

E COMPANY, FIRST PLATOON, SECOND BATTALION, SEVENTH MARINE REGIMENT, FIRST MARINE DIVISION

ECHO 1-2-7

VIETNAM 65-66
A MARINE PLATOON LEADER'S STORY

A PLATOON THAT DID IT RIGHT — IN A WAR THAT WENT SO WRONG



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NEVER BEFORE HAVE SO MANY GIVEN SO MUCH FOR SO LITTLE

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PROLOGUE

— — — — Jan. 29th, coord. 441029, near Chu Lai, Approx. 2100 hours.---our reinforced ambush squad of Marines was stretched out in a line overlooking the 'killing zone' of the path running along the side of the hill. We had been in position for over three hours. We had left the Company CP (Command Post) after dark to avoid being seen—we had moved towards the target zone through the undergrowth—avoiding villages and pathways. We had quietly located our killing zone for our ambush and moved into position as we had rehearsed earlier. We were certain our movements to the target zone had been undetected. We had posted our 'rear watch' to prevent a surprise attack from our rear. Corporal Nelson and his squad were disciplined, focused and very much awake—- There was a cacophony of sounds all around us from the critters of the jungle. We were used to the 'noise' they produced but something new broke the symphony ---The sound was unmistakeable—a 60 mm mortar round leaving the mortar tube--you know the mortar round is in the air and that you and your unit are the target —our ambush had been discovered! The VC mortar round explodes fifty or so yards in front of your position--you hear the next round leaving the tube-- you know it's in the air--it lands thirty or so yards behind your position--they have you 'bracketed'--you make the only decision you can make--leave your position-- but which way do you go-- Forward or back--left or right--the decision would prove critical because the VC most likely had set up an ambush for your exit from

the ambush site-- There was no panic-- these disciplined Marines waited until the signal was given to move out . You decided to move the unit rapidly forward-- toward the sound of the mortar rounds leaving the tube—and toward the first 'marker round' that had been fired—as you do --the next round drops almost on top of the position you just vacated--you and your unit are moving fast--thru the underbrush, in column--still a disciplined, silent, exit from the danger zone---up ahead you can hear the VC moving their equipment--confused because you're moving directly toward them--they didn't expect that--they thought you would hunker down or move backward--probably into an ambush they had set up----you caught them off guard--you can imagine they're packing the mortars up and moving out--away from where you're headed. Not wanting to move into an ambush situation of unknown size, you move the unit to the right --past the sounds of VC moving their equipment--you head back to the Company HQ— stopping to check that all members of the squad are present and accounted for— three/four miles North----you contact company HQ to let them know you're on the way back but you will hold up outside the company perimeter to avoid the possibility of friendly fire— (1. Bn. Sit Rep. 1/29/1966). www.records of war)

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This is a personal project intended to simply put in writing memories of a special time in my life. It's not intended to be a 'documentary' or a literary work of art.

Over time, names, dates and other facts tend to become fuzzy or even forgotten.

I've tried to verify as many of the details as possible—unfortunately, official records are often hard to come by, especially regarding small unit operations. As is always the case when you write about your 'personal' experiences it is often impossible to 'source' all of those. I did, however, discover a web site that had many of our Battalion Sit Reps organized by month beginning in May 1965 and continuing thru the duration of the Viet Nam conflict. That site is :

www.recordsofwar.com/vietnam/usmc/2ndBn7thmarines.htm **and**

www.recordsofwar.com/vietnam/usmc/1stBn4thmarines.htm. ***These records***

were archived by Texas Tech. University and are linked to the 'Records of

War site ' (VVA.vietnam.ttu.edu) This site enabled me to read the actual sit reps

submitted by our Battalion to Regimental HQ and read them month and day at a

time —often seeing actual reports from companies re. enemy and friendly activity

within their TAOR (Tactical Area of Responsibility). They contained our

positions by coordinates and often, outlines of patrols being run by each platoon in each company in our Bn. As such, I was able to nail down certain specific things that I write about. Over the years I've shared some of these stories / vignettes with my family and friends on certain occasions. As time has passed I realized that, unless I wrote these memories down, they may be forgotten. My family has often encouraged me to 'write a book'. This isn't that book! Rather it's a 'collection' of selective memories' that I've tried to tie together in a coherent fashion to tell my story. This project wasn't intended to be a story about 'me' so much as it was a story about the job—platoon leader! I purposely try not to mention names at certain times since I couldn't possibly remember everyone who came and went during our time— -- the endless patrols and sweeps—time has eroded many of those details. My 'Story' is written from a perspective of a young Marine officer as I relate it to other officers I knew at the time. In this 'story' I talk about our troops over and over—from time to time I mention names but for the most part I focus upon the fellow officers in my Company and our Battalion. It would not be possible to list all of men in the First Platoon—E Company or the Battalion. This isn't a 'journal', as such, since I didn't write down events as they occurred. My journey consisted of daily patrols, perimeter defense, operations and sweeps that provided little time for the luxury of writing and keeping a journal. We literally lived 'out of the pack on our back' and the pack was intentionally kept 'light' carrying only our essential needs, poncho, C-rations, mess gear, personal hygiene items, change of socks, underwear, sewing kit, weapon cleaning gear, mosquito repellent (bug juice), etc.

The First Platoon, E Company did it's job and we did it well. We were professional, humane and committed to carrying out the missions we were given. I later realized that American troops were being cast as villains by the media—often depicting our troops in a bad light—with cigarettes hanging out of their mouth, looking like homeless vagabonds. I wanted to counter that contrived image with the truth. In 1965 our Marines weren't allowed to 'smoke' on patrols and operations—the VC could smell that smoke for miles—we had rules for when the smoking lamp would be lit. Everything we did had to be done in accordance with the tactical situation we were in. As dirty and tired as we were —we still obeyed our uniform regulations—only relaxing them when it was appropriate to do so. We treated the Vietnamese civilians with respect and consideration. Our Marines did not abuse innocent civilians and we treated the prisoners humanely in accordance with the Geneva Convention Treaty. Our platoon, E Company and the Second Battalion , Seventh Marines did it right—as right as we could under the incredible circumstances we had to deal with.

This story represents my memories as I recall them. I thought that others may enjoy some of these stories too--especially those who served in Viet Nam, history buffs, and anyone who is interested in the life of a young Marine officer and his platoon serving their Country during the Viet Nam era from May 1965-Jun. 1966. The memories I refer to in my 'collection' are probably very similar for thousands of others who served in the military in a time of war. I know it certainly is a close approximation of each of the platoons in our Company and in our Battalion—Second Battalion , Seventh Marines. One of the benefits of writing this story was

the privilege of tracing down some of my fellow Marines with whom I served during this time. It is written out of the greatest respect for the 'common grunt'—the Marine in the trenches—one of which I considered myself to be! The officers and enlisted men in 2/7 were a special breed—I knew many of the platoon leaders in other companies in our Battalion—I knew them well from our time together in OCS and in Basic School AND our time together in 2/7. These Marine officers and the men they led distinguished themselves while engaged in combat—they displayed the leadership, courage and responsibility that the Marine Corps expected of them. These Marines were the best of the best—folks I trusted—I knew many of their families and had the greatest respect for them. My story, however, is written from this Marine officer's perspective—and it's 'my' perspective—not someone else's.

As I progressed in the research and study of the Viet Nam War that I knew —I discovered information that I had not heard or seen before. Time had passed—thousands of books and articles had been written and documents released to the public that had been classified before. The internet enabled me to discover that information and tie into it with my story. For example, I discovered a paper written by the former battalion commander of the First Battalion, Fourth Marines, Col. R.E. Sullivan. He wrote the paper years after he retired from the USMC . I had worked for Col. Sullivan as his Staff Intelligence Officer—(S-2) after 'migrating' from 2/7 as a result of Operation 'Mixmaster'. The paper described in detail the 'fiasco' of Operation Oregon with which I was personally involved as the S-2 (staff intelligence officer). I describe that operation later in this project

but finding the Col.'s paper on that operation is an example of the kinds of bits and pieces of my story that I was able to find thru research and especially the internet.

My focus is upon the time I spent in E company, Second Bn., 7th Marine Regiment, First Marine Division. Later, after 'Operation Mixmaster' I focused on my time in A Co., First battalion, Fourth Marine Regiment, first Marine Division as the first platoon commander. I would be assigned to the Battalion Commander's staff in 1/4 later in the Spring of 1966 as the S-2 (Intelligence).

I became a platoon commander right out of basic school in the Summer of 1964. Most Marine lieutenants with an 03 (Infantry) MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) did, if they were lucky. Infantry had been my first choice of MOS coming out of Basic School (we were given three choices as to our desired Military Occupational specialty) . I had just completed approx. nine months of OCS and Basic School before being assigned to the Second Bn., 7th Marines located at Camp Pendleton. Our Battalion Headquarters was at Camp Las Pulgas— —one of the several 'satellite' camps located within the boundaries of Camp Pendleton.

I had the honor and privilege of being the commander of the First Platoon in Echo Company for and entire year prior to shipping out for combat duty in Viet Nam—I continued in that role, commanding the same platoon of Marines throughout our combat operations in Qui Nhon , Chu Lai and Phu Bai until Nov.

1965 when E Company was transferred to A Company, First Battalion, Fourth Marines as part of 'Operation Mixmaster' where experienced Marine Units were sent to inexperienced or new outfits to prevent the sudden disappearance of combat experience at the end of the year when the units were due to rotate back to the States. I remained the platoon commander of the first platoon, A Co until 12 Feb. 1966 when I was transferred to the First Battalion, Fourth Marines HQ as the S-2.

Chapter 2

California—here we come!

My wife Kay and I had a few weeks R & R after I graduated from 'The Basic School' (Summer 1964) and we spent time with our families in W.Va knowing it would be a while before we would see them again. Little did we know that I would be on my way to Viet Nam a year later. After a month long leave Kay and I drove across Country which was a first for both of us. We took a week to make the journey enjoying the scenery along the way. We stopped every 400/500 miles trying to time our stops to coincide with tourist attractions along the way. We enjoyed nice restaurants and shopping in places we had only read about. One of the most breathtaking places we came to was Albuquerque, NM. We arrived on the outskirts of the City on Rt. 66 coming, of course, from the East--the Sun had just gone down and the City stretched out on the plains below like a sparkling jewel. We pulled the car over and simply sat and stared at one of the most beautiful sights either of us had ever seen. The lights seemed to stretch out forever and the spot at which we had parked was on a high elevation overlooking Albuquerque. Over the next few days we stopped at the 'Painted Desert' and the Grand Canyon as well as other interesting places that reflected

the 'Wild West'. We made the trip in a slightly used 'Rambler' midsize car--it got approx. 25 mi./ gal and gas was approx. .25 cents per gal--water in AZ at that time cost \$1 /gal! We stayed at AAA approved motels along the way at the bargain prices AAA recommended. Kay shopped at delis and grocery stores and made sandwiches and fixed our snacks along the way. Our major expense was our evening meals which we tended to go a little overboard on.

Kay and I arrived in CA and began looking for an apartment near Camp Pendleton. We found our place in Carlsbad--approx. 10 mi. to Camp Las Pulgas--new home of the Seventh Marine Regiment and the First Marine Division. The apt. was a two bedroom , second story apt. on Pine Ave. I found out later that several other new lieutenants had also selected these apts. (Pine Avenue Apts.) during the same period--we were all coming from Basic School and I knew most of them. Kay and I stayed in a motel for a couple of days then 'camped out' in our new apt.--we slept on the floor making little sleeping pads with my sleeping bag and some bedding we had packed til we could buy our furniture, etc.. Once we had settled in our new place I checked in to the Second Bn., Seventh Marines.

Meeting my Company Commander

The drive to Camp Las Pulgas was a little depressing. From the time I entered the Main Gate at Camp Pendleton til I arrived at Camp Las Pulgas I saw nothing

but dry, brush covered , brown hills--everything looked dusty and hot! It was nothing like Quantico or Camp LeJeune which were lush and green. The road to Las Pulgas is named after the Medal of Honor recipient John Basilone--'Basilone Blvd.'--a two lane road!

Checking in was not what I expected. Battalion Headquarters was in pandemonium. The 2nd Bn. and the Seventh Marine Regiment was being reconstituted after being disbanded in the years following Korea and the eventual downsizing that had taken place. Everyone was 'new'. Boxes were everywhere and people were scurrying around trying to get set up. I met a First Lt. who introduced himself as the S-1 (personnel officer). I completed the necessary paperwork and found I had already been assigned to E Co., Second Battalion. I found the E Co. billet and checked in at the Company HQ office. The First Sgt. welcomed me and took me in to meet the Company Commander, Capt. Fred Tolleson. a Naval Academy graduate from ten yrs. earlier as I found out when he shared some of his background. Tolleson was a gung ho, hard charging, no nonsense Company Commander who treated his new officers like we were 'boots'—which we basically were!

Over the next few weeks our command assignments were sorted out and those were:

Capt Fred Tolleson--

Company Commander

1st Lt. Rosewell (Rosie) Page-	Executive Officer
2nd. Lt Bill Asbury	1st. Platoon Commander
2nd. Lt. Gerald (Jerry) Kozak	2nd. Platoon Commander
2nd. Lt. Richard (Rich) Boryzewski	3rd. Platoon Commander
2nd. Lt. Joe Lloyd	Weapons Platoon Commander

Troops continued to arrive daily and they were assigned to the various platoons accordingly. Our platoon sergeants (the guts of the Corps) were also assigned to the various platoons as they arrived from being transferred from other units throughout the Corps. Most of our young Marines who made up the squads and fire teams were only recently graduated out of boot camp. We were blessed to have experienced sergeants and NCO'S , transferred in from other outfits, to work with our eager and energetic young Marines.

A Marine platoon consists of 44 Marines. There are three rifle squads—each with three four man fire teams and one NCO squad leader. Platoon guide (Sgt.) and a platoon Sgt. (S/Sgt.) and a radioman /communicator (pfc. or L/cpl.) , a Navy corpsman (attached) and a Platoon Commander (Lieutenant). A Marine Company consists of three infantry platoons and a weapons platoon. The weapons platoon consists of the same basic organization but the Marines are tasked with providing support of the infantry platoons with heavier weapons—



mortars, rocket launchers and M-60 machine guns—these are assigned to the platoons by the Company Commander as needed.

Each of the E Company platoon leaders met with our respective platoons, introduced ourselves and met the individual Marines in our platoons.

My former enlisted experience was approx. two yrs. I was also a meritorious NCO (lance corporal) coming out of the 2nd. Recon. Bn. stationed at Camp Lejeune, NC via the Infantry Training regiment (ITR) at Camp Lejeune and boot camp at Parris Island, SC. My Recon platoon took part in the Cuban Blockade in 1962. I had completed OCS in late 1963 and Basic School in the Spring of 1964.

Lt. Kozak (Jerry) was a new Lt. who arrived about the same time as the rest of us. He had completed his officer's training thru the PLC program A military 'brat' Jerry's father was a Marine Col. His high school years were spent in the Oceanside community just outside the gates of Camp Pendleton--his college years at Randolph -Macon near Quantico, Va.. Jerry was a nice looking , trim, athletic Marine officer who could have graced the covers of GQ . Jerry was unmarried and a gung ho, committed young officer .

Lt. Rich Boryszewski was also a new Lt. Rich was also a bachelor and the ladies loved him. He was a big, strapping guy with an easy smile and a laid back personality. Rich was a 'yankee' through and through—raised in the outskirts of NY he attended schools in that region — —he was active in sports and popular in school. Rich's platoon loved him--he was tough but he had a good sense of humor and he was a good and decent person and a great role model for his platoon.

Lt. Joe Lloyd was a meritorious NCO and had passed thru OCS and Basic School as he became a Commissioned Officer. Joe had been a successful non commissioned officer and had several years of valuable experience. Joe was a steady, likable Marine officer that brought his experience to the critically important Weapons platoon with our Company's 'heavy weapons'—60 mm mortars, machine gun sections, rocket launchers and grenade launchers

First Lt. Roswell Page (Rosie) was our Co. Executive officer--second in command . Rosie was married and lived off base. He was a great 'buffer' between the jr. officers and Capt. Tolleson. He often played the role of 'ombudsman' and helping guide our Company on maneuvers. Rosie's tour in the Marines was nearing it's end when we mounted out for Viet Nam --since he decided to resign his commission he did not stay with our company when we left for Viet Nam.

First Lt. John Clancy would eventually replace Lt. Page as our Co. XO. Lt.

Clancy was born and raised in the South—graduated from the Citadel and spoke with a deep Southern accent. John had played football at the Citadel and joined the Quantico football team after receiving his Commission. He had been a running back during the couple of years he was on the team before joining E Company. He had a calm demeanor and worked well with the younger officers in our Co.

Camp Pendleton was/is a hot dusty place with thousands of hills--most of which we marched, ran and climbed in the upcoming months. We were also located next to the beautiful beaches of California and the Pacific Ocean. We would train in the surf and along those beaches also in the upcoming months. This was my first experience on the West Coast. California living was completely different from where I had been raised in the hills of West Virginia. I was in awe of the people and the lifestyle which were completely different from those I had known on the East Coast.

Chapter 3

Becoming E Company

Capt. Tolleson, our Company Commander sought and received authorization for our company to train as a 'raid' company, using techniques that went further than routine 'infantry training'. As a result our company participated in rigorous training which included 'jungle warfare', entry and egress methods of entering enemy controlled territory, demolition training, and land and sea 'navigation' training. We were exposed to submarine living and how to exit the submarine at sea using rubber boats.

Alex Lee, in his book 'Utter's Battalion', made some disparaging comments about Capt. Tolleson and E Company. 2 @ There was obviously some bad blood between these two officers but having worked with both I would like to say this— Alex Lee would not have lasted a full week in E Company undergoing the arduous training Capt. Tolleson was putting our Company through. Later in Viet Nam, Lee actually took command of E Co. in Tolleson's absence in late Oct. 1965—I can't speak for Kozak or Boryszewski but I was unimpressed! So Alex Lee's 'opinion' of E Co. meant nothing to me.

We trained in the surf with rubber boats learning how to launch them in high surf and to return in the high surf. We also participated in 'endurance swimming' and survival training'--we were dropped off a couple miles off shore--at night --in



teams of two--with our weapons and our gear in a 'water proof' bag--and --using our compass--swam to a pre arranged location on the beach. These surf training days were uncomfortable--we were cold, covered with sand and yet we trained hard--running in the sand--sleeping when we could --wrapped in our ponchos to curb the chills.

Part of our training regimen took us to the Bridgeport Mountain Warfare Training Center--in the Sierra Nevada Mountains--this training was also rigorous and involved cold weather survival techniques, warfare techniques, skiing, snow shoe training, etc. The entire Battalion was involved in this training during the Winter of



1964-65.

L-to R (front row) Asbury, Kozak, Boryszewski

The day to day training for E co. was tedious, tiring and depending on the Season, hot, chilly, dry, cold and wet. Through the rigors of our training the platoons, the companies of 2/7 learned to work together—learned how to communicate, to implement a variety of strategies and tactics for raiding an enemy compound, destroying an enemy structure, gaining entry into an enemy location thru the air, on the water and on the ground while building our endurance and stamina. At the end of a typical day the troops would clean their gear and enjoy a little free time . The Company officers would often meet in the CO's office and debrief the CO re. our activities that day, personnel issues, etc. I commuted from Carlsbad along with several other Lt.s and often we didn't get home until well after dark. This routine went on during the months remaining in 1964 through the Christmas Season and into the first months of 1965 Kay had somehow become pregnant with our first born sometime in Aug. of 1964. Our baby was due in April 1965 . Kay and the other wives that lived in the 'Pine Ave. Apts.' in Carlsbad— The Doss's, the Archers, the Bests, the Alls and others kept each other company, shopped together, etc.—several were pregnant and 'due' about the same time! Hugh Doss, another 'classmate' from basic School was actually transferred from F Co. where he was a platoon leader out of 2/7 in January'65—Hugh and his wife Kaye had their second child (Donna) a couple of months before Kimmie was born—I wouldn't see Hugh again until years later after Viet Nam. Hugh had ended up being transferred to L Company, 3/7 as the

XO, and actually arrived in Viet Nam at Qui Nhon before 2/7 landed in July 1965. Hugh Doss's story was interesting as his unit was the first in Viet Nam to make an enemy assault from aboard ship in helicopters. They were flown in to rescue a unit from third Bn., third Marines and helped evacuate the remainder of that unit which had been badly mauled. Hugh's Company Commander, meanwhile, suffered a heatstroke and had to be evacuated as well—Hugh took over the Co. and led them back to base camp with quite a story to tell about his first day in VN. More about this later.

Jack Archer was also a platoon leader in 2/7 but was also transferred from F Company during that Spring ('65) where he was a platoon leader to H & S Co., 2/7 where he would be in charge of the 81 mm Mortars section for the Bn.—an absolutely critical unit in Battalion combat operations and Jack Archer was the perfect fit for that important job.

In the early Spring of 1965 we learned that our Regiment was going into what is called 'lock on'—preparation to mount out (deploy) wherein leave and liberty were restricted in time and distance from the Base. The staffs of each of the Battalions began the process of preparing for deployment—our training accelerated and time at the Base increased while time with our families and loved ones decreased. Our baby arrived on April 14, I was on 'temporary detached duty' as the Range Safety Officer at the Regimental Firing Range near Camp Las Pulgas. I received the call from Kay at around 1200 hrs.—Kay's message was "our Baby is here!" she was calm and very happy. I told her I was on the way. We did not have a unit firing that day and S/Sgt. Fish, the

Range NCO in charge , agreed to take over for me. I zoomed home to get Kay who had her bag packed and ready to go—we zoomed back to the Base and the Naval Hospital at Camp Pendleton, Mainside—Kay was going thru the breathing exercises and so was I!! We arrived at the Hospital after 1300 and the contractions were closer and closer. We got Kay admitted and she was in good hands at the hospital and I was able to be with her—we waited another hour—the contractions eased up and we thought maybe it was a false alarm. I had not had lunch so we agreed that I would run out for a sandwich and hurry right back—which I did. We lived about 20 min. from the Hospital in Carlsbad—I went home—made a peanut butter /jelly sandwich, changed into my ‘civies’ and sat down to eat my sandwich. The phone rang—I picked it up —it was Kay—I said something like “ How’s it going “? Kay was calm and had a smile on her face—I could hear it in her voice—she said “ our baby is here” —I almost choked—I said ‘WHAT’?!—I couldn’t believe it—our baby had decided to come right after I had left to get my sandwich! After I asked how she and our baby were doing— I said I’m on my way!! Kay said—‘be careful!’ since I had broken the speed limits going to the hospital earlier! At the exact same time—I learned later another Marine Lt. —Sheldon Best and his wife were going thru the same thing—our babies were born at the same time—in the same hospital. Kay and our baby—we named Kimberly Kay—were doing fine—Kay had lost a lot of weight—back then she had a doctor that believed new Moms should diet. and ‘keep their weight down’!—as a result Kimberly was also a little underweight but still a healthy six and a half pounds . In the room next door Sheldon Best and his wife were enjoying their

new arrival too—also a beautiful little baby girl! Several other Marine Lt.s' and their wives welcomed new babies to the world that Spring. It was a bitter sweet time because we knew that we were preparing to go to war and would be leaving our new families way too soon. Preparations began —on the home front for a deployment that we knew was coming—we had just learned that our deployment would be on May 24. Kay and I had six weeks to pull together our plans and put them in motion. Kay and I wanted her to go to her parent's home in Bramwell, W.Va, after I left—her support system would be there in the hometown she grew up in. Bramwell was close to Bluefield, W.Va. where my parents lived—they would be part of that support system. So arrangements were made for the movers to move all of our stuff to storage with exception of a few things that Kay wanted in W.Va. Next was getting our car back to W.Va. because Kay was going to fly, along with her Mother , who was coming to Carlsbad to help with the move. Another Lt. from Basic School was heading back to the East Coast to Join Force Recon—Joe Laterra agreed to drive our Nash Rambler across Country and leave the car at the Charleston, W.Va. Airport where he would embark on the rest of his journey. Even though I paid Joe a pitiful amount to cover his expenses he accomplished the mission without a hitch—and I am forever grateful for his generous gesture to help us out. The Marine Officers' Brotherhood was alive and well! The night I left Kay and our new baby Kimberly is one I'll never forget—the Troops were being bussed down to San Diego to board the USS Pickaway—a combat destroyer. We were to Board early on May24.

Capt. Tolleson had assigned me to be the Company liaison officer to join other officers from 2/7 in San Diego the week leading up to our departure—to assist with the process of embarkation for E Co. This meant one less week with my new baby and Kay—Lt. Boryszewski—a bachelor—had no such problem. He volunteered to replace me for that duty—a gift I'll never forget!



Lt. Boryszewski

All in all that time was a blur—making sure our platoon was ready to ‘mount out’—inspections, meetings, etc. and making arrangements on the home front—for the movers—for storage of our few things—arrangements for the car to be driven to the East coast by Joe Laterra and other matters of insurance, arrangements for my salary to be sent to Kay in Bramwell. etc., etc., etc.

Some of the married officers chose to drive down and join the Companies of 2/7 there at the loading dock. Lt. Jack Archer A close friend whom I had been with since OCS and Basic School also lived at the Pine Ave. apts. with his wife Vicki.

He was driving down in the early dawn along with his Father who was visiting that week—Jack invited me to ride along and saved me having to make other arrangements to get there. Kay , Kimberly and I spent the evening talking and preparing for the moment when Jack would toot the horn. Finally, the toot came and it was time—the roughest night of my life—saying goodbye to Kay and our six week old Kimmie—maybe forever. We stood in the parking lot of the Pine Ave. Apts. next to Jack’s idling VW beetle and hugged one more time with tears all around. I held little Kimmie up close to my face and placed her little cheek next to mine and it was a feeling I knew would stay with me the rest of my life—the hardest thing I had to do that night was to leave my little family standing in that parking lot. I’m sure the same scene was being repeated elsewhere around Camp Pendleton. I got in the beetle and Jack’s Father drove us to San Diego—The USS Pickaway and to the Viet Nam War.

Chapter 4

Leaving Home to Fight

May 24, 1965—Sailing from San Diego Aboard the USS Pickaway.



Our Battalion began loading equipment a couple of weeks prior to our sailing. In addition to logistical equipment and supplies each Marine was allowed to pack one USMC issued trunk and one sea bag—in addition officers were allowed to bring a ‘val pac’ because of additional uniform requirements for officers. These were all loaded a few days before we boarded ship—the personal gear was well marked with the Marine’s name and unit. The gear was placed on pallets by unit and loaded aboard. The BLT (Battalion Landing Team) had been loading the Bn. equipment and supplies for approx. two/three weeks before the departure date. The rest of the Seventh Marines’ Regimental Landing Team’ (RLT) was going through the loading process in Long Beach, Cal.

For most of the Marines this was their first trip at sea. Life aboard a troop ship is not luxurious. Space is at a premium as over a thousand Marines are billeted below decks for the journey across the Pacific—much like their predecessors from WWII. The ships used in the RLT (Regimental Landing Team)—USS Picaway, USS Alamos, USS Okanogan , USS Alamo, USS Iwo Jima, USS Tallega and the USS Point Defiance were all of WWII vintage—so not only were we making the same journey —we were making it under the same conditions as our WWII brothers. Our ships would be exchanged along the way as we stopped in Okinawa to regroup, board different ships and head for Viet Nam. The troops' quarters were cramped and, although, the veterans in each Company had briefed the platoons re. the conditions before loading—there was still a little shock at seeing the actual quarters they would be living in for the next couple of weeks. We took our platoons below decks to the troops quarters and introduced them to the squad bay—in the squad bay were their bunks or berths or hammocks, depending on what you wanted to call them and were stacked six high, row after row. A Marine who drew the top berth had to crawl over five other berths to get to his 'rack'—the Marine and all of his gear had to fit on that rack. The ship had several of these squad bays—all pretty much the same with toilet facilities and showers to support the berthing facilities—the berths were adjoining aisle ways so that the troops could move back and forth albeit tight passage. The Companies had the platoons involved in classes and exercises as much as possible during the day in order to get the troops topside and into the fresh air. In addition it was not good policy to have young Marines just lying around in their

bunk—so we kept them busy—with classes, PT out on the decks, inspections, etc. The ship’s command provided excellent chow in the mess halls and the meals were a highlight during the voyage. Evenings were reserved for movies, free time where troops could move about the ship freely and have some time to themselves. Each Company was expected to provide work details for the mess hall, guard duty and policing the living areas of the ship. Although officers of our BLT were provided officer’s quarters many of us spent as much time with our



troops as possible while trying not to be a nuisance. Officers quarters were nice —two man bunks, shower and head facilities, snacks from the officer’s galley 24/7 and room to relax with a small library. It was in this library that I was introduced to Ian Fleming’s ‘James Bond’ series. I had heard that JFK enjoyed this Author so I tried it and liked it. When I had a few minutes to relax I would often read while some of the other officers played cards, chess, etc. The Navy is big on separate living conditions for the ship’s officers and the enlisted crew members—the Marines—no so much—Marine officers are expected to experience the same harsh conditions as our troops when in the field—many of us considered the troop ship carrying us to combat was ‘in the field’—at least I



did and I know that most of the officers in E Co. and 2/7 felt the same. At some point during our cruise we learned that our first stop would be in Hawaii where the ship would be resupplied and the crew and the troops given an opportunity to go ashore for a brief period of time.



Life aboard ship

The 'cruise' to Hawaii lasted approx. three weeks (mid June) and we gathered on deck as the Capt. announced that we were entering Pearl Harbor. You could hear a pin drop as we sailed slowly past the USS Arizona Memorial. Our Marines knew the history of Pearl Harbor and the horrific scenes that occurred there in 1942. With each passing day—as we sailed further and further away from home the realization of where we were going loomed larger and larger in our thoughts—seeing first hand where so many of our brothers had died in defense of our Country only added to those thoughts. The command of BLT 2/7 announced that we would have a 36 hour leave to go ashore in Hawaii—our troops were excited of course and we spent the next couple of days sampling good food and drink—beautiful sites and enjoying relaxation on the beaches and beside the pools. We basically wore our khaki 'class C' uniforms with the garrison cap and short sleeve shirts because we didn't have access to our civilian clothes and the uniforms drew a lot of welcome attention from the folks in Hawaii. Three of us rented a car and went on site seeing tours of the Island—ending up at our new favorite bar and restaurant. The Hotel where we checked in treated us very well—they gave us the Bridal Suite for the regular price of a two bedroom suite—It was wonderful—plenty of space and really thick towels! We didn't spend much time in the suite however, we wanted to eat, drink and be merry—in that order—which we did. I discovered Mai Tais and had more than my share the couple of nights we were there.

Everybody spread out — but we would run into each other here and there , often



ending up with six or seven of us at the same table in one of the restaurants. Our troops did the same thing—hung out in groups but mostly returned to the ship in the late evening. The two and a half day R & R ended and we were back aboard

Kozak

the USS Pickaway minus a couple of troops that didn't make it back in time for sailing—they would be brought along soon to join up again with their unit—minus a stripe or two! The USS Pickaway got underway again and this time—as we were leaving Pearl Harbor, Col. Utter ordered all troops to the fantail of the ship and spoke to us via a loud speaker. He talked about our mission and complimented everyone for their readiness to defend our Country and then took a moment to point out the Island of Hawaii and he made a sobering comment when he said—“ take a good look—for many of you this will be the last time you see the United States of America”! Looking back—of course his words were prophetic—many of our Marines did not come back —and the first two in that category happened to be two of my Marines who died approximately one month later by friendly fire. As far as we knew at this time we were simply headed to Viet Nam and although the stop in Hawaii had been a nice surprise we were convinced that this would be the final leg of the journey —-we were wrong! several days out from Hawaii the ship changed course and we were told that we

were now headed for Okinawa?! Rumors started to fly—it seemed everybody had a theory about what was happening —from—‘we’re going back home—to we’re going to remain in Okinawa in reserve’. No official explanation was given to us as we steamed towards the shores of the battle torn Island of WWII.

We arrived in Okinawa on June 18 amid a great deal of confusion regarding the change of plan. When we learned that our ship-the USS Pickaway was to be completely unloaded of the BLT and all it’s gear —we were astounded. The troops were taken to Camp Schwab —the Marine base on Okinawa.

We had no idea how long we or two or a year! We turned getting them outside—they got it.



would be there—a day to with our troops needed PT and they

Most of all they needed those comfortable bunks in the barracks and the long hot showers that came with being on land. As I recall, liberty was granted but on a restricted basis so that the troops could be recalled ASAP. Word soon came down that we would, indeed be continuing our journey to Viet Nam—but on another ship! We would be boarding the USS Okinagan as soon as the entire BLT’s gear could be reloaded. The Battalion



Staff and their crews had their hands full with the enormous task of loading the equipment and supplies that had taken weeks to load on the USS Pickaway. A few days later we were ordered to mount up and board the USS Okinagan and we would be setting course for the Republic of Viet Nam. 3 @

Leaving Okinawa and getting back out to sea was a bitter sweet moment—we had come to appreciate the USS Pickaway and its crew and were familiar with its passageways and important sections like the mess hall! The entire Battalion Landing Team was again at sea together and spread out as far as the eye could see—it was truly a beautiful sight! Many of us —whether alone or with a couple of other Marines we would often go out and sit on the fantail and watch the sunsets as well as the moon and enjoy the beautiful sight of this lethal force steaming across the sea and think of our families and loved ones . I think we all knew —to the man—that this was a defining moment in our lives —one that we would remember —forever!

Chapter 5

ARRIVAL AT THE REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM

Amphibious landing at Qui Nhon on July, 7th., 1965

July 7, 1965 —Preparation for an ‘opposed’ landing had been planned for days/ weeks before. 4@ Beginning at approximately 0300 our troops were assembled —breakfast eaten in the ship’s mess hall—inspections were done—ammo distributed along with a two day ration of c-rations for each Marine—platoon sgts. , squad leaders, and officers inspected each Marine to insure that he had all the gear that had been prescribed in our orders. The troops had made up their packs, checked their equipment and were ‘ready’ before turning in the night before—we knew we had an ‘early morning’ so we didn’t wait for the wake up call to get prepared. We had been conducting classes throughout the ship to orient our troops to the landing zone, the region of Qui Nhon, enemy characteristics and intelligence. We were to expect an ‘opposed’ landing—the exact nature of the enemy opposition was unknown. So now—the time was here—the smell of diesel fuel coming from the ship and the amphibious vehicles in the belly of the ship signaled that soon , we would board those vehicles and they would be launched for the landing. We wound our way down ladderwells until we came to the huge open bay with the amtraks idling—the sounds of the diesel engines and the smell of diesel exhaust was unforgettable. Our Company was the ‘first wave’

to hit the beach—my platoon was in the first two amtraks to come off the ship . We loaded the amtraks as directed by Navy and Battalion personnel—roughly one and 1/2 squad per vehicle. My platoon sgt. and platoon guide (sgt.) each went with the remaining platoon in the other amtrak. 5@

Almost exactly twelve months earlier I had graduated from the Marine Officer's Basic School in Quantico, Va. along with several other Marine second lieutenants in the Second Battalion, Seventh Marines. little did I know that I would be in the first amtrak—in the first wave of an amphibious landing at Qui Nhon, Viet Nam one year after graduation.

I looked at our Marines as they boarded those vehicles and saw a little anxiety, a little uncertainty, a little worry but I also saw what I had come to know about the men in this platoon—they were ready and we were a team and we were confident. At this point we had no idea what we might be facing when we landed —machine gun fire, mortars, artillery, hundreds—maybe thousands of VC? We just didn't know! Apparently our Battalion staff didn't know either. This fact gnawed at me later—Why did our Battalion mislead us regarding 'enemy opposition' to expect in our landing? We learned later that some members of the Battalion staff were actually in Qui Nhon prior to our landing—they had flown in earlier. The Third Battalion, Seventh Marines actually landed at Qui Nhon on Jul. 1 and had set up needed security at Qui Nhon. Yet, our 'command' led our young Marines to believe they may face hostile fire when we landed—there is a certain amount of natural anxiety that most Marines feel when entombed in an amtrak racing full speed towards an enemy beach—each Marine is silently thinking

about the moment when the amtrak hits the beach and the ramp goes down and they are exposed to whatever is waiting for them in the sand dunes ahead. Some Marines silently pray—some simply stare ahead and brace themselves for what's to come. For some unknown reason the BLT command decided to announce that this would be an 'opposed' landing—knowing that there were no known VC in the area where we landed—no identified gun emplacements, no enemy units spotted in the area—instead we found women, children and innocent villagers watching the landing from the dunes as if this was a Hollywood production! Knowing the anxiety factor —why would our Commanders add to the stress of the landing by misleading us with erroneous information??

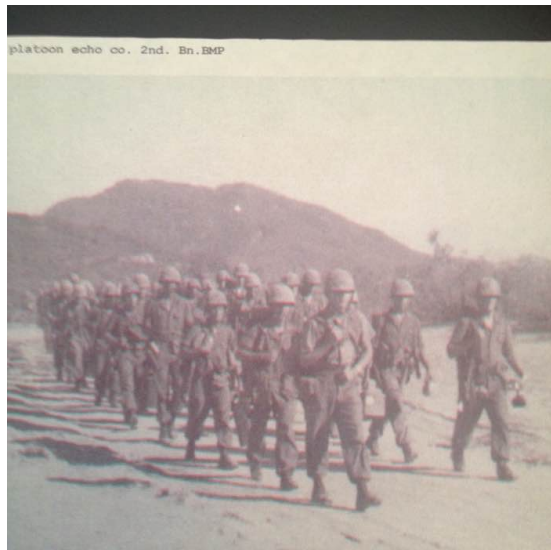
The amtrak's began moving off the ramp of the ship at approx. 0400—the feeling of 'inevitability' was prevalent among the troops—the amtraks become 'boats' once they're in the water—in every 'ship to shore' movement there is definitely a 'risk' factor involving the equipment—some amtraks have been known to sink when they roll off the ship—the troops were very aware of that fact and there was an obvious happy moment when the vehicle began to float and move forward after leaving the ship—a few nervous smiles showed up among the troops. The amtraks continued to roll off the ship and began circling off shore until all vehicles were off the ship—the order was given from the command staff to line up parallel to the beach which was approx. one mile away—all amtraks moved into position—dawn was beginning to break—the line of amtraks loaded with our troops began moving toward the beach. I gave the command to lock and load—each

Marine loaded their full magazine into their M-14—The Sgts. in the other amtrak were giving the same, pre arranged order. Unknown at this time was the enemy situation waiting for us—the troops had their orders—to exit the vehicle when the ramp went down after landing—to move forward past the waterline—take up a prone, firing position—fire only if being fired upon and stand by for the signal to move forward in a Company line. Echo Company would occupy the port side of the landing zone—followed by Golf Company and Hotel Company would follow ‘in trace and fill in the Starboard side of the landing zone. Foxtrot Company was in Reserve aboard ship and would follow once the beach head was secured. Immediately after 2/7 landed—3/7 re boarded the ships to remain off shore in reserve. 6@

We landed—the ramps came down and the troops hurried off the amtraks—no gunfire—what we saw were villagers from the area standing offshore watching this gigantic operation take place—spectators! No enemy fire. It was hot—the troops carried out their assignments and the company formed up. The smell of human feces was overwhelming—apparently the beach was the favorite ‘toilet area’ for the locals. This landing was not what we expected—we still maintained our security posture—having been briefed about guerrilla warfare and how civilians were used to mask the VC. We received one of what became many puzzling orders from ‘on high’ — —not to ‘chamber a round’ until fired upon! As all good Marines we followed those orders until we were in position and nightfall set in—then—like all good Marines we exercised good judgement and prepared

for enemy contact by having our weapons ready for that contact! The villagers were shooed away and forced to the outside of our perimeter operation. Our Company moved inland along with the rest of the Battalion—the Rifle companies fanned out and established a perimeter for the BN.

Each Company had it's own zone to protect —starting at the beach and stretching 180 degrees in a semicircle the perimeter was formed with the four rifle companies of E, F G and H with one of those four held in reserve along with H& S Company and Weapons Company occupying the center area of the perimeter. Highway # 1 paralleled our Perimeter and provided access for our vehicles up and down the line—it was also heavily trafficked by the local Vietnamese.



The villagers were, for the most part, friendly but we were warned to keep our distance—the troops had been told the stories of VC using women, children and old folks to plant explosives, gather intelligence, etc.



Company orders were received and we were ordered to secure the high ground surrounding Qui Nhon—to prevent the possibility of mortar attacks raining down on this critical supply Base from the hills surrounding it. Capt. Tolleson called the platoon leaders together and gave us our assigned 'sector' to secure. We would be choppered in (hill # 586) dropped off and clear a suitable area to defend the position. 7@ We were to dig in , lay wire around our positions and patrol the region we were assigned day and night. We were to set up ambushes on likely enemy pathways and listening posts in and around our positions at night. Each platoon was operating independently while staying in contact with Company HQ. We established artillery target zones by calling in our positions and identifying

likely enemy approach points surrounding our positions. We were indeed choppered to the top of the high ground we were supposed to secure approximately mid day. The choppers landed disgorging the platoon—one by one the choppers came in —the troops scattered into a perimeter in case of an enemy assault on our landing. As usual we waited until all choppers had delivered the entire platoon. This was the adrenaline producing moment we had been expecting—we were essentially alone on top of this Godforsaken piece of real estate looking into the strange land around us not knowing whether or not it was saturated with VC or simply the animals which inhabit the jungle. We found the geographic location we would establish our platoon HQ and perimeter—The platoon Sgt. and I met with the squad leaders and walked the perimeter—pointing out fields of fire, danger zones, etc.—we then identified an area we would use for our toilet needs . Everyone turned to and cleared the area leaving some vegetation for daytime shade and night time camo. We established squad sectors and assigned two Marines to each fox hole position —which each team began to dig, cleared fields of fire for the machine gun (M-60) units and helped set up their positions. We waited till it was dark in case the VC were watching—we did our best to disguise our positions in daylight then change them after dark. We laid concertina wire in a perimeter further down the hill —next we placed anti-personnel (Claymore) mines at strategic locations around the perimeter—these were carefully marked on our platoon map and clearly marked from the friendly side —all troops were shown where these mines were located . Each squad leader controlled the Claymore mines in his assigned sector. Toilet sites

were located inside and outside the perimeter . A helicopter LZ was cleared just outside the perimeter . the choppers would bring in food, water, ammo, mail, visitors from Company or Battalion HQ and remove casualties if necessary. Each platoon in our Company was doing the same things we were in the zones they had been assigned—Lt. Kozak and the Second Platoon, Lt. Boryszewski and the Third Platoon. The Company HQ located in the valley below the high ground was defended by Lt. Joe Lloyd and Weapons Platoon . After dark we went to 50% security and proceeded to clean up, have our evening ‘C’ rations and prepare for our first night completely cut off from the rest of the Company and



Battalion. Our troops were understandably skittish—we had been trained on guerrilla warfare and what to expect from the VC.—The junglelike terrain surrounded us and at night was ominous indeed. Forty Four Marines, a Marine rifle platoon never feels ‘outnumbered’—we knew our perimeter was sound—we knew we could fend off whatever the VC sent after us but still, this was the first night in a combat zone for any of us and the ‘unexpected’ was on everyone’s mind. There is ‘dark’ and there is —-‘dark’! When the Sun went down we settled

into our positions for the night—50% security—one Marine awake in every position. I established my position near the center of our perimeter—my platoon Sgt., radioman and myself dug our positions in close proximity to each other for communications' purpose. I rested from time to time but checked on squad leaders and various positions throughout the night.

The platoon sergeants and squad leaders did the same. We were all tired—from the initial landing, the extreme heat (90-100 degrees), the constant movement, the preparation of our positions and admittedly a little anxiety! The first night or two was pretty much like you would expect—a lot of false alarms—the troops were having to get used to noises they hadn't heard before and on everyone's mind was when Mr. VC would come calling on his new neighbors. The nights and days were hot and we tried to sleep when we could in between patrols to cover our assigned region and maintaining security at our position. The days were spent improving our positions, cleaning our weapons, eating our c-rations, drinking plenty of water that was helicoptered in five gal. 'jerry' cans. We literally 'bathed' out of our helmets—all you could do was pour a little water in the helmet shell and use a rag to wash off the best you could—same with shaving—which we required, even in the field when in a fixed position—the exception was extended patrols when shaving wasn't required. The patrols were run during the daytime hours and were squad sized since we weren't sure of the VC numbers and their activity at this point. The range of our

Sgt. Ingerson on point



patrol activity was approx. 3-4 miles which doesn't seem like much but in the hilly and dense terrain surrounding Qui Nhon it was a 'hike' to complete these patrols. Communications within and between our units was absolutely critical—distance was a factor with our radios—platoon communications internally used the PRC#6 with a range of 1-3 miles—each squad leader had a PRC #6 along with the platoon leader —it was absolutely critical that we maintain contact with company HQ and Battalion artillery support. Our radio batteries had to be maintained and recharged whenever possible. The PRC #10 was the standard radio for Company operations —the PRC #25 was the standard radio for Co. to Bn. communications.—these radios had ranges of 5-10 miles—which was the limit of our patrols. We had 3 or 4 Marines trained in communications as backup for our radio communicator. We stayed in radio contact with company HQ 24/7—we needed to receive info. sent by the CO. throughout the day—and night. The battery 'life' was approx. 60 hours and we always had a backup battery—it was essential equipment —just like our weapons. The exact same routine was taking place in each of the Companies of BLT 2/7. Each of the platoons in E Company covered our TAOR (tactical area of responsibility) with day time patrols, night

time ambushes and we operated our secure perimeters and participated in operations and sweeps that were conducted from time to time with the Company and/or the Battalion.



Chapter 6

Defending Qui Nhon

Our mission was to be a sentinel for Qui Nhon Air Base and the Supply Depot along with the other platoons in E Company and 2/7 , we saturated our zone of responsibility with patrols and ambushes to keep the VC at bay and off balance—not allowing them to get any kind of a foothold close to Qui Nhon. The patrols often had to move through the rice paddies which led to leeches, immersion foot and other health related issues. Water was a necessity but if not treated properly—even when it came from Bn. HQ , it led to dysentery. I had that most unfortunate experience myself and it stayed with me for approximately three weeks—nothing you can do but do what you have to do as often as you have to do it. As a result I lost even more weight—I came ashore in July at approx 195 lbs. —after a couple of months of climbing the hilly terrain, losing sleep, dealing with dysentery I found myself weighing approx. 155 -160 lbs.

A week before 2/7 landed at Qui Nhon—3/7 had also landed there—my former Basic School Colleague and Pine Avenue neighbor , Lt. Hugh Doss, landed there with L Co., 3/7 and participated in the first ever ‘helicopter assault’ launched from ships off shore. Hugh was the XO of L Company—their first mission was to fly into a hostile landing zone to rescue I Company, third Bn., third Marines which had been mauled by the VC in Operation Starlight—most of the officers had been

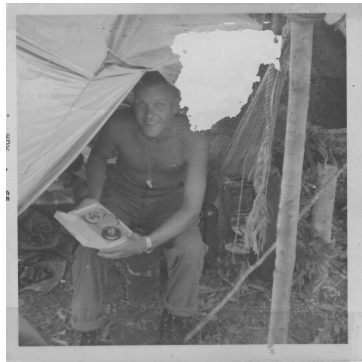
killed. L Co. was attempting to reach the besieged I Company when they were also ambushed—the lead platoon commander was killed. Lt. Doss moved forward to rally the troops in that platoon—they could not reach I Co. because they had to set up a defensive perimeter and evacuate the Marines killed and wounded in that ambush. Later, the next day L Company continued their efforts to reach I Co.—the heat was extreme and several of Hugh's Marines had heat stroke and had to be evacuated—including the Company Commander—Hugh took over the Company and led them safely back to the 3/3 base camp. 2/7 landed a couple of days later and relieved 3/7 of the TAOR. @ 8 More about Lt. Doss and our 'brother battalion'—3/7 later.

A few weeks later our uniforms were literally rotting off our backs—we kept hearing about the new, lightweight uniforms we were going to get—that would dry quickly and were lighter and didn't retain the sweat but helped evaporate it—with a lot of pockets for c rations, ammo—anything—something our regular uniforms didn't have. We also heard about the new 'jungle boots' that were ventilated and dried out quickly.

I did make an observation on one of my brief visits to Battalion HQ that everyone in The Battalion staff and army soldiers walking around the compound all had the new uniforms along with the new boots which were made to drain easier and prevent 'immersion foot' which many of our troops were coming down with. It was obvious that those Marines in the rear area closest to command were

enjoying the privilege of proximity to the warehouses and the senior staff—sad but true! The Marines on the hills surrounding the base were apparently last in line to receive the new goodies—of course I raised hell with anybody who would listen. Finally, after a couple of weeks we received a nice surprise from Company and Battalion HQs—a daily supply of beer and soda ON ICE in huge buckets again delivered by chopper to our positions. The rule from on high was that no Marine could have more than a two beer ration per day. Each Marine could have three drinks (two beer + one soda or one beer and two sodas or three sodas) this was wonderful of course and we looked forward to that ration arriving while on top of that hot, dirty hill! We also began receiving mail from home—again delivery by the chopper. I can't emphasize too much the tremendous boost in morale the effect the simple ice cold drinks had on these young Marines. It was 'something from

familiar logos of Coca Cola, brought America into this Country. Eventually, we new uniforms and boots and rid of the stuff we had worn



home'—and the Budweiser, etc. dusty, violent, strange started receiving the we were glad to get since we landed at

Qui Nhon The troops occupied themselves between patrols by writing letters home, grabbing some shuteye when possible, cleaning their weapons, maintaining their gear and taking care of their sanitary needs. My letters from Kay were absolutely the light of my life at this time. She sent me a small recorder with a tape of kimmie saying her first words—that tape meant everything to me.

Kay assured me they had arrived home safely and that all our stuff was in storage and —most importantly our baby girl was doing fine! The family had embraced them at the Bluefield airport when they arrived home from California. A small army of Gross's and Asburys couldn't wait to see Kay and our new baby —Kimmie. Kay sent pictures of Kimmie and I noticed how much she had grown in just a short period of time.

I was able to keep the little recorder, my writing gear, etc. in the seabag stored within the Battalion Perimeter. I also carried a small 16mm camera about the size of a cigarette lighter that took 32 pictures per roll. I kept that little camera with me most of the time wrapped in a plastic bag and used it to take most of the pictures I've included in this project.

We conducted squad size classes on a range of topics from Vietnamese culture to reviews of land navigation, weapons' characteristics and news from the States. I held Q & A sessions with the platoon from time to time to answer as best I could any question they had about our operations, politics, rumors, etc. We used this time for the troops to make individual announcements about their family, news from home, etc.—these sessions often were light hearted with plenty of laughter as some of the Marines could be real comedians!

We also inspected the troops checking the routine matters of clean and functioning weapons, individual sanitation, and equipment maintenance and upkeep. I also inspected each position to insure the two man foxholes were deep enough—that they had proper cover and clear fields of fire. Capt. Tolleson would call meetings of the Company officers from time to time—each platoon

commander would catch a ride with the supply chopper or a Battalion Jeep from the Motor pool and attend the meeting and be choppered or driven back to our positions. Capt. Tolleson would receive each platoon leaders' briefings re. their



Capt. Fred Tolleson, XO John Clancy

sector—The Skipper would then brief us re. the strategic big picture as far as he knew it and freshen up our missions with new orders from time to time.

The Company staff did a good job of coordinating the logistics to support our operations. The days passed with little fanfare—the VC were elusive and not very active. The nights were long and often shattered with a Marine firing rounds at some of the 'ghosts' that tended to form when staring into the pitch black night—they were still getting used to the idea of being in a combat zone and guerrilla warfare. We honestly didn't know if we were being 'probed' or not most of the time. Then less than three weeks after landing at Qui Nhon came the worst night of my time in the Marine Corps. We had settled in for the night—a half moon was

providing plenty of light over the hills and the valley below. We had , as usual been running patrols all day and had had our evening meal and were settled into another long night with 50% security—one Marine awake and one Marine at rest for four hour cycles during the night. The entire perimeter was ready if the VC decided to pay us a visit.

Chapter 7

Friendly Fire Incident

Jul. 20, At approx. 2300 9@ all hell broke loose on one side of the perimeter— semi automatic rifle fire was taking place—I crouched and ran to the sound of the firing to see what what was happening—keeping low and crawling towards the position where the firing was coming from. Me and corporal Ingerson, the squad leader for the squad occupying that sector of the perimeter, arrived at the position about the same time and saw one of Ingerson’s squad members firing—we then heard a Marine on the left side of the position at another fox hole yell that we had casualties! The Marine that was firing was pumped up and wanted to continue firing at ‘some movement’ he had seen in front of his position—the problem was that he was facing partially inside the perimeter —looking directly at the foxhole next in line on the perimeter. By the time we got him under control and stopped the firing we heard Marines who had arrived at the foxhole where the the firing had been directed yell for the corpsman. I ran to that position and found that two of my Marines had been shot—and it was bad! We did everything we could to save them but both were gone—the shots had left no chance for either of them to survive and the corpsman, had to declare that they were officially dead. A med evacuation was called at daybreak and our two KIA were choppered back to Battalion HQ. The ‘friendly fire’ tragedy resulted in the first KIA casualties in the Battalion since landing at Qui Nhon! As I later stated in a written report of the

incident this was an accident that should never have happened. The Marine shooter had apparently been facing in the proper direction in his fox hole — observing his sector of responsibility—had become sleepy, dozed off and unconsciously rotated his body back and to the right side of his position. When he woke up he was actually now facing down the perimeter looking directly towards the next position on his left—approximately ten yards. Meanwhile the two Marines in that fox hole had broken a platoon rule by sitting on the lip of the hole instead of inside the hole—this couldn't be seen by the squad leader in the darkness from his position—so the Marine shooter woke up from dozing off—looked at the movement he saw—thinking it was in front of his position which he had been facing—he saw movement—thinking the VC were breaching the perimeter and opened fire—emptying his magazine into the other two Marines. There was nothing we could do. We took the errant shooter's weapon and placed him under arrest until we could transport him back to HQ for disposition. The platoon was obviously upset at what had happened and we mourned the loss of two of our platoon 'family' in such a senseless manner.

The routine was pretty much the same day to day through the hot days of July and August. The days and nights were tiring, hot and frustrating. We had occasional enemy contact—mostly on our recon patrols where 'hit and run' tactics were used by the VC to harass our patrols. From time to time we killed or captured the VC that were involved in those attacks. Occasionally, one of our Marines would get hit and either killed or wounded by these 'hit and run' tactics.

Throughout the Battalion area of responsibility the same routines were happening.

A squad ambush from The second platoon (Kozak's platoon) was sprung on a VC patrol late one night that took the lives of 16 VC moving on a trail near the front lines of the Battalion perimeter around the Qui Nhon Base of operations. That VC patrol was armed with small weapons and explosive devices and were moving on a restricted trail after the curfew established for the surrounding villages. 10@ Sit Rep.



Sept. came— along with the monsoon season. The rain was both a welcome relief to the hot, dry conditions we had lived with and a nuisance in that our gear had to be protected—our 'hooches' (poncho covered fox holes) leaked and created muddy, wet and uncomfortable conditions.

Patrols had to deal with driving rain, flooded streams and soaked uniforms. Marines were raised in uncomfortable conditions as our training mirrored the conditions we would face in combat—so the weather, the terrain, the

uncomfortable conditions were taken in stride by our Marines. Marines, for the most part, are not 'made' to remain in a defensive posture—we're made for assaults on the enemy—across beaches—in jungle terrain—in mountains or desert conditions. Keeping our troops occupied in constructive ways and helping them keep their morale and spirits up became a key focus of mine and our NCO's as well. The patrols that we ran throughout our TAOR were tiring but also offered the troops an opportunity to leave the 'perimeter' where they were living like homeless people. On these patrols our troops came alive—they were alert—they had to be or else face the possibility of tripping a booby trapped IED, stepping into a punji trap, walking into an ambush or being shot by a sniper. When they did happen to run into a VC patrol these Marines became a thing of beauty to behold—their lineage showed as they displayed the training and skills they had honed since Boot Camp. After just a few weeks of actual combat experience they executed their maneuvers to perfection. They had learned how to advance on 'hidden' enemy positions while providing covering fire for each other. They used smoke grenades to recover from surprise attacks and occasional sniper fire. Most importantly they operated like the 'team' they were—using arm and hand signals they had practiced—responding to commands instantly and willingly—they 'did it right'!

Chapter 8

The NCO 'Factor'

The NCO's of the First Platoon, Echo Company were the glue that made our platoon 'team' work, Corporal Nelson, Corporal Ingerson, Sgt. Fontaine—our squad leaders—were like co captains of a football team and we worked together like a well oiled machine. S/Sgt. Wenger, our platoon Sgt. was a gruff, tough Marine Sgt. who set the example for these younger Marines. S/Sgt. Wenger was also the 'conscience' of the platoon —our Marines would confide in him and he would provide wise and sometimes tough advice such as 'suck it up Marine' if someone was complaining about something none of us could do anything about i.e.. the heat—the rain—the hills! Our squad leaders were the 'disciplinary' enforcers when necessary. Each squad leader considered himself unsatisfactory if a disciplinary matter found it's way to my attention—they wanted to handle these matters internally—they looked upon their squad as family. This spirit is the essence of the Marine Corps. —first Marines are trained to be responsible for their own behavior—if there are times when circumstances develop where that becomes an issue then the NCO's and even fellow Marines will step in and immediately correct the problem—this rarely happened—to my knowledge?! in our platoon. Our NCO's were the best at providing that small unit leadership that is absolutely necessary in the United States Marine Corps.!

A platoon of Marines is a powerful force. The reason is the training and preparation that begins the day they step off the bus in 'boot camp' in Parris Island, S.C. or San Diego, CA. Marines know their way around the 'killing fields' of combat. Their training is the best in the world—each Marine has met the very high standards necessary to become a Marine. The culture and the traditions of the Corps are ingrained in their character. No matter where they're sent—no matter which unit they are assigned—they fit in and become an instant contributing member of that unit. A Marine platoon consists of three squads—each squad consists of three four man fire teams and a squad leader. The platoon Guide, platoon Sgt. and platoon leader make up the entire platoon. On occasion the platoon can be reinforced from the Company weapons platoon with a machine gun section, mortar section and rocket launchers. In addition, heavier artillery support is available from the Battalion in the form of 106 mm recoilless rifles, 81 mm mortars 4.2 in. mortar section, 105mm Howitzers, tanks, flamethrowers, etc. The Marine Rifle Company consisting of three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon fully supported by Battalion artillery and close air support is a formidable force and is the basic combat unit of the USMC. This is why Marines never feel 'outnumbered'—the cohesive infantry unit coupled with tenacious, well trained Marines and supported with artillery and air resources is a battle tested combination that has proven time and again to be invincible on the battle field.

Chapter 9

United Way

Sometime during Sept. as I recall we were told that a 'pay officer' would be coming to our 'hill' to pay the troops. Sure enough a helicopter brought a Lt. I didn't know up to our position —He was dressed in his khaki uniform with short sleeves—he found a place to set up and asked that we have the troops stand by —in alphabetic order to get paid. I approached the Lt. and asked 'what's this all about'? These Marines have no place to spend the money—it may get lost while they're stumbling around in the surrounding terrain—why can't this wait until we get back to the Battalion bivouac area?

I knew that many of these Marines had made arrangements for their paychecks to be sent to family members at home—keeping a few dollars for themselves each month for bare essentials—other Marines would receive their full paycheck amount. I also learned they were being paid in cash! The Lt. said he was under orders from Bn. HQ and that it wasn't something he could change. He also told me that he would be deducting each Marine's 'fair share' to the United Way campaign. Trying to remain calm although inside I was ready to explode—I said is this about competition between the Battalion Commanders, Regimental HQ, etc.? He said that it was likely! I suddenly knew that the reason these tired, hungry, thirsty, dirty Marines were being paid was so money could be 'taken' from their pay so some senior officer would 'look good' in competition with the other

officers! My fuse blew! I told the Lt. that I would be riding back with him to Bn. HQ.—I requested ‘Mast’ with Capt. Tolleson—presented him with my complaint—he listened but indicated it was out of his hands —not a resolution he could make. According to the rules of ‘Requesting Mast’ if the issue couldn’t be resolved at the lowest level of command it was to be passed to the next highest level—which would be Col. Utter—the Battalion Commander. This was NOT a ‘routine’ action on my part—I had never ‘requested Mast’ in my time in the Corps. —I was told that senior officers did not like junior officers ‘requesting mast’ and that it could be a career ending move. The Colonel agreed to see me and I presented myself to him in command headquarters tent. The XO, Col. Wilson, met me and escorted me in to see Col. Utter. The Col. asked me what this was all about. I explained what had happened and how I felt about the United Way fiasco—I remained ‘at attention’ in front of the Col’s field desk while he listened to my explanation. When I finished he said “ is that it? That’s your reason for requesting Mast Lt.?! I said ‘yes sir’. The Col. said “ you’re dismissed—get out of here Lt.”! I realized that I was not going to ‘win’ on this issue—that it was over and to push it any further would be counter productive. I did feel that I had at least carried an important message to Col. Utter and that my troops deserved that. For what it’s worth the matter had no negative consequences affecting my ‘career’, my fitness reports, promotions and assignments. In fact, knowing Col. Utter’s reputation as ‘one of the troops’ I think he probably agreed with me! Later on—after the ‘mixmaster’ of units our Company and my platoon was transferred to A Co., 1/4—two months later I was assigned to the Battalion Commander’s

Staff of 1/4 as the S-2—that move fortified my belief that my ‘career’ was ‘ok’ and if anything may have been ‘enhanced’ by my meeting with Col. Utter that day in Sept. although, that’s was certainly not the reason I did what I did.

Chapter 10

Beauty and the Beast

Viet Nam was a beautiful Country. It was stark in it's contrasts. The flat lands, the rice paddies, the shoreline villages contrasted with the rapidly rising high country, the dense jungle growth and the high jungle canopy—the steep mountain terrain. The greens were very green and the blue water was very blue. I could see myself enjoying living there—- The simple, ageless villages and hamlets were picturesque—the Vietnamese people were hearty, simple, hard working, family oriented folks who were simply trying to get along the best they could. Many did not understand what the war was all about—why Americans were tramping thru their villages, ransacking their humble shacks and destroying their rice harvests and frightening the children. Marines from the first platoon, Echo Company, 2nd. Bn., 7th. Marines carried out our missions to destroy any 'VC friendly resources' including 'storage centers' for rice and weapons concealed in certain village shacks. Our Marines had to enter the 'homes' of innocent looking women and children and search for enemy caches—this bothered our Marines who felt they were intruding on the innocent lives of vulnerable people—we did not take our missions lightly. There were those who were critical of the United States' involvement in the Viet Nam conflict—our Marines didn't fully understand why we were there other than that's where our Country and our Marine Corps wanted us to go. Our mission was to help the

Republic of South Viet Nam defeat and fend off the enemies of that government and who wanted to overthrow it—this included North Viet Nam and Ho Chi Minh with support from Communist China and The USSR—at the same time we were to ‘win the hearts and minds’ of the Vietnamese people thru education, medical resources, community improvement projects for clean water and sanitation. As time passed and we repeated our ‘Search and Destroy’ operations over and over I often doubted what we were doing and why we were doing it. The First Platoon did not torch villages—we did not beat up innocent Vietnamese—I was still bothered personally whenever we had to destroy a cache of rice that I knew the farmer had worked hard to harvest. These thoughts, of course, I kept to myself. When speaking to my troops or answering their questions I attempted to be as supportive of our mission as possible. Our troops, read the news articles about the war in the mail sent from loved ones at home—so there was no secret that Many americans were opposed to our being in Viet Nam this ‘movement grew with each passing day.

Our patrols would often complete their assignment without enemy contact. This could have led to a sense of complacency but that rarely happened. Our Marines remained vigilant and were aware that this was the nature of guerrilla warfare—The VC did not follow patterns or routines. Surprise and unexpected actions were ‘expected’—we knew that at any moment we could be attacked in a variety of ways and by an enemy of unknown size. From time to time one of our

patrols would make contact with small VC patrols or snipers in which case our patrols would kill or capture those enemy combatants.

On one such occasion we were fired upon from a treeline near a small Hamlet—



we returned fire and advanced on the location of the small arms fire—we discovered three dead VC—from our returned fire—one of the three combatants was in a North Viet Nam (NVA) uniform. All were armed with relatively new weapons. We followed procedure and checked their bodies for intelligence—maps, correspondence—anything. I examined the dead NVA soldier—found a wallet—opened it—saw his ID—he was indeed an NVA soldier and I saw something else—a picture of this soldier , his wife and a baby girl. I stared at this picture and tears came to my eyes—I realized that if our roles had been reversed —he could be looking down at me and finding a picture exactly like his—a picture of me, Kay and Kimmie! It reminded me of the oft asked question ‘why are we here’? This scene was repeated often over the next several months.

From time to time our Battalion would conduct 'search and destroy' operations aimed at preventing an enemy buildup in our 'Tactical Area of Responsibility'. These operations were most often based upon intelligence being provided by the South Vietnamese Army (the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam) and local intelligence developed by friendly villagers. Again, these operations often produced sporadic enemy contact in the early weeks of our occupation of Qui Nhon and the surrounding TAOR. Each platoon in E Company had assigned areas of responsibility—we were given our patrol routes by the Company CO who often received them from Battalion S-2 and S-3 (Intelligence and operations)—these were often given to us as overlays for our maps showing coordinates we were to stay within. The terrain we traversed was as diverse as could be—from mountainous, steep and hilly to flat, wet and open. We often had to maneuver around and thru villages and hamlets and at other times we were in thick and seemingly unpopulated jungle brush . Our uniforms and equipment



took a beating —from wet to dry and always dirty and soaked with sweat.

Our weapons required constant maintenance and upkeep to prevent rust and corrosion from affecting their ability to function when we needed them—Marines in combat always check our weapons—on every break the first thing we do is insure that their weapon is able to fire—that there is nothing clogging the barrel or interfering with the firing pin, etc. Marine patrols have to constantly be ready to fight—to anticipate unexpected enemy attacks and all Marines know that their life often depends upon the weapons they have. Marines may be dirty and covered in mud but their weapons are always clean, well oiled and ready to fire. If there are circumstances where the weapons have been exposed to harsh conditions then, as soon as it is possible, time is taken to clean and maintain those weapons.

Whenever possible we encouraged our troops to remove their filthy uniforms and air out the uniforms, their webbed gear and their bodies. Uniforms regs are strictly enforced in the Marine Corps. From boot camp on Marines are taught to wear their uniforms ‘correctly’. The cover is worn a certain way, the ‘military line with the trousers, belt buckle and shirt lining up, shirt always tucked in, boots shined, trowser legs bloused, rank insignia placed exactly on the collars. Once in combat adjustments and accommodations have to be made to the regs.— although, uniformity is still required re. the wearing of the 782 gear, packs, e-tools, canteens, etc.. These are worn the same from Marine to Marine—even

under combat conditions. Allowing Marines to remove their shirts while in a secure location became necessary for health and sanitary reasons. There were pictures of Marines with these uniform accommodations which found their way into the news media and some folks may have wondered whether or not our vaunted Marine discipline had broken down—nothing was further from the truth—we were insuring that our troops avoided ‘jungle rot’—immersion foot’ and other maladies that are associated with constant damp clothing and wet/dirty conditions. Unfortunately, as the war continued into the late 1960’s these ‘relaxed’ conditions seemed to escalate and our Marines appeared to look more like homeless people than the proud U. S. Marines they were. This process of ‘airing out’ was carefully orchestrated around considerations of security and discipline. In 1965-66 E Company required frequent ‘foot inspections’ which required the troops to remove their boots and be inspected by the squad leaders and /or the corpsman—this produced some familiar ‘bitching’ among the troops but was absolutely necessary and did help reduce the number of cases of immersion foot in our platoon. If we were fortunate enough to be close to a fresh water stream or creek the troops were allowed to bathe and wash their uniforms—hanging them on nearby shrubs and branches to dry out. this simple activity allowed them to freshen up from time to time and made a huge difference in morale.



Asbury with the squad leaders of first Platoon

Other than those times when we relaxed the uniform regs. our Marines were required to wear the full utility uniform properly including the flak jacket. We continued to have rifle inspections—yes—even in the field. Troops were exposed to probing questions re. information they were supposed to know—just as they would back in garrison.

Chapter 11

The Bee Attack

Our platoon was on patrol deep in the mountains near Qui Nhon—we were tired and thirsty and running out of water. Our mission was to patrol the mountainous region assigned to us to prevent possible enemy infiltration into that high country overlooking the Qui Nhon supply base. We had been on the move for a couple of days and finally were traversing a ridge line. We noticed that there did indeed appear to have been some heavy foot traffic on that trail we were on. Villagers tended to stay in the lowlands—tending their crops, etc.—they had very little reason to be moving on that ridge line so we believed the VC were indeed operating up there to avoid the patrols in the valleys below. The platoon was exhausted from climbing the high terrain and we were low on water (two canteens per Marine when we started)—we had not been resupplied since leaving Co. HQ the day before and it wasn't likely we would be in position to be resupplied for another couple of days since our mission was to operate as clandestine as possible—helicopters bringing in water would be a dead giveaway that we were in enemy territory and the VC would know exactly where we were—so finding a fresh water supply was a priority on our mind. I directed the platoon into a secure perimeter to take a rest break. A secure perimeter meant that 50% of the platoon were 'on guard' and the other 50% were resting. I met with my squad leaders and the platoon Sgt. (S/Sgt. Wenger) and informed them that I

was going to do a brief recon up ahead to see if I could find a water source—S/Sgt. Wenger would be in command while I was gone—I took my radio man—PFC. Harris with me—we carried a PRC #6 with us to stay in touch with the platoon while doing our recon—PFC Harris was also armed with his M-14 rifle—I had my .45 pistol— — the PRC #6 was capable of communicating from 1-3 miles—each of my squad leaders had a PRC #6—S/Sgt. Wenger kept our main source of communication which was the PRC #10—it was our main contact with Company HQ and could operate up to 5-6 miles in radius. Harris and I left the platoon and moved forward along the trail—stopping occasionally to check out possible water sources—we had moved down the trail maybe 3/4 of a mile when we heard vietnamese voices up ahead—it sounded as if it could be a VC patrol—they couldn't see us and we couldn't see them—yet! Using hand signals I directed Harris to get off the trail to our left and stay down—I ran to the right and dived under a big dead tree maybe 20 yards off the trail. I was praying that Harris had found a secure spot to land also. Within seconds I heard a loud roar—like someone had turned on a huge vacuum cleaner—I was lying parallel with the log, as far under it as I could scoot—I had my .45 in ready to fire position—I could also hear the VC patrol up on the trail which we had just vacated. I could hear their excited voices as they realized what the roar was—just as I did. The big dead tree I was lying under was hollow and it was filled with a bee nest! At about that same time the huge bees began stinging me and swarming all over the area. The VC were alarmed and I could hear it in their voices—THE BEES. I was staying as still as I could—I did my best to cover my neck and face as the

bees were all over my body —stinging me thru my clothes—I remained as still as I could as each sting felt like a hypodermic needle —the VC patrol apparently did not see Harris or myself—they were focused on the bees. The VC decided to reverse their direction and go the other way. This was good because, otherwise, they would've run right into my platoon. I was in great pain at this point—my entire body was aflame with bee stings—later we counted close to fifty +. I waited as long as I could and quietly worked my way back to the platoon area. PFC Harris was already there and had briefed S/Sgt. Wenger who was in the process of mounting a rescue mission to go get me. I nearly collapsed onto a poncho they had laid out for me—the bee stings looked like golf balls all over my body. Our corpsman began administering steroids to keep the swelling down. We had to hold up there that night as I became very ill with all the poison in my system. By morning I felt a little better but not good. We had to get moving—at this point finding water was our main priority—we were down to approx. 3/4 canteens of water for the entire platoon —we rationed our water so that each Marine could at least get a swallow of water as we searched for a water supply.

Chapter 12

Mt. Spring At Just The Right Time

The next morning after the 'bee attack' and the close call with the VC patrol—the platoon continued into the mountainous region to which we had been assigned. I held up the platoon as we neared the end of the ridge line—I studied my map — examining the contour lines of the terrain immediately before us. I knew from past experience (Recon, etc.) that mountain streams formed often where the contour lines of the terrain came together in a 'V' shape—I marked one such place on my map and guided our platoon patrol down the mountain we were on towards it. The terrain was rugged, rocky and difficult—as we approached the 'V' feature we began to hear the sound of water rushing—like a small waterfall. We continued thru the brush until finally we came to a lush, wet basin at the bottom of a small waterfall—water was gushing out of the side of the mountain down to the basin below then down into a stream approx. 10 ft. across and deep enough to submerge your body into.. We were elated but the troops could only 'celebrate' silently since we were still 'clandestine'. I set up a perimeter with 50% security while the men filled their canteens—using their ' halazone tablets' (water purification) to kill whatever germs may be in the water. We had been hot, dry and very thirsty—now we were cooler, wet and satiated with cool mountain water. The water appeared to emanate from a spring but we couldn't be sure—it was probably safe to drink but we couldn't take that chance—the troops didn't seem

to mind as they drank water to their heart's content. We established our security to permit these Marines an opportunity to wash off downstream from where our drinking water was obtained. The spirit of these Marines jumped a thousand degrees! We had cool, fresh water—we were rested—we were cool and we were clean—there wasn't too many times we could say that on this extended patrol. The cold water felt good on my bee stings!

Chapter 13

Night Time Raid to Capture a Viet Cong Hamlet Chief

Aug. 30—approximately 1200 hrs.¹¹@—Capt. Tolleson called the Company officers together at the Company HQ Command tent—he had the map of the region laid out before him on a field table. The Skipper proceeded to tell us that we would execute a Company sized raid on a distant Hamlet later that night. He drew a rough map of the Hamlet we were to raid—he placed the gate and several huts immediately inside the ‘gate’ of the Hamlet and drew an X on the hut that was supposed to house the VC Hamlet Chief. He pointed out the location of the Hamlet on the map—giving us the exact coordinates. Our intelligence was a ‘friendly’ villager who despised the VC—an informant. The informant was deemed to be credible by our interpreters. We had to strike quickly because this VC commander apparently moved often. Capt. Tolleson proceeded to issue our Orders—Situation—VC Hamlet chief and possible valuable intelligence were in a known location, the Village of Bac Tang. Mission—Capture that VC Hamlet Chief and intelligence data. Execution—we would launch a Company sized, night time raid on the target before dawn of the next day. Capt. Tolleson proceeded to give us our time of departure from Company HQ which would be after dark—he prescribed ‘soft’ uniforms (no helmets) and light packs—all gear would be tied down—no rattles—nothing that shined or glistened—faces and hands would be camouflaged with the camo sticks we carried—communications would be arm

and hand only —radios would be carried but not used until after the raid. First platoon (my platoon) would be the point or ‘advance guard’—Capt. Tolleson provided us with other details including the communications and logistics) ammo., meals, water, etc. This ‘raid’ patrol would mean that approx. 220 Marines would move quietly thru rugged, mountainous terrain avoiding trails or paths that passed near our target. We would move in column formation—small strips of tape were placed on the back collar of each Marine so that the men could keep within one pace of the man in front—the patrol would be moving under cover of darkness. Preparation for the raid/assault was based upon training we had engaged in while at Camp Pendleton during our ‘raid training’. I organized my point platoon into three groups—the raid unit (a squad) which would surround the target hut and capture the VC Hamlet Chief—I was part of that unit. The next unit was the security unit (a squad) that would set up a perimeter around the target hut while we initiated the raid. The third unit (a squad) was the intelligence squad—they would immediately search the inside of the hut for any intelligence available. My platoon rehearsed these maneuvers that afternoon while preparing for the time of departure later that day. The remainder of the Company—the other two platoons (2n. and 3rd.) reviewed their orders and prepared for the mission—their job was to secure the entire Hamlet by establishing a perimeter around it when we arrived on site. Each platoon and each squad within each platoon prepared for the patrol that afternoon—inspections were conducted and checks and double checks done. Weapons were fired to insure there were no malfunctioning weapons. While the platoon

leaders prepared the platoons we depended upon small unit leadership which is paramount in these situations. Fire team leaders, squad leaders —each Marine squad leader / fire team leader not only gets himself ready but he makes sure his fire team/squad is also ready. Our platoon sergeants hovered over their men like hawks insuring that the men, their gear and weapons were ready .

1900 Sept. 29, 1965 Our Company formed up and we moved out—slipping into the underbrush almost immediately —I had the map and had calculated our azimuths from point to point on the map. I was ‘on point’ because of the darkness and the dense undergrowth I had to depend on my compass for an accurate direction to the village. Capt. Tolleson was immediately behind me and I would confer with him from time to time to point out where we were on the map relative to our target. We moved slowly and quietly because of the undergrowth and the darkness—100+ - Marines —in column—moving quietly thru the heavy undergrowth of the mountains West of Qui Nhon—our time target was to be at our ‘line of departure’ at the front entrance of the Hamlet by 0200 the next morning—a distance of approx. four miles from our Co. HQ.

As anticipated the progress was slow because of the terrain and because we were avoiding trails—our progress was checked against our ‘rally points’ that we had marked on our maps which were based upon our estimates of moving our Company at a reasonable rate through the rough terrain. We had a ‘dark moon’ and conditions were fairly good—a slight breeze helped mask our movement thru

the terrain. We weaved our way thru the thick underbrush over the hilly and mountainous terrain—the long green line moved as it was supposed to—quietly, steadily and purposefully—we hit our ‘rally points’ almost exactly and were actually ahead of our time estimates by a few min. at each point. As the ‘point’ for the Company I felt the weight of responsibility to get us to our destination and to get us there on time with our estimate.

We made it to the village of Bac Tang ^{12@} and the Hamlet Gates with a little time to spare —so far everything had gone smoothly and we were at our pre arranged ‘Line of Departure’—quietly Capt. Tolleson moved the Company into position forming a perimeter around the hamlet—my platoon headed straight for our objective—The VC Hamlet Chief’s hut which was located a few meters inside the gated Hamlet’s entrance was encircled by one of my squads. There was a dim light showing through the covered window —the other two squads held positions close by—ready to initiate the raid—a fire team eased up to the door—when given the signal they burst through the flimsy door —I followed with my .45 in the ready position. The hut consisted of one living room sized room with a loft above. There were four people inside—two (a male and a female) in a hammock to the left upon entering the room and two (a male and a female) overhead , also in a hammock, in the loft—the fire team leader restrained the two people on the left—no resistance because they were still waking up—we had completely taken them by surprise—those two were taken outside to the remaining squad members to be restrained. I was inside with the other two

members of the fire team and we had our weapons pointed directly at the two people in the loft—we gestured for them to come down the ladder and they complied—like the previous two—all four of our captives were nude. I proceeded to look for hidden compartments or stashes of rice, ammo, weapons or documents—we found all of the above hidden in the walls. As the captives came down the ladder the female was first -- one member of the fire team took her outside to the other members of the squad to restrain her—at this point neither of the three captives had given us any resistance. The fourth captive came down the ladder with the fire team leader pointing his M-14 at him—the fourth captive we learned later was the VC Hamlet Chief that we had come for. He arrived at the bottom of the ladder and turned around with his hands behind his head . The fire team leader motioned the captive to the door and backed up while keeping his rifle pointed at him. I saw that the fire team leader had the captive seemingly under control so I turned to continue my search of the hut. Suddenly, everything became chaotic—the fire team leader —while backing up with the captive, backed out of the door—the VC saw an opportunity and kicked the broken door shut—leaving my Marine on the outside—and me and the Hamlet Chief on the inside. I whipped around when I heard the door slam—by then the Hamlet chief pulled his hands from behind his head revealing he had a 9mm pistol which he proceeded to aim and fire at me! He missed as I drew my .45 and fired back—and missed—we were engaged in a game of ‘dodge ball’ with bullets—I moved and fired and he moved and fired —I emptied one magazine and replaced it with another—the VC continued firing as did I —we both missed—he ran out of ammo

and ran for a back door and into the arms of members of my platoon which had heard the gunfire and taken refuge behind whatever they could find until the VC ran outside—they restrained him along with the other three—We found documents that later proved to be valuable intelligence info.

The ‘gunfight at the ok corral’ was not pretty—I had emptied two magazines at my enemy in a room sized space—and missed! I had qualified as ‘sharpshooter’ with the pistol!! Fortunately, my enemy had missed also. It’s difficult to explain what it’s like to try to steady your aim while moving around and your opponent is doing the same—call it luck or misfortune—at least I didn’t get hit. The Marines outside of the hut took cover until the gunfire subsided—there was really nothing they could do but let us ‘fight it out’!

Meanwhile the other platoons of E Co. were searching the village and finding VC combatants asleep as we had done with the VC Hamlet Chief—the raid produced nine captured VC and a windfall of intelligence data along with captured weapons. ¹³@ Capt. Tolleson also ‘rescued’ a dog that seemed to take to him—We knew that the Vietnamese ‘ate’ dogs for the meat—we didn’t see many when we passed through the villages—he brought the dog back to the Company CP and named the dog ‘Bac-Tang’ after the Hamlet he came from. The night time , company sized raid had been successful and E Company had no casualties.

Chapter 14

The Big Snake

Our days through August and Sept. were spent running patrols, conducting sweeps and participating in Battalion operations. As most Marines will tell you we had a range of enemies other than the VC and The NVA. Those 'other' enemies were leeches—they we picked up while traveling in the flooded rice paddies and certain streams, dysentary from the water we drank, snakes, large mosquitos and rats. On one patrol our platoon was crossing a valley covered with 'elephant grass'. The grass was eight-ten ft. tall and when standing on a ridge line looking down on it —it appeared to be just regular grass. Once we were in it we realized we were invisible from the hills and —we couldn't see a thing in front of us except the Marine's back that was breaking the trail. I had a fire team (four Marines) on point and we were in column formation crossing the valley—all I could see up ahead was the back of the trailing member of the Fire team—about half way across the valley I noticed that one after the other —the Marines were stepping over a 'log'—as I approached the 'log' —it moved! That got our attention—the platoon gathered around in a circle to watch the largest snake any of us had ever seen—it was indeed, as big around 'as a log'! We don't know how long it was—we never saw the head—but the snake moved

across our path for what seemed like several minutes—until finally, the tail end of the thing passed.

Chapter 15

Rotation Rest

As time passed our Battalion's 'TAOR' (tactical area of responsibility) changed —it became larger—our patrols extended deeper and deeper in the surrounding mountains and valleys—E co., F Co., G Co. and H Co. saturated the region around Qui Nhon known as Binh Dinh Province. ¹³@ Intelligence regarding enemy movements was gathered by our patrols, the Recon Platoon assigned to Bn., friendly forces (the South Vietnamese Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN). The VC and the NVA ran their own recon patrols, ambush patrols and staged assaults on smaller units from time to time —as long as the numbers were in their favor.

Col. Utter developed a policy of rotating companies from the field back to a rest area within the battalion perimeter—it was something like seven days in the field and four days back to the Battalion perimeter. This allowed troops to get hot showers, hot chow, receive the mail, wash their uniforms, maintain their weapons and gear and—rest. Even though we were supposedly back in a 'rest area' there were still work details, guard duty, meetings and inspections—all part of the Marine Corps way—stay ready to fight—rest didn't really mean 'rest' —it meant 'recharge'!

These 'rest' breaks were about the only time we could catch up with friends in other platoons and in other companies. I rarely saw Lt. Boryszewski , Lt. Kozak, Lt. Lloyd, Capt. Tolleson or Lt. Clancy unless we were back in the rear area. We did see one another occasionally when we were on a Company or Battalion Sweep or Operation. The same was true with my fellow officers from F, G, H and H& S Companies. I heard what other platoons—other companies were doing and I was proud to be a part of 2/7. We were accomplishing our mission by controlling our TAOR. That took everybody—every Marine—every platoon — every company and Battalion HQ. Qui Nhon was a vital supply depot with an airfield, shipping facilities and was critical to the operations of all Marine Units and Army Units in the mid section of Viet Nam.

Protection for the Secretary of Defense—Robert McNamara

On August 19th. the Defense Secretary , Robert McNamara, came to visit Qui Nhon and my platoon was selected to provide security at the airport for the Secretary. ^{15@} We had to 'clean up' a bit—made sure we looked sharp because of the circumstances at the airport—we wanted to present a good image for 2/7, our Company and the USMC. After living like monkeys for the past six weeks we again looked like 'barracks Marines'. Since we had not been involved with anything like this before we developed our own strategies we would use if there was a problem at the airport. Marines 'rehearse' their plans and we were no exception—we determined that we would form a perimeter, if necessary, around

the Secretary and his party. We rehearsed the movement of that perimeter to be able to move with the Secretary to a secure location —that movement would involve ‘fixed bayonets’ if ‘crowd control’ was the issue. Keep in mind—in Viet Nam—the enemy was ‘everywhere’—they looked like the everyday civilians that populated the Qui Nhon area. We would absolutely not allow anything to happen to the Secretary ! Of course, there were other units at the airport in case problems developed —As it turned out the Secretary’s visit was calm and without incident. Our platoon stayed close and ready if called upon. The Secretary sent us a ‘Letter of Appreciation’ later.

Bigfoot Encounter

Our patrols, operations and sweeps continued thru the late stages of Summer and into the Monsoon season. I had an 'unusual' experience on one of our long range patrols into the extended TAOR. We were moving up into the mountains from the lowlands and were traversing a dry stream bed—it was rocky but clear of the thick, heavy underbrush we had been experiencing—we had been steadily climbing for a while so I held up the platoon, formed a secure perimeter and called a non smoking break (VC could smell cigarette smoke for great distances). I wanted to check out the immediate area up ahead in the direction we were headed. I moved up the stream bed carefully watching the surrounding terrain. I rounded a bend in the stream bed—out of sight of my platoon — decided I had better not go any further—I was about to turn around and head back when I heard strange noises coming from up ahead—I couldn't see beyond another bend in the stream bed—the noise sounded like something was crashing thru the underbrush and making 'animal like' sounds—and it was coming in my direction. I pulled my weapon from my holster—slipped into the underbrush and hid behind some rocks. A couple of minutes later I saw a huge, orange creature (an orangutang), coming down the stream bed—he was bigger than me and looked like 'bigfoot'—he was angry about something—he was picking up logs , rocks and tree limbs and banging them against the rocks and making loud animal

sounds! He stopped up ahead about fifty yards away from me—held his head up as if he was sniffing the air and looked in my direction. I couldn't tell whether or not he saw me but I'm pretty sure he 'smelled' me! I was hoping I wouldn't have to shoot him but ready to do that if I was attacked. Fortunately, he turned and scurried into the underbrush on the other side of the stream bed. I waited a few min. and moved back down the stream bed back to my platoon.

Chapter 17

The Bamboo forest

We were moving our patrol deep into our TAOR—a two day loop that would take us to the outer limits of our TAOR. Capt. Tolleson had briefed me on the possibility of a battalion sized NVA unit moving in that area—our intelligence had made him aware of this. Platoon sized patrols like this are not easy—we had to carry enough c-rations for at least two days and find our own water supply since helo supply was not going to happen in territory known to be NVA occupied. It was a clandestine patrol—more recon in nature—to gather info. on that enemy unit—if they were there—and report back—not engage. We were into our second day of moving slowly along our prescribed routes outlined on the overlay that Capt. Tolleson and I worked out and reported back to Battalion when I held the platoon up—checked our location on the map—reported back to Co. HQ—no enemy contact and our coordinates. We were tired—hot and needed to rest—we set up a clandestine perimeter and established security so some of our guys could sleep, eat and replenish—while other members of the platoon stood watch. As usual I sent my point fire team on ahead to reconnoiter and let me know what we were facing—terrain, etc.. At times like this when the platoon couldn't 'bivouac', we simply wrapped up in our ponchos—hid in the underbrush and grabbed a little shut-eye as best as possible—but always with security posted. We were buried deep in the undergrowth and even I couldn't see my

Marines as I surveyed our position. I was waiting for the Fire Team to return—a little worried that they weren't back yet. Finally, they emerged quietly out of the underbrush and were out of breath—the fire team leader briefed me and the platoon sergeant Wenger on their recon. They had spotted an NVA unit wearing tan uniforms—size anywhere from Company to Battalion in the valley below our position and the team was worried that they may have been seen. The team estimated that the NVA unit was maybe one mile to a mile and a half away. We briefed the platoon about the situation—everyone made sure they were locked and loaded—We set up a strategy to defend ourselves on the move—we placed our machine gun section near the rear and set up a 'rear guard' (a fire team) and we moved away from the position and up the mountain we were on. We were going to try an outrun the NVA but were prepared to fight if necessary. Radio communications were sporadic with a lot of static—I was trying to let our Company CO know what was happening and that we may need reinforcements —I gave our coordinates and we took off—we were in column formation —we were taking a straight line approach to reaching the top of the mountain—no trail —we ran into a 'bamboo forest' which was too thick to walk thru so we chopped our way up the hill—we had a couple of machetes and we were putting them to good use—it was hot so we had to swap the 'cutters' up front often—I took my turns as well—progress was slow—a Marine from the rear guard came up the column and reported they could hear the NVA several hundred yards back. We were making progress thru the bamboo forest and finally we came into the clear at the top of the mountain—we picked up speed —moving downhill made a huge

difference along with the thinner vegetation. These Marines were tired but we kept moving —almost double time. The squad leaders were making sure everyone was accounted for. We arrived near the base of the mountain and emerged into the valley below. I formed up the platoon—set up a perimeter and took a rest break—the rear guard rejoined the platoon. We couldn't see or hear any sign of the NVA—apparently they had been caught in the bamboo forest too and that had slowed them up while we were moving out. We had outrun them! I reported our sighting to Company HQ—who then passed it on to Battalion HQ. air and artillery strikes were called in while we returned to the Company CP.

Cook Fire Explosion

Unexpected injuries occur with great frequency in a combat zone—sometimes in surprising ways. We subsisted on C rations when we were operating away from the Battalion perimeter—which was most of the time. Often we had to eat the rations cold because we couldn't chance a 'cook fire'. When we did have the opportunity or our circumstance allowed we would make a small fire and everyone would take turns cooking their chow, making a cup of coffee etc. Often we would simply bend the can lid into a handle and place the can on a rock near the fire—it would heat the meal and we would then remove said can from the fire by holding onto the can lid with a piece of cloth from our pack. We became quite good at mixing certain rations together or combining them with 'hot' peppers we were able to scrounge while passing thru a village. Most Marines carried a sock filled with rice which you could bargain for when passing thru the villages—that too could be mixed with our 'C's' for a tasty dish. One evening as I was preparing one of these 'gourmet' meals over the cook fire, I was bending over the fire when the fire 'exploded'! The explosion threw me backwards and I landed on my back—my eyes were in pain and I couldn't open them—the explosion had 'blinded' me. At first we didn't know what had happened—the platoon shifted into a secure perimeter thinking it could have been a grenade or a 60 mm mortar. Meanwhile, I was writhing in pain on the ground—the debris from

the fire had flown right into my face and eyes—my face was covered with a thick, gooey liquid that I thought was blood. We had to call for a corpsman to be sent from Company HQ since we didn't have one with the platoon—I don't recall how he got there—chopper—most likely—they immediately helilifted me back to Battalion and the Base Clinic—during this time I could not open my eyes because of the excruciating pain. Soon, a doctor examined me and cleaned out the debris from my eyes which included little flecks of metal, sand and ashes—he did this while I was awake—no anesthesia. They cleaned up the liquid that I thought was blood—turned out to be 'pork and beans' —one of the C rations we all had often eaten—someone had apparently left their unopened can of pork and beans in the fire and forgotten it—it exploded while I was bending over the fire! They wrapped my eyes in bandages after applying medication to them—still in pain. I was out of commission for several days, unable to see while the medical staff sorta steered me out of the way at the clinic to make room for serious combat injuries coming into the clinic. I was seriously concerned that there may permanent damage to my eyes—something I wouldn't know until the bandages came off. I couldn't return to my unit for obvious reasons so I simply had to wait until the bandages came off and we could determine whether my eyesight was seriously damaged . The doctor didn't think there would be any serious problems but admitted he didn't know for sure—we had to guard against infection and the possibility that some of the debris was still in my eyes. I spent several days with the bandages covering my eyes—finally, we took the bandages off and as I tried to open my eyes, the light felt like acid had been thrown in my face— —they

immediately teared up —the Dr. said to keep trying—gradually, after many tries I was able to open my eyes and keep them open—I could see! I had to wear sunglasses during the daylight hours and it took a couple more weeks—but the exams went well—there didn't appear to be any complications or long term effects and I was back with my platoon picking up where I left off.

Chapter 19

Goodbye Qui Nhon—Hello Chu Lai

Oct 1965 was a transition month—our daily operations didn't change much but some of our conditions improved as we were rotated back to hot showers, hot chow and more comfortable living conditions more often than mid Summer. We learned that our Company Commander, Capt. Fred Tolleson had been transferred and that Capt. Lee (the battalion S-4) would be replacing him on or about 15 Oct. This was a sudden and mysterious turn of events.¹⁶ @ The change in command meant that E Company would have a different CO for the first time since the unit was re formed in Aug. 1964 at Camp Las Pulgas, Camp Pendleton Cal.. Tolleson had been our CO for over 14 months —his departure was never explained. Capt. Lee took over command with the help of our XO, 1st Lt. John Clancy who had been with our Company since May 1965. There was no noticeable change in our routine operations. Capt. Lee was a likable Marine Officer and conducted himself in a reasonable, professional manner. He respected the experienced troops of which he was now the Commander of. This was an 'ironic' situation since Capt. Lee had been an adversary of Capt. Tolleson since the Battalion had formed in Aug. 1964 (Lee referred to this in his book ¹⁷@) The transition of Company Commanders produced little disruption in our daily operations. We continued to run squad and platoon patrols in our TAOR and we

conducted Company sized operations and sweeps in coordination with Battalion orders.

As an aside, it's worth mentioning that (as I recall) our Company never formed up once we landed in Qui Nhon—we basically operated as independent platoons with our own TAOR's—the same is true with our Battalion—we never formed up as a Battalion once we landed in Qui Nhon—right up until E Co. was 'mixmastered' to 1/4 in Nov. 1965—after the Battalion relocated to Chu Lai to join the rest of the Seventh Marine Regiment. The only times we saw Marines from other companies would be on occasion when we happened to rotate back to the Battalion perimeter for recharging. I can't speak for other Marines in E Co. or the Marines from other companies in our Battalion but for the life of me it was hard to see the 'unity' of our battalion when the only time we had contact was from a radio transmission or a written memo read to our platoon by a Battalion or Company representative. I often wondered why we didn't have a Battalion formation in a secure area near the airport to hear and see our Commanding officer—whom I recall meeting only once since we left San Diego. The only time we were 'together' appeared to be when we were coming or going to a new Battalion location. We were certainly able to gather for the Bob Hope Show but apparently not for a 'pep talk' or information session by the Battalion command. Our troops felt isolated and we had many questions re. our mission in Viet Nam—this wasn't just my opinion but the opinion of everyone I knew at the time.

Asleep Standing Up

The daily routine of carrying out the missions in our TAOR was a tiring, sleepless physical ordeal. We ran patrols 24/7—provided our own security perimeter for our platoon CP—participated in Company and Battalion operations and search and destroy sweeps. There were Company meetings with the officers and senior NCOs to receive briefings re. The Battalion and Regimental big picture as well as Company and platoon logistics and tactical situations. There was very little time to rest when we were operating in our forward outposts. When troops returned from patrols or sweeps they engaged in grabbing a quick meal, cleaning their weapons, changing their socks, etc. and preparing for the an ‘anytime’ enemy assault which could occur at ‘any time’. If we were lucky we could crawl up in our ‘hootch’ and sleep—in shifts—at the most four hours. A Marine can sleep anywhere but this begins to take it’s toll day in and day out. That’s why we were rotated back to the Company/Battalion perimeter every few days. Even then there were work details, inspections, maintenance, meetings, etc.—the difference was simply being ‘off line’ for a few hours to read the mail from home, get a hot field shower, enjoy some hot chow, wash and clean our uniforms and web gear and refresh our packs with items we would need when we returned to our outpost. There was a small PX facility in the Base area which helped with such items as toothpaste, soap, etc.. The rotation continued along with the endless

days and nights—on one such routine patrol I was with one of our squads when we stopped to check out a potential ambush site up ahead—the point fire team had moved ahead while the remainder of our patrol remained behind in routine patrol security position—the column facing outward, alternating every other Marine facing the opposite directions—I was leaning against a tree with branches —had my right arm hooked in a fork on one of the branches while I waited for the FT to report back—the next thing I knew—the squad leader was shaking me saying , “ Lt. , wake up” —startled, I ‘woke up’—realized I had fallen asleep on my feet and was hanging by my arm which was wedged in that fork in the branch. This, unfortunately, was not unique or unusual. Anytime the troops had just a few minutes to ‘rest’ they would fall into a deep sleep. All Marines experience tough, demanding physical training from the very first day in boot camp—the idea is to build toughness, strength and stamina. We found that we were calling on that ‘stamina’ every moment of every day—not just physical stamina but emotional and mental stamina as well. The day to day wear and tear on these Marines was evident as we slogged thru the rice paddies, the heat, the hills , the jungle, the mud, the rain and the endless miles of patrols and sleepless nights on perimeter security. Individual Marines lost weight and showed the visible signs of exhaustion as time passed. All Marines from boot camp on—officers and enlisted pride themselves on their physical fitness—we worked at it—running, calisthenics, obstacle courses and then the physical fitness tests and physical readiness tests were administered to all Marines in all Units each year. Yet, here we found ourselves going weeks—even months without the level of fitness

training we needed because we simply couldn't find the time or the circumstance. Marines were encouraged to work on their individual fitness whenever possible with routine exercises—but that was difficult to monitor —so we saw a deterioration in the fitness level of our Marines. At the same time we were working our bodies harder than we ever had in training—digging fox holes, carrying packs up steep terrain, long patrols where we would walk miles and miles each day—still it wasn't the regulated, disciplined type of physical training that keeps your body firm and reflexes sharp.

Although there was the usual grumbling and mumbling that goes with being in the infantry our Marines would rise like a phoenix and get the job done—I was very proud of them and will be until the day I die!

Chapter 21

I Corps.

As the month moved on our 'replacements' began to arrive in the Qui Nhon TAOR (starting in late Sept.). Those replacements were the famed South Korean 'Tiger Division'—our Allies from South Korea. The Qui Nhon Army supply Depot. remained a critical, strategic location and as the war grew in size our Allies began to support the United States and South Viet Nam. The arrival of the South Korean Tiger Division meant that the 2/7 Marines could shift further North to the 'Tactical Zone ' I Corps to meet the ever growing menace of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) as they increased their operations South of the DMZ. There, we would rejoin the Rest of the Seventh Marine Regiment. There were four Tactical Zones in Viet Nam—these were known as I Corps, II Corps, III Corps and IV Corps. These 'Corps" areas were designated as such by the South Vietnamese Army —the (Army of the Republic of Viet Nam - ARVN) The U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force and the USMC partnered with ARVN to conduct joint operations in each of these Tactical Areas of Responsibility. The most Northern Corps area —I Corps was the home of several Battalions of Marines including 2/7. All military operations in Viet Nam were coordinated by (MAC V) the Joint Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. MAC V Headquarters was located at Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base near Saigon. The top military Commander for MACV was Army General William Westmorland.

Chapter 22

Operation Blue Marlin

We learned in late Oct. that 2/7 would be moving further North to Chu Lai and that we would continue operations in the I Corps TAOR. On Nov. 1st., 1965 we were briefed about 'Operation Blue Marlin' and informed that , again our battalion would be making an 'opposed' landing on Nov 10th. at Tam Ky, near Chu Lai. Again Echo Company would be in the first assault group with the first platoon anchoring the Company in that assault.¹⁸ @ My amtrak no. was 1/1. My other platoon boat was 1/2. We were to board the USS Paul Revere on Nov. 6th at Qui Nhon—specific landing instructions were given to us after we boarded the ship and were sailing to Tam Ky near Chu Lai. ¹⁹@ Our Marines welcomed the relief of being aboard ship again, even if it was only for a couple of days—at least they had a clean bunk, hot showers and hot chow and no mosquitos and snakes and —no one shooting at them —what more could they ask?

Bad weather delayed the planned landing on Nov. 10th—this was just a harbinger of things to come. The landing 'warning orders' were on again—off again for two more days until the morning of Nov. 12 when we finally disembarked the USS Paul Revere and landed at Tam Ky—just North of Chu Lai . ²⁰@ The landing was 'unopposed' and quickly turned into a mess. 'Someone' up the chain of command had not actually reconned the beach we landed on.—it was actually a 'sand spit' —surrounded by deep channels of water

Leaving the Second Battalion, Seventh Marines (Operation Mixmaster)

Within a couple of days of landing at Tam Ky near Chu Lai —the Marines in I Corps were introduced to a surprise. The ‘surprise’ was a Marine Corps. order developed by some bureaucrats ‘somewhere’ — Washington? Saigon? The order became known as ‘Operation Mixmaster’ .²¹@ The order effectively guaranteed that our Marines would be coming home from the war alone and not with the unit with which they went to war. Units were to be ‘split’ apart with 1/2 of the Battalions which had been in Country for approx. six months being transferred to Battalions which had arrived more recently. The ‘brilliant’ idea was that the ‘new’ units would always have ‘experienced’ combat Marines to blend with the inexperienced Marines coming into the war during the year. The bureaucrats believed that the thirteen month ‘tour of duty’ would end at the same time for the Marine units that had landed in the build up beginning in the Spring and Summer of 1965. The thirteen month ‘tour of duty’ had been ‘promised’, therefore, it had to be honored. The ‘tour’ for all other military units was twelve months this meant—according to the bureaucrats (military and civilian)—that too many ‘experienced’ Marine units would be leaving Viet Nam at the same time. This ‘concept’ ignored the fact that new units were arriving throughout the year—those new units were working side by side with the experienced Marine

units and gaining combat experience along the way throughout the year and were 'blending in with no problem—just as we did when we first arrived in Qui Nhon. The concept also ignored one of the most important tenets of the Marine Corps.—unit integrity. The Second Battalion, Seventh Marines had trained together for a full year prior to landing in Viet Nam. Companies and platoons had developed as a team. I knew each Marine in my platoon —personally—and they knew me. This was true in each squad, each platoon, each company and with the Battalion Commander's staff. We had spirit —Esprit De Corps— respect, loyalty and commitment to each other , our God, our Country and our unit. I could recognize the silhouette of each of my men in the dark—the way they walked—their body language and vice versa. I knew what they could do, how fast they could do it and vice versa—I trusted them and they trusted me—we were tight! I knew who my alternate radio operators were—who my best shots were—who could throw a grenade the furthest. I knew who my best 'point' Marines were. I knew the character of my Marines individually and as a unit. This is what 'operation mixmaster' ripped apart and it was a really dumb idea! The comparison can be made to a football team—let's say you have a winning football team and you want to create another team—so you take half of the offensive line from the winning, experienced team and put it on the new team with new players—then you take half the backfield—half of the wide receivers—half of the coaching staff and do the same thing—sending them all to become 1/2 of another team—meanwhile you replace the original winning team players with the new , inexperienced players and coaches and what do you end up with?

Two teams that are mediocre! Unfortunately, this was not a 'game'—these experienced Marines from outstanding, proven units, were thrown in with inexperienced Marines 'on the fly' while engaged in dangerous, life-threatening combat conditions wherein a missed hand signal may get someone killed—and it did!!

At this point one thing had become very clear to me—our troops were 'at risk' not just from the enemy but from the bureaucratic decisions being handed down to our units. I felt a deep sense of responsibility for my troops—we were expecting them to do almost impossible things. The 'mission' is always the no. one concern of a Marine officer but closely allied with that 'mission' is the welfare of your troops. I began to have serious doubts about the mission and the way we were being 'managed'—my no. one platoon concern became 'staying alive'! I felt that my job was to evaluate every mission from that perspective and to do what was necessary to protect our troops from thoughtless, ill conceived directives from some clean, starched, paper pusher in some air conditioned tent 'somewhere'! If necessary I would challenge a directive—respectfully—prepared to 'request mast' in order to let my thoughts be known.

Regardless of our 'feelings' about being transferred from 2/7— Echo Company reported in to first Bn. Fourth Marines as assigned on 19 Nov. 1965 and thus became the new 'A' Company, First Bn., Fourth Marines! The old A Company reported into 2/7 and became the new E Company, 2/7. The Command Posts for 1/4 and A Company were located in the Chu Lai enclave. The new A Company



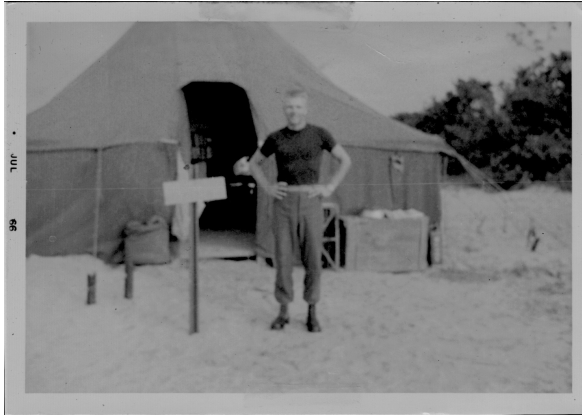
commander was 1st. Lt. John Clancy—the previous XO of E Company—a familiar face. The Battalion Commander was Lt. Col. Perrich.



Lt. Clancy, A Co. Commanding Officer and First Platoon A Co.

The conditions were much improved over what we had in Qui Nhon. Each Company was assigned to sections of the 'base' with tents for housing, hot outdoor showers powered by generators at certain times of the day, hot chow and access to the PX. The conditions were better than anything we had at Qui Nhon.! This is relative to the fact that we had been bathing out of our helmets,

living in lean-tos, eating C rations and co existing with the monkeys in the jungle covered hills of Qui Nhon.



Our Company CP was located in a secure area near the ‘sand ramp’ between Tam Ky and Chu Lai—the entire TAOR of the Chu Lai Air Base was occupied by 2/4, 1/4, and the Seventh Marines, ARVN units, Army and Air Force personnel as well—the perimeter was huge and troops from each of those outfits provided 24/7 security. Meanwhile, because of that security our troops were able to relax from time to time. We set up a volleyball court in the sand and squads would engage in a little friendly competition from time to time—this was also a good way to work in a little PT!

On a couple of occasions we were able to build a bonfire and roast some hot dogs kindly provided by the battalion mess sergeant. I can’t overemphasize how



much difference these 'amenities' made in the lives of our combat weary, young Marines. Hot showers, hot chow, outhouse facilities, three drinks per day (beer and soft drinks), mail and an opportunity to sleep on a cot in a tent if only for brief periods of time was like breathing new life into our Marines



We didn't spend much time in these new surroundings, however, as we began our routine patrols, operations and sweeps from squad size to Company size. Our new TAOR encompassed some of the small islands in and around the Northern section of Chu Lai, the LST Ramp and inland encompassing the foothills in and around Chu Lai.

Not long after joining up with A Company, 1/4 —more of my original platoon Marines were transferred to the units within 1/4—my sergeants were replaced with new ones—as well as a couple of my squad leaders and various other random members of the original platoon. The Marines being transferred in were all good Marines but they required some extra time to rehearse and practice our platoon's way of doing things —like with any team they required time to make these adjustments—and time was our enemy. The squad leaders, the new platoon sergeant and myself worked overtime teaching our new Marines what we expected—the platoon sergeant was both a student and a teacher as he adjusted to his new assignment.

This same routine was being carried out in each of the former E Company platoons who were now A-2 and A-3 platoons. Lt's Kozak and Boryszewski were filtering in new people as well —I had lost track of Lt. Lloyd during the changeover from 2/7—he either stayed with 2/7 in a weapons platoon unit or he transferred along with the rest of E Company—I never found out . Nov. was, for the most part, a transition month as the involved Marines, platoons, Companies and Battalions carried out 'operation mixmaster' one of the biggest boondoggles in the history of the Marine Corps.

Chapter 24

Guarding the LST Ramp

The first platoon, A Company, Fourth Marines was assigned to guard the LST ramp also known as the sand ramp in a channel near Chu Lai. ²²@ The LSTs were supply ships that were able to sail up the channel and on to the sand ramp and anchor there. They were able to drop the ramp of the ship from the bow and off load supplies and equipment on to the shore.



A dirt road connected the ramp to mainland. From there supplies and equipment could be transported into the Chu Lai Base. This was a vital operation and could be a desirable target for the VC. Our mission was to protect the ramp and the ships that were anchored there 24/7. The platoon was deployed in a semicircle with sand bag protection around each defensive position.



In addition we deployed two man patrols in and around the sand ramp and on the road leading to the ramp. Throughout much of Dec. '65 the monsoon rains kept us wet and a lot cooler. We had several probes and attempts by the VC to test our perimeter—they found that we were awake and ready. 23@ The troops definitely enjoyed the break from the mountain jungle living. They were housed in six man tents with wood flooring. The sandbagged perimeter positions were for guard duty only—they didn't have to sleep in those positions. We even had our own outhouse and hot showers were available at certain times near the Company CP.



A Company 'Outhouse'

We were also invited to join the sailors aboard ship to enjoy some down home Navy cooking from time to time—we took advantage of their generosity and sent squad at a time to the mess hall. One ship in particular more or less adopted our platoon —the ship was the USS Kemper County, LST # 854. They wrote us up in their ship's newspaper and complimented our Marines for their professionalism and competence in providing their protection.²⁴ @ Other LST's came and went but we always had a special affection for the USS Kemper County!



The A Company CP was located a short distance away from the Sand Ramp on the peninsula—periodically, we would join other members of the Company for a volleyball game or a hot dog cook out . Our circumstances were definitely improved over Qui Nhon. The sailors were allowed to leave the ship and visit with our Marines from time to time—on one such occasion—the ship’s XO dropped by my CP tent and we shared a couple of beers and talked about our operations.



Asbury and the XO of the USS Kemper County

The XO as well as many of his shipmates were very interested in the Vietnamese people, the VC, the Marine role in the Civil Action efforts to win the hearts and minds of the people by providing medical care, protection from the VC and health and sanitation needs. One evening while the XO was visiting—three VC attempted to breach our perimeter. The Marines in that sector were alert and opened fire and threw a grenade at the potential invaders killing all three who were armed with carbines but no explosives.²⁵ @ The Navy personnel were unceremoniously thrown to the deck by the platoon sergeant while the gunfight took place. It turned out to be the ‘big adventure’ for those sailors that they wrote about in their ships newspaper.²⁶@

Part of our Company mission was to patrol a couple of small islands near Chu Lai—we did this by amtracks—loading the platoon on three or four of the vehicles—going out to the island just a few hundred yards off the coast



Amtrak Patrol

—then patrolling these islands. we often found booby traps and IEDs there along with occasional sniper rounds- We wanted to deny the VC an area near the sand ramp where they could set up mortars and attack the LSTs that were docked there. On one such sweep later on one of my Marines stepped on one of those IEDs—an 81 mm mortar round that was wired and triggered remotely—he was killed instantly and was a reminder that every single step we took—every single day could be our last.

This Marine was a conscientious, dedicated Marine Sgt. with a family. He had approached me earlier before leaving on the patrol with a concern—he had a premonition—a dream that he would be killed that day. As we talked —he realized he couldn't 'skip' the patrol 'because of a dream'—this was something we all had experienced. He just needed to 'talk about it'—he was on a sweep—a line moving across the sand dunes of the island when the explosion occurred—it

knocked me down as I was close by—only one Marine was killed that day it was this Marine with the ‘premonition’!

While becoming part of the First Battalion, Fourth Marines during the month of Dec. my brothers from my old battalion, 2/7 were finding themselves locked in one of the fiercest battles of the Viet Nam War. Operation Harvest Moon got under way in Mid Dec. as 2/7 corralled a NVA Regiment North of Chu Lai.²⁷@ We heard some of the news coming out of that battle and it wasn’t good—there



were heavy casualties and the fighting was fierce. Those of us in my platoon that had been a part of 2/7 until the previous month had feelings of ‘survivor’s remorse,’ etc. We tried our best to get information but it was difficult to come by—we did find out that weather, communications and coordination were problematic in that operation. Over time the heroic deeds of 2/7 and my former colleagues would be well documented—I was proud of them then and I’m proud of them now.

Chapter 25

Kozak Versus the Monkeys

First platoon A Co. continued with patrols, ambushes, sweeps and operations along with the rest of the First Bn., Fourth Marines. The other two platoons that had transferred over to A Co. from E Company (Kozak and Boryszewski's platoons) were doing the same. Kozak's platoon was on one of these sweeps just North of Chu Lai—near Tam Ky when they saw something or somebody run into a cave that was partially hidden in a hillside. They surrounded the cave—took out their handbook on the Vietnamese language and ordered the people inside to come out with their hands up—they could hear a number of voices inside the cave—they couldn't understand what they were hearing—it sounded like a large number of people mumbling. Kozak didn't want to throw a grenade or open fire into the cave concerned about collateral damage if civilians were in there—so they threw a smoke grenade hoping the smoke would cause the cave occupants to come out—when the grenade exploded inside the cave—they heard a lot of screaming and suddenly thirty or so monkeys came running out of the cave past the Marines who were shocked at what they were seeing! There were no monkey or Marine casualties!@28

Chapter 26

Moving North to the DMZ

Over the next several weeks A Company participated in operations and sweeps . We found that the face of our enemy was changing —from the viet cong villager/guerilla to hard corps North Vietnamese army regulars who were well armed and well trained. The VC were still active and involved but our major concern was with the build up of the NVA. We began to run into more snipers and engage in more firefights —we were also seeing more mines and booby traps . Our patrols would normally engage in some type of enemy contact on a regular basis. On one such patrol we were skirting around a village which was surrounded—as usual with rice paddies—we were using the rice paddy dikes to maneuver around the village. I heard and felt the area around me suddenly erupt with the sound of ‘splat—splat—splat’—then I heard the sound of rifle shots (bang—bang—bang) in the distance several hundred meters away towards an outcropping in the rice paddy. The last ‘splat’ had actually hit there ground beneath the heel of my boot —like a hammer knocking me off stride and I realized that I was the target of a sniper who was probably adjusting his elevation at that very moment—-I quickly zig-zagged to cover behind one of the dikes while the sniper continued to try and pick off targets in the platoon—he missed. My

heel was stinging from the close round—I looked at my boot heel and saw the groove where the round had hit. The Marines in my platoon had identified where the shots were coming from—the outcropping in the rice paddy a few hundred yards away. I called in an artillery strike on the coordinates of that outcropping while the sniper was still taking pot shots at my platoon and keeping us pinned down—I gave our coordinates and the coordinates of the sniper location and asked for a ‘time on target— air burst’ and our artillery support complied—big time. within a couple of minutes we heard the big guns fire in the distance the shells exploded over the target and when the smoke cleared there was no sniper and there was no ‘outcropping’ in the rice paddy! The ‘time on target’ meant that our artillery support battery would fire multiple guns at the same time—the air burst meant that the shells would explode in the air above the target raining shrapnel down on the enemy position like machine gun fire —over the entire area of the target zone—it was a beautiful thing to behold!

Chapter 27

Capturing An NVA Soldier

Our Company and Battalion operations continued and as usual we were conducting a 'sweep' of the area looking for signs of enemy build up—the first platoon, A Co., 1/4 was moving on a well traveled trail near a village when out of the corner of my eye I spotted 'something' in the underbrush just off the trail on my right—a quick glimpse revealed a person was hiding in the brush. Not knowing what that person was doing or getting ready to do (shoot? throw a grenade?) I dove into the brush and made a flying tackle of a North Vietnamese Army Regular in a tan uniform—we tumbled backwards as my platoon dispersed and surrounded the activity—I had not had time to draw my weapon— I was sitting on his chest while pinning his arms beside him —other hands began to take hold of our prisoner who was indeed armed—but with a brand new Chi Com , 9mm pistol with the packing grease still on it—it wasn't loaded. Turned out he was an NVA warrant officer who had apparently recently received a resupply of new weapons. We tied him up—with the interpreter's help we did an initial interrogation but learned nothing of value—he was transferred back to Battalion HQ for further disposition. The NVA prisoner was also an indicator that the NVA were indeed operating in the area as we had been told—of course this put the entire battalion on high alert. If an NVA warrant officer was caught in this area

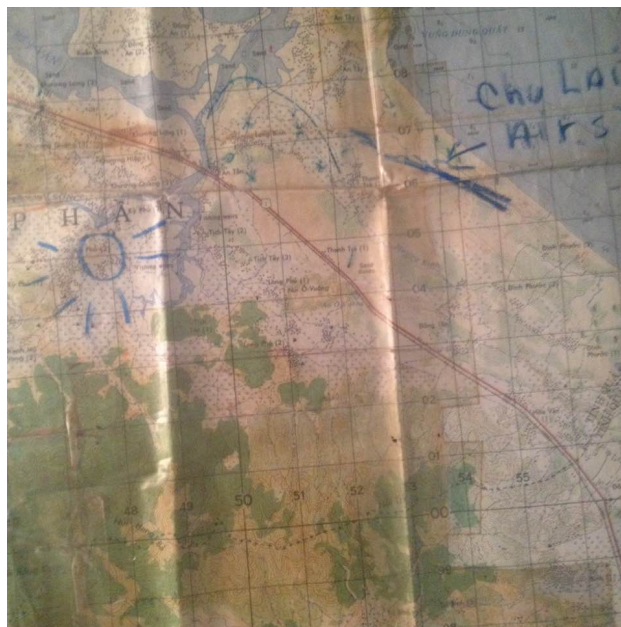
then we were positive his troops were close by—his brand new pistol was another powerful clue—it still had the packing grease on it—a resupply of new weapons had just arrived. This capture occurred in the days preceding ‘Operation Harvest Moon’. My old outfit —the Second Battalion Seventh Marines along with units from the ARVN, the Third Marines , the First Marines and the ninth Marines—engaged several NVA battalions From Dec. 8th-18th in what was to become one of the bloodiest battles of the War. I learned later that the Company that replaced the original E co. (from 1/4) and was now the new E Co. 2/7 walked into a hornet’s nest in the early stages of that fight and took heavy casualties 28@—including the first platoon which would’ve been my old platoon if we hadn’t been ‘mixmastered’ into 1/4 . They had 8 KIA and over 18 WIA and had to be pulled back because of those heavy casualties—units from the ninth Marines in Da Nang were called in as reinforcements. I’ve never for the life of me understood why the First Bn., Fourth Marines wasn’t invited to the fight! We were available—within reasonable distance where we could have been transported —7/10 miles—yet we were never called up. We found out later that the 1/4 Battalion Commander Lt. Col Parrich was being transferred out and Col Sullivan was coming in to replace him—another case of the ‘musical chairs’ taking place that, I believe , affected the tactical situations going on in our TAOR and —possibly cost the lives of our Marines.

Chapter 28

Patrols in the Quang Tri Province

1/4 replaced 2/4 in its TAOR on 25 Jan—2/4 was dispatched to another TAOR. Our new location was South and West of Chu Lai —the Co. CP was located at coordinates 497067 on our Chu Lai map. 29@

This region had become more active in recent weeks with more VC and NVA activity—more booby traps, mines and sniper fire. There was also more sporadic firefights with VC guerrillas who would open fire on our patrols then disappear into the villages



nearby making it difficult to return fire without civilian collateral damage. Some lessons learned along the way while navigating the situations in Qui Nhon—Marines have to move when 'under fire' and out in the open—staying put just gives the enemy a stable target—not moving is not an option—covering fire has to be delivered ASAP in order to move —staying low and using common sense is

absolutely necessary—standing straight up—running in a straight line or in a pattern will get you killed and returning fire immediately helps neutralize incoming rounds. Our training had emphasized all these things but until you come under fire personally you cannot appreciate what it takes to advance towards an enemy who is firing at you—our Marines learned how to overcome the very natural tendency to hunker down when being fired upon and demonstrated time and again the courage and tenacity which defines them as United States Marines! The squad leaders of first platoon (Cpl. Nelson, Cpl. Ingerson and Sgt. Fontaine) were experienced at maneuvering under fire—providing covering fire for each other and moving like a well oiled machine on the battlefield—we moved with arm and hand signals borne out of countless firefights and countless hours of training and even rehearsals for these moments. As we lost some of the original platoon to injuries, promotions and transfers due to ‘operation mixmaster’—we had to continue training and rehearsals to bring the new people up to speed—as time passed we did, however, see an erosion in our ‘teamwork’ because of the turnover in personnel.

‘A’ Company 1/4 operated in our new TAOR much like E Co. 2/7 when we were in Qui Nhon—the platoons had their own TAORs and our patrols operated from the platoon outposts with an occasional Company size operation or sweep. The platoon patrol routes were determined by the Battalion S-3 , S-2 in coordination with the ARVN and other friendly units engaged in the security of the Chu Lai air base and supply depot. These patrol routes were posted on the Battalion ‘sit

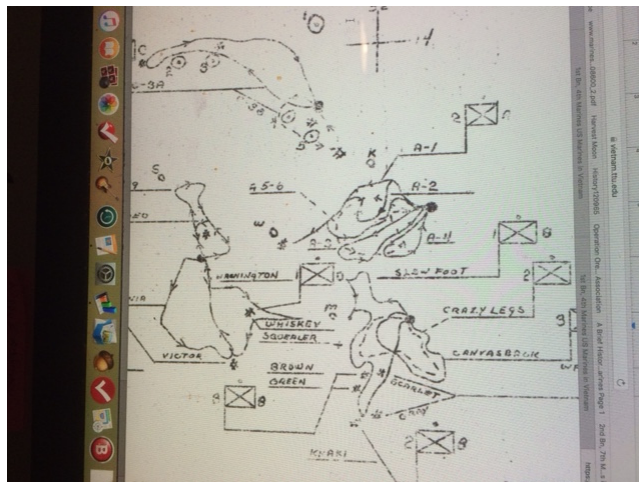
reps' that I discovered while conducting my research of the Qui Nhon and Chu Lai operations by 2/7 and 1/4. 30@

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TIME		SEAL NO.	DATE TIME GROUP	INCIDENTS, MESSAGES, ORDERS	W. High L. Low	ACTION TAKEN
IN	OUT					
		241230Z		INAFPA REPRESENTATIVE ADVISED HE GO DOWN D-DAY AS OUTLINED IN FRAG ORDER NO 8 GRANTED FRAG NO 8 TO 21 AND. SO 9 EXTENDED POSI- TION FRAG ORDER AS 241630Z. IN POSITIVE AT 241700Z.		
		240830Z		LEAD TO ALLEGATIONS OF F DO LAMDED IN LA BOUND IN SOUTHWEST OF F DO POSITION OF FRAG ORDER NO 8.		
		231830Z		F DO SEARCHING SEARCH AND CLEAR DISSECT PERIODS. APPROXIMATED BY VILLAGE. GEP VO FOM. SO COMPANY.		
		231855Z		PLAT (REPT) SO R DISPERSED SEARCH AND DISSECT IN VALLEY AT 08 260130. ADOPTED IMMEDIATE ACTION OF SUSPECTED VO. VO VILLAGE AND SO PERIOD BY FRAG. VO LAMP CAPTURED PER VILLAGE AREA AND AND AND AND AND. ACT PERIOD DISSECT CALLED ON TO WITHDRAWAL BOUND. STRAIGHTY VASOIT SHOOTING.		
		231900Z		BOUND PERIOD REDUCED DIFFICULTY WITH LACK OF MAPS AND BOUND PERIOD FIVE VILLAGE SIX BOUND. FIVE HAD NOT APPROXIMATE PERIOD BOUND. PERIOD THAT BE ABLE TO IN PERIOD INVOLVE BOUND. BOUND UP AND RETURNED TO UP BY BOUND.		
		261700Z		PLAT (REPT) SO R RETURNED TO BATTALION CP BY BOUND AFTER APPROXIMATE PERIOD IN VALLEY. NO FURTHER CONTACT THROUGHOUT LAM VILLAGE-FIVE BOUND.		
		270525Z		SO F OPERATION IN VAN CAME VALLEY SO R PERIOD SO DIVISION APPROXIMATE AND QUESTION AND RELEASED.		
		271530Z		SO R PERIOD. SO R NOTED FROM PERIOD (4) TO 12 CAMP OR DOWNTY TO COUNTRY SEARCH AND CLEAR OPERATION SOUTH BACK TO BOUND CAMP AT 12 PERIOD (4)		

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Overlays with these routes were dispatched to the Company Commanders for further distribution to the platoon leaders. @ 31



The routes encompassed known and suspected areas of enemy activity—much like a police officer’s ‘beat’ our job was to be seen— to set up ambushes on known enemy routes and raid any suspected location where VC tended to inhabit —to sniff out possible enemy activity—supply routes and to prevent a sudden ‘build up’ of enemy units in each of our TAOR’s. Over time our Battalion killed or captured hundreds of VC and /or Regular NVA soldiers —capturing supplies intended for distribution to the enemy units along with weapons and valuable intelligence info. @ 32 On one such long range patrol we were investigating the possible presence of a NVA battalion at the extreme western end of our TAOR—I took Corporal Ingerson’s squad with me and left the remainder of the platoon at our Platoon CP. This patrol required a great deal of stealth as we knew we were going into a possible hornet’s nest. We timed our route so that we would be at or near our objective area by dark. The terrain was rough—steep and hilly terrain with thick underbrush. We approached a large stream bed that looked like it was closer to a river during the monsoon season—it was mostly dry at the moment. I sent a fire team downstream—to the left and another upstream to the right—they were to check for a place to cross the stream bed that wasn’t so open—within minutes they both returned—they had spotted campfires in both directions —down stream and upstream—-immediately in front of us was a dried up waterfall —approximately thirty yards across and maybe fifty feet high. I decided to take one fire team with me across the face of the waterfall so our silhouettes wouldn’t be seen from both directions. The face of the waterfall was a cliff face actually but there appeared to be plenty of footholds —I wanted to see what was on the

other side of the stream bed—on the map—it appeared to be a small valley and was in the same area we had been told to check. I left two fire teams in place—to remain concealed until we returned—in no more than one hour—and to act as our ‘rear guard’. I proceeded to lead the team across the face of the waterfall—it was slow going—although it was dark we had a sliver of moonlight—which helped. The team followed my lead as we carefully picked our way across the face of the waterfall—as I reached the halfway point I placed my left foot on a rock—reached for another rock with my left hand while holding on to a crevice with my right—as I shifted my weight to my left foot from my right—the rock under my left foot gave way—my left hand slipped off the rock I had held onto—I started to fall backwards into the abyss below—I couldn’t yell or scream because we would have given our location away to an enemy of unknown size—maybe a battalion—so I fell—and fell—until I hit the bottom of the waterfall—thinking I was going to die right there. I landed in a large tree sized bush on my back. The bush broke my fall along with a small pack on my back—it still knocked the wind out of me and left me stunned—blinking up at the waterfall above. My troops couldn’t see me—couldn’t call out to me and I couldn’t call out to them. We all held our position until we could determine if our enemy had heard anything. Soon, I could see a couple of my men moving down the side of the waterfall from the direction we had come—they moved toward me and helped me out of the bush and helped me stand up—which was difficult—the fall had hurt—badly—my back felt badly bruised—and I wasn’t sure that I hadn’t broken anything—I decided to keep moving and carry out our mission by climbing up the far side of

the bank next to the waterfall—the team made it across—we continued to scout the target zone and it didn't take but a few minutes—we saw multiple camp fires scattered in the small valley ahead. I decided to head back—we didn't want to risk stumbling into an outpost of what appeared to be a large enemy encampment. We went back across the stream bed—this time at the bottom and up the opposite bank and made our way back to the platoon CP. The going was slow because my back was hurting. We reported our findings to Company/Bn. HQ. For the next few days I put myself on light duty to let my back heal. Apparently nothing was broken but my entire back turned black and a dark blue—I considered myself to be a very lucky Marine.

Chapter 29

'Street Without Joy'

1/4 received orders to replace 2/4 in their TAOR—which moved us into the Phu Bai— Hue region of Thua Tien Province. The next Province North of us was the Quang Tri Province —it was the Northern most Province in South Viet Nam—it's Northern Border was the DMZ. This region had always been a 'hotbed' of enemy activity by the 'People's Army of Viet Nam ' (PAVN). The A Shau valley would later become the scene of some terrible losses by the U.S Army and the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN). ' A' Company began running the same operations, sweeps and patrols as before. This was in a region made famous in the book "Street Without Joy " written by Bernard Fall in 1961 and had been required reading while I attended TBS at Quantico in 1964. @ 33This was not a friendly area. The Vietnamese people there had been thru the French Indochina War and were tired of 'outsiders' —be they French or American —stomping thru their rice paddies, bombing their villages and killing their people. Almost every patrol we ran produced some form of enemy contact—we discovered more caves and hidden trails through the mountains—all of which had been constructed and used over decades. Operation Harvest Moon had been fought in this same region—there was no reason to believe the communist forces were willing to exit



this region anytime soon. The VC guerrilla activity continued along with the hard corps. PAVN activities. We came upon mines and booby traps almost every day. On one such occasion we were passing near a village—I entered a gate behind a village hut and my radioman, PFC Harris called out ‘stop’ Lt.!—I stopped. Harris said ‘don’t move’—I didn’t! PFC Harris pointed at my right heel—approx. one inch behind it was the head of an 81mm mortar round barely protruding from the ground—I had missed stepping on it by a mere ‘inch’—I still didn’t know whether it was ‘spring loaded’ or wired to be detonated remotely—I directed the platoon to move away from the area—including PFC Harris—who had remained cool throughout this situation. @³⁴

I then carefully but quickly moved my foot away from the mortar round and moved as fast as I could to a covered position on the ground—no explosion. We called HQ and they directed us to use a couple of grenades to blow the mortar round up—which we did by putting one on each side of the round, pulling the

pins and moving away from the 'fire in the hole' zone—it appeared to work as there was a huge explosion and just fragments of the mortar round left.

The problem with fighting in a 'civil war' is that your enemy looks exactly like your friend. There was no discernible difference between VC, PAVN, ARVN or North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese.

Couple that with decades of French occupation wherein many of the Vietnamese were of French extraction and often looked taller and European. At a distance we often had to make life or death decisions based upon the description of the people we were seeing—friend or foe? We would often pass people by who looked like simple farmers working in the paddies only to realize moments later that we were being fired upon by that same simple farmer —as we turned to return fire he would disappear into the village nearby where he would simply disappear into one of the huts or into a tunnel whose entrance was disguised as a mud puddle! (actual situation).

Marine and Army units all over Viet Nam faced this same situation day in and day out. This was not a battlefield situation like Guadalcanal or Iwo Jima where you could open fire on a tree line when fired upon—often, we had to hold our fire—wade thru the brush—search those huts and the village to find that one sniper and nine times out of ten we wouldn't find him because he would be hiding in plain site—removing his hat—changing his shirt —hiding his weapon and simply standing there among the other villagers as we passed thru looking for 'that bad guy'!

This enemy did not 'stand and fight' unless they had superior numbers or were surprised. ^{35@} They picked their battles for the most part and when they fought they had a plan to remove their dead and wounded and escape among the many hidden trails and tunnel networks that were available to them in this godawful region.

Near the end of Jan. '66 my platoon was assigned to set up an 'outpost' at Ky Phu—a well known passageway for the VC to resupply and infiltrate the region from the mountain trails linking it to the Ho Chi Minh trail. 1/4 was assuming the TAOR of 2/4 which was moving further North—our outpost was part of that plan. Our chosen site was a good sized hill near Ky Phu. We moved to that position and went about the process of digging in, setting up the concertina wire, claymore mines and laying in our overlapping fields of fire, etc. We would be running patrols from this location day and night. As usual we set up our 'attack plan' in case we had an assault on the outpost. We rotated two squads on the perimeter with the third squad in reserve. We were reinforced with four m-60 machine gun crews which were disbursed around the perimeter. I established radio communications with Company HQ located a couple of clicks away near the AnTan Bridge ^{36@}—I also established contact with Battalion Artillery support including the 81mm mortar section. We determined likely target areas around the base of the hill and pre set those coordinates with the forward observer. We disbursed our grenade boxes to each squad area—each Marine was given several grenades which would be used upon command. We rehearsed the possibilities of attack points around the perimeter with each squad and the

coordination with the reserve squad if that became necessary. We dug 'dummy positions' for daytime observation by the enemy —those were intended to confuse the VC as to where the actual positions were located further up on the hill. A few nights later we were faced with our first 'test' of our new outpost. At approx. 0300 the squad located on the North side of our perimeter detected movement at the base of the hill —approx. 100 meters away—the squad leader alerted me—the entire perimeter was also alerted—we held our fire—I attempted to see what the 'movement' was thru my field glasses—it was dark but with a little moonlight—I saw several dark figures moving on a line approximately thirty yards away moving toward our perimeter. I alerted the platoon that I was going to fire a flare to give us a better view. I fired the flare and we saw a line of approximately 10 VC and another 50-75 scattered in the field immediately behind them—we opened fire from the entire squad on the North side of the perimeter and cut down the line of VC closest to our position. We also threw several grenades into the group of VC. While this was going on we noticed one of our new Marines reaching into the grenade box and throwing grenades down the hill—with a little shock we realized he was throwing them without pulling the pin! This we stopped immediately —he was embarrassed as his squad was ribbing him about it already.—the problem was that we saw those grenades coming back at us —the VC couldn't throw the grenades up the hill as easily as we had thrown them down—they started falling short of the perimeter but still got our attention—within minutes the VC dispersed, running for cover in the tree lined area nearby. I called for 81mm flares from Battalion and they responded

immediately. The entire field lit up like a football stadium scattering the VC who were also dragging their killed and wounded with them—we held our fire. We kept the flares coming but it appeared the VC had seen enough —they didn't return—Our perimeter had held—done it's job. We would find out later that this was a rehearsal for a larger attack a couple of weeks later.

The 'End of the 'old' E Company

In the period between Jan. and Feb. 1966 Kozak, Boryszewski and myself were again 'mixmastered' from A Co. to various 'staff ' positions in 1/4. Capt. Tolleson was already gone before moving to Chu Lai in early Nov. —he was transferred to various staff positions and would eventually return to Viet Nam as an ARVN Advisor. Lt. Kozak transferred to the Battalion staff of 1/4 as the 'Adjutant' ; Lt. Boryszewski was transferred to Battalion HQ as Asst. S-1 and I was moved to the 1/4 Battalion Commander's staff as the S-2. We were the last officers of the original E Company that had formed up at Camp Pendleton in 1964. The platoon sergeants from the old E Co. were transferred to other companies throughout 1/4. All of the training —all of the combat experience—all of the comraderie—all of the unit cohesion— was now scattered to the four winds—our E Company brotherhood was split up and sent to new outfits.

I can't speak for Lt. Kozak , Lt. Lloyd or Lt. Boryszewski but I know that I felt a sense of loss when we were split from 2/7 and then again when we were transferred from our A Co., 1/4 platoon commands to staff jobs. I felt like we had been 'benched' after a successful season on the 'varsity'. This was no reflection on the officers and men of 1/4—we had simply been a part of 2/7 since Aug. of 1964 through a year of training and six months of combat—together! We would

each do our jobs to the best of our ability—as always and ride out the rest of our tour in these staff billets as the War appeared to be picking up steam!

(Commentary)

It appeared to many of us that many—not all- of the ‘transfer’ decisions being made were for ‘career enhancement’ reasons primarily. Wars make—or break careers. It had been 12 years since the Korean War had ended in 1953—many of our Marine NCOs and officers had served during that time—some of our NCOs and officers had not served during that war as they came along later. There was a twelve year ‘dry spell’ between conflicts. Combat is where career Marines earn their stripes—and their stars. Their ‘successful’ command experience under combat conditions is absolutely a career builder—along with the medals, awards and commendations that go with go with the territory. No one knew that the Viet Nam war would last ten years! Many of these ‘career bureaucrats’ as I call them thought the Conflict might end in a year—or two. Therefore, they pushed and lobbied for transfers in and out of command and then to staff billets early on—to build their resume—at the expense of continuity on the battlefield. Within six months of landing in Viet Nam the ‘musical chairs’ began as commanding officers were moved in and out of Command and/or staff positions—to build those resumes! These ‘transfers’ occurred up and down the chain of command but was extremely transparent at the Battalion, Regimental and Division levels. It was rare, indeed , to see a Regimental Commanding officer remain in that position for more than a few

months. Entire staffs of the commanding officers also changed as the Commander took over command he would bring along a new staff—so the XO—the Operations (S-3)—Intelligence (S-2), etc. were often moving into their new jobs in the middle of chaotic operations—as I did when I was brought on to Col. Sullivan’s staff as S-2 as the Fourth Marine Regiment was preparing for Operation Utah . I had been a platoon commander since Aug. Of 1964—commanded the platoon with E/2/7 thru our training in Camp Pendleton—aboard ship on the way to Qui Nhon and thru the first six months of our combat experience in Qui Nhon and Chu Lai—I found myself moving into a staff assignment with people I didn’t know and in the middle of a chaotic situation serving with a ‘new’ battalion commanding officer (Col. Sullivan). Previous staff officers had been sent to the field to become Company Commanders, etc. I had a field desk with a few file folders and that was it. Within a couple of days I was part of the Col.s briefing meeting with his company commanders , senior NCO.s and other staff members and my job as S-2 was to bring the Battalion officers ‘up to date’ on the enemy intelligence to date. My point is this—I scraped my way thru that briefing—did the best I could with the limited info. I had been able to scratch together but I rated my briefing as unsatisfactory! The Company Commanders deserved better—they deserved a staff briefing by experienced, well informed staff members—not a first Lt. who had been yanked from a field position a couple of days before.

Operation 'mixmaster' further contributed to the 'musical chairs' confusion by ripping apart the unit integrity so vital in combat. Senior ranking NCOs were also pulled along with their favorite commanding officer as he moved up the chain of command. Many of us were befuddled with the ever-changing landscape of our units but I had no idea how pervasive it was until years later when I was able to study the history of 'our' war. I learned that the average 'tour of duty' for battalion commanders in the Seventh Marine Regiment from 1965-1969 was approximately THREE MONTHS! (Dirty Little Secrets of the Vietnam War-Leadership , pgs. 203-210)This startling fact verifies that our battalions were always in flux with each change of command—further contributing to the lack of unit integrity which many of us felt.

Chapter 31

New Assignment

I was assigned to Col. Sullivan's 1/4 staff as his S-2 (Intelligence Officer) on Feb. 12th, 1966. ^{37@} I was a newly minted first Lt. and had served as a platoon commander for the past year and a half. I had been in 1/4 since being mix mastered from 2/7 in Nov. I had met The Col. only once prior to reporting for duty on 2/12/66—he had presented me with a commendation while I was serving as a platoon commander in A Co. Col. Sullivan was an experienced Marine officer having fought in WWII and Korea where he had acquired four purple hearts. He was 'old school' and did not suffer fools! He called his new staff and older staff together and laid out his expectations and that bar was high—as it should have been. The Col. never minced words and often gave orders himself rather than thru his XO—and the orders always carried a 'bite' to them—he didn't accept excuses and wanted everything done 'yesterday'—if not sooner! I knew that I couldn't 'fly by the seat of my pants' and bemoan the fact that I was 'new' to the job—none of that mattered—I had a job to do and I had better damn well do it! I found that the Recon teams would be working in coordination with my office along with a team of snipers. I set up our communications 'tree' and outlined my

expectations and those of the Col. . I had one staff clerk who was assigned to help with the reports, filing of documents , etc. My main mission was to gather intelligence on the enemy and disseminate that intelligence to the Col. —his staff and the company commanders. My initial days were spent just trying to find my way around our HQ area—we were housed in a command tent with sandbags for walls and orders to exit quickly when we came under mortar attacks—there were huge foxholes dug outside the HQ area—we were to run to those holes and hunker down when we were under attack and of course be prepared to fight if the base perimeter was breached. Indeed a few days later we had such an attack—The VC were popping 81mm mortars in on us during broad daylight—sure enough everyone in the CP took off for one of the foxholes—the one’s nearest the CP filled up in a hurry—I took off for one in the distance that was unoccupied —jumped in and pulled my flak jacket around me and hunkered down with my helmet—a few seconds later Lt. Brian Fagan —another staff officer —came tumbling down in the hole—the mortars were raining down on the CP area. This is a very uncomfortable feeling—there’s nothing you can do but wait it out and pray that one those missiles don’t come down on top of you because that would be it! Fagan and I tried to keep our mind’s off of the situation by making jokes, talking about home—anything to distract us from the attack. We listened for gunfire which would signal a ground attack but heard none. The mortars stopped —we climbed out of our hole and heard a lot of activity approximately 20/30 yards away—one of our Marines had hidden beneath a ‘mighty mite’ (small jeep)

which had taken a direct hit from one of the mortars—he died without ever knowing what hit him.

After living outside the perimeters in Qui Nhon and Chu Lai with my platoon this HQ strategy for evading a mortar attack seemed simple enough—except there weren't too many options other than jumping in a hole.

I reviewed each of the company and platoon situation reports (sit. reps.) and gleaned what I could about enemy activity in our TAOR—we also established communication channels with our South Vietnam partners —the ARVN. Within a couple of days I had established contact with Regimental and Division HQ and my counterparts in the intelligence ops. there— Info. obtained from enemy combatants—POW's was also an invaluable source of intelligence for us. My initial problem was simply finding ways to organize my time to get it all done—the info. was streaming in from a variety of sources 24/7 and there just didn't seem to be enough hours in a day to manage it. The Col. received briefings from each of the staff officers each morning and he expected anything of an urgent nature to be brought to his attention immediately. During these briefing sessions each dept. learned what was going on with personnel, supplies and equipment, friendly units, enemy movements, the weather, etc..

The Col. was an impatient Marine Officer—he wanted clear, concise reports and if they weren't he would —in no uncertain terms let us know—I had my arse handed to me a few times in these briefings.

I also participated in a couple of Company sized sweeps along with the Col. who often tagged along with the companies to get a feel for the terrain and the

conditions our troops were facing—I was much more comfortable being back in the field with one of our rifle companies than I was inside the Battalion perimeter. On the night of Feb 26, 1966 I was inside the battalion Command Post when we started receiving a radio transmission from the first platoon, A Company—my old platoon that I had just left on 12 Feb. The platoon outpost at Ky Phu was under attack by an estimated VC company plus.^{@38} I was monitoring the communications with A Co and Battalion HQ. This initially wasn't alarming to me—I knew what my old platoon could do—we had laid out the perimeter before I transferred out to S-2. I knew that the outpost had overlapping fields of fire for the four m-60 machine guns—I knew we had carefully placed our claymore mines around the base of the perimeter—each squad leader had the switch for those claymores. I knew we had laid concertina barbed wire around the entire perimeter several meters below our dug in positions—I also knew that we had rehearsed just such an attack from each side of the perimeter—we had our grenade boxes and extra ammo placed near each squad for easy access and I knew we had 'laid in' our coordinates with artillery and the mortar section—just as we had done several times before. I also knew that we had weathered an assault just before my transfer to the S-2 job. The platoon was fighting for its life but I felt it was secure because of the planning we had done before. A 'company' sized VC unit would not take this platoon down—this I knew for sure. As I learned later part of the perimeter security had been turned over to the ARVN by the platoon Sgt. —who was also new to the platoon (operation Mixmaster). That part of the perimeter was 'breached' by VC infiltrators who had spent some time wriggling

under our concertina wire. This was discovered at approximately 0230 AM and all hell broke loose as our Marines opened fire on the infiltrators killing them and opening fire around the perimeter. The VC poured small arms fire, 60mm mortars and hand grenades on the First platoon but our Marines held their position repulsing one attack after another from what appeared to be suicide fighters who may have been high on drugs. Flares were fired and revealed a hundred or more VC surrounding the hill below the perimeter. Our Marines returned fire aggressively and had thrown our grenades down the hill throughout the perimeter. The assault lasted for over three hours. What I had not known was that a Popular Forces unit had been assigned to the outpost and the Battalion had not appointed a new platoon commander to replace me. In the two weeks since I was with the platoon —they had received some more replacements—ie. ‘Operation Mixmaster’—one of those ‘replacements’ had just arrived from the States the day before—he was the lone KIA in the attack—two of the four WIA were also ‘new ‘ to the platoon. The battle raged until daylight. The VC lost an estimated 35 KIA and twice that many wounded as they retreated back towards the mountains in the West. ³⁹@ I had commandeered a jeep with a driver and arrived at the hill at daylight as the last few rounds were being fired at the retreating VC. A Regimental reserve platoon from C Company arrived at the same time to reinforce the First Platoon, A Co. I noted that most of the Marines in my old platoon were new—thanks to Operation Mixmaster and they had merged a ‘Popular Forces’ platoon (South Vietnamese militia) in with the Marine platoon. I would never have relinquished a portion of our perimeter to the PFs

and we were constantly checking and rechecking our perimeter for possible breach locations—something I don't think had been done since I left for the S-2 job (this was told to me by some of the original platoon members who were still there). The 'good news' was that the perimeter operation *still* worked—our overlapping fields of fire , the placement of the Claymore mines, the proximity of grenades to each position along with the pre arranged artillery coordinates we had arranged with Battalion—it all worked .

Chapter 32

Operation Oregon

In early March '66 rumors were surfacing that 1/4 was going to be headed North —there was a rumor that III MAF (III Marine Amphibious Force)was being pressured by higher command to 'retake' the A Shau Valley Army /ARVN outpost that had recently fallen in a massacre. A Shau Valley was the 'badlands' of Thua Thien Province. We began to do some preliminary packing in preparation for appeared to be an inevitable move coming up. @40

On Mar. 12th the Col. received marching orders from III MAF to move 1/2 of the battalion (two companies—A & B) and a skeleton Battalion staff to Phu Bai and we would get there in C-130's —where half of 1/4 would remain in Reserve—We learned later that this normally meant that III MAF or Division HQ was planning an imminent Operation of which 1/4 minus would be a part . The splitting up of Battalions and Regiments appeared to be a pattern from what I could see.

Battalion Commanders often had to operate independently from their assigned Regiment. 2/7 had been detached from the Seventh Marines in Qui Nhon while Division HQ and the other two battalions were in Chu Lai. 1/4 and 2/4 operated in and around Chu Lai while 3/4 was in Reserve at Danang. 41@ The ninth Marines and the third Marines faced the same disjointed assignments by 'higher

command'—It appeared that day to day tactical decisions were being handed down by III MAF and not Division Commands and the results were confusion, delays, shoddy communications and coordination—we saw this with Harvest Moon and were about to see it again soon! The 'Chain of Command' for Marine Units in Viet Nam looked something like this:

The President of the United States

Secretary of Defense



Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Commandant of the Marine Corps _____> U.S. Pacific command

US MAC V

FMF Pacific

III MAF _____> Task Force Delta

Division Command

Regimental Command

Battalion Command

37@ (quote Shulimson—USMC Historical Ctr. —see copies)

It often appeared to me that someone in the upper echelon in some office in Washington, Okinawa , Saigon or Hawaii would make decisions that directly affected those of us in the field without consideration of the actual enemy

situation—the weather—the terrain—, etc. By looking at a map and simply drawing a circle around a region of some tactical importance or reported enemy activity and then piece together a ‘task force’ of bastardized units to go in and ‘destroy’ the enemy! I witnessed one of these ‘strategic plans’ once in a staff meeting at Regimental HQ (Fourth Marines) Where the staff was explaining an upcoming operation they had been handed down by III MAF. We saw circles, arrows, boxes, numbers and later statistics—estimated friendly casualties—WIA and KIA and estimated enemy casualties as well—how much time it would take to secure the objective, etc. I noticed that the staff officers making the presentation were well fed—clean with shined boots, starched utilities, clean shaven and well rested. Their job was to give the orders —our job was to execute those orders. We would return to our respective battalions and begin the process of accumulating the data necessary to conduct the operation and disseminating a more detail plan to the company commanders designed by our Battalion Commander and his staff. The ‘rubber would meet the road’ when our troops actually had to implement those decisions made by others thousands of miles away and fight and die in some rice paddy in the mud while dodging enemy gunfire , sleeping in a hole and eating cold c-rations—all because some General or some politician willed it to be! We would confront our enemy—defeat that enemy—leave the area and the enemy —in greater numbers than before — would return to fight again. This was the legacy of this ‘war’—take terrain—give it back—fight and die to take it back again and on and on. I felt as if there were far too many ‘cooks in the kitchen’ and those cooks did not appear to know what

the hell they were doing! 'Task Force Delta' was a good example of the inept leadership that resulted in Marines being killed. My old outfit (2/7) was pulled into Operation Harvest Moon' by a loosely strung together 'Task Force' led by General Henderson—a respected veteran of WWII and Korea but he had never commanded a large, regimental sized unit. @ 42 The Task Force pulled in units from two different Regiments and Two different Divisions, (2nd. Bn, 7th. Marines, 3rd. Bn., 3rd. Marines and 2nd. Bn. 4th Marines),The ARVN, Navy Amphibious artillery and air support, Air Force air support and artillery support from the 12 th. Marines. Neither of the aforementioned battalion commanders had their full battalion contingent with their own artillery support in this operation. This is important because battalions train together—develop communications networks, call signs and know what to do when confronting a given situation. The coordination and communications issues with this pieced together regiment proved to be a disaster! Marine units couldn't communicate due to radio 'interference' from the helicopter support units who were inadvertently interfering with the ground to ground communications. 43@ As every one now knows our Marines, including 2/7 overcame the miscues of higher command and fought bravely thru their objectives —turning an assault into a rescue mission for it's own units and the units from participating Battalions—The Task Force Commander—General Henderson was relieved during this operation by general Walt. @44

I had great empathy for our Company commanders in 1/4 when I would brief them in our staff briefing sessions. These Marine officers were the ones who

were directly responsible for carrying out the 'plans' that had come down from 'on high'. The briefing sessions would often become contentious to the point when the XO or the Battalion Commander would have to intervene by giving a command all Marines understand—" AS YOU WERE"!!

In one particular briefing session on or about Mar. 15 th. the Col. had informed the Company Commanders of our upcoming operation called 'Operation Oregon' having met with his immediate staff earlier. The Col. announced that our upcoming operation would be conducted in the same general neighborhood as the one described by Bernard Fall in the book 'Street Without Joy' that the French dubbed 'Operation Camargue' which was a major battle against the Viet Minh fought along State Route 597 (named "The Street Without Joy) wherein the French got their nose bloodied by the Viet Minh Regiment # 95. @⁴⁵ We proceeded to describe the enemy situation, the terrain which included trenches and bunkers used by the Viet Minh against the French—we described the weather forecast which was not good and finally we got to the Q & A part of the briefing. I was 'up to bat' as the Company commanders wanted more details about the enemy—the size, the location, the weapons, etc.—I presented what we knew and offered the info. coming out of Div. HQ and III MAF. The Col. had been given conflicting info. regarding the enemy locations—so conflicting that Col. Sullivan told the Company Commanders that he " would direct them towards the enemy after we landed—whether that be North , South, East or West! "@⁴⁶ I was asked for maps of the area—I had none. I informed the company Commanders that we had been trying to locate maps for them but they were not available. The

Company Commanders were livid—as they should have been and as was I. If we couldn't find the maps then 1/4 would be flying into a battle zone blind—It was imperative that they would be able to identify terrain features, streams, villages and other terrain features and these were an essential tool for calling in artillery and air support! The Col. was upset about this and promised that we would indeed get those maps forthwith—he looked at me and said that's job no. one Lieutenant—get on it! Everyone on the Col.'s staff turned to and called surrounding outfits, division HQ, III MAF HQ and gradually over the next 24hrs. we were able to scrounge enough maps for the Col., the company commanders, support units, etc. to mount the operation. Combat situations normally develop around the movement of enemy units —so Intelligence and operations people operate in a very fluid, developing situation. Having maps of every Region of the Country immediately available in large quantities for distribution wasn't feasible in 1966. Often, we would have maybe two or three days after being given an Operational Order for the Battalion to mount out—the challenge was to provide what the troops would need for each operation on short notice.

Sometime between Mar. 15th and Mar. 16th. Col. Sullivan decided on the location of the LZ's. @47This would be a helicopter assault with Companies A and B. On Mar. 18th Col. Sullivan received the 'deployment orders' which directed him to have the Battalion (minus) ready for boarding the choppers early on the 19 th. of Mar. This would be a 'Task Force' operation with Col. T.F. Fisher commanding. The 'Task ' organization included H& S Co., 81mm mortar platoon,

Batteries C and Y of the 12th Marines, Medical platoon, communications platoon, S-2 Section, vietnamese interpreter, Navy Gunfire spot team, Marine helicopter Squadron 163, Destroyer USS R.B. Anderson, 2216 Aviation unit , the local Popular Forces unit and co. A, 1st. Eng. Bn. @ 48 The weather was bad—low cloud cover and steady rain which prevented the assault from occurring on the 19th.—the battalion hunkered down over night waiting for the weather to clear — finally—at mid day on the 20th. The weather was still not ‘clear’ but it was better —very cloudy and overcast with a mist in the air. Operation Oregon finally got under way. @49 The Col had been ordered to leave two companies behind for Base security and Regimental reserve. Battalion 1/4 (-) would be moving into an unfamiliar region known for being the base for several enemy battalions and a hot bed of hostility with less than a full strength Battalion—(another example of the ineptitude of the higher echelons over which we had no control). The Col. had designated our LZ ’s for the Operation (LZ Robin and LZ Eagle) the ‘Street without Joy’ was in the middle of these landing zones! Because of the number of helicopters available—the choppers had to make multiple trips producing some anxious moments as the day wore on—once the VC knew where we were landing we knew they would try and take out the choppers—and they did! Once on the ground —the Col. and part of his staff moved with B Company followed by A Co. and the other half of the Col.’s reduced staff which began to secure the LZ’s . Col. Sullivan and his reduced staff moved South toward the location of the last reported sighting of the enemy unit reported to be a possible platoon sized PAVN (Peoples Army of Viet Nam) unit . A Co. and B Co. had landed on

opposite sides of the “Street Without Joy” and headed south. B Company formed up to move with part of the Col.’s Command Post and was brought under small arms fire— I was moving with A Company as we reacted to the attack. They were almost on top of us—too close for comfort causing everyone to seek cover until we could identify the enemy locations. @ 50 At first we thought we were facing a small enemy squad —-then things changed rapidly—we began receiving heavy machine gun fire from multiple locations indicating at least a platoon or



Operation Oregon Battlefield

company sized unit was firing on us. B Co. and A Co. began taking casualties. The rounds were hitting with all of the force of a .50 cal. machine gun—which they were. This was no longer an assault—it was an enemy ambush!

The ground shook from their force and the sound of the rounds passing through the air was mind-blowing as they hissed over and around our position. We were being ‘ambushed’ with .50 cal—.30 cal machine guns, and small arms fire along with 60mm mortars. The Bn. CP unit along with elements of B Co. moved to an old Buddhist temple where we could regroup and set up the CP and an

observation post—our assault had become an enemy ambush—our staff group with A Co. was maneuvering toward the old buddhist Temple when the heavy machine guns hit us—one Marine went down—he was maneuvering his Marines to get them under cover—ignoring his own safety he was standing up giving hand signals to his men when the machine guns got him—S/Sgt. Vergalito died that day—formerly of E Co., 2nd. Platoon, 7th. Marines and as of late— First platoon, A Co., Fourth Marines— He had been mix mastered along with several of the new Marines in A Co. - I watched this happen approx. 20 yards from my position which was on the tail end of the Battalion staff group—Helplessly, I watched this great marine Veteran lose his life in this Godforsaken place and for what Godforsaken reason! There was nothing we could do to save him by the time we got to him. @51 The machine gun fire from the tree line was relentless— All of us began hitting the ground, looking for cover—the dikes were the only cover we had—Marines were being cut down from both A Co. and B Co. Orders were given to ‘stay down’ but one Marine to my right was screaming for his buddy who had been cut down in the initial burst from the tree line—his buddy was approximately 40-50 yards from our position—he said ‘hold on—I’m coming to get you’! We screamed at him to stay down—but he didn’t—he got up—ran forward—zig-zagged, got down, got up and was hit square in the chest with what appeared to be a .50 cal round—both Marines were KIA ! We wouldn’t be able to reach them until hours later when the firing from the tree line was neutralized. Enemy fire became so intense that our Marines couldn’t advance without taking heavy casualties. @52

This 'platoon sized' enemy force revealed itself to be at least a two VC Companies with a heavy weapons Company plus a company of local heavily armed fighters dug in amidst the old fortifications left over by the Viet Minh from the French war in this same region. @ 53

B Company and A Company were maneuvering to return fire the best they could but everyone was pinned down by relentless heavy 50 mm machine gun fire grazing across the terrain and 60 mm mortars zeroing in on our positions. I estimated the enemy fortifications were 100/150 yards from our positions. This would have been too close for any sized unit but we had a Battalion Commander within the uncomfortable reach of an enemy of unknown size— Like most of the staff officers I was armed only with a .45 cal pistol—I had it in my hand and was honestly close enough to the treeline 100 yds. or less — I was within effective range to fire into that treeline—which I didn't—wanting to hold on to my ammo because I thought they might rush us —one of those times when I wish I had an M14 Rifle. I ran, crawled and squirmed my way across the field—there was smoke, the smell of cordite and the sounds of battle unlike any of the experiences I had up to this point. The 60 mm mortars were exploding in front of our positions —the .30 cal. and .50 cal machine gun fire was moving back and forth over and around our heads and across the field in front of us— It was a chaotic situation until I finally reached our staff command group—they were out of the line of fire and hidden within the old buddhist Temple grounds. I made contact with our communications team and began to document the reports coming in from the two companies. We located our position and that of the

enemy on our maps. Fortunately, we had a forward air controller, a naval gunfire liaison and artillery liaison's at the CP. They began to do their jobs and the supporting artillery from 105 MM Howitzers and 155 mm Howitzers began to find their marks in the treeline that camouflaged the enemy fortifications. Orders had been given to hunker down and let artillery and air support do their job. Within minutes the big guns from the U. S. Navy Destroyer, USS Richard B. Anderson , began to make Her presence known and the rounds from those big guns whistled thru the air right on target .@ 54 Then, the guns became silent —on command from the Col.—to allow air support to come in —-enemy firing had eased up as our air support kicked in raking the tree line fortifications with their guns, rockets and bombs and last but not least napalm—our aircraft dropped canister after canister of napalm on the target igniting the entire tree line and the hidden fortifications—the fire was so hot we had to turn our faces downward to avoid the heat —like standing too close to a bonfire. By then the enemy, or what was left was on the run with A Co. and remnants of B Company in pursuit. The aftermath of our attack left VC bodies, body parts and destroyed fortifications—it was obvious that we had destroyed much of the enemy battalion.@ 55 This 'after action report' was written by me—as S-2 for the Bn.

The battalion pursued the remnants of the VC for the next two days—A Company and B Company executing their 'frag' orders to search for and destroy the remaining enemy—which they did!

The cost of this battle was significant—we had lost 11 Marine KIA and another 50 wounded—the number would've been much higher if our artillery, air and

Naval support hadn't been there. @ 56 enemy losses were difficult to measure but it appeared that we had 48 confirmed VC—possibly another 40 KIA and another 50 WIA had been confirmed.

Hindsight is 20/20 of course but the question will always remain in my mind—why in the hell were we there with a bobtail Battalion and not at full strength Especially, in light of what happened during Operation Harvest Moon a few weeks earlier just South of Operation Oregon's battle zone. Col. Utter and the Marines of 2/7 (minus) did the best they could but they were fighting at less than full strength because of the incompetence and poor judgment by the higher echelon resulting in the eventual removal from command of a Marine General! Col. Sullivan and the Marines of 1/4 were also operating without a full battalion and communications with one in reserve from another Division was a disaster.

@57

Many of the details I have mentioned I was able to glean from reports made later re. our operations. My memory was pretty good but it helped immensely to have dates, times, units and the sequence of some events verified by official records and reports. I reference these throughout this project.

Chapter 33

Operations North into Khe Sanh, Phu Bai, Hue and Que Son

Battalion 1/4 continued its operations in the Quang Nam Province—just South of the DMZ. We now knew—for certain —that the NVA had increased the volume of troops it was sending south—Operations Harvest Moon ,Oregon and Utah had revealed that —along with the Army's losses in Ashau Valley. The 'face of our enemy was indeed changing—from the simple villager turned Viet Cong —to the hard core, well trained military units out of the North. Throughout the Spring of 1966 our Battalion continued its operations in and around the Phu Bai region of the Quang Nam Province.



We ventured into Hue where we saw beautiful temples and a bustling city—it would later be reduced to rubble near the end of the War in one of the bloodiest battles of the War. We conducted mostly battalion sized sweeps at this time since the intelligence reports indicated regimental sized enemy units infiltrating across the DMZ. On one such patrol we came upon an old French Fort where we stopped for the night to rest and regroup. The fort was smaller than I would have anticipated—made entirely of concrete it resembled a bunker inside—with shooting slots in the sides of the walls. Sure enough, it was in the middle of a valley surrounded on all sides by hilly terrain . This was one of the strategic ‘failings’ of the French that we had learned in Basic School—they suffered defeat after defeat at their forts due to the fact they were all built in valleys, surrounded by mountainous or hilly terrain where the Viet Minh and the PAVN would simply rain artillery and mortars down on them —like the battle at Dien Binh Phu. @ 58

Moving as a Battalion we experienced very few contacts with the enemy—they liked to attack platoon size or smaller targets and always when they had superior numbers—in a surprise—heavily fortified location with exit routes pre planned. Everywhere we went we saw the evidence of the French-Indo China War fought a decade earlier. As we moved among the villages we could see the French influence in the people who had a mixture of French-Vietnamese in their heritage —Many were beautiful/handsome , taller than the average Vietnamese with softer facial features and lighter colored hair. As usual we were often met with a variety of attitudes—some friendly—some openly hostile—some suspicious. It

was obvious that many of these people saw us as ‘invaders’ not ‘saviours’—they still remembered the French occupation and simply wanted foreigners out of their Country—something we understood completely in 1966. General Walt had initiated a ‘three pronged strategy’ to accomplish our mission to secure the I Corps. region. @ 59 (Shulimson) the three prongs were: Search and Destroy Operations; Counter Guerrilla Operations; Pacification Operations. The ‘Pacification’ effort never really took hold. The strategy to bring medical supplies and treatment to the villages was one of the best parts about his strategy—much good was done throughout the Country in this regard. Another part of the Pacification strategy that did some good was the ‘education/training component’.

@ 60 The Vietnamese were introduced to ways to make their drinking water safer, how to grow better crops and various ways to improve their infrastructure .

These efforts were thwarted often by the communist influence in these villages—folks were threatened for participating in these programs—the communist simply did not want the people to be ‘won over’ by the Americans and the S. Vietnamese government.

These operations continued through the Spring of 1966—several operations were launched against the growing number of NVA crossing the DMZ and the South. The NVA had indicated they were willing to lose large numbers of their soldiers to make a statement against our presence there and they were prepared to make us ‘pay’ for that presence by inflicting major casualties on our Marines and the ARVN.

Chapter 34

Reflections

As the End of my 'tour' began to approach I couldn't help but look around and ask 'what have we accomplished'? It was a 'rhetorical' question- but one I couldn't honestly answer—I had helped fight an enemy that refused to retreat even when beaten—I had watched our Marines give all they had to do what our Country expected them to do—I had watched with pride as the Marines in my platoon—in our Company and in our battalions had performed as advertised—they had been brave, courageous, adaptive, aggressive—they had shown compassion for the innocent and the vulnerable—even at the expense of putting their own safety at risk. They had died, been wounded , faced fearful circumstances in the dark and dangerous jungles of Viet Nam. They had survived hunger and thirst—hot and steaming conditions—mosquitos, snakes and other creatures—miserable, wet clothing—weeks and months without the basic comforts of a hot shower, a hot meal, a cool drink and the comforting embrace of their loved ones—in some cases—forever! The average age of these Marines was 22—the ave. educational level was H.S. grad plus one yr. of higher ed. @ 61 In 1965-66 they were all volunteers—they wanted to be Marines—to fight for our Country. This was not a War that was won by winning battle after battle—which we did—it was a War that could not be measured by the

number of enemy casualties versus the number of friendly casualties—it was not a war that could be measured by how much terrain we controlled—we often took an objective—left that objective only to have to return later and ‘retake’ that objective. In other words we could not quantify our success! This was the first war in our history that was fought as a ‘politically correct’ war! We simply repeated the same patrol routes, operations and sweeps—taking fire from the VC who knew we were coming and returning fire when possible —occasionally killing, wounding and/or capturing a few VC here and there. Our Marines did the best they could under impossible circumstances—this became obvious to us as the months passed by and the overall ‘strategies’ didn’t change. Looking back—of course hindsight is 20/20—it appeared that our top commanders didn’t know how to fight this War. It was unlike anything we had faced before—the same tried and true methods that had worked in other Wars simply didn’t fit in this war. Supposedly, we had all the advantages—the latest weapons, air support, Naval support and the best equipped—best trained military in the World. Our tanks were useless in most of the terrain—helicopters couldn’t provide support in the cloudy, wet and misty jungles at certain times due to those conditions—the artillery couldn’t provide support for the close in, smaller unit battles which occurred in the jungle undergrowth which the VC preferred. Our troops were weighed down by the gear they had to carry on extended patrols—we had to carry our food, our water, our ammo., our weapons though steep, heavy undergrowth in 100 degree temperatures while our enemy traveled much lighter with their food , water and ammo hidden nearby in the villages, hamlets and

sometimes caves. No, this was not a pretty war—not that any war ever is—this war was ugly and for many of us the unspoken word was —unwinnable—a word that Marines never use but it's a word I thought and kept to myself. I realized that I had done my best —to keep my troops alive and accomplish our missions and done so in keeping with the traditions and customs of the United States Marine Corps and we had done it 'the right way'!

I'll forever appreciate the 'little things' that makes life go around—the hot shower, hot food, clean water, cold drinks, a safe place to sleep, a comfortable bed and not having to 'duck' when I heard a loud noise. I had been 'lucky'—blessed and unable to comprehend how I had somehow 'dodged' the bullets, the mines, the mortars and although I had been injured several times I was always able to continue to function. I appreciate being alive and in one piece—grateful for one more day—one day at a time. I had moments of prayer and I feel those prayers were answered—there were a couple of times when I know there was 'divine intervention'—I know when those happened and I'll always keep those moments near and dear to my heart . People that know me best know I'm not a 'religious' type but they don't see what's inside —we all worship in our own way—I know what happened to me and that's all that's important.

I turned in my 782 gear and my trusty .45 pistol that I had carried since it was issued to me at Camp Las Pulgas in Aug. 1964. I had slept with that pistol — carried it everywhere I went (in Viet Nam). It never let me down and saved my life at least on one occasion. I carried a few personal belongings but I was

traveling light knowing I would meet up with my uniforms back in Okinawa where everything had been stored on our way to Nam.

I knew that most of the 2/7 Marines that had landed with me a year earlier had already rotated back or were in the process of doing so. I had lost track of Kozak and Boryszewski earlier when we were mix mastered out of 2/7 into 1/4 but I figured they were probably on their way home too. There were several flights leaving Danang every day since this 'rotation' began.

Soon—I was on my way to Okinawa via the 'Northwest Orient Airlines'—I settled into the comfortable seats, enjoying the air conditioned comfort of the plane and noticing the attractive flight attendants who helped get us settled. The crew was playing the song "Up, Up and Away" by the Fifth Dimension as we boarded—I'll always remember that moment. No one said very much—we just stared out the window as the plane took off from Da Nang. Everyone was apparently lost in their own thoughts as we left the place that had caused us so much pain and discomfort for the past year and would forever be burned into our memories.

Once in Okinawa I would be debriefed, provided fresh uniforms, receive immunization shots, receive hot chow, a clean cot with a comfortable mattress and clean sheets— enjoy hot showers as long as I wanted and other amenities that were intended to 'take the animal out us ' before shipping us home. I received orders to my new assignment —Quantico, Va. —I would be a platoon commander at OCS —training new Marine officer Candidates—my first choice on my 'Request for Duty Assignment form'.

I boarded the plane in Okinawa a few days later for the United States with a profound sense of gratitude and appreciation for being alive—in one piece and headed for home and my family—and a sadness knowing that many of our troops would never again experience that—- and I will never, ever forget that!

Chapter 35

Moving On

My orders had me reporting to H & S Co., Quantico, Va. Marine Base 45 days later—this included leave and travel time the Marines provide for a ‘change of duty station’. I landed at LAX and made my way thru the concourse to my next flight to Washington D.C. where I had planned to meet Kay—it was the closest National Airport for Kay to reach from Bramwell, W. Va. —Kay had flown from the Bluefield Airport to Washington and rented a new Chevy Montecarlo for us to drive home. My walk thru LAX was wonderful—the people, the smells, the sounds—America! Although I was in uniform I had no comments made to me one way or another and that was fine with me—I didn’t expect to be ‘greeted’ by anyone. I never saw anyone ‘spit’ on a soldier or a Marine like so many said they experienced. If someone had spit on me they would’ve had a broken nose shortly thereafter.

Upon landing in Washington I deplaned and met Kay as she was waiting in a crowd of people greeting their loved ones. I spotted her right away— She looked beautiful and we both had tears in our eyes as we embraced in front of God and everybody! We didn’t say anything for several minutes —we just held onto each other—the best feeling in the world! Although she didn’t say so—I’m

sure Kay noticed how much weight I had lost—the dirty tan on my face and the new wrinkles around my eyes and the look of a man that had a wiser, older look than the last time she has seen me. Kay, on the other hand looked younger and more poised not to mention gorgeous ! Kay had decided to leave Kimmie with her Grandparents while she made the trip to D.C.—Kay and Kimmie had spent the year with her family in Bramwell so Kimmie was right at home for that couple of days. We decided to stay in DC overnight since it was late in the day by the time we got away from the airport. The trip to Bramwell was approx. six hours and after fourteen + hours on the airplane I was feeling the effects of the journey. —We stayed at the soon to be famous Watergate Hotel (of Richard Nixon fame). We couldn't stop talking—I wanted to hear all about Kimmie and what they had been doing for the past year and Kay wanted to hear all about my experiences. We had a big steak dinner which I found too 'rich' for my stomach —I actually had a little queezeness from the meal since my diet had been so bland for so long. We had a wonderful night together and left for Bramwell early the next morning —I couldn't wait to 'meet' our little toddler who was now walking and saying a few words. Kay had sent pictures and made audio recordings of Kimmie through the past year—keeping me up to date on her growth and development so I already knew a lot about her —I couldn't wait to actually pick her up and hug her close like I did that early morning a little over a year earlier when I had said goodbye and left her and her Mom in front of the Pine Ave. Apts. in Carlsbad Cal.

My 'introduction' to Kimmie did not go as I expected—we arrived in Bramwell at The Gross's (Kay's Parents) home in mid afternoon—Kimmie was taking her nap—we went upstairs where she was sleeping —Kay went over and gently woke her up—she was sleepy but she smiled at her Mommy —Kay picked her up and I came over and took Kimmie from her Mother's arms—at which point she looked at me and her little face twisted into a very unhappy face and she started crying and wanting 'down'—I put her down and she ran out of the room—I couldn't believe how big she had gotten and she could 'run'—not just walk. I again had tears in my eyes—certainly understanding why she would be afraid of this strange man who had picked her up. In all fairness—she had just woken up and here were all these people around her bed. We eventually worked everything out and explained to Kimmie that I was the 'daddy' in the picture that Kay had repeatedly shown her while I was gone. Our baby girl was now a beautiful, blonde, blue eyed little toddler who quickly learned that she could smile at her daddy and get anything she wanted!

The next couple of weeks were spent visiting with all known relatives—watching Kimmie and learning how to be a daddy while also learning how to 'decompress' from the past year. We made arrangements to have our things moved out of storage and arranged to have them shipped to Quantico and our new quarters at Thompson Park on Base. Meanwhile, we enjoyed our families and doing things together as a family of our own. Things were remarkably quiet—from what I had been used to—the Fourth of July rolled around—we had turned in fairly early —in the garage apt. the Gross's had turned over to us while we were there. —-later

that evening—we were asleep—the Town of Bramwell celebrated the Fourth of July like most cities and towns—with firecrackers and fireworks displays—the first of the big displays went off and I bolted straight up—yelled ‘get down’ and leaped onto the floor—where I flattened my body—scared Kay half to death—then we both realized what had just happened and had to laugh—but this was but one of many such moments we would have for a while.

Chapter 36

Quantico Marine Base

Kay and I moved to Quantico a couple of weeks before I was scheduled to check in to my new assignment. We furnished our new quarters (a townhouse) and proceeded to get all of our utilities, etc. hooked up. I went by HQ, H&S Co. to let them know I was in the area and to learn where my new 'office' would be. I received my new promotion to Captain and put the new rank insignia on all my uniforms. The uniforms had been updated, retailored to fit after I had lost some weight over the past year. I knew from speaking with my Company Commander that I must appear in front of my new officer candidates in uniforms that were impeccable as I would be a role model for the new officers—a role I gladly embraced. Boots, shoes, belt buckles, etc. were shined to a high gloss—utility uniforms were starched along with my utility cover. The new candidates would see their new platoon commander as a squared away Marine who was fit and ready to lead them thru their twelve week ordeal.

I began a fitness program to get myself back in shape. I had about a month before the new officer candidates would check in. The combat zone was not a place you could find the time or the place to keep your body in top shape—so I

had a lot of work to do. I began running gradually increasing my speed and distance. The Prince William 'Forest Park' near Quantico provided the perfect place to get the aerobic training I needed—it had endless trails that were interconnected so you could alter your 'course' for whatever distance you wanted. I made sure to include the infamous 'hill trail' in my weekly regimen. The hill trail was located at the Officer's Candidate School training area on the Base. I also worked out on the 'obstacle courses' and did all the exercises required for the 'Physical Readiness Test'—I knew I would have to be in better shape than the young officer candidates coming to Quantico from all over the United States (Quantico is the only place where Marine Officers are trained). The military academies send some officers to Quantico to complete the 'Basic School' component of the training which is located on a different site on the Base. That portion of the training begins after OCS and extends for six more months and is known as 'the finishing school' for Marine Officers. This is where the officers receive in depth training in all aspects of the USMC. Leadership, history of the Corps., infantry tactics, weaponry, land navigation, command responsibilities, proper military 'etiquette' , etc. to add the polish to become 'an officer and a gentleman'.

Soon, I had my first class of Officer Candidates running the 'hill trail' that I had used and cursed as a student myself a couple years earlier. The weeks progressed and I had the opportunity to coach my platoon under actual 'field conditions' to prepare them for the Viet Nam War which they all would be engaged in within the next year. I shared my experiences and answered their



questions whenever they occurred—mostly they wanted to know ‘what it was like’? I did my best to present an honest and forthright answer to those questions —I wanted them to know what they would be facing —and get ready for it!

I explained to them that no matter how wet—how tired—how miserable they were during our training—they would not come close to being as miserable as they would soon find themselves to be in actual combat. During our night time exercises in the wooded, hilly terrain around the training area of Quantico, we would do our best to replicate the situations they would find themselves in. We had ambushes staged—patrols conducted, defensive positions occupied and we had sounds of small arms fire, explosives. We also let them experience absolute silence—where they knew ‘something’ might happen but didn’t know what—or when. We trained them hard—expected everything they had to give —we lost three or four along the way as these candidates found they couldn’t meet the standards we had for them to receive a Marine Officer’s Commission.

Finally, in Dec. 1966 my second class (the first class was a PLC Platoon Leader’s Class that were finishing their final six weeks of training) of Officer Candidates graduated and would move on to Basic School in Jan. 1967.

Chapter 37

Independent Duty (Richmond, Va.)

During the month of Dec. 1966—while preparing my platoon of Officer Candidates for the final days of their OC training I received a shocking notification from Headquarters Marine Corps.—I was being transferred to Richmond, Virginia as the Officer in Charge of Marine Recruiting for the State of Virginia! This would mean a second transfer in less than a year—a second move for my little Family and all the details that would entail. I was livid! I loved Quantico—Kay loved Quantico—I was told that I had done a great job as an OCS platoon leader/instructor—my evaluation marks were excellent—I couldn't understand why I was being transferred and for the second time in my career I requested 'Mast' with the Quantico Base Commander on my way up the chain of command to HQMC (Headquarters Marine Corps)—The base commander assured me that he could not resolve my concern and referred me to HQMC. I soon realized that two other sets of orders were involved—the current OIC (Officer in Charge) in Richmond had orders to Viet Nam and an officer returning from Viet Nam received orders replacing me at OCS. The wheels were in motion

and there was nothing more I could do except report for duty in Richmond as Assigned by Jan. 22, 1967.

Reluctantly, Kay and I —with little Kimmie in tow, drove to Richmond to locate housing and to become familiar with our new duty station. By late Dec. 1966 we had made arrangements to move our belongings to our new quarters in the West End suburbs of Richmond, Va. I checked in with the outgoing OIC and met Station Sgt. Major See who resembled 'Mr. Clean' in the commercials. The main office was located in downtown Richmond. Capt. Brown, the outgoing OIC had received orders to Viet Nam and had as many questions for me as I did for him. My commute from the West End to the office was approx. 25 min. in traffic — something I had not had to face before—commuting to work with thousands of civilians every day.

My immediate Command HQ was located in Philadelphia, PA. My assignment was 'independent duty' for that reason. I had a central staff of Marine and civilian clerks and logistical personnel of approximately ten/twelve. I also took command of twelve Marine recruiting stations scattered across the State of Va.—each Station ranged in size from one recruiter to eight—from Bristol, Va. to Norfolk for 12 stations in all and approximately 35 Marine recruiters. In Jan. 1967 the War was heating up and the quotas we were assigned were raising each month from 80 to 150 recruits over a period of a few months. This same picture was forming in every State in the Union so that it was clear the Marine Corps was in need of thousands of new Marines every month. My job was to insure that our Station met it's quota—conversely each of the sub stations had to meet their assigned

quotas—I arranged staff meetings, received briefings and estimates and we developed Public Relations strategies to attract more young men and women to the Corps. I traveled the State often unannounced to inspect our sub stations and check on the recruiters who manned them—I wanted to see their records , their ‘contact list’, records of high school visits, drop ins, etc. Initially, I had to get a few ‘salty’ Marine recruiters ‘squared away’ by reminding them that they were ‘still in the Corps.’ and refreshed their memories about the care of the uniform and the condition of their office. For a Captain I was still ‘youthful’ in my appearance but that initial reaction on their part was quickly dispelled when they had their first ‘dressing down’ discussion with me. My initial reaction to my first visit ‘to the field’ is that we had some complacency and therefore, some ‘slippage’ in our sub stations—something the Sgt. Major agreed with when I shared my observations upon return to the Station. The word quickly got around (the recruiters called each other to share their experience) that the new OIC was a ‘hard ass’ (according to the Sgt. Maj.) and for the most part the recruiters knew that things may have gotten too lax over time. We had a budget that required that our expenses be tied to our recruiting quota—how much were we spending to recruit each new Marine—by Station—By sub station and by recruiter. I worked with my immediate staff to figure ways to reduce spending and increase ‘production’. Basically, I was operating as a CEO or a manager—and this was a new experience for me.

Meeting Chesty Puller

Other duties came my way—I learned that I was to be the ‘Aide’ for General Chesty Puller’ who lived in Saluda, Va. whenever he had to attend some function in and around Virginia. Also, we provided a vehicle and a driver for his trips to the airport. I enjoyed meeting General Puller and his lovely wife —Virginia, who normally accompanied him on these trips. My first visit to his home in Saluda was special—I had learned all about General Puller, of course, throughout my time in the Corps.. his home was modest but nice—a comfortable home that smelled of cedar wood burning in the fireplace and his favorite pipe tobacco. My first visit was simply to introduce myself as Capt. Brown’s replacement and to acknowledge that I would have the honor of serving as his aide whenever the need would arise. The General never did say much—Mrs. Puller did most of the talking —asking me questions about my family and such. The General wanted to know what I thought of the War and I told him—he shook his head in agreement —and said ‘a damn mistake’!

Not long after my first meeting with the General I learned from Capt. Bob Padgett that Chesty’s Son, Lewis Puller, Jr. was going to be sworn in as an officer candidate recruit. Capt. Padgett was the OIC for officer recruitment. My office was the ‘ceremonial’ office—with the U.S Flag, the Marine Corps. Flag and the State of Virginia flags appropriately displayed for ‘swearing in ‘ ceremonies and the like. Capt. Padgett arranged with me to have Chesty ’s son sworn in using that office. I was present along with the Pullers, family members and friends of the family—it was a little crowded. The picture of the swearing in ceremony shows Capt. Padgett giving the oath to young Lewis Puller, Jr. When the oath

was finished young Puller turned and said something to his Father that I'll not repeat but to say it was not a happy moment is an understatement.

Less than a year later young Puller would come home from serving honorably in Viet Nam as a platoon Commander --he came home on a stretcher severely wounded, losing both legs—He survived the catastrophic injuries—became a lawyer and a writer but the injuries became too much to bear and he eventually took his own life at age 48. @ 62

Another one of the necessary but unpleasant duties I had as the OIC was 'casualty notification'. Our job was to receive information re. Marine casualties and notify the family—in person —of that Marine's casualty. There is absolutely no way to do it pleasantly. The Wounded in Action cases were challenging — depending on the injury—we stayed with the family as long as necessary to insure their questions were answered and that they had contact information, etc. There were always two of us to make the call on the family—We always wore our Class 'A' uniforms. The KIA's were a different story—I always tried to find a local minister—who could help locate the family minister—if there was one—or the Rabbi or Priest . We would then physically visit the family and would face a range of actions that one might expect—the protocol was one that was required by regulation—certain words had to be used—certain information given and we were restricted from making other comments. This was the hardest thing I ever had to do as a Marine officer.

Along about this time—June 1968 Kay gave birth to our littlest Marine—Clay Asbury (William Clayton Asbury Jr.) who would join his big sister Kimberly as the future of the Asbury Family. Clay was a chubby, happy little guy with platinum blond hair and an infectious smile. Kimmie took to him right away and became a little momma —helping Kay and me with our parenting chores—she was only three! Both children would grow into beautiful, well balanced citizens who made me and Kay happy and proud!

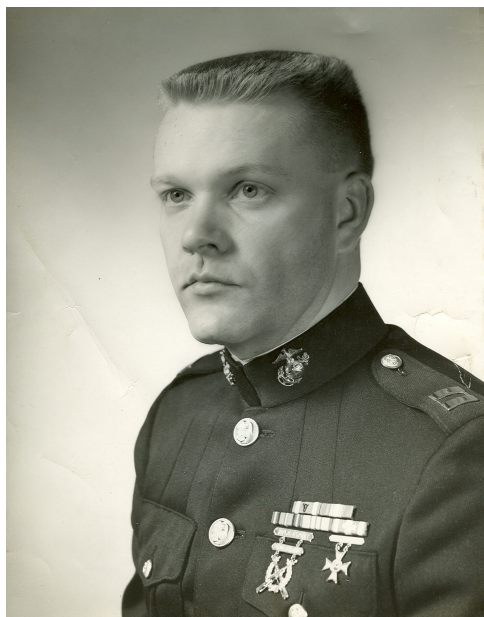
While Kay was in the hospital giving birth to Clay —Jun. 28—I received word that something tragic had occurred.

I had to make a ‘casualty call’ on a family Kay and I knew personally from our Church. Their Son had enlisted a few months earlier at the Richmond Recruiting Center . I received the notification that he had been killed in Viet Nam. I agonized over this notification—I considered letting the officer in charge of the local Marine Reserve center do it but decided that it was my responsibility. I notified our Pastor—whom I knew—he met me at the church and drove over to the family’s home a few blocks away.—We rang the doorbell and the Marine’s Mother answered the door—she knew me and she knew the Pastor —right away she knew why we were there—she collapsed in our arms and we managed to bring her into the living room—soon we had contacted the Father and he came and helped console his wife while fighting thru his own heartbreak—other family members and friends soon came to the home. The entire family of this young, fallen Marine treated us graciously —were appreciative that it was indeed me that had broken the news and not some stranger which caused me to reflect on

my earlier decision to break this news myself—as bad as it was —I was mollified by the fact that it may have eased their pain slightly. Both parents expressed their concern about me having to leave Kay and Clay in the hospital in order to meet with them—they had heard about Clay’s birth earlier thru church members. These wonderful people —in the midst of their own tragedy actually sent flowers and a wonderful note to Kay while she was in the hospital—one of the most heartfelt moments in my life.

During these times I reflected on the irony of the situation where I had had to send Marines home from Viet Nam a year earlier and now I was receiving Marines being sent by the Corps. from the home end of the War.

Another of my many duties was to act as the OIC of the ‘burial detail’ . Our detail provided the Marine escorts for the caskets, played taps at the grave site and I presented the Flag to the Family—this detail took on many forms depending on the churches, the graveyards, family desires, etc.—we had to adapt to those various circumstances. Again, not one of my favorite duties to perform.



We were also required to perform ceremonial duties from time to time. On one such occasion HQMC notified us that we were to provide a 'Flag detail' for the Prime Minister and Princess Grace of Monaco. Apparently, our U. S. Ambassador had arranged for a ceremony at one of Richmond's Malls wherein the Monaco Flag and the U. S. Flag would be given —each to the other Country



—then raised on two flagpoles at the mall. We learned as much as we could about the layout—what was expected—did an early rehearsal and prepared to adapt to whatever they expected us to do. This turned out to be a bigger operation than I expected since the U.S. Ambassador didn't show up and they asked me to do the actual presentation of colors to the Prime Minister. This we carried out as smoothly as we could have imagined with the news media all around it went off without a hitch. Each day as the 'Officer in Charge' was pretty much like this—we never knew what was coming next—we had a small unit so

everyone—including the clerks—had to be ready to do whatever was required.

I was asked to speak at many events and with many groups who were interested in the War in Viet Nam. There were many questions that I did my best to answer but—there were times that I doubted my own answers. The news media often called my office ‘for comment’ on some Marine event or another—I was essentially the Marine Corps’s ‘ Public Relations Officer’ throughout Virginia. At the same time I was expected to run a recruiting operation that was getting tougher and tougher by the day—the protests were growing —the media was becoming more anti military and it was getting harder and harder to meet our quota and keep the standards we were accustomed to.

The Marines—at the time—had standards for recruiting young men and women —those standards were mental, physical, psychological and legal. Examinations and background checks were given to insure these recruits could meet the tests that would face them in becoming a Marine. In the Spring of 1968 we received new orders regarding the ‘relaxation’ of these standards in order to broaden the pool of eligible recruits. The ‘mental’ or ‘academic’ standard had five categories with one being the highest—the brightest and five being the lowest and least able to meet the stringent requirements of the Corps. We had been using Category III as the lowest score we would accept and we tried to limit those and focus on cat. I’s and II’s. HQMC and HQ Philadelphia notified us to begin accepting category IV’s as well as waiving certain law enforcement charges we had used to screen candidates. Marine Boot Camp—the heart and soul of the Corps was cut from 12 weeks to 8 in order to send more troops to Viet Nam—faster! We also learned

that —beginning in 1969 the Marines would be accepting draftees for the first time since the Korean War.

Chapter 38

Leaving 'The Corps'

In the Fall of 1968 I checked in with HQMC to find out my status re. a turnaround tour in Viet Nam—I knew it had been two years since I rotated back and I knew that many of my colleagues were receiving orders for return duty in Viet Nam. With my family situation and having had two moves in two years I didn't want another 'surprise'. Sure enough I was told that I could expect new orders any day. I had been wrestling with this decision for quite a while—knowing this day would come. My family meant everything to me—I was enjoying watching both our children play, grow and develop. We had even purchased a nice ranch style house near the apartments we had been living in. It had a great yard—nice neighbors and was in an upscale suburban neighborhood—we were happy! I had become comfortable in this 'civilian' world I was living in and that played heavily in the decision making process of whether to give up the commission I had worked so hard for. Kay was worried—she and I knew that if I went back overseas she would be raising two small children on her own—no family nearby to help. I also knew that this tour would bring a Company command post since I had already been a 'staff officer' as S-2 of 1/4 and most likely that would be in I Corps. where all our units were located. I knew I had been very lucky—blessed , during my first tour in '65-'66—there had been too many 'close calls' and I

doubted that my 'luck' would hold up the second time. I also have to admit that I was not pleased with the way our Marine Corps was being used in Viet Nam—the decisions that were being made or the politics of defending a Country that didn't seem to want to defend itself!

The total number of KIA in Viet Nam in 1965 was 1,928; in 1966 it was 6,350; in 1967—11,363; 1968—that number grew to 16,899. @ 63 These casualties were growing because of the incredible stupidity of our own government and top commanders in the field. We had the numbers—we had the equipment —yet—inexplicably, our commanders were sending ' platoons' into the hills to search for 'regiments' of the enemy. The VC simply observed when our troops came in by chopper—they retreated to pre prepared fortifications—lined up their troops in superior numbers and proceeded to ambush and annihilate our Marines on many occasions.

I had done well in the Marine Corps.—I had been meritoriously awarded a slot at OCS after two years in Recon- I had been promoted to Captain less than two years after being commissioned a second Lieutenant and I was currently number 43 on the 'major's list' for promotion to major after only four years as a commissioned officer—I had been a platoon commander—a staff officer—an OCS platoon leader and served on independent duty with the command of the Recruiting Station for Virginia—my career path was very bright.

I weighed all of the above very carefully but the one overriding concern above all else was my family—I simply did not want to leave Kay and our two beautiful children and face the prospect of me not coming back. This tour would have

meant missing another year in Kimmie's young life and the first year of my new Son's life. The Marine Corps had been my life for six and one half years—I had been 'reborn' in the Corps—I had grown up—I had matured—I had become a new person—one with confidence and experience—I had become a warrior, an officer and a gentleman and the Marine Corps provided me with a 'past' as well as a future. This was one of the hardest decisions in my life! My hat's off to the career Marines that have to make that decision and do it—no one can appreciate that sacrifice more than me—I decided at that point that I would not be a 'career' Marine—but I would always be a Marine —through and through!

I respectfully resigned my commission on Oct. 30, 1968!

What happened to the officers of E Co., 2/7?

As a follow up to the story that I've told I tried to learn what the Marine officers of E-2-7 did after their time in Viet nam. I learned that most of the E-2-7 officers left the Corps after their four year commitment as did most of the officers of 2-7 generally. The good news is that all of the 2-7 officers that started out together , survived the war. Every single officer in 2/7 had distinguished himself in combat. Lt. Nick Groz was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions during Operation Harvest Moon . Several others were awarded commendations for their time in VN and several received the Purple Heart ' for wounds received while there. A few of these Marines continued their career in the Corps. The majority decided to exit the corps . The Viet Nam War was a deciding factor in many of those Marines' decisions. At the time we all faced a turnaround tour in Viet Nam and most of us had seen up close and personal how the War was going and if anything—in 1968 —things were even worse than when we were there in '65-'66. Many of us were now married —with children. As I spoke with these Marines I got the distinct impression that many—would have made the Corps a career if not for the Viet Nam War. Combat, itself, didn't bother these Marines—it was simply the disillusionment that they had with the political juggernaught that ran the military operations in Viet Nam. At the time we had to make the critical decision to remain in the Corps or resign our commissions—the War was unpopular—things

were not getting better in that Country—there had been several ‘coups’ in the South Vietnamese Government and it appeared that our Country’s leaders were clueless regarding a winning strategy—while Marines were being killed in large numbers as a result of the ineptitude of the military/political command decisions. Putting it simply—and speaking for myself—I didn’t trust that command structure enough to put my life in their hands—again! Decisions regarding Marines weren’t being made just by Marines—they were often being made by high level Army and political bureaucrats—along with the unstable South Vietnamese Government. Many of our young ‘career minded’ officers saw this and decided they did not want to throw their hat into that ring—again!

Joe Lloyd literally ‘disappeared’ from my radar when we were ‘mixmastered’ from 2/7—I don’t know much about him , where he went or what happened to him and have not been successful in finding out much about him.

Jerry Kozak, came back from Nam—was assigned as Company Commander at San Diego Recruit Training Command while being promoted to Captain. Shortly thereafter General English selected Jerry as the General’s aide. Meanwhile, Jerry had met ‘Mrs. Kozak’ and wanted to start a family. Jerry was facing the same critical decision to stay in the Corps. and face a turnaround tour in Vietnam. He chose to leave and began a new career working for Ross Perot—the millionaire business man who ran for the office of President of the United States.

Rich Boryszewski, returned to Camp Pendleton after his tour in Viet Nam. Rich was assigned the responsibility for receiving and processing over 2,000 Marines on their way to Viet Nam. He was promoted to Captain and exited the Corp not long after and embarked on a new life of marriage, family and entrepreneurship. He became a successful financial broker with Dean Witter, later brokered new businesses in oil and real estate, became President of a National real estate sales force and eventually slowed up by just owning two successful coffee houses.

John Clancy our Company Executive officer in E, 2/7—was mix mastered to A Co., 1/4 as the Commanding officer in Nov. 1965. He led A Co. in Operation Oregon —earning a Silver Star for his leadership and sacrifice during that operation. John apparently remained in the Corps. until his retirement. I'm not clear on when that was and I have no further info. on his life after Viet Nam.

Captain Fred Tolleson was a career officer—he stayed in the Corps until retirement. He rose to the rank of Col. along the way. Col. Tolleson was also a family man . He returned to Viet Nam for at least two more tours, receiving numerous awards and citations including the 'Legion of Merit'. Among the many posts he held he served in Washington D.C. at the Pentagon as an undersecretary to the Secretary of Defense? Col. Tolleson retired from the Corp. in 1981 and entered the business world as a corporate financial executive. For a

time he had his own consulting business. He has remained active and involved in that world.

The 'Pine Ave, Circle of friends'.

John (Jack) Archer—one of the Basic School officers also started with 2/7 was in charge of the 81mm mortar section throughout his tour in Viet Nam —Jack had supported the companies and platoons with his mortar section and was always well prepared when called upon. The mortar platoon was vital to our operations and Jack and his platoon always came through. Jack returned to California and Camp Pendleton where he and his wife Vicki added another Archer or two to their clan. He was promoted to Captain and assigned as a Company Commander of an Infantry Training Regiment Company and at the same time wrote the new syllabus for training in the Advanced Infantry Training Regiment being formed. Jack exited the Corps like so many of us when his four year commitment was up. He entered the business world and eventually started his own financial brokerage firm—retiring not too long ago to their ranch near Camp Pendleton.

Hugh Doss—Another of the original Basic school class that started their careers in 2/7 who lived at the Pine Ave. Apts. along with his wife Kaye had also survived Viet Nam, although being wounded, after serving as a Co. XO and platoon leader in 3/7 where he had been transferred while we were living at Pine Ave. Hugh had also survived several 'close calls' during his time in VN Hugh and Kay

had also added another little Doss to their family prior to his shipping out for Nam when our regimental landing team left in the Spring of '65. Hugh returned 1966 like the other Seventh Marine Regiment personnel. He was promoted to Capt., assigned a couple of administrative posts before being assigned as a Company Commander of Headquarters company, Headquarters battalion, MCB Camp LeJeune

Hugh also exited the Corp. at the end of his Four year commitment. He entered the business world and eventually started his own successful franchise in the medical services industry.

Roll Call

First Platoon , Echo Company. 2nd. Bn., 7th. Marine Regiment Platoon Roster

Anderson	KIA
Bricieno	
Boyles	
Buford	
Cobler	
Cook	
duquette	
Foisy	
Fontaine	
Freeman	
Fuchs (arrived in Country 2/25/'66)	KIA 2/26/'66
Galbraith	
Gigante	

Garrison	
Harris	
Hemphill	
Hooper	
Ingerson	
Janeiro	
Jermaczonak	
Kannedy	
Leach	
Mazzone	
Midkiff	
Nelson	
Norman	KIA
Omera	
Perez	
Peterson	
Quintana	
Sacks	
Salinas	KIA
Sanner	
Schneider	
Sercu	
Shehorn	
Shriver	
Smith	
Swanson	
Teton	
Sutcliffe	
Vergalito	KIA (A Co. 1st, plt. when killed in Mar. 1966)
Voorhees	
Weiser	
Westfall	
Wenger	
Wooten	

Officers of the Second Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, First Marine

Division

from August 1964 -June.1966

E Company

Tolleson

Clancy

Asbury

Kozak

Boryszewski

Lloyd

F company

Welty

Meehan

Feille

Fink

Kesselring

G Company

Seymour

Jolley

Hartman

Barnett

Willich

H Company

OConnor

Lau

Hall

Ketchum

Yoshida

Peters

H & S Company

Groz

Snyder

Archer

Rider

S-1

Flynn

Corson

S-2

Noland

S-3

Doublet

Savarese

S-4

Lee

McElwain

Cornelius

Command

Maj. Wilson

Col. Utter

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Dr. Bill Asbury

Upon leaving the Corps I entered the field of education. Eventually, advancing thru the administrative ranks to become a high school principal, and superintendent of schools . Along the way I finished my Masters Degree and my Doctorate in Educational Administration—-I was aided in this effort by receiving one of two fellowships awarded to the City of Richmond Public Schools by the University of Virginia. I worked during those years in the Richmond Public Schools, The City of Chesapeake Public Schools, Caroline County Public Schools and Pulaski County Public Schools. I also taught as an adjunct instructor part time graduate level courses in educational administration at Virginia Commonwealth University, J. Sergeant Reynolds Community College, Old Dominion University and Tidewater Community College. I retired from my educational career in 1998 and worked part time at New River Community College for a few more years.

Kay did a wonderful job raising our two beautiful children (Kimberly and Clay). She received her RN Degree from Virginia Commonwealth University and worked in various hospitals in the Richmond area for several years. Kay also fought a courageous battle with Multiple sclerosis for many years before losing her battle in 2011.

I never regretted my decision to leave the Corps when I did. The memories I've shared in this project convey my deep affection for the United States Marine Corps and the men and women who serve and have served. I'll forever be indebted to the Corps for the foundation for success that it provided.

Semper Fi!



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The ‘fellow’ officers in E Company walked the same path as Me—we trained, fought, cried and celebrated—together as we developed our own ‘band of brothers’ fraternity—my story—in many ways—is their story! I leaned on them heavily, as I struggled to remember our time together. They each contributed ideas, memories, suggestions and constructive criticism in writing this project.

The ‘Pine Ave. Apartment’s circle of friends consisted of fellow Marines and their families—I’ll forever remember the good times we had—the support our wives gave to us—and each other—they’re forever included in my fond memories of this special time in our lives.

My Son—Clay. He was my constant assistant—contributing ideas and providing excellent advice re. research and the use of computer technology to enhance the project. I would have been at a big loss without him at my side.

To all Marine veterans who fought in Vietnam and to all soldiers, sailors, airmen and others who also fought in that war—thank you for your service—you deserve to be remembered as having fought in a war that was politically unpopular, often with both hands ‘tied behind your back’ but you fought anyway and did your best under the most difficult circumstances and when you returned—you returned alone—not with parades in your honor—not to cheering crowds waiting on you and your unit at the airport, Navy pier or military base somewhere. Some of us never returned—others returned damaged but

for the most part we returned to a Country who never really appreciated what we had done and how we had to do it. But return we did and we rejoined our communities and became good citizens and productive , contributing members of our society. I consider it an Honor to have been a part of that generation and it has been a privilege to share some of my memories of that special time in our lives!