

U.S. MARINES IN VIETNAM

THE WAR THAT WOULD NOT END

1971-1973



*COVER: Near Tan My, combat photographer
Cpl Steven C. Lively records the takeoff of
HMM-164 helicopters from the 9th Marine
Brigade carrying the 4th VNMC Battalion
into combat on 24 May 1972.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection

U.S. MARINES IN VIETNAM
THE WAR THAT WOULD NOT END
1971-1973

by

Major Charles D. Melson

U.S. Marine Corps

and

Lieutenant Colonel Curtis G. Arnold

U.S. Marine Corps



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Foreword

This is the eighth volume of a projected nine-volume history of Marine Corps operations in the Vietnam War. A separate functional series complements the operational histories. This volume details the activities of Marine Corps units after the departure from Vietnam in 1971 of III Marine Amphibious Force, through to the 1973 ceasefire, and includes the return of Marine prisoners of war from North Vietnam. Written from diverse views and sources, the common thread in this narrative is the continued resistance of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces, in particular the Vietnamese Marine Corps, to Communist aggression. This book is written from the perspective of the American Marines who assisted them in their efforts. Someday the former South Vietnamese Marines will be able to tell their own story.

By July 1971, less than 500 U.S. Marines, mostly advisors, communicators, and supporting arms specialists remained in Vietnam. It was thought at the time that the success of "Vietnamization" of the war would lessen even this small number, as it was hoped that the South Vietnamese could continue fighting successfully. This hope vanished in spring 1972, dashed by a full-scale North Vietnamese Army invasion. The renewed combat saw the U.S. Marines return once more to Southeast Asia in a continuation of the war that now seemed to have no end. The fighting proceeded into the fall, and only ceased with the signing of peace accords in Paris in January 1973.

The War That Would Not End is the product of a collaboration of two career Marines, who brought a total of 42 years of service experience to the project while assigned to the History and Museums Division of Headquarters Marine Corps. Lieutenant Colonel Curtis G. Arnold began the task. A native Alabamian, Lieutenant Colonel Arnold enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1950 and served with the 1st Marine Division in Korea. Discharged in 1953, he remained in the Marine Reserve in inactive status while he attended Auburn University. Following graduation, Lieutenant Colonel Arnold was commissioned in January 1958. He attended the Communication Officers Orientation Course at Quantico, Virginia, and served as a communications officer for much of his career. He served in Vietnam with the 3d Marine Division from 1966 to 1967, receiving the Bronze Star Medal. He was aide to Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps General Lewis W. Walt from 1968 to 1969. He then attended Marine Corps Command and Staff College at Quantico and remained there at the Marine Corps Schools as an instructor. He joined the History and Museums Division in 1973 and retired from the division and the Marine Corps in 1975. Lieutenant Colonel Arnold's efforts are reflected in the themes of Chapters 2 through 9, based on interviews and then-available records. He played a critical part in the location and recovery of the Marine Advisory Unit records just prior to the fall of Saigon. Lieutenant Colonel Arnold also contributed to this project through his review of the comment edition and with further advice and encouragement until his untimely death in 1990.

The project was completed by Major Charles D. Melson. From California, Major Melson entered the Marine Corps Reserve in 1967 and in 1970 both graduated from Sonoma State University and was commissioned. Following Basic School, he served overseas as an infantry officer with assignments to Vietnam in 1972 with the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade. He was awaiting orders to Sub Unit One, 1st ANGLICO, when the war ended in 1973. Major Melson spent a large portion of his career in combat and reconnaissance units in both Fleet Marine Forces Atlantic and Pacific. He has decorations for military merit, combat action, and humanitarian service. Beginning in 1982, he was as an instructor at the U.S.

Naval Academy and earned a master of arts degree from St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland. Major Melson subsequently was assigned to Headquarters Marine Corps, first to the Command Center and then, in 1986, to the History and Museums Division. Major Melson wrote the remaining eight chapters and shaped the volume into its final form. This included revising the Arnold manuscript to make use of much additional material. Major Melson left active service in 1990, but was recalled to active duty with the division, including duties with the U.S. Central Command during the Persian Gulf War.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "E. H. Simmons". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "S" at the beginning.

E. H. SIMMONS
Brigadier General, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)
Director of Marine Corps History and Museums

Preface

Ernest Hemingway wrote about war in *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929, contending that, "Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates." For many reasons, this observation holds true for the narrative in this volume. The variety and scope of U.S. Marine participation in this phase of the war makes this an account of units and individuals as part of the activities of the other Services or of the South Vietnamese forces. This is reflected in the sources used to tell this story; both authors had to rely on diverse material for information. In fact, most events discussed are drawn as exceptions from the normal process of records-keeping and availability: ad hoc units and mixed-service, or even multinational organizations were the norm. This suggested the use of commenters who could bring together otherwise dispersed records to support the volume. Interviews from recorded and transcribed and other oral formats were also especially valuable. A draft of this book was sent to key participants, 231 individuals. Of these, 114 replied. They are listed in the appendix and referenced repeatedly in the text. Most of this newly acquired material has been archived for use by Marines and other scholarly researchers.

Military evolutions are the product of teamwork and this book is no exception. Lieutenant Colonel Arnold's chapters were reviewed by Dr. Graham A. Cosmas and Lieutenant Colonel Lane Rogers. The original narrative subsequently was reorganized by Major David N. Buckner, himself a former advisor in Vietnam. The narrative benefitted from the transcription of advisor debriefs undertaken by Colonel Gerald H. Turley with funding by the Marine Corps Historical Foundation. He was assisted in this by Major Edward F. Wells, representing the History and Museums Division. Major Wells and Major Frank M. Batha, Jr., conducted additional inquiry to support the manuscript. Major Melson's work was carefully reviewed by his peers: Dr. V. Keith Fleming, Jr., Major George R. Dunham, Major Arthur F. Elzy, Major Leonard A. Blasiol, and Lieutenant Colonel Gary D. Solis. Their help went beyond the call of duty and reflected the Historical Branch's collegial approach to writing.

Appreciation also is due the able Editing and Design Section of Mr. Robert E. Struder, the senior editor: to Mr. William S. Hill for artwork and layout and to Mrs. Catherine A. Kerns for editorial and composition services. They were essential in the volume's final form and style. Further thanks are to be given the interns from The Madeira School who assisted with the project: Ms. Soudarak S. Luangkhot for her efforts with the command and staff lists and Ms. Jaime Koepsell and Ms. Sylvia Bunyasi for their enterprise with the appendices. Mr. David A. Melson is gratefully recognized for his help with aircraft identification and nomenclature.

Special thanks are offered for the managing supervision of the involved Deputy Directors for Marine Corps History: Colonel James R. Williams, Colonel Marguerite J. Campbell, and Colonel Daniel M. Smith. They were ably supported in providing direction by the efforts of succeeding chief historians: Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., and Benis M. Frank. The project also was enhanced by the day-to-day tutelage of the senior Vietnam historian, Dr. Jack Shulimson. The authors were especially dependent upon all manner of materials from Mr. Danny J. Crawford's Reference Section, Mrs. Meredith P. Hartley's Oral History Section, Ms. Evelyn A. Englander's Library Section, and Ms. Joyce M. Conyers and Sergeant Kevin L. Parker's Archives Section. Their contributions are most gratefully ac-

knowledge. Last but not least, both authors have long wished to formally recognize the enlisted Marines who are the often unrecognized backbone of the History and Museums Division.

Both authors are indebted to their colleagues in the historical agencies of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Joints Chiefs of Staff, all of whom provided information and opinion, and made documentation available for analysis. Thanks are extended to all those who reviewed the various editions and provided comments, corrections, and insights only available from those who took part in the events described. Finally, however, it is the authors alone who are responsible for the content of this history, including any errors in fact or judgement.

CHARLES D. MELSON

CURTIS G. ARNOLD

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PART I
VIETNAMIZATION

CHAPTER 1

From the Delta to the DMZ

*Nixon's Doctrine — Contingency Forces — Flexibility and Response — Command Relations
Residual Forces — Marine Security Guard, Saigon — The Marine Air Control Squadron Detachment
Sub Unit One, 1st Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company*

Nixon's Doctrine

For over a decade, decisions by three presidents transformed America's role in South Vietnam. Reaching a maximum troop-level of 549,000 during 1969, the U.S. Armed Forces found themselves involved in a long and unpopular war. With the Nixon Doctrine of July 1969, however, the U.S. began its essential disengagement from Vietnam. The United States would meet its treaty commitments, but expected South Vietnam to assume the greater portion of its own defense through "Vietnamization."¹

By July 1971, Marines in the Pacific Command (Pac-Com) had once again become a combat force-in-readiness, leaving behind in Vietnam only residual forces. General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC), observed that the Marine Corps during this period witnessed "the emergence of new forms of force, some overt, some more difficult to recognize or define, and fewer purely military in character than before." He went on to conclude that properly balanced and properly deployed amphibious forces provided "an effective means — and at times the only means — of exerting influence on situations where our interests are involved."²

Yet for Marines stationed in the Western Pacific (WestPac), Vietnam was a war that would not end. A war whose continued prosecution was carried on throughout Vietnam and Southeast Asia, from the Pacific and even from the continental United States of America. Although officially the "Ceasefire Campaign," this period is better known for the central event of the time, the Spring or Easter Offensive in South Vietnam.³

Contingency Forces

With Marine Corps strength in Vietnam limited to a few hundred, the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) in the Western Pacific reverted to a responsive posture with the U.S. Navy Seventh Fleet. Marines served in detachments on board carriers, cruisers, and command ships. With the exception of these ships' detachments, Marine units made up the fleet landing force.⁴ The usefulness of deployed landing forces had been apparent since Marines first went on board ships.

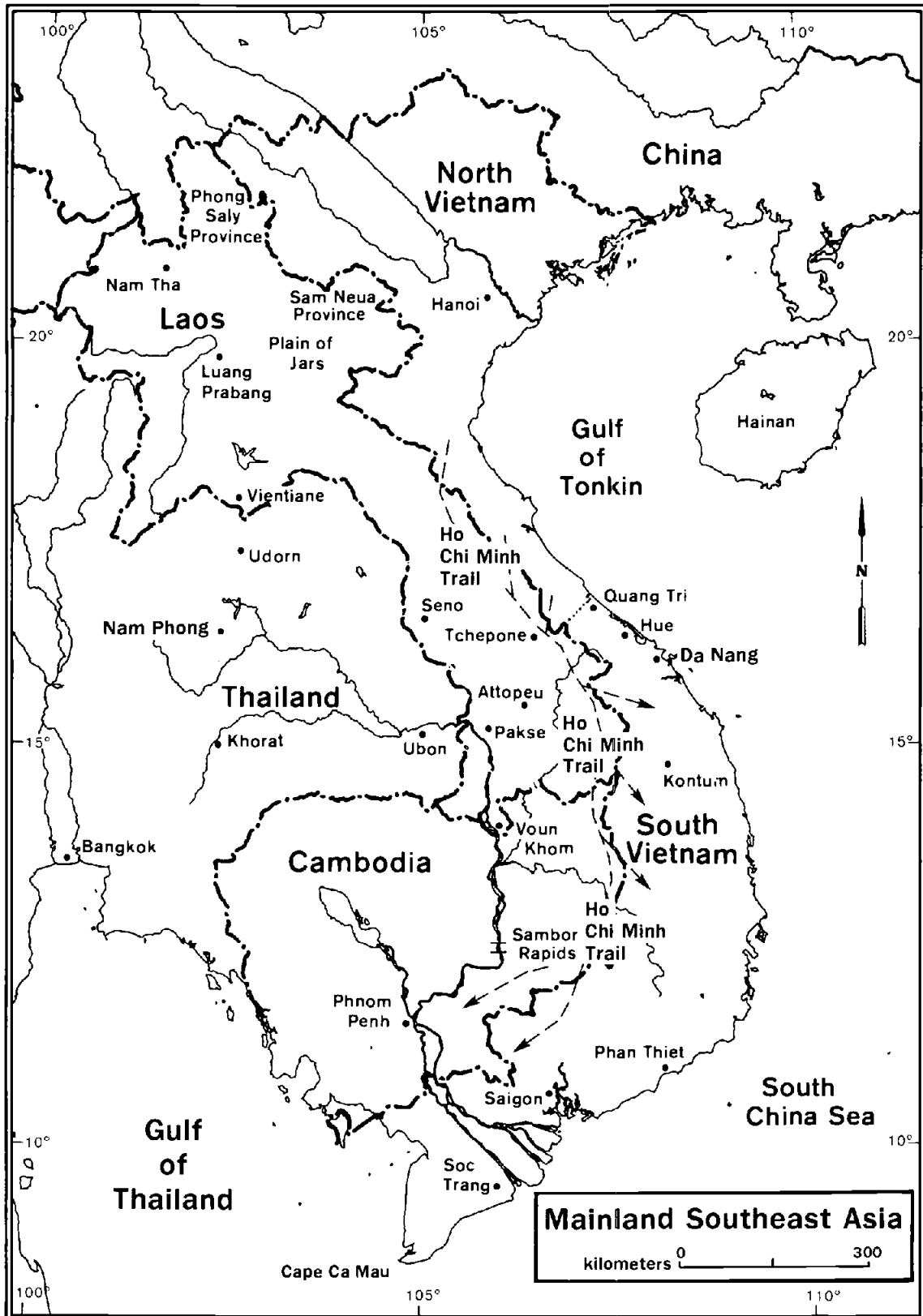
During the Vietnam war these forces consisted typically of a battalion landing team (BLT) supported by a composite helicopter squadron, forming a basic air-ground team. Seventh Fleet's landing force, called the Special Landing Force or SLF, made 72 amphibious landings in Vietnam through 1969. The Seventh Fleet assigned the SLF mission to the 3d Marine Division on Okinawa in late 1969. The 4th and 9th Marines provided battalions and Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 36 sent medium helicopter squadrons (HMMs) to serve with the fleet amphibious forces.* Navy amphibious squadrons were administrative organizations while the amphibious ready group (ARG) was the specific organization tasked for a particular mission.** The amphibious ready groups deployed in two independent configurations. ARG Alpha was organized around a helicopter carrier. ARG Bravo centered on an amphibious transport dock. Another BLT remained on Okinawa as the air-transportable contingency battalion.⁵

After 21 November 1970, the SLF name was changed to Marine amphibious unit (MAU) and Headquarters, 31st Marine Amphibious Unit deployed continuously with Amphibious Ready Group Alpha.*** As amphibious ready groups were the building blocks of the Navy's amphibious forces, the MAU was the foundation of the landing force. Commanded by a colonel, this was a standing headquarters which provided command, control, and continuity for ground and air units which deployed in rotation. For the 31st MAU, the war did not cease with III MAF's departure from Vietnam in April 1971. The MAU was kept within a 120-hour travel time of Military Region (MR) 1 and BLT Bravo was no more than 168 hours away from commitment to operations in MR 1. In May and June 1971, the 31st MAU with BLT 1/9 and

*A composite squadron generally consisted of 4 heavy-cargo lift CH-53As, 14 personnel lift CH-46Ds, and 4 utility UH-1Es.

**An amphibious squadron typically consisted of an amphibious assault ship (LPH), two amphibious transport docks (LPD), two landing dock ships (LSD), two or three tank landing ships (LST), and an amphibious cargo ship (LKA).

***The terms SLF and Special Landing Force continued to be used informally. As of 1989, the MAU was changed to MEU for Marine Expeditionary Unit, a return to a more traditional designation for deployed Marine forces.



Adapted from Naval Historical Center Material



Department of Defense Photo (USN) K98639

The instrument of forward deployment was the Marine landing forces and the amphibious ready groups of the Seventh Fleet, represented here by an amphibious assault ship (LPH) and two amphibious transports (LPDs) underway in the Western Pacific in the 1970s.

HMM-164 was on 72-hour standby in support of the departure from Da Nang of the 3d Marine Amphibious Brigade, the last major Marine combat unit remaining in Vietnam.

By July 1971, freed from direct operations in Vietnam, III MAF was the Pacific Command's immediate reserve. Lieutenant General Donn J. Robertson, as III MAF commander, had operational control of the 3d Marine Division (3d MatDiv), the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW), and the 3d Force Service Regiment (3d FSR). III MAF was now a regional force with theater concerns ranging from Vietnam to the Philippines and Korea, concerns corresponding with the Seventh Fleet area of operations. As crises occurred, the Marine units afloat were among the first U.S. tactical units to respond. Regional responsibilities brought new problems and concerns to General Robertson. One issue was the reduction of Pacific Fleet amphibious shipping from six to four squadrons during the year, severely constraining the ability of the Seventh Fleet to commit amphibious forces.⁶

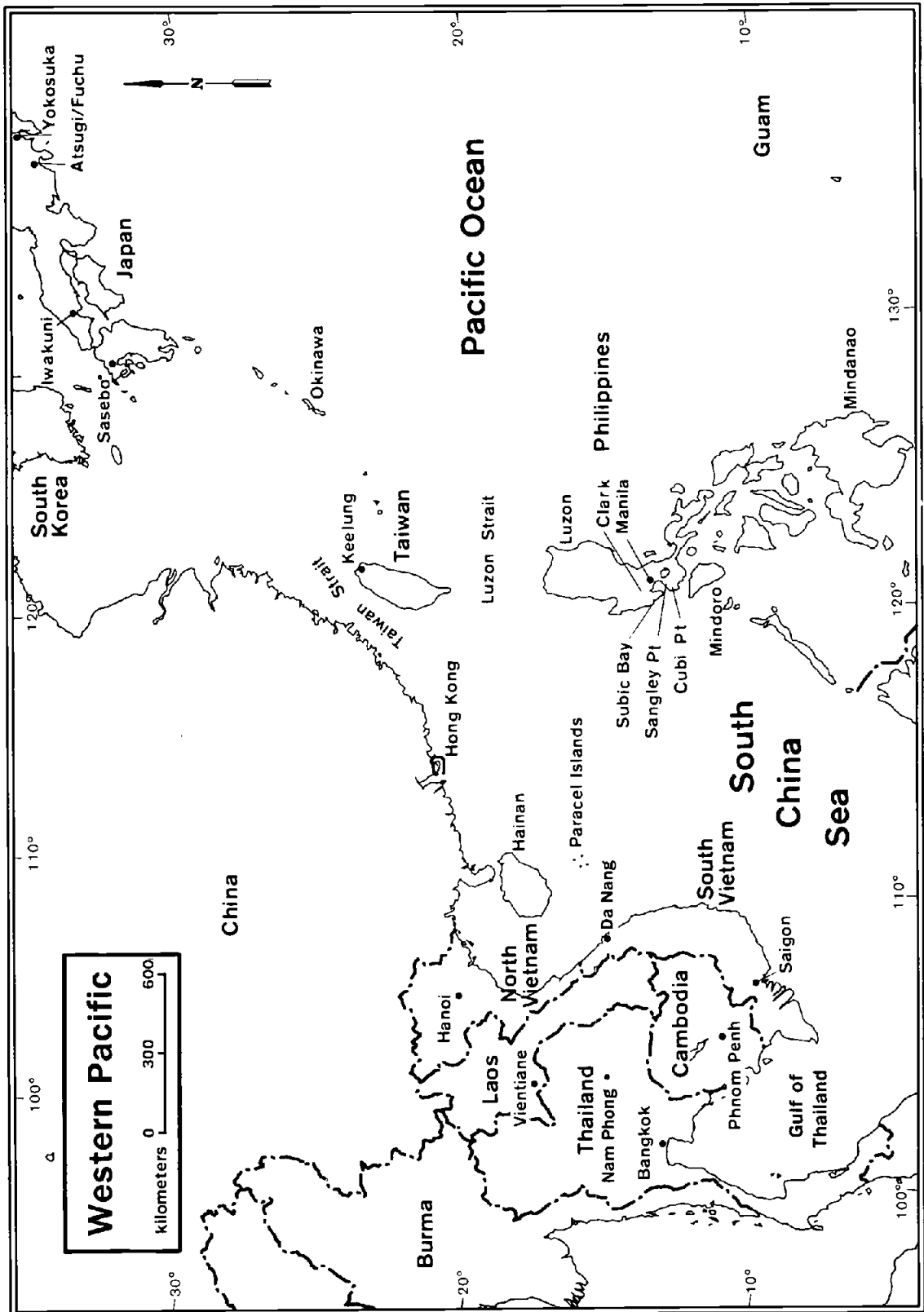
The 31st MAU served as the forward element of a Marine amphibious brigade (MAB), based on General Robertson's conclusion that the MAB was the size of force that available Seventh Fleet transport could move. Existing contingency plans reflected incremental deployment as shipping became available. General Robertson's staff planned for at least one additional battalion landing team to be flown into an objective area to reinforce a deployed brigade. The III MAF planners assumed that additional Marine units could

mount out within two weeks if supported by the Eastern Pacific amphibious ready squadron. Within another two weeks the arrival of two additional amphibious squadrons could double the available shipping for amphibious operations.⁷ When not on board ship for contingencies, exercises, and port visits, Marine units trained ashore at III MAF's "MAU Camp" in the Philippines, using the nearby Subic Bay and Zambales training areas.* Upon joining a new Marine battalion and squadron, the ARG and MAU conducted amphibious landing exercises to rehearse and validate operation and landing plans. At the same time port calls to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Japan caused deployments to take on aspects of pleasure cruises.

In August 1971, Fleet Marine Force Pacific (FMFPac) established a table of organization for a Western Pacific "ready" brigade. The following month, the 9th MAB formed a cadre staff from personnel of the three Okinawa-based Marine commands to plan and prepare for a scheduled exercise, Golden Dragon II, with Rear Admiral Walter D. Gaddis's Task Force 76. This nucleus staff embarked on the task force's flagship, the USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC 19). That fall BLT Bravo (BLT 1/9) deployed to Camp Fuji, Japan, while the 31st Marine Amphibious Unit with BLT 2/4 and HMM-165 on the USS *Tripoli* (LPH 10) remained at sea or at Subic Bay with Amphibious Ready Group Alpha.

War between India and Pakistan broke out during

*The presence of Philippine security forces and Communist New People's Army units made these training areas literally live-fire areas.



Adapted from Naval Historical Center Material



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A26566

The senior Marine in the Pacific through the end of 1972 was LtGen William K. Jones, commanding Fleet Marine Force Pacific. He oversaw the Marine Corps standdown and withdrawal from South Vietnam.

this period. Vice Admiral William P. Mack of the Seventh Fleet assigned the 31st MAU to Task Force 74 for the evacuation of Americans threatened by the fighting in Pakistan. The MAU interrupted its preparations for Exercise Fortress Light II in the Philippines and the ARG proceeded towards the crisis area. It was replaced in December 1971 by the provisional 331st Marine Amphibious Element of Major Raymond M. Kostas, known as "Ray's MAE" at III MAF. This consisted of a headquarters, rifle company, and helicopter detachment all on board the USS *Denver* (LPD 9). The India-Pakistan emergency required combined Marine and Navy staffs to develop planning data for the air deployment of company-sized to brigade-sized units to assist in the evacuations of U.S. civilians and foreign nationals when requested. This planning effort provided the basis for III MAF evacuation contingencies the following year.⁹

Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., CinCPac, declared the crisis resolved on 7 January 1972 and the 9th MAB nucleus staff resumed planning for Exercise Golden Dragon. Lieutenant General William K. Jones, as FMF Pacific commander, drew three observations from the

crisis: first, the separation of individual ready group ships for more than 30 days reduced Marine readiness to carry out the mission of amphibious assault by fragmenting the 31st MAU; second, Marines had to supplement ships' crews because Navy manning levels did not account for 24-hour combat operations, and finally an increased use of "special category" message traffic reduced the flow of necessary information needed for effective planning. These observations proved valuable in the months to come as amphibious forces returned to Vietnam.⁹

The 1972 New Year, the Year of the Rat in the Tet calendar, began with Lieutenant Colonel William R. Von Harten's BLT 3/4 assuming duties with the 31st MAU, now under Colonel Walter C. Kelly, and Lieutenant Colonel Phillip B. Friedrichs' BLT 1/9 continuing as BLT Bravo. In another change, Lieutenant General Louis Metzger relieved III MAF commander General Robertson.** In March 1972 BLT 1/9 loaded ARG Bravo ships at White Beach, Okinawa, for the crisis-delayed Exercise Golden Dragon II, by way of port visits to Hong Kong and the Philippines. At this same time the assistant commander of the 3d Marine Division, Brigadier General Edward J. "E. J." Miller, joined the staff on the *Blue Ridge* as brigade commander for the exercise.

Flexibility and Response

During the last half of 1971, the main activity of III MAF aviation units in Southeast Asia was duty at sea with the Seventh Fleet amphibious groups. Marine Medium Helicopter Squadrons 164 and 165 rotated in turn to the 31st MAU as "composite" squadrons; the BLT with ARG Bravo was supported by a detachment from Marine Light Helicopter Squadron (HML) 367.

In Vietnam, a detachment of air controllers from 1st MAW remained at Da Nang. Another "in-country"*** aviation activity was the combat evaluation of the North American Rockwell YOV-10D Bronco gunship, for which a detachment of two aircraft and 21 Marines flew with the U.S. Navy's Light Attack Squadron (VAL) 4 at Binh Thuy.**** The modified OV-10s mounted a 20mm gun and an infrared sight, the night observation gunship system (NOGS). The Marines flew 200 combat missions denying the cover

*This message traffic was usually highly controlled and thus unavailable to most who needed the information.

**III MAF remained a lieutenant general billet through 1972.

***Term referring to the geographic confines of South Vietnam.

****Deployed from 1 June 1971.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800352

The commander of the III Marine Amphibious Force during the reaction to the Spring Offensive was LtGen Louis Metzger. The former 3d Marine Division commander was responsible for the Marine air, ground, and logistic forces used in the Western Pacific.

of darkness to the Communists in MR 3 and MR 4. By 31 August 1971, with the testing completed, the Marines departed. As a result of the evaluation, Lieutenant General William K. Jones recommended adoption of the OV-10D by the Marine Corps.¹⁰

Strict Department of Defense limits on the entry of combat aircraft and personnel into Vietnam limited the 1st MAW during 1971 largely to its CinCPac strategic reserve mission. For the air units stationed in Japan and Okinawa this brought an emphasis on reconstructing material stocks eroded over the years of combat and filling training gaps which had developed because of the demands of operations. In December 1971, the USS *Coral Sea* (CVA 43) arrived for a Western Pacific cruise with Marine All-Weather Attack Squadron (VMA[AW]) 224 attached to the carrier air wing, and provided an added capability. The character of Marine air deployments remained stable through the first three months of 1972.

Command Relations

Seventh Fleet, Seventh Air Force, and the remaining advisory, administrative, and logistical units with



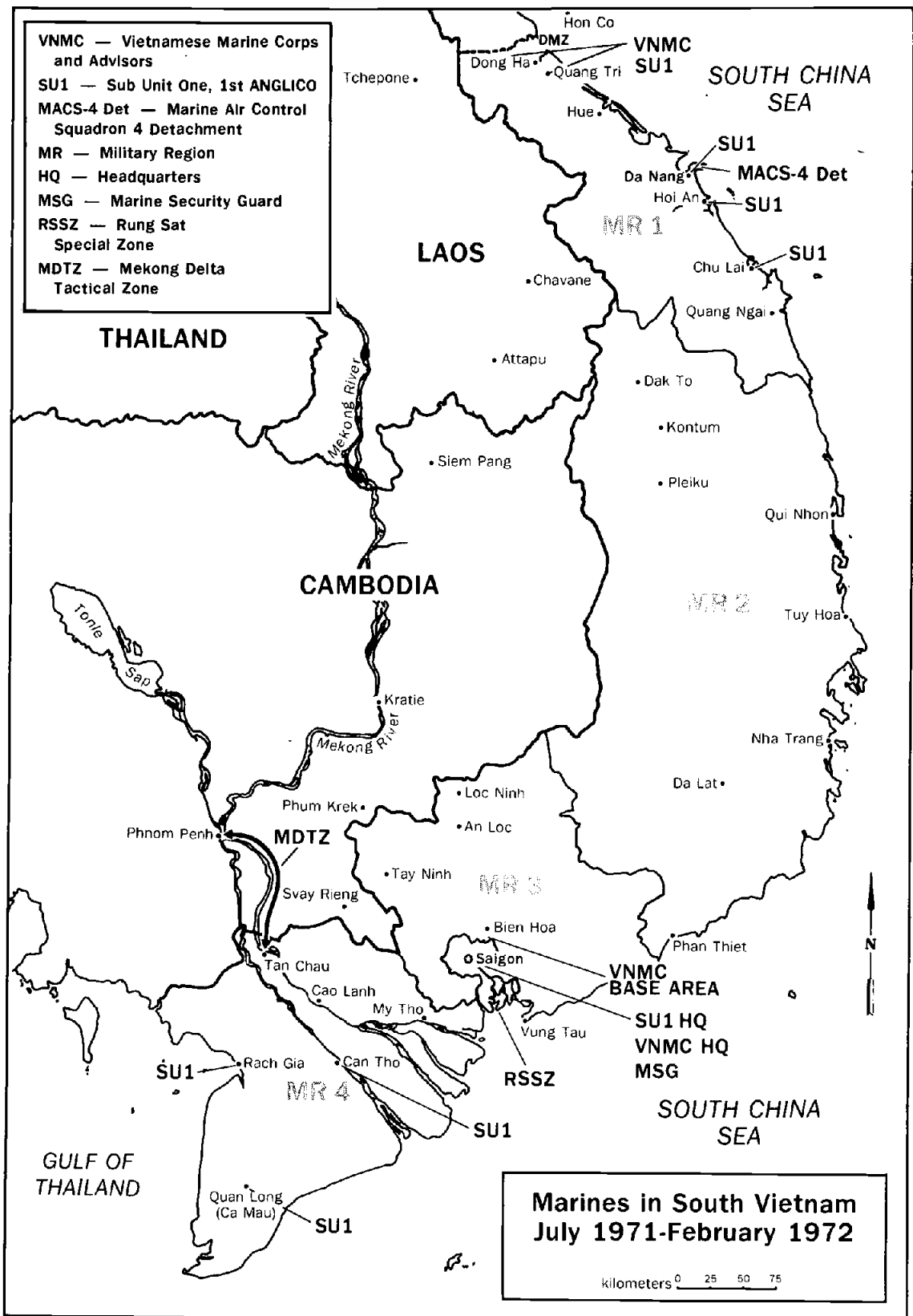
Military Advisory Command Vietnam Photo

The commander of American forces in South Vietnam through the middle of 1972 was Gen Creighton W. Abrams, USA. Complex command relations in support of the South Vietnamese resulted in a coalition.

the Military Advisory Command Vietnam (MACV) continued to support the South Vietnamese in their war against the North Vietnamese. The Seventh Fleet provided strategic deterrence and sea control. In accordance with Washington's policy, senior American commanders in the Pacific increased the logistic and combat support to South Vietnam, but at the same time continued to withdraw American troops from the embattled nation.¹¹

Command relations varied depending upon the mix of forces.* Operations at sea were under the control of the Seventh and Pacific Fleets. For operations in South Vietnam, MACV, as a subordinate of CinCPac, exercised control of units through regional assistance commands. The 1st Regional Assistance Command (FRAC) was assigned to MR 1. Seventh Air Force's commanding general controlled air operations in South Vietnam as MACV's deputy for air. In contrast, air operations over North Vietnam were controlled by either Seventh Fleet or Seventh Air Force under CinCPac. For the redeploying Marine units this meant

*This was complicated by an "advisory" command operating in support of the Government of South Vietnam.



defining operational control (“opcon”) and administrative control (“adcon”) depending upon where they were and for whom they worked. Complex command relations required that the greatest attention be paid to coordination at the tactical level (see appendices). General Metzger commented that most, if not all, major deployments and actions during this period originated from the Joint Chiefs of Staff passed through the chain of command to the “action agency,” III MAE, and that FMFPac “could only serve as an advisor” to CinCPac and Pacific Fleet to “sell” a specific course of action.¹²

Residual Forces

In South Vietnam, Keystone Oriole Alpha, the seventh increment of President Nixon’s phased withdrawal program, was completed on 30 June 1971, marking, for the time being, the end of the U.S. Marine ground units’ active combat role in the Vietnam War. However, as the sun rose over the South China Sea on the morning of 1 July 1971, United States Marines were still to be found, nevertheless, throughout the length and breadth of the Republic of Vietnam. These Marines were charged with diverse roles and missions. Some were combat-experienced advisors, others

possessed detailed technical knowledge, a few had broad training in computer communications and data theory, but they all had one common denominator — they were U.S. Marines.

Not since March 1963, when they had numbered 532, had there been so few Marines in-country. The largest group, with a total of 195 Marines, was Sub Unit One, 1st Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (ANGLICO) with Lieutenant Colonel Eugene E. Shoultz as officer-in-charge. The next larger group was comprised of the Marines who guarded the American Embassy in Saigon and the Consulate in Da Nang. These were the 156 men of Company E, Marine Security Guard Battalion (MSG). The Marine Advisory Unit of the Naval Advisory Group was the third largest in size with 68 Marines serving as advisors to the Vietnamese Marine Corps (VNMC). The smallest unit was the 20-man detachment of Marine Air Control Squadron (MACS) 4, 1st MAW, which had remained behind at Da Nang to operate the Marine Tactical Data Control Center known as the Southeast Asia Tactical Data System Interface (SEATDSI). The remaining 107 or so Marines were assigned duties as advisors to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), the Vietnamese Navy (VNN), the Territorial Forces, and

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, second from the left, was the senior American official in South Vietnam. He is pictured in Saigon at the change of command for Company E, Marine Security Guard Battalion. Maj Edward J. Land, Jr., is on his left. Other Marines present for the ceremony were from the MACV staff and Sub Unit One, 1st ANGLICO.

Photo courtesy of LtCol George E. Jones, USMC (Ret)



as members of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam staff.¹³

Marine Security Guard, Saigon

In a less dramatic, but no less meaningful role than the fleet or advisory units, was the special mission being carried out by the Marine Security Guard (MSG) at Saigon and by the detachment at Da Nang. Five officers and 151 enlisted Marines guarded the U.S. Embassy in Saigon and the U.S. Consulate at Da Nang. Their primary mission was to "provide protection for all classified material and equipment and other administratively controlled matters at the Department of State's Foreign Service Establishments." In addition, these Marines were "to provide protection for U.S. personnel and Government property under the direct control of the Chief of Diplomatic Mission." Because of the large size of the Vietnam security guard, it was designated Company E of the Marine Security Guard Battalion.¹⁴

All Marines on State Department duty in Vietnam had successfully completed the necessary training and had met the stringent qualifications required while undergoing the five-week academic and physical training course at the Marine Security Guard School at Henderson Hall in Arlington, Virginia. They had received training in subjects ranging from protocol to counterespionage. Qualification with a new series of small arms was mandatory since Marine Corps-issued weapons were not used in embassies. A joint board of both State Department and MSG Battalion personnel had the final word as to whether a Marine was accepted for embassy or consulate duty. One out of four trainees was eliminated. The tough school was necessary for the demanding subsequent assignment of security guard Marines to one of 117 embassies and consulates located in 96 countries.

The Marines of Company E did not restrict themselves exclusively to security tasks. As much as the political and military situation would allow, they formed a viable bond of comradeship with the Vietnamese people, particularly the children, in and around "The Marine House"* compound near the ambassador's residence. They had "adopted" the children at Hoa Khan Hospital, as well as the orphans at Hoi Duc Anh.

On 3 July 1971, Dr. Henry Kissinger, special advisor to President Nixon, arrived at Saigon to confer with U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu, and other U.S. embassy and military dignitaries. The MSG Marines performed

a myriad of chores related to providing security for Dr. Kissinger. That same month, on 13 July, an electrical fire developed in offices of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Saigon, trapping mission employees on the fifth through ninth floors. Seventy-five Marines, both officers and enlisted men, responded to USAID's call for assistance. The Marines entered the building, located the trapped employees, and guided them to safety. Time and again the embassy Marines entered to make certain all persons were clear of the building and that all classified material was secured. After ascertaining these two facts, the Marines turned their full efforts toward fighting the fire. Their quick response prevented the fire from spreading beyond the fourth floor.

The political and military situation in Saigon during the last half of the year had become tense as the date for national elections neared. Routinely scheduled training was cancelled during this period of unpredictable activity, not only by the enemy but also by the diverse factions within the city of Saigon. In the month of August, the city of Saigon was on full alert as citizens went to the polls to elect their representatives to the Republic of Vietnam's lower house. On 26 September 1971, Sergeant Charles W. Turberville was killed and four other Marines wounded during a terrorist attack on U.S. Embassy personnel in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. This necessitated the transfer of five Marines from Company E, under Master Sergeant Clenton L. Jones, to Phnom Penh to reinforce the embassy guard there.¹⁵

On 28 October 1971, a new commanding officer, Major Edward J. Land, reported to Company E, relieving Captain William E. Keller. Major Land, a native of Nebraska with an easy-going, midwestern manner, had enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1953 at the age of 17. Before being commissioned in 1959 he served as a drill instructor for two years in San Diego and was a distinguished marksman with both rifle and pistol. His first tour in South Vietnam had been spent with the 1st Marine Division at Da Nang as officer-in-charge of a scout-sniper platoon. Major Land faced some of the biggest challenges of his Marine Corps career as he took charge. During the fall, the Company's "Scramble Reaction Team," designed to meet any kind of emergency, responded to 140 bomb threats and 29 bomb detonations, as approximately 122 enemy rockets fell within Company E's area.¹⁶ On Christmas Day 1971, a Communist terrorist threw a M26 fragmentation grenade into the Marine House compound in Saigon, injuring Sergeant Michael L. Linnan and Salay

*Generic name for the lodging for MSG Marines in Company E.

Mag, a local security guard. While the Security Guard detachment continued its mission, other Marine units were more directly involved in the continued conduct of the war.

The Marine Air Control Squadron Detachment

The smallest and most concentrated unit of U.S. Marines in South Vietnam was a detachment on top of "Monkey Mountain" on the Tien Sha Peninsula northeast of Da Nang. The 20-man detachment of Chief Warrant Officer Guy M. Howard was from Marine Air Control Squadron (MACS) 4, 1st MAW. Its job was to operate and maintain the Southeast Asia Tactical Data System Interface (SEATDSI) and had stayed behind when the air wing departed Vietnam. These Marines were operators and technical specialists of the Marine Tactical Data Communications Center (TDCC), a component of the Marine Air Command and Control System which was originally known as the Marine Tactical Data System (MTDS).

Developed by an exclusively Marine Corps research and development effort, MTDS was meant specifically for amphibious warfare and to be compatible with the systems of the other services as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) system. It was designed to be "an advanced, mobile, land-based, semi-automatic tactical air defense and air control capability." The system made full use of computers integrated with a display system to process volumes of information rapidly. It was a case of space-age technology being used in a "brush fire war."

This system, which was operational in South Vietnam in July 1967, enabled the squadron to establish a data-quality interface with units of the Seventh Fleet. This was the first combat employment of such a system and allowed the integration of MTDS with the Navy's shipboard and airborne tactical data systems (NTDS and ATDS). Shortly after being established on Monkey Mountain, the TDCC was expanded to provide assistance for all American as well as allied forces.

In December 1971, CinCPac approved the deployment to Udorn, Thailand, of an Air Force unit that would provide an air-to-ground digital link capability as well as ground terminal equipment that could be integrated with the Marine SEATDSI at Da Nang. This vital data link and interface also automatically transmitted radar surveillance provided by Air Force and Navy elements operating over the Gulf of Tonkin and North Vietnam. The information then was transmitted instantly to the Task Force 77 Anti-Air Warfare

Coordinator and the Air Force Air Defense Commander. The SEATDSI also was used to rendezvous, refuel, and monitor air strikes over North Vietnam and to provide the vital coordination between naval gunfire missions and air strikes that were being conducted near each other.

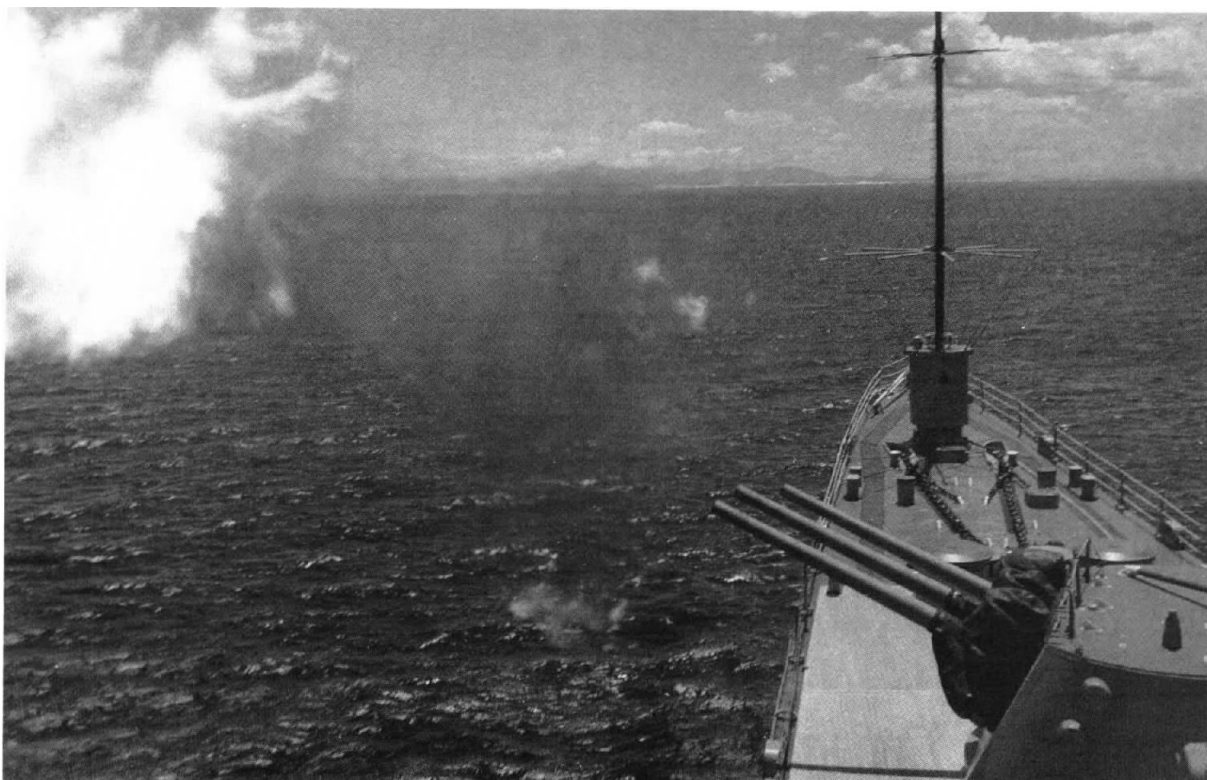
Because of the special capability of the Marine TDCC to understand clearly data messages from both the Air Force and Navy data systems, it was imperative that a detachment of Marines remain in Vietnam to continue to provide an interface between the incompatible Air Force and Navy systems. All three systems were used to monitor the location and disposition of friendly air and to detect, identify, and direct intercept efforts against the hostile air threat which still prevailed in the north. This small Marine detachment with its unique equipment contributed to the capability of both Air Force and Navy units to operate on a regional basis.¹⁷

Sub Unit One,

1st Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company

The single largest and most dispersed U.S. Marine unit in Vietnam was Sub Unit One, 1st Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (ANGLICO). Much as the motto of the U.S. Armed Forces Radio and Television Network in Vietnam, Sub Unit One (SU1) covered "From the Delta to the DMZ." Marine naval gunfire spotters on top of outpost Alpha 2 from Gio Linh just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) kept a close eye on any movement to the north, while as far south as the Ca Mau Peninsula on the Gulf of Siam, spotters provided territorial forces their naval gunfire (NGF) requirements. Unlike the handpicked U.S. Marine advisors, the ANGLICO Marines and naval personnel had received neither language training nor formal instruction on Vietnamese culture, yet were called upon to serve in ARVN units. They were quite capable, however, of putting high-explosive naval ordnance on target. According to Lieutenant Colonel D'Wayne Gray, who, on 19 July 1971, had relieved Lieutenant Colonel Shoults as officer-in-charge of the unit, "the Marines came through in good style."

Lieutenant Colonel Gray, a prematurely gray, pipe-smoking Texan, was well qualified for this assignment. He was knowledgeable of the Vietnamese, their language, and their culture. In 1964 he had attended the Vietnamese Language School at the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, Virginia, and had served a previous tour in Vietnam in 1965 as advisor to the Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese Marine Corps, then



Department of Defense Photo (USN) KN20294

Sub Unit One, 1st ANGLICO, was an essential element for the continued American naval gunfire support to South Vietnamese and U.S. Army forces. Here the guided missile cruiser USS Oklahoma City fires 6-inch, .47-caliber, triple-turret guns supporting ground units.

Lieutenant Colonel Bui The Lan. After his return to the United States he organized the first Marine Corps Vietnamese Language Course at Quantico, Virginia. He taught Vietnamese language for one year before being assigned to Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) and took over the Vietnam desk in the Joint Planning Group. In addition to this extensive knowledge of Vietnam, he was a qualified aerial observer (AO) with broad experience in supporting arms.*¹⁸

As Gray assumed command of Sub Unit One at a platoon-sized ceremony in Saigon, he was concerned with two matters. First, he was determined to supply the South Vietnamese all the naval gunfire and air support they needed to stand off the northern forces. Second, he also wished to see his Marines and sailors

*The AO, a naval aviation observer (tactical), was a Marine Corps phenomenon in which ground officers in light aircraft and helicopters controlled supporting arms and reported on enemy activities. At times, a warrant officer or lieutenant found himself controlling the firepower of a major general. These qualified, and occasionally colorful, individuals served with ANGLICO, observation squadrons, artillery regiments, and the division intelligence section.

continue to work well with the Vietnamese as well as the Koreans and the Australians. He later stated that the possibility of a major involvement with North Vietnamese forces never crossed his mind: "things were winding down; this was going to be a quiet period."¹⁹

ANGLICO was charged with the coordination of naval gunfire and air support in any form for U.S. Army and allied forces. In Vietnam, ANGLICO was responsible for obtaining and controlling the fire of Seventh Fleet's destroyers and cruisers along the country's entire coastline. In addition, the ANGLICO Marines assigned a brigade tactical air control party to the Korean Marine Corps units. Sub Unit One's headquarters was in Saigon adjacent to the MACV compound, but its spot and liaison teams were positioned at eight sites along the coastal areas. Lieutenant Colonel Gray felt that his teams knew how to shoot and communicate, that they were above average in intelligence, and that they possessed the initiative necessary to carry out their advisory responsibilities to senior officers concerning fire support matters. The teams were ready, but there were some obstacles.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A704818
Sub Unit One's officer in charge, Lt Col D'Wayne Gray, pictured here as a colonel in 1974, led a diverse group of specialists in operations that covered the length of the Republic of Vietnam. He wears U.S. Army and ARVN parachutist and naval air observer insignia.

When coordinated, naval gunfire, artillery, and air support complemented each other. Naval gunfire was generally accurate and effective under a variety of weather conditions and helped fill the gap left by departing U.S. artillery. These gunfire missions, however, had to be coordinated to prevent interference with air strikes in the same area. It was standard procedure to coordinate the activities of both air liaison teams and tactical aircraft with naval gunfire support ship missions. The Marine tactical data system interface capability, mentioned earlier, provided the close coordination and control of supporting arms.*

The problem for ANGLICO teams was the necessarily detailed coordination of supporting fires to combat units. At the time, artillery and NGF were not permitted to fire at the same time that close air sup-

*The basic organization for employment was a tactical air control party (TACP) with airborne or ground forward air controllers (FACs) and a shore fire control party (SFCP) with naval gunfire spot teams and liaison teams. These task units combined to form an air-naval gunfire platoon.

port missions were being flown in the same area. This problem was addressed daily, but no satisfactory solution was found to permit use of the Marines' restrictive fire plan, which allowed for simultaneous air and gunfire missions. Gray recalled the U.S. Air Force "just refused to consider any alternative . . . and the U.S. Army, all the way to the top, let them get away with it." Consequently, when the aircraft made their runs, the artillery and naval gunfire simply had to stop firing. Although it was a coordination nightmare, the situation was tolerable during this slack period as there were no really worthwhile targets of opportunity or pressing needs for gunfire support.²⁰

The range of the naval guns was also a major deficiency. Almost three years earlier, on 15 March 1969, the battleship USS *New Jersey* (BB 62), with her 16-inch guns, had returned to the United States for decommissioning. The preponderance of naval guns that remained were mounted on destroyers and were of 5-inch bore diameter. The older 5"38 guns, with their limited range and manual loading, were reserved for areas near the coastline. The newer automated and longer-range 5"54 gun was used on targets which were either farther inland or which called for heavy, fast concentrations. The 5"54 also fired a rocket-assisted projectile (RAP)** which extended the normal range of the American gunfire support ships. This round, however, was not very accurate or effective at maximum range. Despite limitations, the support ships, working closely with the spotters ashore, formed an array of combat power which was a deterrent to enemy movements and activities along coastal areas.

Liaison and staff integration between ANGLICO and supported forces presented a real, but lesser, problem. ANGLICO detachments, headed by junior Marine and Navy officers and enlisted men, often were challenged by senior American Army and Air Force officers to provide the most appropriate supporting arm to employ in a given situation and how best to use it. Often the rank differential was extreme, such as the time a U.S. Army lieutenant general landed his helicopter on a fire support base in MR 1, to discuss naval gunfire with the senior American present, a U.S. Marine lance corporal.

The challenge to communications for the widely dispersed ANGLICO and fire-support units was met by

**This projectile was fired from a gun-tube as though it was an ordinary round. At a certain point after leaving the gun a rocket ignited and gave the ordnance extra propulsion to extend its maximum range. Keep in mind that effective use of naval gunfire is within the first three-quarters of the range of the gun fired.



Photo courtesy of MajGen Donald R. Gardner, USMC
Control of supporting arms by Sub Unit One was by air observers flying from American and South Vietnamese aircraft. This AO is flying in the right seat of a U.S. Air Force Cessna O-2 Skymaster over the Mekong Delta in support of riverine operations.

Master Sergeant Donald E. Heim and his team of Marine communicators. Heim, a former Marine artillery officer and to Gray "a superb staff NCO," was constantly at work holding together a radio network plagued by the area's marginal high frequency wave-propagation and extended distances that taxed the capabilities of his equipment. The network, however, was unusual in that it provided an alternate means of voice communications among Marines throughout South Vietnam. This network later was to prove significant in tying together an otherwise disparate group of Marines.*

Fire support teams were supporting the United States, Vietnamese, and Australian armies and the Korean and Vietnamese Marines. In MR 1 a liaison team with XXIV Corps in Da Nang supported U.S. Army units. Shore fire control parties were with the 1st, and later the 3d, ARVN divisions at Quang Tri; spotters worked with Vietnamese Marine Corps (VNMC) units and their U.S. Marine advisors along the DMZ and with the American 23d (Americal) Infan-

try Division at Chu Lai. In MR 2 a liaison team was maintained at Nha Trang; spotters were flown in on rare occasions when needed. A liaison team was at MR 3 regional headquarters in Long Binh and spot teams were with the U.S. Army's 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, at Bien Hoa and with the Australian forces at Nui Dat. In the Mekong Delta in MR 4, a liaison team was assigned to the regional headquarters at Can Tho. Two Marine AO's flying with VAL-4 at Binh Tuy and a shore fire control party with the 21st ARVN Division at Ca Mau completed Sub Unit One's dispositions. During the next few months, Gray shifted his teams to meet the differing needs of the supported units.

Near Hoi An in MR 1, the largest ANGLICO contingent in South Vietnam was assembled under Major Edward J. "Jim" Dyer. Within this northernmost and most heavily threatened of the country's military regions, ANGLICO Marines supported the 2d Republic of Korea Marine Corps (ROKMC) Brigade and were charged not only with control of naval gunfire support but also with arranging for and controlling all allied air support. ANGLICO personnel were attached to the companies of the brigade so that when the Koreans needed air strikes, helicopter support, or medical evacuation, the planes could be requested and directed in English. This policy was necessary because the helicopters belonged to the U.S. Army and the tactical close air support was provided by the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, and South Vietnamese Air Force (RVNAF). English was the only common language.

Major Dyer, a former naval officer, was an especially qualified Marine. While in the Navy, he had been a naval gunfire liaison officer on Okinawa with the 3d Marine Division. During his first tour in Vietnam, he was an advisor to the Vietnamese Navy's junk force. At the end of 1965, he requested an inter-service transfer to the Marine Corps, was commissioned in Saigon, and reported to the Marines for a full tour of duty as a 105mm howitzer battery commander in Vietnam. In June 1971, Major Dyer was in Vietnam again for his third tour, his second as a Marine, and was right at home with his naval gunfire platoon in support of the ROK Marines.

The Korean camp and outposts were examples right out of a field manual — immaculate in every way with every sandbag in place. It was apparent to Major Dyer that the "Blue Dragon" Marines were thoroughly professional: they kept their hair cut close, wore their uniforms with pride, and appeared physically ready.

During July 1971, despite Typhoons Harriet and Kim, the cruiser USS *Oklahoma City* (CLG 5) fired

*Because ANGLICO operators were with a variety of units and in equally varied locations, MACV's Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, J-3 (Operational), Brigadier General William H. Lanagan, Jr., a Marine himself and a personal friend of Lieutenant Colonel Gray, had a Marine-manned communications system that extended the whole length of South Vietnam.



Photo courtesy of Maj Charles W. King, USMC (Ret)

Ground spot teams brought supporting arms to bear on the enemy from various locations, such as from this outpost just below the Demilitarized Zone in Quang Tri Province. Here an air strike is conducted along the main avenue of approach from North Vietnam.

repeatedly in support of the ROKMC. Staff visits to the ship by both ROKMC staff officers and ANGLICO personnel ensured coordination and technical understanding among the parties concerned. Briefings were held in the areas of operations, friendly positions, common radio frequencies, intelligence targets, and target lists. Enemy activity was generally light, but the ROKMC had scattered contact while on a cordon and search operation in the foothills of the Que Son Mountains. In the field with the ROK Marines, Corporal Anthony Sandoval provided the communications link and control necessary for NGF and air support. Most of his efforts were directed toward controlling helicopters flying logistic support missions.

Military Region 1 was the area that, on a day-to-day basis, provided the most return for the expenditure of money, ammunition, time, and manpower. Although it was difficult to assess damage done and enemy killed, many targets along the Demilitarized Zone were fired upon daily. In addition, Marines in Quang Tri, the northernmost province, served as an early-warning, instant-response, reaction element. Lieutenant Colonel Gray called them "disaster preventers." Time was to prove him correct.

Elsewhere, when things were quiet, Marines were

idle, and this idleness presented a problem. The apparent enemy inactivity and the lack of a need to respond was countered by a vigorous training and cross-training program and enrollments in Marine Corps Institute correspondence courses in forward observer techniques. Communicators were sent to the 3d Marine Division Naval Gunfire School at Subic Bay, Philippines, and NGF spotters were trained in communications procedures and equipment while in Vietnam. Many Marines, including Gray and First Sergeant Ernest Benjamin, both of whom were over 40, underwent parachute jump training at the ARVN Airborne Training Center at Tan San Nhut Air Base, while some Marines completed similar training on Okinawa given by the U.S. 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). The physically demanding preparation for such training occupied the otherwise slack time and built an "Airborne" esprit within Sub Unit One.* It also created an atmosphere of mutual respect between ANGLICO and the ARVN Airborne Division it supported.

Along the northeast sector of the DMZ, the NGF area of responsibility shifted inland to the west. Naval

*Members of ANGLICO units were required to be parachute trained in order to carry out their mission in support of joint and combined operations, in this case with the ARVN Airborne Division.



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck Magazine*
Sub Unit One liaison teams operated with selected American and allied units. Here Korean and American Marines work side-by-side at the Korean Marine Brigade's combat operations center near Hoi An.

gunfire spotters shared common locations with the U.S. Marine advisors on such hilltop outposts as Alpha 1 and Alpha 2 (Gio Linh) just below the DMZ. A spurt of enemy activity during the latter part of August gave the spotters the opportunity to call up to 10 missions a day. Most of the missions were suppressive fires targeted against enemy mortar and rocket positions. Supporting the Marine spotters on the ground as well as the 1st ARVN Division were ANGLICO aerial observers flying from the airfield at Dong Ha in both U.S. Army and RVNAF aircraft. Army Lieutenant General Welborn G. Dolvin, commanding XXIV Corps, expressed his satisfaction with the naval gunfire support rendered in his area of responsibility during this period.²¹

Despite the fact that areas became devoid of enemy activity and obvious enemy movements, Lieutenant Colonel Gray was insistent that his men be gainfully employed. Drugs, racial unrest, inter-service rivalry, and bad weather threatened morale and challenged his unit's leadership. In a letter to Headquarters Marine Corps recommending a reduction of the unit's manning level, Lieutenant Colonel Gray said, "No Marine should remain in Vietnam who does not have a full day's work to do every day." The proposal to reduce was made in order "to make these Marines available for more productive employment and to remove them from this environment where idle minds create problems at a higher rate than found in a normal devil's playground."²² These reductions were made feasible by dissolving all ANGLICO units in MR 2 and MR 3, while still maintaining mobile spot teams prepared to reenter those areas on short notice.

For example, during late September 1971, a flare-up in Tay Ninh Province, MR 3, and across the border in Cambodia, challenged the responsiveness as well as boosted the morale of Sub Unit One. Enemy activity in that area appeared to threaten the city of Tay Ninh. Intelligence reports caused the MACV Deputy J-3 for Operations, Brigadier General William H. Lanagan, to ask for an additional tactical air control capability along the Cambodian border. The USAF was tasked to provide the forward air controllers (FAC) and ANGLICO to supply the communicators and FAC teams to direct and control USAF aircraft inland.

In less than an hour, Master Sergeant Heim had the men and equipment staged. At first light the next morning, Lieutenant Colonel Gray, Master Sergeant Heim, and the Marine teams boarded helicopters, flew to Bien Hoa, picked up three USAF ground forward air control officers, and then flew to Tay Ninh City. There they took up three positions around the city. During the next several days, the teams received sporadic rocket fire in and near their positions. Although they did not control any air strikes, the teams were in place and were ready and communicating with the orbiting aircraft. An emergency had been met with dispatch.²³

By October, the winter monsoon had come to the northern provinces. Weather conditions were so severe from 4 to 13 October that there were no naval gunfire support ships available. During the rest of the month the weather remained so miserable that neither friend nor foe did much moving. On 23 October 1971, typhoon weather conditions, with gusts up to 85 miles-per-hour, was uprooting trees and flooding the Da
1st Sgt Ernest Benjamin was the senior enlisted Marine in Sub Unit One. This was his fourth tour in Vietnam and one during which he confronted many demands of combat leadership in the Spring Offensive.

Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck Magazine*

