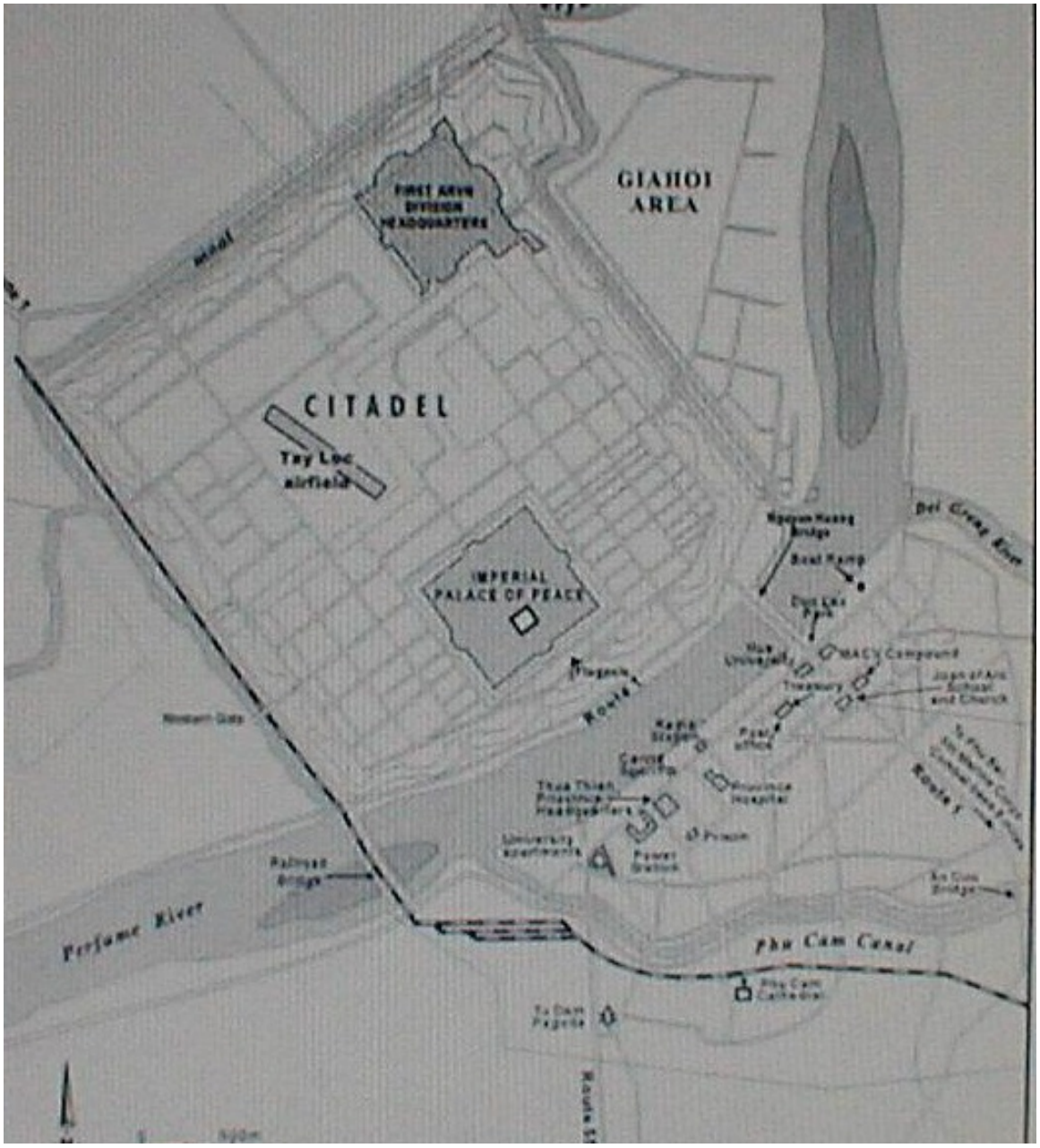

Our entire staff considered Hue City to be the most secure place in I Corps. The Imperial City sits within the three-square mile Citadel and resembles a medieval fortress, with twenty foot ramparts, and high towers positioned behind a 90 foot wide by 20 foot zigzagged mote filled with lotus flowers. It housed the imperial palace, complete with a dragon-decorated throne room and ancient artifacts. The Citadel also contained the small Tay Loc airfield and a headquarters compound for the ARVN 1st Division. Although security in the countryside was poor, the city's 140,000 residents felt relatively secure. For this reason, we assigned Eugene Weave

SOUTHERN HUE CITY
TET

r to Hue City as the Province Special Branch Police Advisor. The elderly Gene had been a WWII B-17 who joined the Agency after earning a Masters Degree from the University of Wisconsin joined the Agency and served abroad. Because of his age, we hesitated to place him

any of the other I Corps provinces where attacks were frequent and officers often had to remain awake all night and still work the following day. We also arranged for him to move in with two young officers, David Hayes (Alias), a young CIA junior officer, and Marine WO1 Solomen H. Godwin, a 33 year old Marine intelligence specialist on loan to us from III MAF. The trio lived in a two story house overlooking a small bridge spanning the Phu Cam Canal. Our RDC/O officers lived three blocks to the north in a four bedroom, one story house. The team included Billy Milton, POIC, USMC Captains Bob Hubbard and Ray Lao, RD Advisors on loan to us from the Marines, Sgt. Howard Gregory Vaughn, PRU Advisor also on loan, Bob Ennis, U.S Army Military Intelligence assignee and Jim Harris, newly arrived RD officer. I had planned to stay in this house during Tet. Billy said I could stay in his room while he went back home for the holiday period. Before leaving on 27 January, he ordered Bob Hubbard to take charge during his absence.

Naturally we were concerned about the loss of communications with our officers in the two Northern provinces, but we fully expected a repeat of the previous day experience and our men turned out to be just fine. However, ominous reports continued to flow from MACV's Thua Thien Headquarters. The MACV compound consisted of several two-to three story buildings astride Duy Tan Street (Route #1) at the foot of the Song Huong or Purfume River Bridge

The MACV compound had been under constant enemy attack all night and barely hanging on by morning. A brave and alert Army soldier manning a wooden guard tower gave early warning when he spotted and killed several approaching sappers. He sacrificed his life in this exposed position when an RPG round knifed through the protecting sand bags. By morning, MACV was pleading for immediate reinforcements. However, they could not provide a clear estimate of enemy strength, other than to state they were considerable. Rather than sitting around waiting for word from our people, I volunteered to fly over the city and attempt to raise someone on my PRC-25 radio. When I reached the airfield around 0900, fighter bombers were attacking enemy positions a mile west of the Danang air strip. However, I was still able to board a Porter aircraft

and fly to Hue on this perfectly clear and sunny day. Our aircraft approached the city at 10,000 feet, and I can only describe the site below as “surreal.” Not one inhabitant, vehicle, bicycle, or other form of life could be seen in this city of over 140,000 Vietnamese. It was like a scene in a science fiction movie where all the people had been gassed or died from some lethal biological agent. Smoke was bellowing from several destroyed L-19 aircraft at the Citadel’s Tay Loc airfield. Bursts of tracer fire could be seen around the prison, MACV building, and PRU compound located at the old Madam Nhu mansion located on a hill overlooking the Phu Cam canal bridges. What really caught my attention, however, was a huge, red communist flag waving from the main Citadel flag pole.

I scanned several frequencies trying to contact our people. All I was able to raise was a Vietnamese worker in one of our office buildings. He had no information on any U.S. Nationals; however, he did say many VC/NVA were in the streets. I also raised the PRU commander whose unit was still fighting the enemy. He reported his men were low on ammunition and that he urgently needed re-supply. I said I would try and get back to him later. To get a better view of the buildings below, I asked the pilot to descend to 5000 feet. At 8000 feet, watermelon sized anti-aircraft tracers came at us from atop a two story building near the An Cuu Bridge. Much to my surprise, I later found the address to be 90 Duy Tan Street, the house my wife had planned to stay. It belonged to Mr. Cuu Lem, a distant wealthy relative

After two fruitless hours of trying to make contact with any of our men, I headed back to Danang to update Harry and arrange ammunition delivery to our PRUs I felt this was critically important since they occupied a strategic hill overlooking the three Phu Cam Canal bridges. Any 4.2 mortar or artillery position could effectively cover Marines later crossing the bridges into southern Hue. Harry agreed and visited the III MAF Commander, General Cushman who later gave appropriate orders for a Marine helicopter to support the mission the following day. The plan was to land, or crash land if necessary, at a site near the three story mansion. I would be in a Porter aircraft to coordinate the landing. Early the next morning, we loaded a truck with ammunition and drove to Danang East where a new Marine UH-1H helicopter was waiting. I assumed this to be the operational chopper; however, orders came from above to transfer the cargo at Phu Bai to an older and more expendable H-34 helicopter. I could understand the reason for this, but it caused in a significant delay. In the late afternoon, I had been circling over southern Hue City for over an hour when the chopper finally appeared. Up to then I maintained radio silence, however, I now had to ask the PRUs to mark a safe helicopter landing zone (HLZ). No sooner had red smoke appeared, when the VC/NVA launched an all out ground assault. The PRU Commander called off the operation, saying the landing would be suicide, adding he didn’t think they could hold on much longer with their dwindling ammunition supply. He therefore withdrew his forces to pre dug trenches near the southern perimeter wall. While circling above, I watched the PRUs retreat as enemy forces swarmed into the vacated building. I immediately contacted our supporting FAC who said he could provide naval gunfire support from an American naval cruiser offshore which I believe was the USS Providence. The first round exploded directly in front of the building. A massive barrage of eight inch shells quickly followed, reducing the structure to rubble instantly. The PRUs then counter-attacked and moved into the smoking rubble. The chopper was then able to land and unloaded without difficulty.

Reports flowing from Hue City on 1 February continued to be grim, but no one realized how grim. While I was flying over the city, Alpha Company 1/1 Marines under the command of Captain Batcheller was on its way to Quang Tri when it received orders to reverse course and reinforce the Thua Thien MACV compound and secure the nearby LCU ramp. On their way, they linked up with four M-48 tanks from the Marine 3rd Tank Battalion under the command of Lt. Col. Edward La Montagne which were scheduled to be loaded at the LCU ramp for shipment to Dong Ha. No sooner did the convoy cross the An Cuu Bridge when it was met by heavy enemy fire at the An Cuu intersection. The convoy came to a halt when a rocket propelled grenade destroyed the lead tank, killing its commander. The company inched northward under steady sniper fire, wounding several Marines and a Navy man. While Captain Batcheller tried to drag the sailor to safety, he came under enemy machine gun fire, wounding hin in the right forearn, right thgh and left knee. Sgt James Canley took over for a short period before command of Alpha Company was later assumed by 2nd Lt. Ray Smith, a combat seasoned mustang. (Ray Smith later became a Major General and the most decorated officer in the Marine Corps.) By early afternoon, a relief column under LTC Gravel, the 1/1 Commander, reached Company A. Once there, he ordered the wounded men to be loaded aboard a truck and driven unescorted to Phu Bai. Miraculously, this vehicle arrived there safely. LTC Gravel's men finally reached the MACV compound despite being under constant enemy sniper fire, sustaining losses of 10 killed and 30 wounded. At this juncture, LTC Gravel was ordered to cross the Nguyen Hoang River Bridge in to relieve pressure on ARVN 1st Division Headquarters forces fighting in the Citadel. He left heavily depleted Co A behind to secure the MACV compound and LCU ramp and ordered Captain Charles L. Meadow's Golf Company with a few tanks (three American and a few Vietnamese) to cross the Song Huong (Perfume River) Bridge and push toward the Mang Ca compound inside the Citadel. They started across the bridge at 1610 and ran into fierce 51 cal and RPG fire from enemy strongholds along the Citadel wall. The sun was in their eyes as they tried unsuccessfully to identify and strike enemy positions to their west. Capt. Meadows was forced back across the bridge with heavy casualties. LTC Gravel had to use civilian commandeered trucks to extract the wounded, since pleas for medical evacuation fell on deaf ears. The mission proved costly. Golf Company lost a third of its strength, 44 wounded and five killed, and the Battalion lost its S-3, Major Walker D. Murphy.

By this time it became obvious enemy strength far exceeded intelligence estimates. Brig. Gen. LaHue gave the new 1st Marine Regiment commander, Colonel Stanley S. Hughes overall tactical command of U.S. forces south of the Perfume River. Hughes directed LTC Gravel to protect Americans living in the southern area and to sweep it clear of enemy forces. Gravel then ordered Company F of 2/5, now under his control, to rescue U.S. nationals, including the VOR communications facility and the Province Senior Advisor at his home. The Marines didn't get very far and were stopped cold by late afternoon, suffering three killed and thirteen wounded.

The following day, 2 February, Company H, 2/5 commanded by Captain Ronald G. Christmas crossed the An Cuu Canal Bridge in a truck convoy equipped with quad 50 caliber machine guns along with two ONTOS tracked vehicles, each equipped with six 106mm recoilless rifles. With Marines lining the rails, they shot their way into the city, linking up with Lt. Col. Gravel's position near the MACV compound which had been under continuous enemy machine gun and rocket fire all day. Losses here included two Marines dead and thirty-four others wounded. Later in the afternoon, Col Hughes moved his command to the MACV compound, riding in a convoy with 2/5 commander, LTC Ernest C. Cheatham, whose battalion conisisted of three companies and whatever clerks and cooks could be assembled. Hughes directed Gravel to cover the left flank and keep the main Route 1 supply line open, while Cheatham was to attack the university toward the treasury building and provincial headquarters.

Thus began the fierce house-to-house, room by room fighting, which characterized street fighting throughout the battle against a very determined and well dug in NVA enemy.

All of this happened on the 1st and 2nd while I was flying over Hue attempting to contact our officers and encouraging our surrounded PRU force to hold on until I could arrange to supply them with ammunition. News from Hue City became grimmer with each report. We knew a Marine company took heavy casualties while moving to reinforce the MACV compound. We then learned a Marine company was cut to ribbons and forced to retreat after crossing the Perfume River Bridge. Furthermore, all attempts to rescue U.S. Nationals proved disastrous, with Marines suffering heavy casualties. However, most surprising was no less than three Marine "Rough Rider" convoys were able to pass over the An Cuu Bridge without it being blown. I would never have believed this possible. The main purpose behind re-supplying the PRUs was to establish a fire support base and enable this to happen. Although we began to recognize the enemy force was considerable, we falsely assumed it wasn't powerful enough to stop traffic along Route 1. It also influenced our decision to send a makeshift CIA team into the city with the next Marine convoy.

This next convoy drove over the An Cuu Bridge on the 4th. Although many of the lead vehicles were destroyed by enemy RPG fire, Billy Milton, our CIA Province Officer in Charge, managed to drive his ½ ton truck through the ambushes unscathed. He then moved into an abandoned building on Duy Tan Street across from the MACV compound next to a vacant lot. That night enemy sappers blew the bridge. During the day, however, we tried to contact anyone in Hue. In desperation, we dialed the land line phone number of Phil Manhart, the Province Senior Advisor. We almost fell off our chairs when Phil answered. He said many NVA soldiers were in the streets and that he planned to hide in a small compartment under the staircase.

That was the last we heard from him until his release from a North Vietnamese prison in 1973.

I landed at the LCU helicopter landing zone on the 8th, bringing with me eight experienced PRUs and plenty of weapons and ammunition. The VC had blown The Perfume River Bridge the previous night, thereby cutting Hue City in

half.

We moved into our new office and began to assess the overall situation. Naturally, I was doing everything possible to obtain information on the whereabouts of my wife and our missing CIA officers. However, I found nothing. As I moved from one street to another, Marines from 2/5 were pressing westward In some cases I could move three blocks westward before reaching the front line, but that didn't mean I could do the same on the next block. I almost made this terrible mistake when I noticed a Marine looking out a second story building just waiting for some enemy to open fire and give away his location. He laughed when I accused him of using me as a decoy, but that's exactly what he intended.

The next few days were like a blur. I paid a visit to Hue University where Lt. Col. Cheatham had set up his 2/5 headquarters. At the time, Marines in backyard mortar pits were busily firing 81mm rounds from tubes set near vertical. Marine tanks stood at street corners pointing their 90mm guns at the ready. All this demonstrated serious street fighting which hardly enable me to search for our missing people.

Marines from 2/5 moved westward along Le Loi Street which paralleled the Purfume River to the Phu Cam Canal roughly ten blocks away. They cleared the main hospital behind several shot out Red Cross vehicles in the

street.

Slowly, persistently, and relentlessly, Marines advanced, taking treasury and postal buildings against entrenched enemy forces. Meanwhile, 1/1 secured 2/5s left flank driving south and westward past the Esso gas station on Duy Tan Street toward the An Cuu Bridge.

Casualties were high. 2/5 was down to only one company when it attacked and secured the Joan of Arc School and Church, using 106mm recoilless fire support which, unfortunately, did heavy damage to the church. Shortly afterwards, I'm not sure of the exact date, I made my way south along Duy Tan Street to LTC Gravel's headquarters next to an abandoned schoolhouse. I was very impressed by this fine officer. Marines were standing in line for a rare hot meal while the colonel asked how the fighting was going. Morale was high and every one of them was happy to relate their experiences. They were particularly impressed with the effectiveness of the 3.5 bazooka and 106mm recoilless rife. Like a true leader, Gravel was last to fill his plate. After leaving the school yard, I proceeded down Duy Tan Street looking at house numbers as I went. I made my way to where I could see the An Cuu Bridge. From my calculations #90, the address where my wife planned to stay, would have been the last house near the northwest corner of the bridge. But the building had been turned into rubble, being totally destroyed by fighter bombers which received anti-aircraft machine gun fire from this location, the same place that fired at my Porter aircraft on 1 February. From the looks of the building, I concluded no one could have survived.

Driving a jeep in southern Hue at this time reminded me of riding through streets after a hurricane. Tree branches, blown buildings, roof tops and debris were everywhere. My commandeered vehicle soon had four flat tires, and I was running out of cannibalized spares from abandoned jeeps. I reported my findings to Harry Mustakos each night until he directed me to visit Quang Tri and report on the situation there.

QUANG TRI CITY TET 1968

An Air-America helicopter picked me up at the LCU ramp on 11 February and landed at an HLZ near the Quang Tri MACV compound. I was just in time to attend a funeral ceremony in a wooden chapel for the province and district team members recently killed in action The Chaplin, a US Army major, delivered the first speech. His voice broke down halfway through his presentation when he started to sob and weep about the loss of such courageous and wonderful heroes, which they certainly were. He was followed by another such presentation which just about made everyone cry. Then Province Senior Advisor Bob Brewer took the podium and commenced to give, without notes, one of the most deeply moving eulogies I ever heard. He started off by saying, "I want everyone in this room to stop crying. Lt. Col. Joseph Seymore, Major John Payne and the men we are eulogizing today were soldiers. And there is no greater honor for a soldier than to die with his boots on. They understood the danger of their profession and were willing to risk their lives to defend what they believe in; duty, honor, country." To this day, I regret never having taped Brewer's speech. It was magnificent and a tribute to the intellectual capacity and competence of this outstanding leader. Brewer later told me he felt that everything he did in his life prepared him for the moments surrounding Tet. From what I later learned, I certainly agree.

To place events into perspective; on the day (30 January) Harry and I were busy visiting the southern I Corps provinces, my tough Quang Tri PRU commander, Do Bach, was on reconnaissance and spotted a sizable NVA base camp near the city. Together with Bob Brewer and the Sector Advisor, they visited Colonel Donald V. Rattan, the 1st Brigade 1st Cavalry Air commander at LZ Betty. They unfolded a map showing the disposition of NVA fire support position on the eastern and southern fringes of the city. At 1345, the brigade commander ordered air assaults against these positions. Within two hours, the 1st Cavalry helicopters had landed five companies into landing zones east of Quang Tri. One of these companies was commanded by 1963 West Point Graduate, Captain Peter Morgan Bentson, who I later had to privilege to work with during the 1972 Easter Offensive in III Corps. He said, "This tall, articulate CIA officer came to our headquarters with a mean looking Vietnamese wearing a tiger suit. He laid a map on the table and pointed to enemy positions. We quickly assembled an air assault force and landed smack in the middle of the NVA, shooting as we debarked. It was the best tactical intelligence I ever received." (Regretfully, then Major, Peter Morgan Bentson was killed in action on 9 July 1972 by enemy artillery fire east of An Loc.) The enemy attack lasted all night and throughout the following day. Bob Brewer together with his ARVN counterpart deployed South Vietnamese Army, RF and PF and police forces south of the road leading from Quang Tri city west to the La Vang airstrip. The 1st Air Cavalry Commander defended the area north of this road while PRUs fought enemy sappers which made their way into the city. By the morning of 1 February, the battle was virtually over, although RF, PF and police forces continued mopping up small pockets of enemy trying to make their way out. Enemy losses were staggering. Over 900 enemy soldiers of the 812 NVA regiment and 10th sapper platoon were killed while 86 others were captured. Moreover, large quantities of enemy weapons and equipment wee policed up from the battlefield.

The following day, 2 February, Cam Lo district headquarters was struck by Communist forces at 0215 hours. The Sector advisor, Army Major James C. Payne was killed by a recoilless rifle round fired during the initial assault.

BOB BREWER FAR FIGHT AT CAM LO AFTER ATTACK

Defense of the compounded rested on the shoulders of his deputy, Captain Raymond. E. McMacken, who also served as our Phoenix Advisor. Apparently, a US Marine Combined Action Company was sent to reinforce the compound that night. This proved decisive, since without such assistance the headquarters would have certainly been overrun. Marines were placed at the most critical positions and their performance was magnificent. McMacken said,"The Marine defenders stacked them up on the wire." Five Marines manning a machine gun bunker killed 15 NVA before an enemy RPG round hit the position, wounding all the men inside. In an action, best described in his Congressional Medal of Honor Citation, Lance Corporal Larry Leonard Maxam, "observed the enemy massing for an assault into the compound across the remaining defensive wire and unhesitatingly proceeded to the weakened section of the perimeter. Completely exposed to the concentrated enemy fire, he sustained multiple fragmentation wounds from exploding grenades as he ran to an abandoned machine gun position. Reaching the emplacement, he grasped the machine gun and commenced to deliver effective fire on the advancing enemy. As the enemy directed maximum firepower against the determined marine, Cpl. Maxam's position received a direct hit from a rocket propelled grenade, knocking him backwards and inflicting severe fragmentation wounds to his face and right eye. Although momentarily stunned and in intense pain, Cpl. Maxam courageously resumed his firing position and subsequently was struck again by small-arms fire. With resolute determination, he gallantly continued to deliver intense machine gun fire, causing the enemy to retreat through the defensive wire to positions of cover. In a desperate attempt to silence his weapon, the North Vietnamese threw hand grenades and directed recoilless rifle fire against him inflicting 2 additional wounds. Too weak to reload his machine gun, Cpl. Maxam fell to a prone position and valiantly continued to deliver effective fire with his rifle. After 11/2 hours, during which he was hit repeatedly by fragments from exploding grenades and concentrated small-arms fire, he succumbed to his wounds, having successfully defended nearly half of the perimeter single-handedly"

But Cpl. Maxam was not the only hero that night. Another Lance Corporal, Lawrence M. Eades, ran with his M-60 machine gun to a counter another enemy threat coming from the northwest perimeter. He resolutely stood his ground and single-handedly drove off the advancing enemy force despite being wounded by an enemy rocket round. The following morning 20 enemy lay dead in front of his position. For this action, he was later received the Navy Cross.

Following the victory, Bob Brewer held a parade in Quang Tri City. Vietnamese families lined the streets with some throwing flowers as the defenders marching by. Brewer later said it was a very moving and that tears flowed from the eyes of many residence.

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BACK TO HUE CITY

The same evening, February 11, Harry Mustakos directed me to fly to Danang and brief him on the Quang Tri situation. Afterwards, he wanted me to visit the various hospitals and refugee centers, searching for our missing people and hoping for a miracle. Five days of continuous search proved fruitless. Other than witnessing enormous suffering and hardships endured by the local Vietnamese, five days of continuous search proved fruitless. Each night my old Vietnamese maid cried hysterically, fearing for her lost brother who lived near Phu Bai Headquarters. She thought there was a good chance he had been executed for having worked for the Americans. I asked for his address and arranged for Major Nguyen Van Linh to join me the next day, February 17, to see if we could locate him on my trip to Hue City. On this flight, I loaded a Honda 90 motorcycle aboard our Air-America helicopter to avoid the many flat tires experienced earlier while driving around the city. We landed early in the morning at Phu Bai, checked a nearby schoolhouse refugee camp on Route 1, and paid a visit to a small field hospital without results. With the major on the back seat, we sped along a dirt road, stopping outside the village circled on my map. At my request, the major was able to find the maid's brother and bring him out. The three of us then mounted the bike and made it back to the helicopter site safely where they were to stay until the pilot returned after dropping me off in Hue City. (Months later, Major Linh asked, "Why would you risk your life to do such a thing?" To which I replied, "My wife is missing and I know exactly how my maid feels, besides, it's a matter of having to live with myself." "Mamma San," we called her, was a very decent, honest, hard working woman. Her gray hair and black teeth, and small frame typified elderly Vietnamese woman struggling to survive in a world torn apart by war. She had wonderful personality and did funny things. For example, upon returning from the PX with a large turkey, Ngoc asked if she knew how to cook it. She did, by boiling it in a huge pot. We almost died laughing. And it really didn't taste that bad either. We sure grew to love this very fine woman.)

My Air America chopper descended in tight conical turns over the small HLZ next to the Hue LCU ramp. To get a better view below, my head was cocked backwards and tilted to the side when I heard a loud crack and felt a rush of air and dust particles whizzing by my face. The sliding Plexiglas door on my side was closed, but was open on the other side. Besides being startled, my face was numb. This was bad news, since serious wounds are seldom felt. However, a quick facial inventory revealed slight bleeding from only a few shaving type slits. The co-pilot looked back with concern for I looked much worse than was the case. We touched down and examined the bullet hole. It seemed nearly impossible to miss anyone seated in my spot. Having dodged a close one, the helicopter crew helped me unload the Honda 90 motorbike. I fastened my helmet, gave two cranks on the starter pedal when a female voice cried, "Rudy, Rudy". There was Ngoc only 30 yards away wearing black pajamas and a conical straw hat. To the average observer she looked like a small, scrawny, dirty Vietnamese peasant, to through my eyes there stood the most beautiful girl on the Planet. The moment was precious. How she knew I might be on this helicopter still remains a mystery. It was a intuitive decision on her part when Ngoc's aunt

spotted a white and blue helicopter. But there she was on February 17th, entirely safe after struggling behind enemy lines for over two weeks.

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We were standing in a very dangerous spot. Marines from 1/5 across the river had corralled NVA forces in the Citadel into a tiny pocket along the southeaster wall. Up to this time Marines fighting in the old city had their hands tied, gagged, and muffled by politicians more concerned about damage to the ancient Imperial City than they were about the precious lives of our brave soldiers. Use of air, artillery, heavy weapons, tank fire, mortars, bazookas and naval gun fire support was forbidden. 1/5 and ARVN airborne and 1st Division soldiers were ordered into the hornets nest with mittens. The same rules of engagement applied to Marines earlier in the southern city. General LaHue came to his senses when Marines became bogged down with skyrocketing losses. It took four days of horrible bloodshed before decision makers realized the NVA was much stronger than they ever dreamed, and that attacking determined, disciplined, experienced and well dug in NVA positions without heavy supporting fire was suicidal. Thus, the order was given on the 17th to clear the Citadel with everything available. This meant 90mm M-48 tank fire began hitting enemy positions along the southeast wall and the huge commanding tower. Many 90mm high rounds flew over the Perfume River and were hitting two five story school buildings behind the LCU ramp that served as a refugee camp. Rounds also passed over the schools, exploding in the yard and wounding several unfortunate Vietnamese trying to relieve themselves. Many were killed never knowing what hit them. My wife and 15 relatives were camped in a back room of the west building on the third floor. They had little food or blankets. I told Ngoc to stay in the building, not go outside, and that I would do what I could to help those inside. She then headed back.

I started the Honda, turned right on Le Thai To, and rode about 100 yards before I flew head first over the handlebars, landing on my helmet. I had no idea what happened until I looked at the bike's front wheel. It had been struck by a round near the axle and twisted beyond repair. I just left it there, reflecting on how lucky I was to be alive. I then moved to our house on Duy Tan Street, zigzagging from one safe position to another.

Our building had a 10x40 foot enclosed screen porch. Every time I entered the house, I counted the number of holes through the northern screen. First there were three or four, and by the 17th it looked like Swiss cheese. Every day a roar could be heard getting gradually louder as the sun rose in the sky, reaching a peak shortly before sunset when LCU or Wiskey supply boats encased in sandbags motored to or from the LCU ramp. The noise went down with the sun, only to be interrupted with the intermittent sound of automatic gun fire, whirling ricochets and loud explosions. Anyone who thinks Hue City is warm all year long, should have been there this February. No matter what I wore at night, I was always cold. I really felt sorry for the poor Vietnamese refugees having to withstand the cold in skimpy rags. So after the sun set on the 17th and the noise quieted, I sent a pile of blankets and sacks of rice to my wife for distribution to the most needy.

Early the following morning Ngoc visited our compound with information that VC snipers were on the roof of her refugee building. I quickly assembled my small PRU force and sweep the building floor by floor. We captured five VC on the roof, never having to fire a shot. They simply laid down their weapons and gave up. The PRUs marched them to the Province Interrogation Center for confinement and processing, while I sat down and debriefed Ngoc on her past two weeks experiences.

NGOC'S MISADVENTURE

As Ngoc talked, she could have easily been mistaken for a Buchenwald death camp survivor. Her story was chilling. After a pleasant flight to Hue on the 29th, she was met at the airfield by her uncle, a National Police officer. He drove her to his house in An Cuu Village where they chatted late into the night. The next afternoon Ngoc was invited by another relative to a Tet party that night at their house near Duy Tan Street. Ngoc agreed and left in the afternoon. While playing an old Vietnamese party game similar to bingo, Ngoc's uncle's son showed up on his motorcycle. He said his father had very important news and that he wanted her to come to his house immediately. Everyone pleaded with Ngoc to stay, so she refused. She also felt it would impolite to leave without any explanation. At 10 PM her uncle's son returned. This time he demanded she go. His shaking voice and demeanor led her to conclude the matter was more serious than she originally thought. Thus, she thanked everyone and left. When she arrived, her uncle appeared upset. He told her the Police had just received intelligence indicating the VC were about to launch an all out attack that night with 122mm rockets and mortars. After instructing everyone to stay inside at night, he left for his office. At 0330, Ngoc was awakened by heavy explosions and gunfire. She and her relatives huddled on the floor away from windows as the noise increased in tempo and intensity. At sunrise, uniformed NVA soldiers and VC clad in black pajamas with red arm bands walked the streets. They boasted of victory, and that they were there to stay.. Most Hue City residents were shocked and frightened beyond belief, especially individuals like my wife who knew the VC routinely executed those even suspected of having worked for the Americans or South Vietnamese government. Initially, VC/NVA went about their business and left the population alone, except to ask their help in digging trenches and fortifying positions.

Ngoc's uncle's house was near the Esso Gas Station at the Duy Tan/Le Thanh To intersection. This area became a battleground on l February when Marine Company 1/1 Alpha fought their way north along Route #1 to the MACV compound. The fighting was intense, forcing civilians to flee for safety. As a newcomer to Hue City, Ngoc was not familiar with the streets, nor were any other visiting family members from Nha Tang and Danang. Ngoc's relatives moved as a group which included five adult women, one old grandfather and eight children. They moved daily from one empty house to another near the Catholic cathedral in Phu Cam Village.

American forces were now bombarding southern Hue City with artillery and air strikes. Round after round came crashing down, inflicting heavy damage and civilian casualties. A few fortunate soles found refuge in backyard bunkers, but most people had nothing overhead except tile or wooden roofs. When the artillery ceased, hoards of panic stricken Vietnamese flowed into the streets seeking safety.. Some fled to the countryside, while others thought it was best to stay put. Actually, there was no safe place.

Ngoc's survival depended on fate, cunning and common sense. The VC would knock on the door and ask to be let in. Those inside were mostly too terrified to answer. The VC would then ask a second time. If no answer, they threatened to toss grenades and start shooting into the house. That usually generated a response. A shaking occupant would then open the door, pleading not to be shot. The VC would then say, "Uncle Ho (Ho Chi Minh) is here to liberate you from the American imperialists. You need not worry. We're all bothers and sisters in need of food and medicine for our brave and victorious fighting men". Should the VC spot a strong, healthy young woman, they would ask her to help them carry food and supplies for only two days. Usually, the woman would never be heard from again. Ngoc witnessed this several times. When the VC knocked, Ngoc was handed her cousin's four month old child who they squeezed to make cry. When answering their many questions, they responded to these young VC hoodlums in trembling voices with "yes sirs and no sirs," making them feel important and in control. Like typical youth stripped of their boyhood, some NVA soldiers were seen laughing and joy riding on children bicycles they found in the streets.

When the fighting died down, the VC ordered everyone to report and register. Those that did were told they would be forgiven for past deeds against VC/NVA forces and issued a surrender certificate. However, those who failed to register would be arrested and face a

revolutionary tribunal. A few men and women registered the first day, returning unharmed. They persuaded others to register the following day when offered a two day grace period. When this larger group returned, many were convinced the VC's word could be trusted. Thus, large numbers turned themselves in on the final day, only to be arrested and marched off with their arms tied behind their back. Roughly 3,000 of them were later slaughtered and buried in shallow graves outside Hue city, including a brother-in-law of Ngoc's cousin whose wife was in her group.

Ngoc stayed on the move with her relatives. One evening the VC barged in and escorted the group to a nearby schoolhouse. They took no names, but asked for two-day volunteers. It was all eyewash. Strong and healthy females were kidnapped. Fortunately, no one in Ngoc's group fit this description.

On one occasion, my wife was hiding in a wooden house overlooking an open field. Through the cracks she noticed two armed VC clad in black pajama tops, khaki trousers, sandals, helmet and colored neckerchief. They yelled at a frightened man crossing the field and ordered him to stop. The man didn't hear the command or was too afraid to answer and kept walking. He stopped when the VC fired an AK-47. They walked up to the man, fired two shots into his leg, and said, "You can go now". The man was left screaming.

The older children in Ngoc's group were sent rummaging through abandon homes for food. Normally, they returned with only scraps which was divided and shared equally. More importantly, they came back with news about large Marine convoys traveling north into Hue City along Route #1. Such bold movements apparently caught the enemy by surprise. The VC/NVA looked in awe as truck after truck of Marines drove past them with M-16s pointing outward. Except for ambush sites, neither side fired their weapons. Until that moment, VC/NVA forces truly believed they had won. Now reality set in. Whatever their fantasy, it vanished along with the disappearing dust clouds following the Marine convoys. From then on, with the enemy's composure was shattered. They showed visible signs of strain and began treating the local civilians with increasing hostility. Overall, except for Communist sympathizers, the Marine presence boosted local morale considerably. Most people recognized rescue was only a matter of time and that it was better to stay and wait.

LtCol Gravel's Marines reached their street around 12 February. Everyone was ordered to remain inside during the fighting. At night, however, the VC returned soliciting information on anyone passing information or cooperating with the Americans. After two days, the Marines began searching house to house. One of them entered Ngoc's house. Three other Marines covered him through the door with their M-16 rifles. He yelled in poor Vietnamese, "Can Cuoc," meaning Identification Card. Hardly anyone understood what he saying because he didn't pronounce the words properly. Finally, in his own language he said, "Does anyone here speak English?" Ngoc was not about to stand up and say, "Yes, I do." It would have meant a death sentence should the VC return. When the Marine checked Ngoc's ID card, she whispered "I'm the wife of an American, can you help me?" He whispered back, "I'll see what I can do." He then shouted, "You VC?" Ngoc thought this was a ridiculous. Who in their right mind would ever reply, "Yes?"

Ngoc and her group decided to make their way to one of the school buildings on Le Thai To Street now serving as a refugee center. Their food supply had dwindled to practically nothing and Ngoc thought someone could have overheard her speaking English. They made it past the Marines and checked into the center. It was good decision. Food was available and they were able to find a safe rear room on the third floor. Prior to my arrival she had been in the building for two days and began to worry when VC were spotted inside. Naturally, she wanted to leave there as soon as possible.

EVACUATION

The two refugee buildings behind the LCU ramp continued to be bombarded by stray rounds crossing the river. I hoped to get my wife out of there and fly her back to Danang. An Air-America re-supply chopper was scheduled to arrive at the LCU ramp at 1000 on 19 February. I told Ngoc to be ready, although I explained there was little chance for her board the helicopter since wounded civilians took first priority. Nevertheless, I told her to be ready.

She showed up on time with three of her relatives just as the helicopter circled overhead. I told them to wait inside a nearby sandbagged bunker until I called. A few minutes later, an enemy mortar round exploded less than fifty yards behind me in the street. Another landed near the ramp. Shortly afterwards, a Marine 81 mm mortar crew quickly set up behind the bunker and began firing shells across the river. Apparently, the helicopter pilot wasn't aware the HLZ was under fire and landed. Meanwhile, all the wounded civilians on stretchers were moved to a safe location. By an act of God, there was room aboard this helicopter to evacuate my wife and those with her. I called inside the bunker, fully expecting them to be terrified by the explosions and Marine counter mortar fire. Instead, they were laughing and busily eating C rations from cans left inside. They quickly ran out, climbed aboard the helicopter, and took off. My heart only stopped pounding when the chopper was safely high and headed south.

HUE CITY CONTINUED

I was hoping to find a more secure landing site, preferably to land a fixed wing aircraft which had a greater carrying capacity than a helicopter. One road struck me as being secure and possibly wide enough to land a Short Takeoff and Landing (STOL) aircraft. However, the road was lined with old French type concrete telephone poles which first had to be cut down. I did this one morning with explosive charges. The road proved bumpy and canted, very border line for a fixed wing landing. The attempt was made later, but proved to be too risky. The road was simply too narrow.

With my wife safely in Danang and Marines ever pressing through the streets westward, I fully expected our security situation to improve significantly. Our CIA team manned battle stations nightly with PRUs dug in slit trenches outside building facing west. Inside, we stayed in prepared positions behind sandbags, keeping a lookout at the window overlooking an open field to the south. All of us cat napped in full gear, including helmets, and mostly shivered all night in the damp, penetrating cold. The night Ngoc departed, a 122mm rocket landed nearby shortly after midnight filling the house with dust. Two hours later, all hell broke lose when our PRUs opened fire with everything they had. I stayed at my position observing the rear wall and could see no rounds passing through. I casually mentioned this to Billy Milton, who agreed the PRUs had been spooked by something other than the enemy. To my amazement, Billy turned on the rear outside light, walked out the door, and gave the PRUs hell for shooting at ghosts. I should have kept my mouth shut, for my conviction wasn't that sure where I would present myself as a target.. A short while later we were under sporadic enemy tracer fire from a second story schoolhouse at the far end of the open field. I responded by firing a few M-79 40mm grenades from my open window. Tactically, our building served as an outer defense for the MACV compound. No matter how much pressure the Marines applied, a few VC/NVA always managed slip past and harass the MACV compound. With us across the street, the enemy was forced to fire from a greater distance.

It is difficult to describe the chaos in southern Hue City during this period. Other than Marines fighting street by street, my handful of PRUs represented the only available Vietnam

security force. The Vietnamese Province Chief, Lieutenant Colonel Pham Van Khoa, was missing, as was the entire police force and government infrastructure. As a CIA officer, I had a specific mission. However, as a human being, I could not live with myself by ignoring the life threatening conditions Vietnamese civilians now faced in the surrounding environment. The most pressing problem, I thought, was there were no medical facilities for the many civilian casualties. Doctors abandoned the badly damaged hospital and were desperately seeking a way out. Since I had control of the only civilian Air America helicopter flights, a group of them approached me for a lift out. Without any real authority on my part, I ordered them back to the hospital, under guard, and look after the wounded. They said it was impossible to treat anyone because the water tower was damaged and there was not even running water. I told them to get back to the hospital and that I would take care of the water problem.

I sent one PRU team to the water tower near the river to patch the holes with cement bags I had found. I took the remainder with me to the fire station, intending to drive a fire truck to the river bank and use its pumps and hoses to fill the tower. However, on inspection, the VC had riddled the radiators with bullet holes. As we were bunched up discussing ways to solve the problem, I heard the crack of an AK-47. Instinctively, I hit the ground. Experience conditioned my body to react without thinking upon hearing this distinctive crack. It signals the bullet is close, very close. On the other hand, a miss has a much different whistling sound. While flat on the ground, the PRU next to me found my reaction amusing and began laughing. The next round hit him in the upper arm. Fortunately, it was a clean flesh wound. I never evacuated him, since many others were much higher on the priority list.

We moved two fire trucks to the river bank by jamming wood plugs into the holes and constantly pouring water into the radiators as we slowly motored along Duy Tan Street.. Once at the river bank, we used the pumps on one truck to fill the radiators while the other pumped water through a long hose line to the water tower. The water could be boiled later inside the hospital.

I also sent a PRU team search abandon houses for sheets, towels, food, and whatever supplies could be used in the hospital or refugee center.

When I returned to the compound that night, my PHOENX assistant, a US Army Major, complained about being asked to perform duties outside his MOS. I hit the ceiling. Originally, I sent him there to assist the Province Interrogation Center in developing intelligence on Vietcong Infrastructure Cadre who surfaced during Tet. However, I directed him to do something else. I said,"Circumstances sometimes require common sense. Since I was the senior officer present, I was making judgments and decisions based on priorities dictated by the surrounding chaos. My MOS didn't include repairing water towers, moving fire trucks or collecting sheets and pillow cases, but this had to be done for humanity's sake, If we didn't do it, who would? And I'm not about to witness poor Vietnamese dying while there was something I could do help their dire situation."

After reflecting a bit, the Major Maynard Thompson apologized about complaining and offered me his full support. Other than this brief episode, he proved to be a highly competent and effective officer throughout his entire tour.

While our small group was busy coping with a city in chaos, a new man arrived and introduced himself as the new CORDS Province Senior Advisor or Phil Manhard's replacement. I briefed him on the overall situation, the missing Americans, each officer's role, and our difficulties. He asked no questions and remained aloof; leaving us the firm impression he was in charge. The day after he arrived, we were sitting down eating lunch when a mortar round exploded outside driving an elderly Vietnamese woman through the front door. She was struck in the back below the right shoulder by a fist sized metal fragment which protruded through her blouse. Except for our new Province Senior Advisor, all of us at the table rose to help. We gave her morphine, compressed the wound, bandaged her as best we could, and moved her by stretched to an aid station for evacuation. The new PSA did nothing. This got to me. Politics aside, I lit into him and let him

know he showed no concern, compassion or common decency, that I considered him a disgrace not only to Americans, but to mankind. In my view, his paralysis throughout this incident was deplorable and totally unacceptable. It's beyond comprehension why such a man was chosen to lead, especially in such dire circumstances? I related all this to Barney Koren when I returned to Danang. He was absolutely shocked. Needless to say, he shortly relieved the man.

A splitting migraine headache had been bothering me for two days, when I decided to bob and weave across Duy Tan Street to the American MACV field stationl. Pain was shooting up my neck and my vision was starting to blur. I felt embarrassed to complain and ask for help, especially since wounded stretcher cases in the aisles needed medical attention far more than I. Nevertheless, after I explained my symptoms sheepishly, Doctor Hamilton graciously handed me a small can of caffeine tablets. I took only two pills and the headache vanished in less than five minutes. On this day, CBS news correspondent, Walter Cronkite, clad complete with helmet and flak jacket, visited southern Hue City. Marines escorted him near the Le Loi/Duy Tan intersection. He was taking a chance, since any stray round could have easily fallen in that area. However, he didn't stay very long. I later learned he reported on nightly American TV, "U.S. forces had to destroy Hue City to save it," adding words to the effect the war could not be won. This 70 year old liberal could very well have dressed himself in a North Vietnamese uniform, for his performance was as traitorous as Tokyo Rose in WWII. Less than 2,000 heroic Marines outnumbered three to one not only drove the enemy from Hue, but destroyed them completely. Cronkite offered no praise or sympathy for Marine blood spilled to drive out those responsible for murdering innocent civilians in cold blood; instead he took the enemy's side never mentioning their cruelty in violating every aspect of civilized behavior. I would have liked to ask this 70 year old propagandist and enemy sympathizer, "Didn't we destroy Germany to save it? Didn't we destroy Soul Korea to save it? Didn't we drop an atom bomb on Hiroshima to save it?" That's what happens in war. Why didn't he complain about the enemy breaking the cease fire? Why didn't he mention the murder of 3,000 South Vietnamese civilians? Whose side was he on? I don't care how many accolades the liberal media pin on him, in my book he's dirt, and as much of a traitor as Jane Fonda. If I ever walk past his grave, I will spit on it.

Mustakos informed me that his CORDS boss, Ambassador Barney Koran, had asked our organization to identify and, if possible, rescue Americans captured in Hue City. Moreover, a chopper would arrive shortly with Lieutenant Colonel Oats aboard from Saigon's Joint Prisoner Recovery Center. Ltc. Oats had a list of missing Americans and the authority to approve any rescue plan. This was a major undertaking. It required locating and searching the homes of each individual on the list, looking for photographs, and questioning those living nearby who could provide information concerning their capture. We went from home to home, alternating entering and covering
positions.

On one occasion, I was slowly walking down a dark hallway when I heard a loud crashing noise inside an open door to my right. Next thing I see is a chain leashed German shepherd dog staring at me. He looked near starvation. After my heart stopped pounding, we found some can goods, fed him, and took him along to our compound as a new pet.
Another time, we were nearing the Duong Dong Da/Duong Trung Trac intersection when two rounds cracked overhead. I immediately hit the brakes and we dove out of the jeep A Marine fire team apparently spotted the sniper's position in the nearby field and fired back.

The photographs and information we collected on missing Americans far exceeded our expectations. The list included, Philip Manhard, Senior Province Advisor, USMC Captain Hubbard, USMC Captain Ray Lau, Sgt. Howard Vaughn, USMC WO1 Solomon Godwin, CIA officer David Hayes (pseudo), USA intelligence specialist Bob Ennis, CIA officer Jim Harris, CIA officer Eugene Weaver, State Department officers Steven Harkness and Steve Miller, Navy Civil Service employee Lawrence Stark, Armed Forces TV Station personnel USMC Lt James D. Bernardo, USMC Sgt John Deering, Army Sgts Donat Gouin and Harry Etmueller and John Anderson The men at this station fought until 5 February when their food and ammunition ran out and efforts to assist them all failed. Along with the reported deaths of Steven Stroub, Sgt Franklin Young and civilian Courtney Niles a Vietnamese claimed he saw John Anderson carried out of the AFTV building apparently dead. Nevertheless, we reported him as missing. The missing list continued with USMC 135 Mi Group USMC Captain Ted Gostas, Sgts Robert Hayhurst and Edward Dierling, Donald Rander, and USMC corporal Barry Wolk, AID officer, Tom Ragsdale, civilian Pacific Architects and Engineering civilian, Richard Spaulding, civilians Gary Davis, Russel Page, Alexander Henderson, Robert Olsen and Charles Willis, Lewis Meyer, Tom Rushton and two females, Sandra Johnson and Marjorie Nelson. We could never consider our list to be complete. For example, Foreign Service Officer, James Bullington was visiting Hue and we only learned this when Marines liberated him on 8 Feburary and he was able to provide information on fellow State Department officers, Steve Harkness and Steve Miller.

Initially, our reports indicated they were being marched southwesterly toward Phu Bai and A Shau Valley and guarded by only a few VC. We headed in that direction with my PRU team, hoping to get ahead of them and set up an ambush. However, we stopped after learning the prisoners were now sighted heading in a different direction toward the Hue Tombs area, possibly toward Route 9 along the eastern coast. We returned immediately, and discovered too late that they reversed course and again headed toward the A Shau. By this time, any attempt at rescue was too late and we returned to Hue City. The next morning, Harry called with news that Sergeants Robert Hayhurst and Edward Dierling had escaped and were being debriefed by Marine Intelligence officers in Danang. Colonel Oats and I flew to Danang and were later able to question them.

They were in the MI-135 group villa the night of Tet with Donald Rander, Ted Gostas, Barry Wolk, Ronald Ray, and Everett King. They defended their compound against persistent NVA attacks and were forced to surrender on 1 February. Wolk and Ray were killed during the fighting. Except for Gostas, who was injured, the NVA escorted the group to Province Senior Advisor Philip Manhard's home on Ly Thuong Kiet Street where they were kept overnight in a small room and moved the following morning to a camp near Phu Bai. Once there, they joined other Americans, including CIA officer Eugene Weaver. Under interrogation, Hayhurst and Dierling stuck to the cover story of security investigators checking Vietnamese applicants for American employment. Eventually, a total of nineteen U.S. Nationals were assembled, their shoes removed, and marched to A Shau Valley under the watchful eye of only three NVA armed guards. Hayhurst and Dierling decided to break away when the trail they were following took a sharp turn. Two of the three guards were out of view and the column screened the lone remaining guard. Moreover, the trail cut through a heavily vegetated area above a steep drop off amidst large trees. The two quietly slipped away, slid down the slope, and were a good distance away before the guard noticed they were gone. They then slowly made their way east until they ran into a Marine unit on 23 February which arranged their lift to III MAF.

The two escapees were able to identify many on our list. However, other than Weaver, they could shed no light on other missing CIA team members. This came the following morning when we learned CIA officer Jim Harris had made his way to Phu Bai by following the railroad tracks south. He had a chest wound and was evacuated to an offshore hospital ship. We were about to go there when we learned Bob Ennis also made it out and that Ray Lau had been found by Marines near the Phu Cam Canal. The story they were about to tell would have been my fate had Jack Horgan's flight not been delayed on 29 January.

Like everyone, CIA's Thua Thien Revolutionary Development Cadre Operations Team was surprised and shocked by the 31 January VC/NVA attack and blatant violation of the Tet cease fire. At the time, USMC Captain Robert Hubbard was in charge. The square jawed, strikingly handsome Hubbard was selected to take over while CIA Province Officer in Charge, Billy Milton, was on home leave. Hubbard was an exceptional Marine officer, proven by the courage, decisiveness, and leadership qualities he was about to perform. Shortly after daybreak on February 1, a large NVA formation crossed the Cau Ben Ngu Bridge over the Phu Cam canal. Provincial Reconnaissance Advisor, USMC Sergeant Howard Vaughn spotted a battalion sized NVA formation quick stepping in closed ranks as it passed the street corner to his left, heading north.. Like a true Marine, Vaughn opened fire. The NVA stopped, fired back briefly, and continued on their way. However, a round passed sideways through Vaughn's upper chest and had to be pulled back inside the house. Hubbard tended to Vaughn. He then organized a quick defense. A few days later, NVA soldiers began searching house to house, As two enemy soldiers approached the front door of our RDC/O house at #6 Le Thanh Ton Street, the defenders tossed two M-26 grenades killing them both. A while later, NVA soldiers armed with Rocket Propelled Grenades and AK-47s were spotted moving into position across the street and opened fire. A round passed through the front wall, wounding Jim Harris in the chest. The defenders

moved away from the front wall just as an explosive satchel charge was thrown through the side window, blowing out the front room. When the smoke cleared, Lau looked at Hubbard saying, “I can’t believe we’re still alive?” Lau said the blast felt like being hit in the chest with a sledge hammer. With the house reduced to near rubble, the NVA attack ceased.

HARRY MUSTAKOS IN FRONT OF HUE RDC/O HOUSE

Hubbard and others pulled Sergeant Vaughn to a rear bedroom and lifted him out the window into the back yard. While doing so, Lao opened the opposite hallway door and was amazed to see the room and rear wall were blown away, exposing the entire yard. They could have easily walked out this way. Like many upper class Vietnamese houses, a narrow storage or maid’s quarters with separate doors was located perpendicular to the rear. The group dragged Vaughn inside the last room and locked it from the inside. They hid there for a few days, observing kangaroo court proceedings in front of the adjoining building. They looked in horror as countless crying Vietnamese citizens pleaded for their life before they were savagely executed. One morning and enemy soldier suddenly appeared and for no reason sprayed the back yard. Unfortunately, one of the rounds struck Sergeant Vaughn above his right knee, adding another wound and extreme pain. A lone enemy soldier later approached their hideout and tried to open their locked door. They were prepared to kill him when he suddenly moved to the next room, looked inside, and left. During this incident, Vaughn bit his teeth in pain, but remained quiet. It was only after Hubbard realized the sergeant’s death was inevitable that he decided the team should move, concealing the unconscious Vaughn as best they could under a small bed.

The team left their hideout late at night. Hubbard led them toward the Phu Cam Canal and into a culvert passing underneath Phan Dinh Phung Street. Once there, Hubbard left briefly and returned with some food and rags to pack Harris' wheezing chest wound. The plan was to squeeze through the culvert at daybreak, follow the canal westward, cross over the Cau Phu Cam Bridge and follow the railroad tracks south toward Phu Bai. At first light, slender frame Lau wiggled through, exiting near the Phu Cam Canal. He waited in the open for Ennis. However, Ennis was much too large to make it out, thereby stranding Lau outside. Fortunately, Lau's khaki clothes closely resembled the NVA uniform, so he casually walked across the street, climbed a ladder into a water tower, and hid there in the cold until the Marines arrived. Meanwhile, Hubbard, Ennis and the wounded Harris backed out of the culvert, made their way across the Cau Ben Ngu Bridge, and into a drainage ditch parallel to the road. After crouching down and running a few hundred yards south, Captain Hubbard was stuck in the spine by an enemy AK-47 round and died instantly. Ennis and Harris took cover and were able to double back to the canal. They then entered the foundation of a partially constructed building on Phan Chu Trinh Street with a high rear wall with no exit. Despite a chest wound, Harris scaled the ten foot wall and eventually reached the railroad tracks which he followed it to safety. However, Ennis had to pile concrete blocks to make it over the back wall. To avoid detection, ran into the nearest house. By an act of God, it happened to be occupied by his interpreter's family. More importantly, they were willing to risk their lives to hide him from the enemy. Rather than placing this kind and compassionate family in mortal risk, Ennis left at night. He walked south and made contact with friendly forces early in the morning. He was obviously shaken and could hardly relate events as told clearly by Ray Lau, and Harris later.

We next received the good news that David Hayes was alive and well. His villa at #4 Phan Dinh Phung Street overlooked the Phu Cam Canal and was second house east of the Cau Ben Ngu Bridge. Like everyone else the night of Tet, they first mistook the shooting for celebration fireworks. However, at first light NVA soldiers ominously filled the streets. Together with Gene Weaver and USMC WO Solomon Godwin, they were trapped inside as American artillery rounds began exploding everywhere. The artillery stopped a few days later and the enemy soldiers began searching the houses. A tall uniformed NVA soldier opened the front door and walked in. Godwin shot him with his M-16 and the soldier kept coming. He fired two more rounds before he finally went down. Simultaneously, another soldier entered the rear door. When he heard the shooting, he pressed up against a hallway umbrella closure way too small for his body. Hayes fired his shotgun, hitting the man's spine and spinning him through the back door. Godwin and Hayes sprinted past the blood stained body, calling for Weaver to follow. Unfortunately, Gene was too frightened to move and stayed frozen until captured. Godwin and Hayes split. Hayes found a building with a large hole in the tile roof and climbed inside. Although enemy soldiers eventually searched this building, he stayed quiet and remained hidden. He survived without food and water until Marines secured the building, urinating, into a rag so as not to reveal his position. (Only after Eugene Weaver's release from captivity on 16 March 1973, did we learn Solomon Godwin apparently died along the Ho Chi Minh trail on the way to North Vietnam. Weaver reported the undernourished, malaria ridden, foot infected Godwin was in very poor condition before a North Vietnamese soldier forced Weaver to sign a paper confirming Solomon's death. Since both intelligence officers were held in isolation and tortured severely, one can only speculate how he died. His body has never been recovered, nor did North Vietnam acknowledge his capture. So much for prisoner rights under the Geneva Convention.)

Ray Lau's harrowing experience didn't stop him from volunteering to return to Hue City to help recover Bob Hubbard and Howard Vaughn's remains. We searched the room where Vaughn was left behind, but his body was missing. Later, a bloated body was reported to be seen alongside the road leading over the Cau Ben Ngu Bridge. It proved to be Vaughn, although it was impossible to tell.

We could see Hubbard's body laying on Nguyen Truong To Street a few hundred meters south of the Cau Ben Ngu Bridge. The enemy controlled this area, so we had to wait helplessly

as his corpse rotted in the sun until weeks later this great Marine's mutilated body was finally recovered and identified by his khaki trousers and brown shoes. Words can not describe USMC Captain Robert Hubbard's heroism, nor can they describe the anguish we all felt in the loss of such a fine young man. It remains etched in my brain forever.

Priests in the Catholic Church reported the VC had executed a Vietnamese speaking American in their rear building. Blood stains and bullet holes were clearly visible. He was apparently shot him in the head while kneeling. We were led to a shallow roadside grave where the priests buried him along with eight Vietnamese. Ray and I dug less than three feet before we reached the bodies. Every one had their arms tied behind their backs with barbed wire and showed similar signs of execution. We finally found the American, but could hardly identify him even after carefully sweeping the mud off his face. I originally thought it might be State Department officer, Steve Harkness, whom I knew in Danang. The body was the same size, Steve spoke Vietnamese, and he was on our missing list. In any event, we slid him into a rubber body bag, zippered it, and moved him to graves registration near the MACV compound. (Later we learned from Jim Bullington, who at the time was visiting from Quang Tri and I hid in this same church before being rescued by Marines, the body was that of Steve Miller. Later examination confirmed this. Although I didn't know it at the time, Bullington's Vietnamese wife was also visiting Hue City and survived a harrowing experience similar to my wife.) It was truly a pleasure working alongside young Marine captain Lau. He is the type of individual you would pray to have next to you in a firefight. Besides his proven bravery and calmness under duress, he had a wonderful sense of humor which could energize a smile no matter how bitter the circumstances. Most of all, he never complained. (To my surprise and delight, Ray joined the Agency after leaving the Marines. He later retired after an extremely successful career in the Clandestine Service.)

In the months following the Tet Offensive, our major concentration was to round up and incarcerate the many newly identified VC insurgents. Phoenix coordinating centers were developing card files on identified members of enemy's clandestine infrastructure. Action forces aggressively rounded up many VC terrorists and armed political cadre.

One morning General Dick Stillwell visited my office for a briefing. He was relieving the Commander of XIV Airborne Corps and wished to pick my brain, knowing I had been in country since 1966. At the time, I didn't know he was once detailed to CIA, or that he previously had extensive planning experience in Saigon. The session began in early afternoon, ending the following morning way after sunrise. By that time my voice was horse, my brain numb and my eyeballs rolling. On the other hand, he was wide awake. I updated him on our Phoenix capabilities, suggesting he might use troop density to fight the enemy infrastructure. It would be a massive US military commitment combined with considerable South Vietnamese military and police components. Little did I know he kept this seed in his head? In September 1968, III MAF Commander, General Cushman, went on leave placing General Stillwell temporarily in charge.. Normally you would think a relieving general would be reluctant to take dramatic action in applying new counterinsurgency methods, but not Stillwell. He ordered Operation Vinh Loc I and Phu Vang I the cordon and search of an entire districts in Thua Thien province.

VINH LOC and PHU VANG I
(September 1968)

Vinh Loc Island is roughly twenty-five miles long and three miles wide. It's situated about fifteen miles east of Hue City along the coast. Following Tet 1968 the district became a enemy safe haven, causing many of its inhabitants to flee to safer areas. To combat enemy forces, a planning group was assembled consisting of the province and district chiefs, Vietnamese Army

commanders, U.S. advisers, and the commanding officers of the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), and the 1st Battalion (Airmobile), 501st Infantry. The plan called for a combined operation to cordon the island, emphasizing combined operation, the limited use of firepower to keep property damage and civilian injury at a minimum. In preparation, Phoenix Intelligence and Coordination Centers consolidated files on all known or suspected VCI in the area long with enemy order of battle information.

At daylight on 11 September 1968 naval forces surrounded the island, followed by American reconnaissance into Vinh Loc District, thus preventing enemy escape. With blocking forces in position, US Airmobile units along with an ARVN battalion air-assaulted into six landing zones along the seaward shore. Two battalions then swept to the southwest into the blockade established by two ARVN battalions and naval forces. Two South Vietnamese Regional Force Companies conducted similar sweeps. Hence, the entire district was sealed by sunset. At night, those attempting to escape were illuminated and fired upon by blocking forces.

The cordon was held tight for eight consecutive days. During this period, civilian residents inside the area were instructed to follow certain routs leading to a large prepared holding area with tents, food, water, and medical facilities. Called a “County Fair,” the displaced population was treated with continuous entertainment, including sports events, live shows, singing, movies, and games. Meanwhile, South Vietnamese and American forces continuously sweep inside the cordon, coupled with saturation patrols, night flights, and small unit ambushes. Indigenous paramilitary forces were used extensively, with two Regional Force companies being assigned to their own areas while working alongside ARVN and U.S. rifle companies. Moreover, Popular Force platoons worked with each company-size tactical unit, taking advantage of their extensive knowledge of local terrain and population. Twenty-four members of the National Police Special Branch, 100 members of the National Police Field Forces, 30 men organized into Armed Propaganda Teams, and a 7-man detail for census grievances were kept on hand to question and control the population while still inside the cordon. This arrangement insured that South Vietnamese government representatives were with all units, thus minimizing potential misunderstandings with detainees and allowing for the meaningful screening of people. A central collection point within the holding area was prepared with barbed wire where prisoners of war and detainees were held by district National Policemen. A combined Intelligence Center was created and staffed by representatives from all U.S. and Vietnamese intelligence agencies. This combined staff interrogated suspects instantly, producing information which could be exploited immediately by Provincial Reconnaissance Units or People’s Self-Defense Forces.

The Combined Intelligence Center proved highly innovative. In one instance, helicopters carrying 231 suspects landed at the interrogation center. The LZ was dusty and noisy which led to considerable confusion.. Upon leaving the helicopters, suspects were given directions such as, "All members of K4B Battalion over here, 0117 Company over there." Accordingly, sixty-three of the suspects lined up as directed. The district S-2 then asked the suspects to identify other members of their units who had not followed the instructions. Hence, more prisoners were identified.

Operation Vinh Loc I was highly successful. Prior to the operation, the enemy was estimated to have two local companies, augmented by hamlet guerrillas. At the completion of the operation, enemy organizations were virtually ineffective, allowing regular U.S. and ARVN forces to be replaced by Regional and Popular Force units. Subsequently, two revolutionary development teams returned to the area and continued their work with no further interference. Enemy losses included 154 KIA, 370 POWs (including 116 VCI), and 54 ralliers, whereas friendly losses were 2 US and 1 Vietnamese Policeman KIA.

PHU VANG I

Operation Vinh Loc was followed immediately by Operation PHU VANG I. The cordon simply flip-flopped. The area begins one kilometer east of Hue city and included parts of three districts, encompassing nearly twenty-nine square kilometers completely surrounded by navigable waterways. It housed a main route into Hue City long called “Ambush Alley.” The entire population here had strong family ties to insurgent forces and many served as VCI cadre. Using Vinh Loc as a model, operation Phu Vang began at first light on 27 September with the cordon being in place the following morning. Operational procedures inside the cordon were essentially the same. Only difference was early captives claimed the enemy might attempt to withdraw to the east before blocking forces were in position. Consequently, the cordon was closed immediately instead of waiting until 28 September. Here again, the use of indigenous paramilitary forces was maximized with Regional Forces, Provincial Reconnaissance Units, and Census Grievance Teams distributed among tactical forces to assist in the preliminary screening and interrogation of suspect captives.. Many also staffed the Combined Intelligence Center, processing intelligence for immediate exploitation. The immediate tactical results of Vinh Loc and Phu Vang were impressive, the long-term results of these operations was even more startling. Viet Cong influence ceased immediately. Furthermore, the South Vietnamese government was able to develop a new environment of stability and security. From then on, anyone could ride a bicycle, motorcycle or vehicle on every road throughout the province without fear ambush. As I Corps Phoenix Coordinator, I felt the enemy infrastructure in Thua Thien had been effectively destroyed and no longer a serious threat.

Before proceeding further, it’s worth documenting how such large scale joint operations were made possible. In I Corps, both III MAF Commanding General, Robert Cushman, and the I Corps Commander, General Lam, controlled the enormous and costly resources required to implement such large scale cordon operations. Remember, this was at a time when fire support bases near the DMZ were under frequent attack. My CAS boss, Harry Mustakos, a former Marine, met daily with these leaders, and I attended all morning III MAF staff meetings. Obviously, the credibility derived from Operation Vinh Loc and Phu Vang convinced these leaders to support and continue along the same path. In doing so, I worked directly with III MAF G-3 Assistant, Lt. Col. Ellison, a very bright and competent officer. III MAF issued orders to American units, whereas I dealt directly with General Lam’s G-3 office and the Regional South Vietnamese National Police Chief, Col.Vo Luong. As the Regional Phoenix Coordinator and CAS RDC/O officer I had control many of the needed Vietnamese assets. Point is, a joint effort on such a scale requires the total cooperation and commitment of every component involved. Sour grapes or political in fighting cannot be tolerated. Fortunately, the personalities I dealt with then were exceptional, eager to cooperate, respectful, competent, and most of all, energetic. It was probably the main reason for making this all possible.

MEADE RIVER

Our next target focused on enemy concentrations in Dien Ban District, Quang Ngai Province. Enemy forces in this area suffered heavily after Tet 1968, Many undercover VC infrastructure cadre surfaced while fighting alongside the VC and NVA throughout I Corps. Accordingly, District and Province Intelligence and Operations Coordination Centers worked full time building card files on those identified. Local action forces were kept busy exploiting actionable intelligence and bringing captives to Interrogation centers now working day and night to keep pace with the flow. Intelligence thus derived showed solid evidence that a second major attack was soon imminent.

We had several recruited assets in the area surrounding Danang City. One particular low level unilateral asset lived in a in a key VC village which the enemy used as a staging before attacking the City. This individual was not in a position to provide strategic intelligence, so we decided to have him remain in place and defect when significant NVA forces moved into in his area. This district was Dien Ban, knick named Dodge City by Marines who regularly swept through and sustained high casualties through ambushes, mines and booby traps. At morning staff meeting, you could count on the III MAF briefer announcing the loss of five or more Marines in this area. We singled out this district for the first Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation Center which

gave rise to the Phoenix program. The initial center was built by Marines and staffed by one of their Marine intelligence officers.

We addressed III MAF with the idea of developing a contingency plan to cordon off all of Dien Ban District should our agent show up as directed. Such an operation called for a massive troop commitment, way beyond anything experienced before in any single I Corps district. For example, only three Marine battalions fought to regain Hue City, although Army units were also involved in the fighting. Initially, the Marines would only commit to four battalions. As weeks went by, the plan grew, General Cushman took a personal interest in the planning. He had approached Harry Mustakos and his Deputy, Jim Smith, if there was anything going on that could use the Strike Landing Force (SLF), a special force maintained aboard ships offshore. He also mentioned Admiral Zumwalt had asked to use this force as "Riverene Forces." Thus, more forces became available for this contingency operation. Moreover, General Cushman felt very strongly about the politics of not including General Lam's ARVN battalions in the operation. We all felt ARVN represented security problem since we knew Vietnamese I Corps Headquarters was penetrated by the VC. Thus we suggested they cover the area south of the Hoi An River without reading them into the entire cordon plan. Naturally, General Cushman had to brief General Lam on the plan and convinced him not read his staff in on the Marine part of the plan. Before long, contingency plans were in place for the largest single joint operation of the war in I Corps. What originally was billed as a joint pacification effort to wipe out insurgents in Dien Ban District, evolved into a major battle against powerful enemy forces.

Essentially, the operation depended upon secrecy, and rapid deployment of sufficient troops to surround a rectangular area roughly five miles long and three miles wide. The northern and southern boundaries were extensions of Danang's Song Yen river the north and the Thu Bon River extending in a westerly from the Hoi An to the south. Thus, the upper and lower cordon perimeter could be secured by naval craft, although Vietnamese units moved into positions on opposite shore lines. A dirt road running south from the Marine base at Hill 55 and parallel to am old north/south railroad was selected as the western boundary, whereas Route #1 to the east enclosed the rectangle. By taking advantage of easily identified and traveled roads and rivers, Marines were able to ring the area in less than five hours. Troops moved by foot and trucks drove south from hill 55 dropping fire teams off every 15 meters, as Marines from the Brigade Landing Force offshore moved into position along Route 1. Thus the cordon was sealed by seven Marine battalions of roughly 5,000 men, augmented by South Vietnamese Navy patrol boats. A remarkable achievement, considering this entire plan sat on the shelf cocked and ready for the go signal.

From an intelligence perspective, Meade River was a gamble. III MAF order of battle intelligence showed only the local VC R-20 and V-25 battalions in the area along with a few sappers. Much hinged on the judgment and reliability of a single agent defector. There were, however, other signs. Route 4 which passed east/west through the cordon became impassible and Hoi An City was experiencing increased enemy attacks nightly. In any even, at a minimum, the operation would deal a severe blow to Dien Ban's VCI which had now filled Phoenix card files.

Meade River kicked off on 22 November 1968 at 0400. Simultaneously, a "County Fair" holding complex was constructed to house an estimated 3,000 civilians, and mirrored that described earlier.

It didn't take long to realize the Meade River cordon netted a fierce tiger. Marines were unable to meet their first day objective of closing 1000 meters from the eastern boundary road to the railroad. Enemy resistance was too heavy. Moreover, fire fights were reported at several different locations. As the operation progressed, enemy forces tried to escape repeatedly, particularly at night, only to be decimated by well dug in Marines. They then began probing in all directions for a way out. They even tried swimming across the northern boundary river, but were gunned down by Marine sniper teams on the other side in strategic positions. Searchlights, flares, and starlight

scopes were employed at night, along with artillery and overhead gunships, to prevent enemy escape.

As Marines began to close the cordon two days into the operation, it became obvious Meade River would become a bloody and costly battle against a well disciplined and determined enemy on his turf. The entire area was seeded with mines, booby traps, reinforced (railroad iron) concrete bunker complexes, spider holes and trench lines in swampy terrain. Progress would be extremely slow, as Marines probed every meter of with iron rods to detect food caches and ammunition buried underground. As the operation progressed, it became necessary to call in 16 inch Naval gun fire from the battle ship New Jersey, and heavy air bombardment to destroy the hardened bunkers.

After seventeen days, Operation Meade River was concluded. Intelligence from the County Fair's Combined Holding and Intelligence Center revealed the enemy was warned about the operation one day in advance. However, cordon elements acted too fast for them to move out. Interrogation reports also verified the cordon trapped the NVA 36th Regiment inside along with the VC R-20 battalion. Reported enemy losses were 1,023 killed, 123 captured, 71 VCI captured and 6 rallied to the government's side. The number of killed could be much higher, since many were killed trying to leave the area after December 8. Moreover, who know many vanished after153 sixteen inch shells were fired from the New Jersey.? On the down side, this operation proved extremely costly. 109 brave Marines died in battle while another 513 were wounded and evacuated.

RUSSELL BEACH

Quang Ngai's Batangan Peninsula, located about 10 miles southeast of Chu Lai. Practically every hamlet in the area was colored red on our charts. Besides strong guerrilla units, this area was considered home of the legendary VC 48th Regiment. This enemy unit had proved to be extremely elusive and had never been defeated by either us or the French. They were hard nosed, tough warriors. Our next major cordon operation was designed to destroy them.

Operation Russell Beach, as it was named became one of the largest pacification operations of the Vietnam War. A joint force of Americal soldiers, Marines, and Vietnamese Army forces moved swiftly into cordon positions around the Batangan Pininsula perimeter. However, it wasn't quick enough to trap the slippery VC 48 Regiment. Whether they received advanced word from their spies or were plain lucky we will never know. Nevertheless, by 13 January, 1969 an 11 mile cordon was set in place by Americal units consisting of four Americal battalions, two Marine battalions, two ARVN battalions and Navy Swift Boats. The cordon encircled enemy forces operating within the entire Batangan peninsula. Marines from the Strike Landing Force then landed on the beach, followed by others flown in from vessels stationed to sweep the area. This was the biggest Marine amphibious assault since the Inchon landings in Korea.

With the cordon in place, Psychological Teams dropped leaflets as loudspeaker helicopters flew overhead instructing civilians to evacuate through specific routes and perimeter check points. From there they were moved to a "County Fair" tent area near Quang Ngai City, containing a central holding and interrogation center. Within the first four days, roughly 2,500 civilians were moved out of the cordon and transferred to the tent site. Psychological operations teams continued their activities, as operational components engaged pockets of enemy resistance. More than eleven thousand civilians were eventually removed before combat forces began compressing the cordon. By 9 February, the entire area had been swept with numerous tunnels, bunkers and arms caches destroyed. The operation resulted in 210 VC killed, 256 VCI captured, 59 individual weapons seized

along with six crew served weapons. Afterwards, the civilian population retuned home to a pacified area.

To be continued……..