

April 4, 1998

Hi Gary,

Here is the stuff my friend, Jack Herrick, sent me a short while ago. He was providing this as more detail on Operation Dewey Canyon. I know the part copied from the Primer is probably old news, but I just sent along what he sent me.

As I have said before, thanks for all the help you have provided with the incident reports and the data on individual soldiers. You remain the best and most reliable source for this sort of information.

See you in July in Ft. Worth,



Gary Thewlis

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WASHINGTON—(UPI)—  
former President Lyndon B. Johnson  
branded as inaccurate in recent accounts of how the decision was reached last Jan. 31 to order a limited bombing halt over North Vietnam.

A statement reporting Johnson's views was issued in Austin, Tex., by Tom Johnson, served as the former president's assistant press secretary at the White House and is now executive assistant. The statement took issue with accounts of the behind-the-scenes discussions within the Johnson administration which led to the decision.

But it did not stipulate "major inaccuracies" the former president was said to have found in those accounts.

#### LONG ARTICLES

The New York Times and Newsweek magazine last week published long articles on the agonizing debate that the partial bombing halt, ultimately became the point toward the peace talks now under way in Paris.



AP Wirephoto

**MARINE DUCKS FROM BLAST FROM PROPS OF CHINOOK HELICOPTER MAKING LANDING NEAR A SHAU VALLEY**  
Other Marines are carrying supplies from other choppers for units in Operation Dewey Canyon near Laos border.

## Marines Occupy Laos Hilltops

By B. Drummond Ayers Jr.  
(C) 1969, Denver Post-N. Y. Times

DONG HA, SOUTH VIETNAM—Allied forces operating out of this combat support base are winding up a major campaign in which about 100 S. Marines seized several hilltops just inside Laos, military sources said Saturday.

The seizures, which are violations of Laotian neutrality, were made to protect the flanks

Marine elements maneuvering nearby along South Vietnam's northwestern border, according to the sources.

Dewey Canyon, it has resulted in the deaths of about 1,400 enemy soldiers, about 125 Marines and several dozen South Vietnamese infantrymen. More than 400 tons of enemy arms and ammunition have been captured, including about a dozen long-range guns.

International agreements reached at Geneva in 1954 and 1962 provided for Laos' independence and neutrality.

However, Laos is unable to guard all of its borders, particularly the mountainous, almost uninhabited stretches in the Dewey Canyon area.

training and military advisers to pro-Western forces in Laos.

At the request of the pro-Western elements in Laos, American warplanes fly every day over Laos on "reconnaissance missions," a euphemism for bombing raids.

Operation Dewey Canyon may or may not have been the first time in the war that a large unit of allied ground troops deliberately crossed into Laos and dug in. Almost certainly there have been a number of accidental brief incursions not only into Laos but Cambodia as well.

Allied commanders refused to

circumstances. When actions occur in border areas, the rules take on added importance.

In recent months, an unusually large number of battles have been fought near the Cambodian and Laotian borders, particularly in the provinces north and west of Saigon. Many of the fights have been brief because the enemy chose to break contact and flee across a boundary line to a "border sanctuary."

Thus, it appears that the rules of engagement do not



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Marine elements maneuvering nearby along South Vietnam's northwestern border, according to the sources.

Some of the Americans reportedly remained on Laotian soil for about a week. They are said to have engaged in brief fighting, although a mile or so away in South Vietnam, low Marines made frequent contact with North Vietnamese and Viet Cong elements and covered some of the largest major caches of the war.

The campaign began six weeks ago. Labeled Operation

Dewey Canyon, it has resulted in the deaths of about 1,400 enemy soldiers, about 125 Marines and several dozen South Vietnamese infantrymen. More than 400 tons of enemy arms and ammunition have been captured, including about a dozen long-range guns.

International agreements reached at Geneva in 1954 and 1962 provided for Laos' independence and neutrality.

However, Laos is unable to guard all of its borders, particularly the mountainous, almost uninhabited stretches in the Dewey Canyon area.

As a result, the North Vietnamese use jungle trails and roads in eastern Laos to move men and war materiel into South Vietnam. North Vietnamese troops and supplies also are being sent across the Laotian border to aid the Pathet Lao, a pro-Communist force trying to seize control of Laos.

To counter the North Vietnamese, the United States provides war materiel, military

training and military advisers to pro-Western forces in Laos.

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Allied spokesmen refused to comment on the Dewey Canyon report and would not discuss the possibility that there might have been accidental incursions in the past.

"Such things, of course, involve rules of engagement and we never discuss rules of engagement," one spokesman said.

The rules of engagement tell commanders what they may and may not do in certain circumstances. When actions occur in border areas, the rules take on added importance.

In recent months, an unusually large number of battles have been fought near the Cambodian and Laotian borders, particularly in the provinces north and west of Saigon. Many of the fights have been brief because the enemy chose to break contact and flee across a boundary line to a "border sanctuary."

Thus, it appears that the rules of engagement do not permit hot pursuit across borders, on the other hand, operation Dewey Canyon seems to indicate that allied commanders operating along borders may dip across lines to secure their flanks.

Some allied officers think that so long as the enemy has border sanctuaries the war can go on indefinitely. These men say that any "real" settlement of the war must involve both Cambodia and Laos.



## WRITER LISTS CHOICES

# U.S. Options in Viet Called Few

By GEORGE C. WILSON

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Cheyenne's pilot can focus devastating firepower where he looks. With armament slaved to the movement of his head, he can accurately direct a veritable hail of fire.

Lockheed Aircraft  
Corporation  
Advertisement, January 1969

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In 1969, the 250 fixed-wing aircraft and 225 helicopters of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing were organized in six groups with 26 squadrons, flying from five major airfields. The three fixed-wing groups were MAG-12 and MAG-13 at Chu Lai and MAG-11 at Da Nang. The three (primarily) rotary-wing groups were MAG-36 at Phu Bai, MAG-39 at Quang Tri, and MAG-16 at Marble Mountain. The second increment of U.S. troop withdrawals, the 35,000 announced in September, included 18,000 Marines. Of the three Marine helicopter groups, MAG-39 was deactivated and MAG-36 went to Japan. Of the rotary-wing groups, only MAG-16 remained in I Corps. Most of the fixed-wing squadrons also stayed. The first Marine AH-1G Cobras appeared at Marble Mountain on 10 April, joining the eight UH-1Es and 23 OV-10s of VMO-2. The squadron received its 24th and last AH-1G in December. Shortly thereafter, a reorganization took place that shifted the Cobras to HML-367.

In August 1969, as the first Marine contingent was withdrawn from I Corps, HMM-362 flew the last UH-34 combat sortie in Vietnam. The last six UH-34s were then flown to Da Nang for shipment back to the States and the squadron's title was passed to a new HMM-362, reforming with CH-53s at New River. HMM-362 had been the first Marine helicopter unit to arrive in Vietnam in April 1962 and had flown the UH-34 in combat for seven years.

The year had started with 89 enemy battalions in and around the northern provinces. By the year's end, they numbered 97. Enemy strength was increasing significantly while U.S. strength was decreasing significantly. One Marine division and two helicopter groups had left the country and despite the arrival of the more powerful CH-53D Sea Stallion, this severely reduced the airmobile capability available in I Corps. To compensate (in theory), the Vietnamese Air Force were supplied with UH-1 and CH-47 helicopters beginning in 1970. The Allied situation in I Corps was substantially weakened during 1969 ... and things were not to get better.

## MARINES GET SNAKES WHILE WINDING DOWN

The Marines in I Corps still had their hands full as NVA units continued to infiltrate into South Vietnam, from north across the DMZ and from east through Laos. Operation Dewey Canyon began on 22 January when the 9th Marine Regiment went into the Da Krong Valley in an operation completely dependent on helicopters. By mid-March the Marines had flown more than 13,000 sorties and had accounted for 1,617 enemy dead. Hundreds of tons of ammunition and supplies were captured. Considered one of the most successful regimental operations of the war, Operation Dewey Canyon cost the Marines 121 dead and 611 wounded. Again, the Americans won the body counts while continuing to lose the war. The 9th Marines fought their last battle in June, a joint Army operation named Utah Mesa. Then the 3d Marine Division began to stand down, prior to moving its flag to Okinawa. By the end of August, the 9th Marines had departed, along with an F-4 squadron and HMM-165 with its CH-46s.

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**Lockheed Aircraft Corporation**  
Advertisement, January 1969

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Jon Boulle flew CH-46 Sea Knights with HMM-163, the Phrog Phlyers. In *VIETNAM The Helicopter War*, he recounted the flying environment in I Corps in 1969:

Helicopter Valley was in my area of operation (AO) and we avoided it like the plague. It got its name mostly because of all the CH-34s that went down there, although there were 46s there, too. The valley was a shallow grove that ran east to west and then to the east of the valley was Con Thien, where the NVA tried to uproot the Marine outpost by every means possible. The NVA tried to move troops toward Con Thien from that direction and the powers-that-be decided to head them off at the pass and lift in blocking forces. The NVA were dug in on the ridges north and south, so anything flying into the valley or trying to land on it, was immediately brought under a heavy crossfire. The result was a valley littered with wrecks of a variety of helicopters, mostly CH-34s, with a sprinkling of everything else.

How did guys like me get shot down? It all depended on how you flew. At three or four thousand feet a helicopter makes a lot of noise and is easy to see, especially if you were in flat country. But the VC and NVA knew where the ground units were and would try to catch you when you were about 500 feet up and slowing for your approach. Then you were an easy target. You were going in a straight line and they knew exactly where that line was. They would just sit along that line and shoot at you; sometimes they got you, sometimes they didn't. So we developed a variety of techniques to get into an LZ while trying to fake them out. On one approach with a guy named Jerry Blackbird from Montana, he flopped that thing around in the sky so much that I lost track of what he did! I couldn't even guess what he did, but it worked.

My favorite techniques were either a very high and tight spiral into the LZ, or at extremely low level, beneath the treetops if I could. By beneath the treetops I mean ten to fifteen feet above the ground. I preferred low level over all others for two reasons. First, the CH-46 can be heard from behind and not from in front like a Huey. I could be past them before they knew I was coming. [Second,] we also flew in valleys a lot and a 46 could not be seen very well from above on the ridge line. I would come into the LZ at cruising speed, dump the collective and throw the bird into a hard right or left bank to slow it down and end up with a final approach of about 100-250 feet, instead of a quarter of a mile like some guys did. Of course, this required absolutely great engines and systems, because one error and you would wipe yourself all over the trees or hill or whatever was there to kill you. If one thing failed you, then it was all over. You were too low and too fast to save anything.

The tight spiral when done properly was a thing of beauty and finesse. From 3,000 feet directly over the LZ you would dump the collective and go into a 65- to 75-degree angle of bank. In one 360-degree turn you would come out on heading to your LZ. Manipulated properly, you would build up rpm to about 105 to 115 percent and roll out wings level just as you were about to land and you then had all the rotor rpm for power when you pulled the collective up into your armpit to stop you from smacking into the ground and rolling yourself up into a little ball of tinfoil. This had its drawbacks, too, but in war they all had drawbacks to them. The real key was to never do the same thing twice and never go out the way you came in. These were the basic rules we all tried to live by and they would generally keep you alive.

In Vietnam, the altitude for helicopters to use to avoid ground fire was initially 1,500 feet AGL (above ground level). In certain areas, it was raised to 2,500 feet. At this latter altitude, there is relative safety. However, the best flight technique to avoid ground fire was to be flat on the deck because the enemy did not have time to accurately bring his weapons to bear on you.

*Army Aviation*  
March 1969