

**1969**

## **YEAR OF THE ROOSTER**

*'Vietnam was the first war ever fought without censorship. Without censorship, things can get terribly confused in the public mind'*

Gen W.C. Westmoreland

### **JANUARY**

#### **OPERATION TAYLOR COMMON PHASE III**

The month of January saw the Marines of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines still on Operation Taylor Common under the operational control of the 3d Marines. Three Companies of 2/5 continued to patrol the Ong Thu slope which was 7.5 miles west of An Hoa. One Company was providing support for FSB Pike. Most of the contact during this month was chance meetings with the enemy while the Battalion continued to uncover enemy camps and supply points.

On 1 January the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines helilifted to COB Javelin and this signalled the initiation of operations in the western zone of the operational AO. The area was between the escarpment of Ong Thu Slope and the Nui Gaing and Yang Brai Ridge. Once Javelin had been established, fire support for the preparations of Hill 508 (FSB Maxwell) began. FSB Maxwell was north of COB Javelin and over 177 tons of HE was used to establish a LZ, but even with this amount of explosives, a number of limbless tree trunks obstructed touchdown landing. As well as tree trunks the helicopters were taking enemy ground fire. As a result of these factors the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines were helilifted to the LZ on Hill 728 and they attacked towards Hill 508 via Hill 401. Hill 508

was finally secured on 15 January.

It was on the 15th that an Army recon chopper was shot down by enemy fire in the operational area. The chopper crashed and burned, killing all personnel aboard. The men killed were the Regimental Commander of the 3d Marines, the CO of the 1st Bn, 12th Marines, the Regimental Sergeant Major of the 3d Marines, the Regimental Commander's Radio Operator and the four-man crew of the chopper.

Work went ahead to turn Hill 508 into FSB Maxwell. Tree trunks were chainsawed down by the Engineers Company B, 1st Engineer Bn and then they set about building bunkers and other buildings needed for an FSB. They were also employed in destroying enemy bunkers, booby-traps and dud ammunition.

On 23 January the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines were given orders to disestablish FSB Pike and to prepare to move to a new AO.

On the 25th a tall white, blond-haired male wearing jungle utilities was seen north-east of An Bang near to Hill 94. Once he knew he had been spotted he ran off north along a trail. One of the Marines shouted for him to stop, but no effort was made to apprehend him since he was thought to have been a member of another Company in the area. This was no sea story. This was fact. During my research into An Hoa many Marines have told stories of a white American who had joined the enemy. Maybe this was him?

During January the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines continued with their participation in Operation Taylor Common. Their AO was the eastern part of Duc Duc and the Duy Xuyen District. The mission for 1/5 was to conduct aggressive offensive operations to seek and destroy the enemy. They were also to protect Liberty Road and the ferry crossing at Liberty Bridge (Phu Lac (6)). During this month 1/5 initiated a new concept

“Night Owl” (close air support at night). These air strikes were controlled by the FAC which consisted of marking the targets at night with artillery and 81mm mortar illumination rounds, timed to burst at ground level. Experience proved that a string of four illumination rounds covering an area of 100-150 metres marked the target best and provided the pilot with a good ground reference for his attack.

Each flight carried napalm and 500 lb bombs. Napalm was dropped first to further mark the target. The results were excellent and this system proved to be accurate. Marines observing the strikes through Starlight scopes saw excessive damage to the targets and many KIAs. This in-close coordination with Spooky and A-6 Intruder Radar Beacon strikes provided the Battalion with 24 hour air strike capability and denied the enemy safe cover during darkness.

During January Company Bravo, 1st Engineers Battalion were employed to destroy duds, booby-traps, enemy bunkers and fortifications. They also conducted daily mine sweeps on roads in the AO. Numerous mines and booby-traps were detected by visual sightings and mine detecting equipment. The loss of lives and vehicles was considerably reduced by the detailed work carried out by the Marines.

A light section of Amtracs from the 4th Platoon, Company A, 3d Amtrac Battalion was in direct support of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. The LVTs proved satisfactory in transporting Marines. With the Amtracs was a light section of the 2d Platoon, Company Bravo 1st Tank Battalion. The tanks gave daily support to mine sweeps and provided direct fire support to daytime Battalion operations.

1/5 continued its CAP work with the people from Phu Da (2) and they started a CAP in Mau Chanh (2) in connection with CAP 2-9-1. With Phu Da (2) the Battalion

constructed five new homes and repaired four others with better materials. In total 127 sheets of assorted plywood, 30 assorted boards and sheets of plastic were used for the building and repair of these homes. Two trailer loads of wood were delivered to supplement the shortage of fire wood.

The battalion assisted the people of Mau Chanh (2) in the repair and rebuilding of homes in the hamlet previously damaged by fire from An Hoa Combat Base. One home had been completed and 26 were under repair or construction. A total of 367 sheets of plywood, 1269 assorted boards and 50 sheets of plastic were distributed to help with repairs. Six trailers of wood were delivered to supplement the firewood.

## **FEBRUARY**

On 1 February 2/5 was sent to An Hoa for a short rest period. This was a welcome break from combat for these Marines and once back at An Hoa they could get their weapons checked and their own cuts, skin complaints and ailments sorted out at the Battalion Aid Station.

On the 5th 2/5 returned to Operation Taylor Common when at 0930 1st Platoon of Company E rappelled into the jungle canopy onto Hill 432 which was 20 miles southwest of An Hoa. Once they had touched down the Marines of 1st Platoon began to cut out an LZ. By 1710 the rest of Company E was on Hill 432. The next day the rest of the Battalion arrived and search and destroy missions began with the building of LZs throughout the AO.

Between 7-12 February BLT 2/26 was passed OPCON to Task Force Yankee to conduct a short operation in the Go Noi Island Area. On the 10th BLT 3/26 was deployed in the

Arizona Area and the 1st ARVN Ranger Group was withdrawn to Da Nang. By mid-February Task Force Yankee had neutralised Base Area 112 and had established FSB/COBs on the western approaches from the Laotian border. On the 15th the 1st Marine Division ordered Task Force Yankee to reduce the scale of Operation Taylor Common by displacing all forces in Base Area 112, except two Companies, each with one battery of artillery located at FSB Maxwell and Tomahawk.

The 16th saw the 3d Bn, 3d Marines helilifted from FSB Bolo to An Hoa. Once all the Battalion was at An Hoa they were redeployed to Quang Tri by C-130 aircraft.

On the 17th at 1200 2/5 was returned to operational control of the 5th Marines. At 1540 2/5 began to helilift its Companies back to An Hoa. By 0935 the next day the airlift was complete. For the next three days the Marines cleaned up and prepared for another mission. The 17th also saw the 1st Bn, 3d Marines airlifted from COB Scimitar to Hill 55.

On the 21st the Battalion left An Hoa at 1520 by convoy and they were heading to Liberty Bridge (Phu Lac 6). An hour later they had arrived. The mission was to send 2/5 to Go Noi Island. They were to move by foot eastwards to the island the next day. 2/5 was to work in cooperation with the 1st ARVN Ranger Group while searching the Go Noi.

Early on the Monday morning of the 23rd An Hoa Combat base came under enemy attack. At 0130 82mm and 120mm mortars began to impact on the north-east corner of the base near to the ammunition storage area. During this mortar attack the enemy

managed to cut the outer perimeter wire and using bamboo poles they were able to lob satchel charges into one of the ammo dumps. The resulting explosion from the charges ignited the ammo and as this began to detonate, it shot fire into the other HE storage berms in the surrounding area, setting off the ordnance.

The Marines opened fire on the enemy and called in artillery and a Spooky gunship to pound them. The enemy subsequently broke contact and fled north-east, having achieved what it set out to do. Throughout the night the ammo dumps rocked with explosions as artillery rounds cooked off in the intense heat of the fires. Many Marines were wounded by flying debris.

The enemy action had destroyed all of An Hoa's stock of HE ammo for 105mm, 155mm, 8" and 175mm artillery rounds. In total 27,845 rounds were destroyed and six ammunition storage revetments were blown to kingdom come. For the next 48 hours rounds kept cooking off making it hazardous to helicopters and personnel. The attack killed four Marines and three PFs, and wounded eighty-eight Marines. The enemy sustained seventeen dead and unknown wounded.

The 24th saw 2/5 pulled out of Go Noi Island and they were ordered to search and clear the area in the Phu Nhuans, Chau Phongs and Le Nams. The 25th and 26th saw the re-supply of operating units transferred from the Logistic Support Area (LSA) at An Hoa to the alternate LSA at Hill 55. Once the ammo dumps had been cooled down the re-supply to An Hoa's LSA could take place. Another problem that the attack caused was the damage to a refugee camp built outside An Hoa by the Marines of 3/5. The camp consisted of several tents and housed 650 people. The people had now abandoned the camp and the CAP team was preparing to build another camp once they gained authority

from the Regimental S-5, 1st Lt D.W. Jamieson.

The 26th saw L/3/26 east of Dai Khuong. This hamlet was deep in the Arizona and soon they came into contact with a large enemy force that opened fire with mortars and captured M-79s. Lima returned fire and assaulted the enemy's position. As the unit moved it came under intense small arms fire which was backed up with automatic weapons and mortar fire. Lima continued with suppressing fire and called in artillery and air strikes to home in on their adversaries. The NVA carried on with its concentrated fire and Lima had to call in more air and arty support. This time the enemy began to withdraw, but not before it had killed six Marines and wounded twenty-nine others. The NVA left behind thirty dead.

During February the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines found the Vietnamese population very receptive and cooperative. This may have been down to the Civic Action programme (CAP). Many families were visited during Tet by the Marines who gave out gifts. Hamlet Chiefs were also called on by the Commander of 2/5 and other Marine representatives of CAP. The gift the Battalion gave was a plot of ground for a dispensary at Phu Da 1&2. Battalion Corpsmen visited the hamlets and conducted sick calls while training Vietnamese to do the same job in the future. The goodwill even extended to a young boy from Phu Da (1) who had a cleft palate and received surgical treatment aboard the hospital ship *USS Sanctuary* which was on station in Da Nang harbour.

From 1-28 February the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines continued to take part in Operation Taylor Common. Their mission was the same as December's: protect Liberty Road and the bridge crossing at Phu Lac (6). They were also to hunt and destroy enemy forces in

their AO. During February the NVA and VC probed 1/5 with harassing tactics. On the 23rd at 0200 the Battalion's fire base at Phu Lac (6) took 82mm mortars and small arms fire as the enemy attacked the base. The Marines returned fire and the enemy broke contact.

1/5 carried on with its *Night Owl* missions with the assistance of the USAF who completed thirty-one of these missions in February. Sixty-nine USMC/ USN A-6 Radar Beacon strikes were completed in this month, fifty-seven of which took place at night. The A-6 Grumman Intruder is a twin engine jet which started service in 1963. This all-weather aircraft was the replacement for the A-1 Sky Raider. With payloads up to 18,000 lbs the A-6 could bring a huge amount of ordnance onto the battlefield. The USN and USMC used the A-6 as their main all-weather bomber.

The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines carried on with their CAP and worked with the villagers of Mau Chanh (2) constructing eleven homes which had been destroyed. They were also working on another seventeen homes. In total they used 370 assorted sheets of plywood and 88 assorted boards. One trailer load of sand, four bags of cement and one set of carpenter tools were also given for the construction of a pig pen. 1/5 also delivered ten trailer loads of firewood. The Battalion also assisted the people of Phu Da (2) by giving them ninety sheets of plywood and ten assorted boards for rebuilding work.

## **MARCH**

March saw the winding down of Operation Taylor Common which ended on the eighth.

The results of the Operation were as follows:

### **FRIENDLY LOSSES**

157 USMC KIA

100 ARVN KIA

1 USN KIA

4 USA KIA

1043 USMC WIA

2 USN WIA

1 KCS (Kit Carson Scout) WIA

342 USMC WIA (Non-envac)

23 USMC KNBC ( Killed Non-Battle Casualties)

102 USMC NBC (Non-Battle Casualties)

1 KCS NBC

378 ARVN WIA

2 ARVN KNBC

20 ARVN NBC

### **ENEMY LOSES**

1,389 NVA KIA

778 VC KIA

23 NVA POW

24 VC POW

## **BOMB DAMAGE TO ENEMY TARGETS**

Bunkers destroyed	99
Bunkers damaged	27
Structures destroyed	359
Structures damaged	31
Trenchline destroyed	2085 metres
Trenchline damaged	1420 metres
Secondary explosions	104
Boats	11
Probable KIA	61

It was also on the 8th that An Hoa Combat Base came under attack. The enemy roared in 122 rounds of mixed recoilless rifle, mortar and 122mm rocket fire. The result of this attack left one Marine dead and 37 wounded.

The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines were operating clear operations north-east of An Hoa in the Phu Nhuans while providing one Company for security for a portion of Liberty Road between An Hoa and Phu Lac (6). The Battalion used TD-18 bulldozers and an Eimco tractor with a Rome plow in clearing tree-lines, trenchlines and fortifications. Contact with the enemy was light, but numerous surprise firing devices were encountered. The Battalion also had a new CO in March, and on the 14th Lt Colonel James H. Higgins took command of 2/5. On 19 March the Battalion crossed the Song Thu Bon and began a search and clear operation moving west into the Arizona Area. The Battalion encountered light enemy contact from 19-26 March. On the 27th the Battalion