cutback of U. S. personnel in South Vietnam ordered by Secretary McNamara, these troops were withdrawn  
(9)  
from the task unit in December.

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(9) General Roberts commented that he "did not concur in the withdrawal of this security platoon and predicted that the base camp would be subject to harassing fire about its perimeter." LtGen Carson A. Roberts, Comments on draft MS, dtd 21Jul69 (Vietnam Comment File).

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In January 1964, Colonel Gomez received word that the entire task unit was to leave South Vietnam by June (the squadron was scheduled to depart in March). The implementation of this order was left to his successor, Colonel Robert A. Merchant, who assumed command on 15 January. A few weeks later, the new commanding officer established a helicopter pilot and mechanic training program for the Vietnamese Air Force. The 24 UH-34s of the squadron were to be turned over to the South Vietnamese when the Marines departed the country. It was hoped that at that point the Vietnamese would be able to operate and maintain their own squadron. Lieutenant Colonel John H. Lavoy's HMM-364, which relieved HMM-361 on 1 February, [received its first class of eight Vietnamese pilots on the 4th, and training began immediately.] The syllabus called for 50 hours of flight instruction in operational missions, night and instrument flying, formation work, and rough area landing practice. By the middle of May, three classes had graduated. The training had taken place concurrently with normal operational flights, comprising about 250 helicopter hours per month. The Vietnamese pilots went directly into operational flying and thus obtained a first-hand knowledge of helicopter tactics. The Marine unit was able to maintain its integrity and still provide the necessary support to ARVN forces in I Corps.

In spite of the intensified training, the March departure date of the Marines from Vietnam had to be postponed because it soon became obvious that the Vietnamese were not prepared

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to take over. HMM-364 was providing over 80 percent of the troop-lift requirements for all of the ARVN forces in the northern five provinces. By May it was apparent that the demand for American-manned helicopters would remain high for the foreseeable future and General Westmoreland, the new USMACV commander, recommended that the Marine unit be retained. On 10 June, the Joint Chiefs approved this recommendation and the Marines were authorized to remain indefinitely. A week later, HMM-162 under Lieutenant Colonel Oliver W. Curtis arrived in-country and replaced 364. The new squadron brought in its own aircraft since 364 turned over its helicopters to the Vietnamese Air Force as originally planned. (10) Only one other transfer of UH-34 squadrons occurred in 1964, when on 8 October HMM-365 (Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Koler, Jr.) relieved 162. The task unit had two further changes of command during the year when Colonel Hardy Hay succeeded Colonel Merchant in July and was followed by Colonel John H. King, Jr. in October.

The expected reduction of the American participation in the war in South Vietnam in 1964 had not occurred. Not only had the Marine helicopter squadron remained in-country, but it

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(10) Major General Paul J. Fontana recalled that "...within a week or so they [South Vietnamese] could not muster more than a half dozen for any given operation. As a result, our combat support increased rather than diminished." MajGen Paul J. Fontana, Comments on draft MS, dtd 10Jul69 (Vietnam Comment File).

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was quickly reinforced in March by the return of the security platoon from the 3d Marine Division. A series of harassing incidents during the month jeopardized the operational efficiency of the task unit. The Marine camp was fired on repeatedly from an adjacent village, located about 10 yards beyond the barbed wire surrounding the base. Ironically, many of the inhabitants of the hamlet were dependents of Vietnamese Army troops and some indigenous laborers employed by the Marines. Although ARVN sentries patrolled the camp perimeter, the incidents continued and even increased. During March more than 15 bullet holes were found in the generator building. Late on the night of the 15th, one of the Viet Cong hurled a "Madame Nhu cocktail" (a Vietnamese beer bottle filled with gasoline and a rag fuse) at the door of the NCO quarters. The bottle shattered on the ledge, but fortunately failed to explode. The security platoon from the 3d Marine Division on Okinawa arrived at Da Nang on the 24th.

The emphasis on internal security at times inspired some barbed remarks between the "grunts" and the "chopper drivers." Captain Charles K. Breslauer, who had the additional duty as security officer, made the comment:

We spent many hours in preparation of fixed positions and fields of fire, all predetermined. The aviators used to pass by on the road to the flight line, laugh, pass  
(11)  
snide remarks, and called it the Breslauer Line.

(11) Taped Interview with Capt Charles K. Breslauer, ExO,

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In spite of all efforts, the VC harassment continued and by the end of the year the security platoon had been replaced by a reinforced company from the 3d Marine Division.

The tempo of operations for the task unit remained high during 1964. The 24 UH-34s maintained a monthly average of over 1,450 flight hours and carried 4,100 passengers and 160 tons of cargo per month. In November, Typhoon Iris struck in the northern provinces causing floods and wreaking havoc and destruction throughout I Corps. HMM-365's helicopters were pressed into service to evacuate civilians and to bring in essential supplies. According to General Krulak, the helicopter squadron's rescue operations in evacuating flood victims, "brought us more good will than almost anything I saw during (12) that period in Vietnam."

The Marines found themselves hauling all types of assorted cargo including livestock. Animals in transit often created unusual situations. Once, a farmer had his cow on board a helicopter, tied to a metal bracket in the cargo compartment. The animal, not accustomed to this mode of transportation, moved from side to side, disturbing the equilibrium of the aircraft. Finally the pilot yelled down to the crew chief, "Tell him to keep that damn cow still." The Vietnamese peasant knew no English, but he understood the tone of voice.

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MABS-16, HistBr Tape No. 71 (C).

(12) Krulak Comments, Aug69, p. 5.

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He immediately slashed the throat of the unfortunate bovine with his knife. The cow no longer disturbed the flight.

Another aviator recalled an occasion when his passenger was a pig---like the one that went to market, this one went "wee wee  
(13)  
all the way home."

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(13) Yingling, Bradshaw, and Frank, USMC Activities, 1954-63,  
p. 184 (S).

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## THE BATTLE OF BINH GIA

There were very few recorded humorous incidents in the latter part of 1964 as the war took on a grimmer aspect. The Viet Cong, moving into the final stage of guerrilla warfare, were now willing to challenge the regular battalions of the Vietnamese Armed Forces. On the last day of 1964, VC main force battalions engaged the 4th Battalion of the Vietnamese Marine Brigade near the hamlet of Binh Gia, approximately 40 miles east of Saigon. Since 1962, the Marine Brigade had remained constantly in the field and made contact with the enemy on the average of one day out of three. Many independent observers rated the brigade as the finest ground combat unit<sup>(14)</sup> in the Vietnamese Armed Forces.

Yet in 1964, the Vietnamese Marines suffered from the upheaval caused by the overthrow of the Diem regime. Their apolitical Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Khang, who took no part in the November coup, was eased out of his job, promoted to colonel, and then dispatched to the Philippines as an attache. Four months later, he returned to Vietnam and resumed his duties as Commandant when General Khanh rose to power.

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(14) Bradshaw, USMC Activities, 1964, p. 6. (S).

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The effects of these rapid changes of leadership filtered down through all the echelons of the Vietnamese Marine Corps and morale became a problem. During February, more than 500 Vietnamese Marines deserted their units. With the return of stability at the top, the brigade again began to make some headway in combat effectiveness. By October, desertion was on the decline. At the end of the year, a fifth battalion had been added to the brigade structure and the Vietnamese Marine Corps strength stood at 7,398 officers and men. In spite of this apparent progress in numbers, the battle of Binh Gia was to reveal several fatal flaws in coordination and leadership.

Binh Gia was populated by refugees from North Vietnam who had been resettled in the area after the truce. The villagers were largely Catholic and naturally had little love for the Viet Cong. But while the town itself seemed secure, the surrounding countryside was a battleground between the government forces and the local guerrillas.

Contrary to their usual tactics of hit and run by small armed bands, the VC in December 1964 attacked the settlement in battalion strength, overran the hamlet, and dug in for a long stay. Two ARVN units, the 30th and 33d Ranger Battalions, were dispatched by Saigon to retake Binh Gia. After fierce

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fighting and mounting casualties on both sides, the objective still remained in Communist hands.

On 29 December, Major Nho, commanding officer of the 4th Marine Battalion, and Captain Franklin P. Eller, Jr., the American advisor to the battalion, were summoned to III Corps headquarters. There they were informed that the 4th Battalion, which was part of the III Corps Strategic Reserve, would be committed to the Binh Gia operation to support the Rangers. On the next morning, the Marines mounted out on helicopters from Bien Hoa Airfield and arrived in the vicinity of the embattled area. The battalion linked up with the Army units and attacked to the east. By 1330 the government troops had secured the hamlet. The South Vietnamese forces had encountered no opposition, since apparently the Viet Cong had slipped out of town the night before. From the number of prepared positions, Captain Eller estimated the enemy force to have been a reinforced battalion, numbering about 750 men.

In addition to Captain Eller, there were four other American Marines with the Vietnamese 4th Battalion. Three of these, Captain Donald G. Cook, 1st Lieutenant James P. Kelliher, and Staff Sergeant Charles J. Beaver, were attached to the Vietnamese

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(15)  
unit as observers from the 3d Marine Division. First  
Lieutenant Philip O. Brady was the assistant advisor to the  
battalion.

Lieutenant Brady observed that three of the company  
commanders had just assumed their commands. He noted that they  
all showed promise but reflected the general attitude then  
prevailing in the country as a whole--that they were losing  
the war "and were fast approaching the point of simply giving  
(16)  
up." Major Nho, himself, was increasingly depressed and  
believed that his battalion was not receiving the full support  
of the Marine Brigade. He once made the statement that "I am  
very tired of fighting two wars...one with the VC and the other  
(17)  
with the Brigade." This spirit of resignation was to have  
its effects during the next two days.

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(15) Company grade officers and staff NCOs from the 3d Marine  
Division were often sent TDY for 30 days for an OJT (on the  
job training) indoctrination tour with a Vietnamese unit.

(16) Capt Philip O. Brady, Aftertour Rept, dtd 9Dec65 in SMA,  
Aftertour Repts (U).

(17) Ibid. Captain Eller commented later that the VNMC head-  
quarters exerted only administrative control over its battalions.  
The battalions were attached to the operational control of a  
particular division, sector, or corps. "Decisions as to how  
Marine battalions would be employed, when attached in this  
manner, were out of the hands of Vietnamese Marine Headquarters."

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Shortly after the troops entered Binh Gia on 30 December, the Marines developed their own defensive positions, while the Rangers evacuated their dead and wounded from the previous battle. Later in the day an aircraft spotter detected approximately 100 VC in the open. Vietnamese Air Force A1Es blasted the area followed at 1800 by an armed helicopter strike. The lead U. S. Army helicopter took several hits from small arms fire and smashed to the ground. The crash site was approximately two miles east of Binh Gia, located on a rubber plantation, which was surrounded by jungle. Major Nho received orders to retrieve the downed craft and any survivors, but refused to do so until the next day. He was reluctant to commit his troops after dark in an unexplored and unfamiliar terrain.

On the morning of the 31st, Major Nho directed his 2d Company to recover the helicopter. Approximately at 0745, the company, accompanied by Captain Eller and Lieutenant Kelliher, departed the battalion lines. The Vietnamese Marines had no difficulty in reaching the crash site where they found the charred remains of the aircraft and two freshly dug graves on either side of the wreckage. Captain Eller discovered several blood soaked cards, which apparently had dropped out of one of the crewmen's wallets. Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, four or five VC appeared, walking directly towards the troops. The

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Captain Franklin P. Eller, Comments on draft MS, dtd 29Aug69  
(Vietnam Comment File).

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Marines, on the order of the company commander, Lieutenant Tuon, opened up and one of the enemy soldiers fell to the ground. Their suspicions that they were not dealing with a rag-tag local guerrilla force were quickly confirmed after examining the body of the fallen VC. He was wearing a clean green uniform, boots, and helmet, and carrying a carbine. The man was approximately six feet tall and weighed about 180 pounds; unusually large for a Vietnamese.

After this interruption, the Vietnamese Marines reluctantly began to dig up the graves. Just under the surface of the ground, one of the shovels struck what was apparently the chest of one of the dead American crewmen. At this point, an enemy platoon was observed moving into position on the left. The Marines began to receive fire from two directions and mortar and recoilless rifle shells impacted in the midst of the government troops. According to Captain Eller, "It was apparent at this time that the VC had rigged a trap and that we were in the middle of it."<sup>(18)</sup>

Captain Eller maintained radio contact with the armed helicopters on station and called down a strike on the enemy positions. But the enemy continued to press the attack, both on the left flank and in the center. The captain was on one knee, directing the helicopters, when he was wounded in the

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(18) Statement of Capt F. P. Eller, dtd 4Jan65, Encl 4 to 4th VNM Bn, Opn Rept, Binh Gia, dtd 7Jan65. (SMA, A/A Repts).

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face and part of his nose was shot away. He was bleeding severely but a Vietnamese corpsman quickly attended to his wounds. The American captain turned to Lieutenant Kelliher and told him to remain in radio contact with the gun ship, but the battery was dead. By this time the center platoon had been overrun and the survivors had joined the platoon on the left. Lieutenant Tuon, seeing that the situation was hopeless, directed that the troops retreat to the relative safety of the jungle. The UH-1Bs provided cover while the remnants of the company made an orderly withdrawal still firing their weapons at the enemy. At times, the fire from the helicopters came too close for comfort and the Marines were forced to take cover. Lieutenant Kelliher estimated that 30 men were left from the original company strength, as the battle-weary troops made their way back to Binh Gia.

Lieutenant Brady and Major Nho had monitored the radio nets and were quite aware that "Leatherneck 4" (Captain Eller's call sign) was in trouble. At 1145, the armed helicopters had relayed the information that they had lost contact with the company. The Vietnamese major decided to take the rest of the battalion to relieve the besieged group. About 1220 they met the battered 2d Company on the outskirts of the village. Captain Eller, still ambulatory, reported to Lieutenant Brady and Major Nho: "They were waiting for us--there was a battalion down there and (19) they were regulars." The captain returned to Binh Gia to

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(19) Statement of 1stLt P. O. Brady, n.d. Encl 5 to ibid. (ibid.).

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await medical evacuation and Lieutenant Brady assumed the position of "Leatherneck 4."

The battalion commander requested an air strike from the Vietnamese Air Force and placed two of his companies on line facing the east. Commencing at about 1300, the VNAF A1Es raked the enemy positions for 45 minutes. Major Nho then ordered the two forward companies to move into the jungle surrounding the plantation. As the troops advanced, they received sporadic small arms fire from the tree line. Two additional air strikes were called down on the VC.

Approaching the American lieutenant, Major Nho exclaimed, "We have intelligence--one VC regiment here!" The battalion commander then requested another air strike but was informed that the A1Es had run out of ammunition. Lieutenant Brady then contacted the armed UH-1Bs which were on station and asked them to hit the targets. The chopper pilots replied, however, that they were under specific orders not to fly into the area (20) because it was "tactically unsound." The Marines would have to await the attack aircraft.

Major Nho decided to take the situation into his own hands. He notified the Ranger units in Binh Gia to be on the alert for an attack while he positioned the 2d Company as a rear guard and reserve. The remainder of the battalion moved in a southeasterly direction guiding on the main road leading through the jungle into the plantation. Brady advised the major that it would (20) Ibid.

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not be too wise to linger in the area, but Major Nho decided to stay just a little longer.

Fifteen minutes later, the battalion approached the western edge of the rubber trees. The requested aircraft had not yet arrived. Lieutenant Brady checked with his radio monitor on the location of the A-1s. Major Nho then stated that he wished to go into the plantation with the battalion, check it out, and then evacuate the American and Vietnamese dead from the crash site. Lieutenant Brady considered the venture too risky. He advised the major that the Vietnamese should establish a tight perimeter with the three companies and send a small detachment to bring back the bodies. The two officers compromised. Major Nho ordered the 1st and 3d companies to proceed to the downed helicopters and establish defensive positions around it, while the 4th Company would protect the northern flank.

At 1545, the 4th Company heard the VC digging approximately 500 yards to their front. Brady was able to call down the armed helicopters and things became relatively quiet. Forty-five minutes later, the young American was informed that the eight A-1Es dispatched to the area had been orderdd back to their home bases because the requested strikes "were unnecessary." (21) He was told that if the battalion wanted the aircraft they would have to go through Vietnamese channels. When Major Nho was informed of this, he bitterly remarked: "If I ask through

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(21) Ibid.

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Vietnamese, I will get aircraft one month from now." (22)

At 1630, Lieutenant Brady advised Major Nho that it was getting late and they should get out of the plantation. The major agreed and stated that he was ordering the evacuation of the site. A landing zone was prepared for the evacuation helicopter which was scheduled to arrive within the hour. The American then suggested to Major Nho that they get out any bodies they could by 1715, move the battalion back to the village, and return the next day. Major Nho disagreed and stated that the evacuation would be completed by 1800. By 1730, only three bodies had been brought to the landing zone, The major's decision had been a prelude to disaster.

Fifteen minutes later, the blaring sound of bugles heralded the enemy attack. The Viet Cong advanced in human waves through the rubber trees and bore down on the Marine positions. Lieutenant Brady called on the armed helicopters, but they had almost no effect in stopping the VC regiment. The government battalion stood its ground and fought, but the enemy fire was overwhelming. The Marines were being butchered. Major Nho disappeared, apparently killed or captured, and was never seen again. By 1830, the battalion no longer existed as an effective fighting force. Elements retreated to the south and southwest and eventually made their way back to Binh Gia. Stragglers continued to come in during the night and with the arrival of

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(22) Ibid.

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80 survivors on the morning of the first, the battalion reached half of its original strength.

There could be no doubt that the battalion had suffered heavily. Eleven officers, including the battalion commander, had been killed and four were wounded. A total of 112 of the approximately 430 men in the battalion were dead, 71 were wounded, and 13 were still missing. The battalion had left on the field of battle more than 140 weapons. It would take months before the 4th Battalion would be once again fit for combat.

The American Marine advisors with the battalion had not come out unscathed. Sergeant Beaver, who had been with the 3d Company, arrived in Binh Gia on the morning of the first, somehow miraculously unscratched; but Captain Cook, who had been with the 1st Company, was still missing. One of the Vietnamese Marines from that organization reported that he had seen the VC searching the unconscious body of the captain, who was wounded in the left thigh. Cook apparently moved and was quickly taken prisoner. His captors bound him and marched  
(23)  
him off into the jungle. Captain Eller was the only other U.S. Marine advisor who had been wounded. Both he and Lieutenant Brady won Silver Stars for their part in the battle.

Binh Gia reflected in microcosm the frustrations of the American advisors with the Vietnamese. The Marine advisory

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(23) Intelligence reports as late as May 1965 indicated that Captain Cook was alive and still a prisoner of the Viet Cong.

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component had not shown any appreciable numerical growth since 1962. In 1964, it was authorized a strength of 19 officers and one enlisted man as part of the Naval Advisory Group. The only change during the year was the disestablishment of the MAAG as a separate entity under MACV. All the Americans could do was to offer advice and set an example through their own actions. The war still had to be fought by the Vietnamese. At the end of 1964, the Viet Cong were growing stronger and bolder.

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## CHAPTER 4

(1)

## THE MARINES ARRIVE IN FORCE

(1) Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: MilHistBr, OSJS, USMACV, Comd Hist 1964, dtd 15Oct65 (TS), hereafter MACV Comd Hist, 1964 (TS); MilHistBr, OSJS, USMACV, Comd Hist, 1965, dtd 20Apr66 (TS), hereafter MACV Comd Hist, 1965 (TS); CinCPac, Comd Hist (Vol II), 1965 n.d. (TS), hereafter CinCPac Comd Hist, 1965 (TS); Cahill and Shulimson, USMC Ops, Jan-Jun 65 (S); Comment File on draft MS of Cahill and Shulimson, USMC Ops, Jan-Jun65, hereafter Comment File on draft MS, Jan-Jun65; Com Amphib For, U.S. Seventh Fleet, Hist of Amphib Ops in South Vietnam, Mar65-Dec66, n.d. (C), hereafter CAF Seventh Flt, Hist of Amphib Ops (C); Hq, FMFPac, U.S. Marine Corps Forces in Vietnam, Mar65-Sep67, Hist Summary, n.d., v. 1 Nar (S) and v. 2 Stat (S), hereafter USMC in RVN Hist Summary (S); Hq, FMFPac, Ops of III MAF, Vietnam, Mar-Sep65, n.d. (S), hereafter III MAF Ops (S); FMFPac Comd C, 1Mar65-31Dec65, n.d. (S), hereafter FMFPac Comd C (S); 9th MEB Comd Ds, Mar-Apr65 (S); Vietnam Comment File; SEAsia Msg File (OCMH), hereafter OCMH Msg File; HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, Msg File, hereafter HQMC Msg File; CNO, Flag Plot File (OHB, NHD), hereafter Flag Plot File; MCCC, Items

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of Significant Interest; NMCC, Op Summaries; Transcript of BGen Frederick J. Karch Presentation to the Command and Staff College, Quantico, Va., dtd 27May65 (HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC Oral Hist Collection) (S), hereafter Karch Presentation (S); Cornelius D. Sullivan, George Fielding Eliot, Gordon D. Gayle, William R. Corson, The Vietnam War: Its Conduct and Higher Direction (Washington, D. C.: The Center for Strategic Studies, Georgetown University, pre-publication draft, 1968), hereafter Sullivan, et al, The Vietnam War; Admiral Ulysses S. G. Sharp, USN, CinCPac and General William C. Westmoreland, USA, ComUSMACV, Report on the War in Vietnam (As of 30 June 1968) (Camp H. M. Smith, Hawaii: 1968), hereafter Sharp and Westmoreland, Report on the War; Col Edwin H. Simmons, USMC, "The Marine Corps Response to Vietnam and Santo Domingo," MS Individual Research Paper, dtd 15May67, NWC, Washington, D. C. (U), hereafter Simmons, Marine Corps Response (U).

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## THE ARRIVAL OF THE LAAMS

(2)

## AND THE DECISION TO SEND THE MEB TO DA NANG

The Viet Cong attack on Pleiku, 7 February 1965, was to have far reaching consequences. President Johnson directed American aircraft to strike at military targets in North Vietnam, south of the 20th Parallel, and at the same time ordered the 1st Light Antiaircraft Missile Battalion (1st LAAM Bn),<sup>(3)</sup> to Da Nang. The initial air strike on 7 February, FLAMING DART I, hit Army barracks and port facilities at Dong Hoi, just north of the DMZ. After the VC attacked the U.S. billets at Qui Nhon on 10 February, the American command launched FLAMING DART II against the Chanh Hoa barracks, 35 miles north of the Demilitarized Zone. This tit-for-tat retaliation against the North was soon transformed into a strategy of graduated reprisal and the name ROLLING THUNDER was given to the intensive air campaign against North Vietnam. Just as significant, however, was the arrival of American troops in Vietnam.

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(2) Additional sources for this section include: 1st LAAM Bn Comd D, Feb-Mar65 (S) and Taped Interview with Capt Ronald G. Richardson, S-3 1st LAAM Bn, HistBr Tape No. 50.

(3) The 1st LAAM was equipped with ground to air missiles (HAWKS).

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Units of the United States Marine Corps were among the first to be called upon. General Westmoreland had requested the HAWK missiles as early as August 1964, but the decision was deferred because of facility construction costs. The LAAM battalion deployed to Okinawa from the United States during December and was prepared to move on short notice to Da Nang. The call came on 7 February 1965. Battery A had just finished firing in an exercise when the entire battalion went on special alert at 1745. Three and a half hours later, the battalion executive officer directed the Battery A commanding officer to prepare for an airlift to an unknown destination. The order to deploy to Da Nang came during the morning hours of 8 February and the first aircraft departed Okinawa at 1045. The plane landed at Da Nang seven hours later, and by that night most of the battery had arrived.

Before dawn on the morning of the 9th, Lieutenant Colonel Bertram E. Cook, Commanding Officer of the 1st LAAM Battalion, reported to Colonel King, Commander of the Marine Task Unit at Da Nang. Although the HAWK battalion remained under Marine Corps command, Detachment 1, 619th Tactical Command and Control Squadron, USAF, determined under what conditions the missiles would be fired. Within 24 hours after its arrival,

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Battery A was prepared to defend the Da Nang Air Base from enemy air attack.

At the same time the one battery departed for Da Nang by air, the order came to move the remainder of the battalion, with the exception of Battery C, by sea. Two ships, the AKA Washburn and the LSD Gunston Hall, carried the Headquarters and Service (H&S) Battery and Battery B to its new base. On Okinawa, another LST, the Vernon County, embarked Company C, 7th Engineer Battalion on 14 February; this unit would have the mission of supporting the LAAM battalion. The first two vessels arrived off the coast of South Vietnam on the morning of 16 February. The limitations of the port facilities at Da Nang soon became evident. The ships had to unload their cargoes into boats in the harbor and the small craft then proceeded to the Da Nang docks. There the equipment and supplies were transferred to trucks that wended their way through the streets of the city to the base, a distance of some two miles. With the arrival of the Vernon County two days later, the initial American reinforcements directed by the President were in place. The Marines had landed, but the situation was not yet well in hand.

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Even more significant than the terror attacks against American facilities in South Vietnam, was the gradual buildup of regular units of the North Vietnamese Army in the south. The experience of World War II had conditioned the Western World to a stereotyped concept of invasion. Immediately brought to mind were the German lightning attack against Poland in 1939 and Hitler's Blitzkrieg victory over France in 1940. The North Vietnamese, however, had neither the technical knowledge nor equipment to resort to this strategy. They reverted to their experience against the French, the writings of Mao Tse Tung, and even back to the literary works of the Chinese Clausewitz, Sun Tsu. If the North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam appeared slow, it was because North Vietnam's means of access to the south--jungle trails by land and sampans by sea--were hardly conducive to mechanized warfare.

The enemy plan of battle for 1965 apparently called for cutting South Vietnam in two, along Route 19 between the Central Highlands and the coast. The first phase was the infestation of the mountain provinces of Kontum and Pleiku by regular NVA divisions and simultaneously the concentration of Viet Cong main force units in the coastal provinces of Phu Yen, Binh Dinh, and Quang Ngai. The aim was to establish both a political and military base of operations from which the two forces could link up once they obtained overwhelming military superiority. Further south, the VC would continue to strengthen their forces around Saigon, develop their base

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area, and slowly strangle the capital city. Much of the same strategy was to be applied to the northern provinces of Quang Nam and Quang Tin. The large cities were to be surrounded by a hostile countryside. The enemy would then move into Mao Tse Tung's classic program of "People's War" with the capture of the large urban centers. The Communist leaders apparently saw light at the end of the tunnel and were not about to allow a few bombings and troop reinforcements to deter them from their goal.

Allied intelligence reports revealed the infusion of North Vietnamese regulars while the sinking of a North Vietnamese trawler laden with arms off the coast of South Vietnam indicated the extensive Communist resupply effort. Coupled with the growing enemy strength was the obvious weakness of the South Vietnamese government, wracked by coup and counter-coup.

At this time the United States was not prepared to do the fighting for the South Vietnamese, yet it had to consider how to protect its resources, troops, and civilian citizens which were in Vietnam. General Westmoreland recalled in a message to Washington on 9 February 1965, that in the past he had considered requesting American combat troops to provide for close-in security of the U.S. bases in Vietnam. This course of action had been rejected for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was that the presence of American forces might cause the South Vietnamese to lose interest and relax. The general was now of the opinion that the attack on Pleiku marked

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a new phase in the war. It was obvious that the Viet Cong were turning their attention to direct attacks on American personnel and facilities. The question of protecting these troops could no longer be ignored. The MACV commander had directed his deputy, Lieutenant General John L. Throckmorton, to conduct a survey of what was needed to protect the American bases. It was General Westmoreland's belief that this would require at least a division. Finally, Westmoreland declared: "These are numbers of a new order of magnitude, but we must <sup>(4)</sup> face the stark fact that the war has escalated."

There was no doubt among any of the senior American officers that important decisions were about to be made. Vice Admiral Roy L. Johnson, Commander of the Seventh Fleet, alerted all his units with the warning that they were faced with an extremely high tempo of operations and there was no relief in sight. <sup>(5)</sup> The only remaining question was what these increased operations would be.

The Joint Chiefs recommended to the President an eight-week program of sustained pressure. This would include the continuation of the strikes against the north and the landing of additional American troops in the south. The actual designation of units and where to send them was still undecided. One of the most apparent resources was the U.S. 3d Marine

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(4) ComUSMACV msg 091220Z Feb65 (Flag Plot File) (S).

(5) ComSeventh Flt msg 120102Z Feb65 (Flag Plot File) (S).

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Division on Okinawa. Plans already developed provided for Marines to operate in the northern portion of South Vietnam. General Westmoreland saw an additional advantage in sending Marines. They could sustain themselves logistically for an extended period. The only Army unit which was readily available was the 173d Airborne Brigade which would require MACV logistical support from the very beginning.

General Throckmorton had completed his study by 20 February and recommended that the initial troops be inserted at Da Nang. Part of his rationale was the fact that the U.S. Air Force launched its ROLLING THUNDER strikes from Da Nang; the base, therefore, was a likely target for VC retaliation. He feared that the South Vietnamese troops in the area were not capable of preventing a determined enemy attack against the base.

By the 27th, President Johnson made the decision to commit a brigade-sized force at Da Nang with the mission of protecting the base from any enemy incursion. The only other problem was to convince the South Vietnamese to accept American troops. The next day, Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland met with Prime Minister Quat, and on 1 March with Generals Minh and Nguyen Van Thieu of the Vietnamese General Staff to discuss the landing of a Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) at Da Nang. The South Vietnamese were prepared to accept any help that they could get, but the two generals stated that the American forces

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should arrive "as inconspicuously as possible." (6) Thieu and Minh never did make clear how one lands a Marine brigade near the second largest city in South Vietnam and keeps it a secret. Their reservations apparently had an effect on the Washington authorities for General Westmoreland received an order which directed the 173d Airborne to deploy by air instead of an amphibious operation by the Marine brigade.

This caused consternation at MACV headquarters. General Westmoreland was quick to reply that this measure was unsatisfactory from a military point of view. He pointed out that his staff was too far along with plans for the Marine landing to be sidetracked at the last moment. The main thrust of the general's argument was that MACV was still essentially an advisory command and just did not have the logistic capability of supporting the Army brigade. He then remarked that it was his belief that Thieu and Minh had overstated the psychological impact that the arrival of an American combat unit would have on the civilian population of South Vietnam. ComUSMACV mentioned in passing that General Thi, the Vietnamese I Corps Commander, disagreed wholeheartedly with his comrades-in-arms' assessment of the popular reaction. Westmoreland's reasoning finally persuaded his superiors in Washington. On 6 March, the Joint Chief sent the long awaited signal. "Land at once at Da Nang MEB command and control elements, a surface Battalion Landing

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(6) MACV Comd Hist, 1965, p. 31 (S).

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(7)

Team..."

The Marine brigade was to go to Vietnam.

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(7) JCS msg 070001Z Mar65 (HQMC Msg File) (S).

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## FORMATION OF THE 9TH MEB, THE LANDING, AND 1ST ACTIVITIES (8)

Elements of the 9th MEB had been afloat in the Western Pacific since the Gulf of Tonkin crisis in August 1964. At that time the MEB under Brigadier General Raymond G. Davis, along with a regimental headquarters and three Marine BLTs, embarked on board Seventh Fleet amphibious shipping---approximately 6,000 Marines in all. General Davis and his staff visited Saigon and Da Nang, made liaison with both MACV and

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(8) Additional sources for this section include: 9th MEB Comd D 4Aug64-16Oct64, dtd 16Oct64 (S); Hq, III MEF, 9th MEB Chron Hist 16Oct64-22Jan65, dtd 8Mar65 (S); 3/9 Comd Ds, Mar-Apr65 (S); 1/3 Comd Ds, Mar-Apr65 (S); 9th MEB Log Spt Gru, Comd Ds, Mar-Apr65 (S), hereafter BLSG Comd Ds (S); Dir MCCC memo to CMC, dtd 19Oct66, Subj: Landing of Initial Marine Forces at Da Nang (U); Taped Interview with LtCol Joseph Cervell, G-4, 9th MEB, HistBr Tape No. 91, hereafter Cervell Tape No. 91; Taped Interview with Maj Pat Morgan, Executive Officer, 9th MEB BLSG, HistBr Tape No. 19; Taped Interview with LtCol George H. Smith, Commanding Officer, BLSG, HistBr Tape No. 111, hereafter Smith Tape No. 111; Taped Interview with Capt David Whittingham, Commanding Officer Detachment 1st ForRecon Co, FMFPac, HistBr Tape No. 81, hereafter Whittingham Tape No. 81.

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Vietnamese authorities, and developed several contingency plans to land along the littoral of South Vietnam. One of the outline plans called for one Marine battalion to land in northern Quang Tri Province in the event North Vietnamese troops moved in strength across the 17th Parallel. According to one apocryphal account, the Marine battalion commander, who was slated to carry out this possible assignment, remarked: "I always wanted my battalion to imitate a division."

Nevertheless, the Marine brigade was ready for action. Two battalions, one the Special Landing Force (SLF) of the Seventh Fleet, stayed on board ships prepared to land on order. The MEB headquarters throughout the latter part of 1964 and early 1965, either stayed embarked on ship or maintained a skeleton staff at the American naval base in the Philippines at Subic Bay. As the situation deteriorated in the south, one battalion or the other, and at times the two together, would stand off the coast of Vietnam. They were ready to land at Da Nang or Saigon or both simultaneously. Brigadier General Frederick C. Karch, who assumed command of the MEB on 22 January 1965, once remarked: "When the temperature went up, we got closer."<sup>(9)</sup> With this recurring alert and realert, the MEB had proved that it could react quickly and appropriately when the situation arose.

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(9) Karch Presentation (S).

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Although the landing was originally scheduled for 7 March, rough seas and the lack of Vietnamese political approval caused a delay of one day. The main disagreement between the Vietnamese and the Americans apparently was in the wording of the proposed public announcement of the MEB landing. Finally on the afternoon of the 7th, Ambassador Taylor reported to Secretary Rusk that the Vietnamese had agreed to the text of the joint statement. The last political impediment to the reinforcement of Da Nang had been overcome; the only remaining obstacle was the weather.

On the 7th, while the task force remained at sea, General Karch with two of his staff left the Mount McKinley by helicopter and landed in Da Nang to discuss his plans with MACV and ARVN representatives. Because of the late hour and the heavy seas, they agreed to delay the landing until the next morning. General Karch received assurance that the Vietnamese Army would cover the objective area, Red Beach 2, located north of the airbase and west of the city. Vietnamese Army engineers had built a road from the beach to Highway 1, just south of the curving two-mile beach area.

General Karch returned to the command ship that evening and contacted Lieutenant Colonel Charles E. McPartlin, the battalion commander of 3/9. The general informed McPartlin that Route 1 would be closed to civilians for 36 hours. The Marines would regulate traffic in the beach area, while the ARVN would control the movement along the rest of the route.

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The last weeks were an extremely active period for General Karch and the Marines of the brigade. General Karch and some members of his staff visited General Westmoreland on 25 February to discuss plans for a Marine landing at Da Nang. At the same time, a detachment of the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company under Captain David S. Whittingham conducted a survey of the beaches and avenues of approach in the vicinity of the proposed target area. The MEB commander left Saigon for Da Nang, which he departed on 27 February for Subic Bay and then Okinawa. The general conducted a CPX (Command Post Exercise) on 2 March on Okinawa and then joined Admiral Don W. Wulzen, Task Force 76 Commander, on board the flagship, AGC Mount McKinley, 10 miles off the coast of Vietnam.

The landing itself was planned primarily as an administrative movement. The JCS order, which directed the landing, had the laconic title "Improved Security Measures in the Republic of Vietnam." The Marines were to bring ashore the MEB command and control group, one helicopter squadron, one of the SLF battalions the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines (3/9) and were to fly in one battalion (1/3) from Okinawa. Minimum logistic support was to be furnished and General Karch was to assume command of the Marine task unit already at Da Nang. His force was in effect a brigade (-), only two battalions strong with an equal number of helicopter squadrons. The Joint Chiefs were quite specific that no further reinforcement would be authorized at that time to bring the MEB to full strength.

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The MEB commander concluded: "Unless the situation ashore changes during the night, you can count on an administrative move from beachhead to airfield."<sup>(10)</sup>

Later that evening, General Karch issued his order to carry out the 9th MEB landing plan. H-hour was set for 0800, 8 March, and the general unloading was to be completed by 1600. Upon receipt of the order, Lieutenant Colonel McPartlin issued his own instruction to his battalion. Companies I and K, on the left and right respectively, were to land simultaneously over the beach. These units were to be followed by Company L, which was to be the advance guard on the march to the airfield. Company M was to be the battalion reserve.

At 0545, 8 March, the four ships of Amphibious Task Force 76, the AGC Mount McKinley, APA Henrico, AKA Union, and LPD Vancouver, closed to within 4,000 yards of shore and anchored in the harbor. The order "to land the landing force," was given at 0600. At this time, weather conditions in the bay were relatively moderate, although there was an intermittent drizzle. Visibility was five miles and the wind was blowing at eight knots from the northwest. Near the shoreline, the waves were cresting from two to four feet, splashing gently onto the beach, but this moderate condition was not to last long. Out in the transport area, the swells reached 8 to

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(10) Document entitled "Information from General Karch for LtCol McPartlin before landing" in 3/9 Comd D Mar65, Part III (S).

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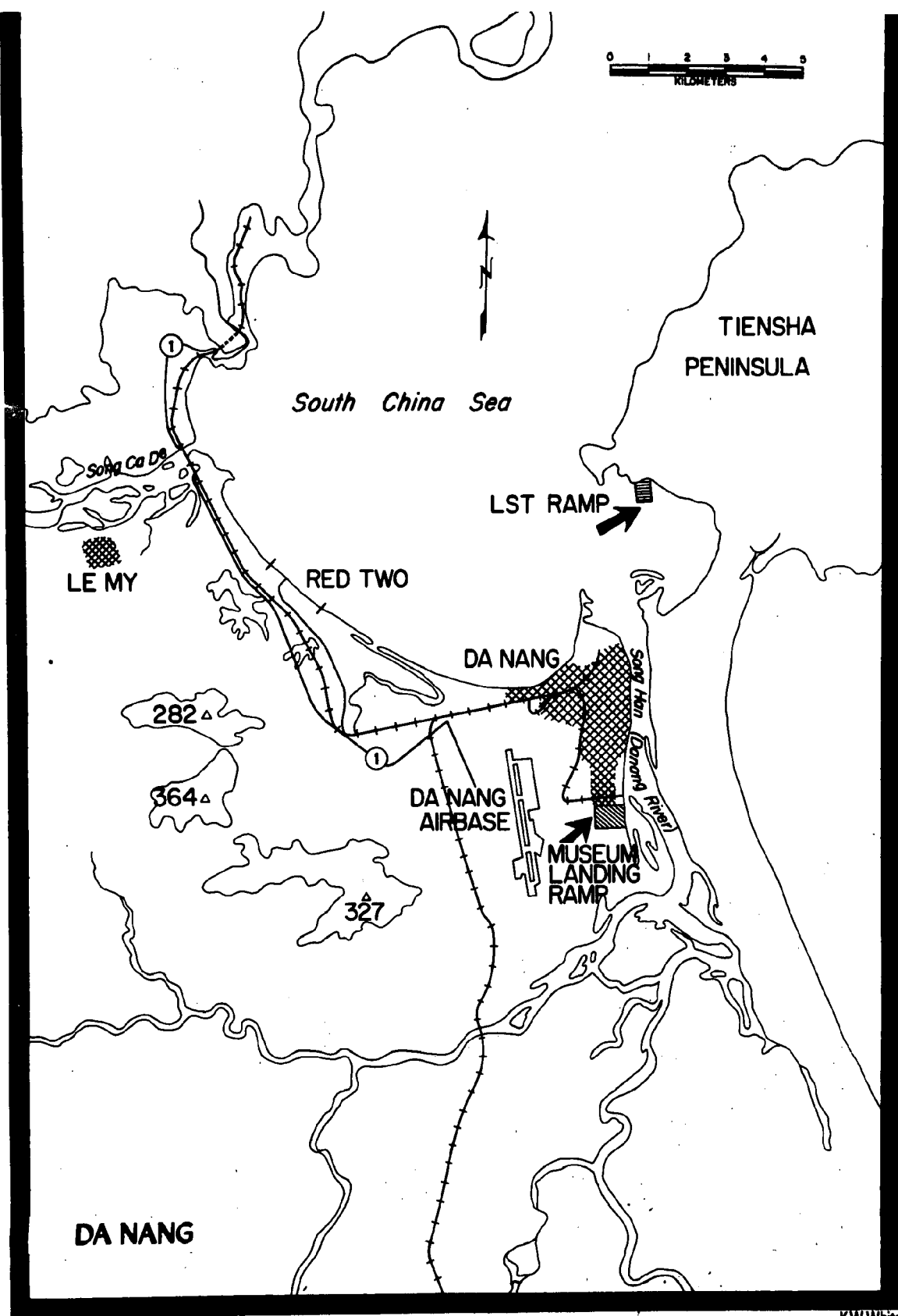
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10 feet, playing havoc with the debarkation. It was almost impossible to hold the nets for the debarking troops and several of the lines holding the landing craft to their mother ships snapped under the strain. At 0730, it became impossible to load the small boats alongside the transports, and Admiral Wulzen postponed the landing for an hour.

At 0830, the task force commander confirmed the 0900 H-hour. The first wave of assault troops in 11 amphibian tractors (Amtracs) touched down at Red Beach 2 two minutes after the hour and the final assault wave of 3/9 landed at 0918. One of the LCMs lost its ramp upon reaching the shore, but the only Marine casualties were two men injured during the debarkation process. On the beach, General Karch, who had arrived ashore by helicopter prior to the landing, and the vanguard of Marines were decked with leis of flowers, presented by pretty Vietnamese school girls. General Thi and the mayor of Da Nang were also on hand to greet the troops. The cooperation of the Vietnamese Army was wholehearted and effective. They had secured the beachhead and the route to the airfield from all interference.

Company L moved out from the beachhead at 0945 under somewhat festive circumstances. Banners in both Vietnamese and English were strung along the route of march welcoming the troops. Even more indicative of their welcome were the waves and shy smiles of the Vietnamese children who lined both sides of the road. The rest of the battalion followed soon after,

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with the exception of Company M which remained behind and maintained beach security for the general unloading. At 1300, General Karch received operational command of all units ashore (11) "and additional units as they cleared the beach."

Five minutes later, the planes carrying the lead elements of the airlift battalion, 1/3, from Okinawa arrived safely at the airbase although they had received harassing fire from snipers during their landing approach. The implementation of the lift had begun on the previous morning when Major General William R. Collins, Commanding General of the 3d Marine Division, in accordance with an order from Admiral Sharp, requested the 315th Air Division, USAF, to provide C-130s to move the Marines to Vietnam. General Collins alerted Lieutenant Colonel Herbert J. Bain, the battalion commander, and that night the troops moved to the Marine Air Facility at Futema on Okinawa. There (12) the battalion and its supplies were integrated into air chalks before moving to the Air Force base at Naha on the island.

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(11) AdminO ComSeventhFlt SitSum 1 090316Z Mar65 (Flag Plot File) (S).

(12) An air chalk is composed of the number of men and/or equipment that constitutes the load for one aircraft.

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Shortly after midnight on the 8th, General Collins radioed MACV headquarters in Saigon for permission to launch the first planes. MACV granted the clearance but amended the arrival hour to noon. After a three-hour hold, the first elements consisting of the command group and part of Company C departed Naha at 0725. Thirteen planes arrived at Da Nang during the day and by evening all of Companies C and B were assembled on the western portion of the base. Company D was already at Da Nang as part of the security force of the task unit and reverted to parent control. This left only Company A on Okinawa.

A sudden hitch occurred in the middle of the operation when General Westmoreland requested a delay of 48 hours in bringing in the last company. Major General Keith B. McCutcheon, who was the J-3 on Admiral Sharp's staff, recalls that the J-3 of MACV telephoned the CinCPac Command Center and declared "they could not accommodate two BLTs arriving at the same time. I [General McCutcheon] reminded him that MACV had granted clearance but he said conditions were changed and we would have to hold up the airlift. We so instructed PacFlt." (13)

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(13) MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon Comments, dtd 24Apr68

(Comment File on draft MS, Jan-Jun65)(S).

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On the afternoon of 9 March, General Karch phoned General Westmoreland and received permission to resume the lift. The first planes took off from Okinawa shortly after midnight and arrived at Da Nang on the morning of the 10th. By 12 March, the rest of the battalion, with the exception of its tank detachment and low priority vehicles, was in Vietnam. Two LSTs departed Okinawa on 14 March, carrying the remainder of the unit to Da Nang.

Even though the insertion of 1/3 was held up on 9 March, there was a smaller airlift on that date originating from the LPH Princeton. The LPH with HMM-365 on board arrived off Da Nang shortly after sunrise. Between 0730 and noon, all 23 helicopters of the squadron were transferred to the airfield. Air crews and ground personnel from HMM-362 arrived by KC-130 from Okinawa to take over the UH-34s. The pilots of HMM-365 returned to the Princeton which carried the squadron to Okinawa to take on new aircraft.

Another snag in the original plans occurred during the general unloading. It proved completely impossible to accomplish the task on the 9th, due to the heavy surf, irregular beach, and enemy interference. On the night of 8-9 March, a fire fight broke out between the VC and Vietnamese troops only two

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miles north of the landing beach. The security force from Company M was withdrawn at 1700 on 9 March and the beach was closed. The ships then moved to anchorages near the entrance to the Port of Da Nang and the unloading continued directly into the city. This too had its limitations which the following report by Admiral Wulzen brought out:

The complete lack of port facilities--cranes, heavy duty fork lifts, cargo nets, and lighterage--coupled with unmarked channels, single small off-loading point (which can only handle two LCMs simultaneously), distance from anchorage to pier (four miles average), lack of staging area at the pier are contributing to slow offloading. (14)

The operation was finally completed on the 12th.

With the insertion of the 9th MEB into Vietnam, another phase of the war had begun. Approximately one-third of the Marine Corps ground and two-thirds of the helicopter strength in the Western Pacific had been committed. The Marines had arrived but sustaining them was another consideration.

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(14) CTF 76 Sit Rep No. 25 dtd 100817Z Mar65 (Flag Plot File)(S).

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The Marines in Vietnam were presented with a complex logistical situation. General Karch later wrote to a friend that in late February, Colonel Robert J. Oddy, Commanding Officer of the 3d Service Regiment, approached the MEB commander and stated:

'Your biggest problem is going to be logistics and I am going to give you the best people I have to get you through this test.' And bless old Bob, he did just that, otherwise the Brigade would have been flat on its  
(15)  
back.

The 3d Service Regiment provided the personnel for the Brigade Logistic Support Group (BLSG). There was some confusion as to the size the group would be since it depended upon which operational plan would be used. The original BLSG was in excess of 1,000 men but because of the personnel ceiling that was imposed on the number of Marines that could be brought into country the group had been cut to 660. General Karch commented that there were several contingency plans which fitted the logistic situation in Vietnam better than the one that was used.

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(15) BGen Frederick J. Karch ltr to Col Clifford B. Drake, dtd 27May65 (Karch Presentation).

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The only representatives of the group during the first phase of the landing were Major Pat Morgan, the executive officer, and 11 other Marines. They arrived on the 10th by air with elements of 1/3 and assumed control of the entire logistical operation. The advance echelon, however, accomplished very little "except to console the MEB that supplies were on the way."<sup>(16)</sup>

The BLSG was officially activated on 12 March. Lieutenant Colonel George H. Smith, the commanding officer, arrived at Da Nang on the 18th and established his headquarters in the southwest corner of the airfield. On the 22d the remainder of the seatail of the MEB entered the port and utilized the ramp at the base of Mon Ky Mountain on Tiensha Peninsula for off-loading. The Da Nang River separated the peninsula from the airfield and caused a major bottleneck. The bridge spanning the river had been destroyed the year before and the only way the supply-laden trucks could cross was by ferry.

Class I supplies (Rations) presented a problem at the very beginning. Lieutenant Colonel McPartlin's battalion had landed with 15 days of rations which had to sustain both battalions. This necessitated a ration airlift from Saigon to Da Nang until

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(16) Smith Tape No. 111.

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the arrival of the seatail. There was some confusion in this logistical area, as to whether the Marines were to be completely self-sufficient from Marine Corps and Seventh Fleet mount-out stocks, or whether MACV would assume part of the burden.

General Karch stated that for days the air was filled with messages regarding rations and ammunition. At the end of March, General Westmoreland declared that his command could take on this task. Although there were problems, the situation was that the troops were equipped, armed, and fed; supplies were unloaded and stockpiled; and the MEB was functioning. (17)

The basic mission of the Marines was entirely a defensive one--to safeguard the vital Da Nang Airbase from enemy take-over or attack. The message ordering the Marines in-country was very precise on this subject. It read: "The U. S. Marine force will not repeat not engage in day to day actions against the Viet Cong." (18) General Westmoreland amplified this directive even further by declaring that the overall responsibility for the Da Nang area remained in Vietnamese hands.

The Marine TAOR (Tactical Area of Responsibility) consisted of approximately eight square miles encompassing the airfield and the high ground to the west. The Marines of 1/3 manned

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(17) According to General Krulak: "The simple fact of the

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the defenses on the airfield itself. Lieutenant Colonel McPartlin's battalion assumed the defense of the Marine forward positions on the hill mass 327-268 due west of the base and afforded protection to the Hawks which had moved to hill 327. The reserve company of 3/9 ran patrols into the hills but made no contact with the Viet Cong. In fact, the first American casualties were inflicted by another Marine when two men from a three-man listening post left their positions to investigate a suspicious movement to their front leaving one man guarding the position. The first two men apparently lost their way in the dark and came upon the sentry from the rear. Hearing a suspicious noise from behind him, the latter turned and opened fire, mortally wounding the other two Marines.

The areas to the south and the east of the airbase were the responsibility of the ARVN, and coordination with the Vietnamese sometimes caused frustrations for the Marines. Vietnamese troops located at an ARVN training camp to the southeast of 3/9 caused some uncomfortable moments when bullets from that sector occasionally zinged over the heads of the Marines. Lieutenant Colonel McPartlin attempted to establish a joint check point with Popular Force troops, the Vietnamese

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matter is, the Marines were prepared to support themselves for a space of about 45 days, and that is what they ultimately did." Krulak Comments, Aug69, p. 8.

(18) JCS msg 070001Z, Mar65 (HQMC Msg File).

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version of the home militia. The Vietnamese showed up and just as quickly disappeared. In somewhat of an understatement, McPartlin made the comment, "most unreliable military personnel."<sup>(19)</sup> On an even higher level, Vietnamese officials were doubtful of the Americans' ability in dealing with the local people. General Thi was reluctant to have the Marines involved in the populated areas because he feared the Americans would not be able to handle the pacification aspects of the problem.

General Karch made no secret about his unhappiness with the defensive perimeter assigned to the brigade. "Actually this was not a satisfactory arrangement. As a practical matter, there is no doubt that the brigade commander would have been held responsible for any successful assault on the airfield."<sup>(20)</sup> Much of his uneasiness was due entirely to the restrictions on the activities of the Marines caused by the nature of their mission.

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(19) 3/9 Comd D, Mar65, Narrative Summary (S).

(20) Karch Presentation (S).

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REINFORCING THE MEB

Even though the MEB was in place at Da Nang, the situation continued to deteriorate throughout the rest of South Vietnam causing General Westmoreland and his staff during the middle of March to reexamine the entire American military effort in Vietnam:

We considered it appropriate to undertake a classical commander's estimate of the situation to think through in a logical and precise manner, strategy, objectives, enemy capabilities, and our own courses of action before making what may prove to be in the light of history, a (22) momentous recommendation.

By the 26th, the American field commander was prepared to furnish Washington with his thoughts. He saw the military objectives of this command in relatively simple terms. The American goal, in conjunction with the South Vietnamese, was to cause the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) to cease its support of the VC and enable an anti-Communist South

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(21) Additional sources for this section include: 3/9 Comd D, Apr65 (S); 1/3 Comd D, Apr65 (S); 2/3 Comd D, Apr65 (S); 3/4 Comd D, Apr65 (S); 3d Marines Comd D, Apr65 (S); MAG-16 Comd Ds, Mar-Apr65 (S); VMQJ-1 (-) Comd D, Apr65 (S); VMFA-531 Comd D, Apr65 (S); HMM-162 Comd Ds, Mar-Apr65 (S); HMM-163 Comd Ds, Mar-Apr65 (S); Whittingham Tape No. 81.

(22) ComUSMACV msg 271338Z Mar65 (OCMH Mssg File) (S).

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Vietnam to survive. To carry out this policy, the American general presented three alternatives.

Under the first, the American government would give more aid to the buildup of the Vietnamese Armed Forces, continue and expand air strikes against North Vietnam, and use the resources of the Seventh Fleet to interdict infiltration by sea. General Westmoreland frankly did not feel this was enough. It would not stabilize the government of South Vietnam and would offer no assurance for the survival of the country.

The second proposal was the deployment of five divisions, including three American, across Vietnam and the Laotian Panhandle near the 17th Parallel. This would be coordinated with stepped up air attacks against the north while at the same time strengthening the South Vietnamese Armed Forces. Other American and Free World troops would be sent to South Vietnam to deal with the Viet Cong insurgency. General Westmoreland rejected this alternative as well. He did not believe that in 1965 the lines of communication or the port facilities in the country could supply and support five divisions strung along the parallel. He feared by the time this could be done, the war would be lost.

According to the general, this left only one feasible solution to avoid disaster. This was the continuing of the buildup of the ARVN, the intensifying of the air war against North Vietnam, and the sending of the equivalent of two U.S. divisions with their necessary combat and service support to

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South Vietnam. The American forces would have a three-fold mission: the protection of vital U.S. installations; the defeat of the Communist efforts to control Kontum and Pleiku Provinces; and the establishment of enclaves in the coastal region. General Westmoreland visualized the total U.S. reinforcement to consist of approximately 33,000 troops deployed by June. He believed that the insertion of American strength would blunt the Communist offensive in the two northern corps areas and stiffen the backbone of the South Vietnamese forces throughout the country.

Most important to the Marine Corps was the general's recommendation to reinforce the 4,685 personnel of the 9th MEB. In addition to rounding out the force at Da Nang with a third battalion, Westmoreland suggested that a fourth be stationed at the Hue/Phu Bai airstrip, approximately eight miles south of Hue. This would provide needed protection to the extra-sensitive mission of the U. S. Army 8th Radio Relay Unit, (23) located there.

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(23) General Krulak commented: "Here is an example of where dollar economics wagged the tail of the military deployment. Phu Bai is as tactically indefensible as anyone could imagine. General Westmoreland was determined, however, that we should go there because of the existence of the 8th RRU. There was an investment of probably 5 million dollars in the unit. It was firmly locked to the Phu Bai plain and he was determined not to see it move. He was reinforced by the testimony of experts

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General Westmoreland's message had its intended impact on Washington. During the first days of April, President Johnson met with his National Security Council and arrived at two far-reaching decisions. U. S. troops in Vietnam would be reinforced and they would be permitted to engage in counterinsurgency combat operations against the enemy. The details of the reinforcement still had to be worked out, but it was decided to implement the general's recommendations pertaining to the 9th MEB.

When the 9th MEB was inserted into Vietnam, the 1st Marine  
(24) Brigade in Hawaii under Brigadier General Marion E. Carl, was ordered to Okinawa. When the 4th Marines arrived at its destination at the end of March, a new expeditionary force, the 3d MEB, was created almost overnight, again under the

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who said its location was particularly good from a "technical" point of view. Whether or not this is true (and our own radio intercept people strongly questioned it) he insisted that we go there despite the tremendous land barrier between Da Nang and Phu Bai, difficulty of providing logistical support and the many better uses to which a Marine BLT could have been put. I believe we would have been better off by far to have moved the 8th RRU to another place and to have kept our forces more concentrated. Gen. Westmoreland felt differently and Admiral Sharp was not prepared to over-ride him." Krulak Comments, Aug69, p.9.  
(24) The 1st Brigade consisted of the 4th Marines and MAG-13.

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command of General Carl. It consisted of BLT 2/3 (Lieutenant Colonel David A. Clement), which had just completed maneuvers in Thailand, BLT 3/4 (Lieutenant Colonel Donald R. Jones), and RL3-3 headquarters (Colonel Edwin B. Wheeler). Planning for the two battalion deployment began on 5 April when General Carl and his staff joined Admiral Wulzen on board the Mount McKinley.

The proposed landing at Da Nang presented no new problems, but Hue was an entirely different situation. Captain Whittingham's Force Reconnaissance detachment had made a surveillance of the beach facilities in the area and studied the feasibility of transit along the Hue River. In their judgment, the internal water route offered the best alternative. Admiral Wulzen, however, was somewhat reluctant to use the river because there was still a lack of detailed intelligence about sandbars, water depth, and the enemy situation along the banks.

General Carl decided to take a look for himself. He flew to Hue, where General Chuan of the 1st ARVN Division furnished him with four outboard motor boats. With four ARVN soldiers in both the lead and trail boats, General Carl and his G-3, Lieutenant Colonel Rex C. Denny, in the second boat, and two American noncommissioned officers in the third, the strange armada set out. They travelled the entire length of the river to the ocean and returned to Hue (a trip of approximately five hours). The entire voyage was uneventful. According to Colonel Denny:

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...when the Navy at the next planning meeting brought up the hazards of the Hue River, General Carl... said he had personally reconnoitered the river...this ended all discussion on the subject and the Navy put the stamp of approval on the landing plans. (25)

It was proposed to land 2/3 over Red Beach 2 at Da Nang, while the battalion's supplies and reserves would be unloaded on the Tiensha Peninsula. Two companies of 2/3 were to be helilifted to Phu Bai and await the arrival of 3/4. Two companies from the latter battalion were also to land at Red Beach 2 at a later date and were then to relieve the 2/3 task force at Hue/Phu Bai. The rest of 3/4 was to remain on board the transports, which would move north to the mouth of the Hue River where the Marines would unload into landing craft for the trip to Hue.

On 8 April, Ambassador Taylor obtained the permission of the Vietnamese government to land the additional American forces. D-Day for 2/3 was set for 10 April. On that morning, the Navy task group, joined by the Mount McKinley, entered Da Nang harbor. In contrast to the landing of 8 March, the seas were calm with only a slight wind blowing from the south. At 0823, the first of five waves of Marines touched down on Red Beach 2 and the landing there was completed by 1310. The ships then

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(25) Col Rex C. Denny, USMC, Comments, dtd 16Apr68 (Comment file on draft MS, Jan-Jun65) (S).

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moved to a point off Tiensha Peninsula where the unloading continued. A provisional task force consisting of Companies F and G and support elements were helilifted to Phu Bai. helilifted  
 Company H took up positions on Hill 312 and 278 to the north  
 (26)  
 of the high ground held by 1/3, while Company E remained on board the ships and helped with the unloading. On the next day Company E joined Company H. General Westmoreland commented to General Karch:

MACV staff officers who observed the amphibious landing at Da Nang and air movement to Phu Bai on 10 April report the movement was accomplished smoothly and professionally, reflecting high standards of training, discipline, and esprit. Congratulations to you  
 (27)  
 and others responsible.

On the 14th, the second landing occurred. The amphibious task group carrying BLT 3/4 arrived in Da Nang harbor and anchored at 0500. Three and a half hours later, two companies landed at Red Beach and were flown to Phu Bai where they relieved the task force from 2/3. The operation at Da Nang was completed by noon.

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(26) On 8 April, 1/3 and 3/9 exchanged defensive positions.

(27) ComUSMACV msg 120856Z Apr65 (HQMC Msg File) (U).

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The remainder of the Navy task group sailed to the Hue transport area and anchored late the night of the 14th. Before dawn on the next day, Mike (LCMs) and Pappa (LCVPs) boats were lowered into the water. The craft were divided into groups of four to six and the first wave departed for Hue, 11 miles up river, at 0640. As the boats approached the landing site in the city, they made a flanking movement, touched down, and lowered their ramps together. The Marines stepped ashore to greet their welcomers. In the dock area were an ARVN band, 500 cheering Vietnamese holding aloft a large sign reading "Welcome U. S. Marines," and the Navy beach group in their dress whites. The troops piled on trucks which proceeded south through the city to the base at Phu Bai.

The river operation was finally completed on 19 April. The boats had made a total of 263 trips, carried 1,371 tons of cargo, and travelled over 6,000 miles. During the period 10-19 April, 3,652 troops were added to the 9th MEB.

The brigade up to this time had been operating without the presence of a regimental headquarters but, with the addition of two more battalions, an intermediate command echelon proved necessary. Colonel Wheeler and a small command group arrived at Da Nang on 7 April, and the rest of the headquarters boarded

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amphibious shipping at Okinawa. This was not the colonel's first visit to the airbase. He had arrived initially on 10 March with the airlifted rear echelon of 1/3 and remained in the country for about 10 days to discuss and prepare for the next increment of forces. <sup>(28)</sup> Colonel Wheeler on his return in April as RLT-3 commander immediately established close coordination with General Karch and surveyed the Da Nang TAOR. He visited Hue/Phu Bai on the 10th and met with General Chuan for the purpose of explaining and coordinating Marine activities in this area. On the 13th, RLT-3 came under the operational control of the 9th MEB and six days later the RLT was task organized as the 3d Marines (-) Reinforced. By this latter date, the ground elements of the full brigade were in place.

The Marine brigade was a closely coordinated air-ground team. The old Marine Task Unit, under Colonel King, transformed itself into MAG-16 when the MEB landed in March. MAG-16 remained under the command of the colonel, who reported directly to the brigade commander. During the first month, the only aircraft belonged to the two helicopter squadrons, HMM-163 (Lieutenant Colonel Norman G. Ewers) and HMM-162 (Lieutenant Colonel Oliver

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(28) BGen Edwin B. Wheeler Comments, dtd 10May68 (Comment File on draft MS, Jan-Jun65 (S)).

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W. Curtiss). The Marines continued to furnish helicopter support to the Vietnamese forces in I Corps and at the same time to meet the needs of the Marine ground troops.

From the very beginning of the MEB operation, General Karch desired an augmentation to his air arm. On 13 and 15 March, he sent out messages strongly arguing the case for Marine fixed-wing close air support to supplement and balance his supporting arms. The limitations of the field and restrictions on force levels at first prevented any insertion of Marine attack aircraft. But on 28 March, General Westmoreland informed Admiral Sharp that the airbase could accommodate three jet squadrons, one of which could be Marine. He understood that, from General Karch's point of view, the A-4 would be the most desirable plane for air support of ground troops. The MACV commander noted, however, that once the squadron arrived it had to be available for both in-country and out-of-country operations. He felt, therefore, that the F-4 was a more versatile and useful aircraft. Admiral Sharp concurred with General Westmoreland's proposal and recommended to the Joint Chiefs that a Marine F-4 squadron be positioned at Da Nang. The approval came from Washington and orders went out to Major General Paul J. Fontana, Commanding General of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

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At 0930 on the morning of 10 April, Lieutenant Colonel William C. McGraw, Commander of Marine Fighter/Attack Squadron 531 (VMFA-531), received a phone call at Atsugi, Japan from his group commander, relaying orders from General Fontana. The general directed that VMFA-531 deploy immediately to Da Nang. Reacting quickly, the squadron commander had the first division of F-4Bs airborne within five hours. Refueling in-flight from a KC-130 southwest of Okinawa, the planes flew nonstop and arrived at Da Nang five and a half hours after takeoff. The remaining F-4Bs departed Atsugi by 1530 and proceeded either to the Naval Air Station at Cubi Point in the Philippines or the Naval Air Facility at Naha on Okinawa. After the F-4Bs had left Atsugi, the remaining personnel loaded the squadron's equipment on board KC-130s and the LST Snohmish County for the trip to Vietnam.

By the evening of the 11th, all of the squadron's aircraft and the majority of its men had been relocated to Da Nang. VMFA-531 reported to MAG-16 and spent the next two days developing its working spaces. On 13 April, Lieutenant Colonel McGraw led the first combat mission, a 12-plane strike approximately 17 miles southwest of Da Nang, in an area dubbed "Happy Valley."

One other Marine squadron arrived in country during April, Marine Photo-Reconnaissance Squadron 1 (VMCJ-1) (-) with six EF-10 aircraft. Although nominally under MAG-16, its activities were directed by the USAF 2d Air Division. The squadron's main

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mission was to provide ECM (Electronic Counter Measures) support for U.S. Navy and Air Force air operations in North Vietnam.

With the arrival of two fixed-wing squadrons, two infantry battalions, and support elements, the MEB reached a strength of 8,878 by the end of April. The brigade now consisted of a four battalion regiment, a four squadron Marine Aircraft Group (MAG),<sup>(29)</sup> along with artillery and engineer groups in addition to the Logistic Support Group. General Karch was satisfied that he could handle anything that the enemy could throw at him.<sup>(30)</sup>

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(29) In addition to the four tactical squadrons, the MAG contained a Direct Air Support Center (DASC) for control of Marine air assets; a Marine Air Support Squadron (MASS) and Air Support Radar Team (ASRT) for ground control of radar bombing; as well as the 1st LAAM Battalion for air defense.

(30) Karch Presentation (S).

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Yet very little was known about the enemy. A Marine staff officer commented, "intelligence of what the situation was, was non-existent." (31) This of course was an exaggeration. The MEB and MACV staffs had some idea of enemy main forces in the area. They credited the VC with seven combat units with a strength of 560 troops within 25 miles of Da Nang. Within 50 miles, 14 enemy combat units, ranging from company to regimental size, with a total strength of 1,480 personnel were reported to be operating. What was lacking was knowledge of the day-to-day movements of the Communist forces, their disposition, and their influence upon the people.

General Karch remarked that from the day of the landing, reports indicated a continual enemy buildup in the area. Most of this intelligence had been garnered from hired agents who were paid according to the significance of their information. Their veracity was highly doubtful at best and the Marines had to obtain reliable intelligence if they were to engage the VC.

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(31) Taped interview with Capt Gaetano F. Squillace, S-3, 1/3, HistBr Tape No. 27.

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INCREASED OPERATIONS AND TRANSFORMATION  
(32)  
INTO THE III MARINE AMPHIBIOUS FORCE

On 4 April, the Joint Chiefs transmitted to General Westmoreland the decision of the National Security Council for American troops to begin counterinsurgency operations. On the 10th, the general furnished Admiral Sharp with a concept of operations which he divided into three phases: the first being the establishment of defensive bases; the second deep reconnaissance patrols into the enemy's avenues of approach; and finally offensive action as a reaction force in coordination with the Vietnamese. Admiral Sharp approved this general mission on the 14th, with one basic modification:

In addition, undertake in coordination with RVN I Corps, an intensifying program of offensive operations to fix and destroy the VC in the general  
(33)  
Da Nang area.

(32) Additional sources for this section include: III MAF Comd D, May65 (S); 3d Marine Div, Comd D, May65 (S); 3d Marines Comd D, Apr65 (S); 1/3 Comd D, Apr65 (S); 2/3 Comd D, Apr65 (S); 3/4 Comd D, Apr65 (S); 3/9 Comd D, Apr65 (S).

(33) MACV Comd Hist, 1965, p. 40 (S).

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General Karch immediately attempted to implement these new orders. He met with General Thi on the 14th and negotiated for the realignment of the Marine TAOR in the Da Nang area. After two days of talks, they agreed to a four square mile increase in the Marine area of responsibility which, however, did not include the terrain just south of the airbase. The number of villages in the Da Nang sector under Marine control increased from 1 to 3, and hamlets from 3 to 15, with a total population of 11,441--an increase of 9,511 persons.

On 20 April, the Marines began patrol activities beyond their TAOR, approximately three to six miles in front of their former positions. These patrols were accompanied by ARVN troops and Vietnamese civil affairs officers. Their mission was to have the Vietnamese villagers become aware of the Marine presence. As a result of this effort, the Americans were to engage in their first real fire fight with the VC. On the 22d, a patrol from Company D of the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, 41 Marines and 38 South Vietnamese troops, engaged a Viet Cong force of approximately 105 men near the village of Binh Thai, nine miles southwest of Da Nang. A company from 1/3 was helilifted into the area and reinforced the reconnaissance unit. They pursued the enemy to the south and to the west, but lost contact. The Marines were flown back to the 1/3 area. The results of this first engagement were one Viet Cong killed and one Marine slightly wounded. Another clash occurred two days later when a Marine reconnaissance platoon was attacked

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on a hilltop about 2,000 meters south of Phu Bai by an undetermined number of enemy. Two Viet Cong were killed as were two Marines.

Even with these minor skirmishes and expanded mission of the Marines, contact with the enemy forces remained slight. General Karch noted:

...when we had reached the limit of our Phase II TAOR we still had encountered no VC in strength other than undersized platoons...After a few sniper shots were fired at the patrol and...[the Marines] moved out to attack the VC disappeared. Also the only attack...at Phu Bai, could well have been a mistake...or a chance encounter...it was broken off immediately after the first exchange of fire. (34)

By this time, the days of the brigade in Vietnam were numbered. The question of American participation in the war preoccupied those in high authority. Two conferences at Admiral Sharp's headquarters in Honolulu during April, attended by either Admiral Sharp, General Westmoreland, the Joint Chiefs, Secretary McNamara, or their representatives, made further recommendations concerning troop deployments. The story of how, and why, and when units were sent was contained in the continuing exchanges of opinions between the President and his advisors, and cannot logically be compressed here. Out of the Honolulu conferences, however, came the decision to land another MEB in

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(34) Karch Presentation (S).

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the Republic of Vietnam, at Chu Lai, 57 miles to the southeast of Da Nang.

This would mean that seven of the nine infantry battalions of the 3d Marine Division, supported by most of the 12th Marines, the artillery regiment of the division, and a large portion of the 1st MAW, would be committed to South Vietnam. It was apparent that a new organization had to be established. On 3 May, General Collins arrived at Da Nang and three days later assumed command of the III Marine Amphibious Force in Vietnam (III MAF), <sup>(35) 35</sup> comprised of the 3d Division and 1st MAW. The 9th MEB silently went out of existence.

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(35) "Amphibious" was substituted for "Expeditionary," apparently because the latter term brought back unhappy memories of the French to the Vietnamese. Colonel Croizat recalled: "I was at HCMC and was shown a message from General Westmoreland to General Greene requesting that the U.S. Marine Corps change the designation of the III Marine Expeditionary Force to something else. General Westmoreland indicated that the word "Expeditionary" unhappily recalled the French Expeditionary Corps to the Vietnamese. Colonel Michael Ryan who showed me the message asked what I thought. I replied that I could appreciate the sincerity of the Vietnamese viewpoint from remembering the day of celebration when Vietnamese officers tore off their French insignia and replaced them with the insignia now in use. I recommended General Westmoreland's request be acceded to." Croizat Comments, Aug69, p. 6

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The true assessment of the accomplishments of the brigade can be ascertained by the fact that there was no major attempt by the VC to attack either the bases at Da Nang or Phu Bai. Apparently the Viet Cong took stock of the Marines, were impressed with what they saw, and in accordance with their doctrine, lay low until a favorable opportunity presented itself. The mission of the Marines had been defensive, but in the words of General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., the Commandant of the Marine Corps during this period: "You don't defend a place by sitting on your ditty-box." (36)

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(36) The Washington Post and Times Herald, 2May65 (U).

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