

Remembering South Vietnam, 1966-1967



July 18, 1966:
First day in the 'Nam.

Approaching DaNang,
from the south.
Under the wing, note
the bridge over the
Song Cau Do. Will
come back to it.



Approaching DaNang

First thought: man,
they're this close --
not yet realizing that
burning out the
shitters produced a
lot of black smoke.



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DaNang:
Marines grab sleep
whenever and
wherever they can.
Sign in background
says Cubi Point, but
these guys probably
aren't going there.



July 19, 1966:
C-130 loading up at
DaNang for short
run to Chu Lai.

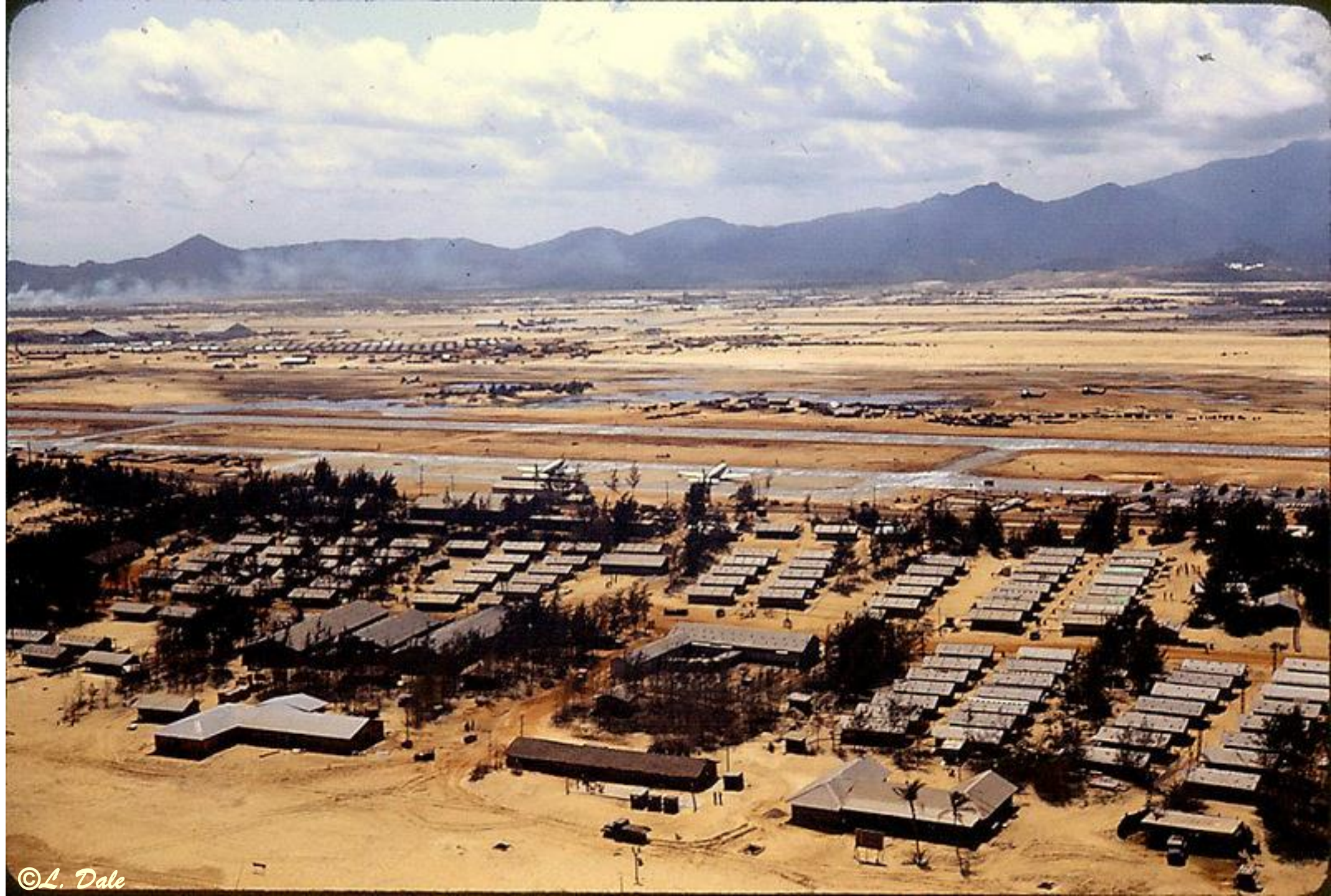
This was my first
flight in-country.
Just as we
approached lift-off,
the pilot jammed on
the brakes, and we
came to a stop a
grenade throw from
the minefield at the
end of the runway.
Pilot came on the
intercom and said
cheerily, "Well, we
didn't make it that
time; let's go back
and try it again."
My thought: this is
gonna' be a long
13 months.



Looking south of the Chu Lai airstrip, with the Song Tra Bong bisecting the pic. At the far right center is the northern edge of the Opn. STARLITE area.



Chu Lai: all the amenities of home – for the aviators. And I might add, they deserved them.



Watchtower at the south end of the Chu Lai base and at the start of sector of responsibility (SOR) of Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines.



CH-46 Sea Knights
lined up at Ky Ha
near Chu Lai.

The rhythmic, pulsing
thump, thump, thump
of those rotors is a
sound no infantryman
will ever forget.

In May-June 1967,
the 46's were grounded
for several weeks,
because the rear rotors on
several detached, or the
rear pylon structure
failed in flight. For awhile,
this cut in half the USMC
airlift capability in VN.



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LSTs bellying up to shore to offload cargo at the Naval Support Facility, Chu Lai.



AMTRACs lined up
on beach near Chu
Lai airstrip.

AMTRACs were very
useful for a variety
of purposes, but
you could hear
them coming a mile
and more away.



Mouth of the
Song Tra Bong
flowing into the
South China Sea,
south of Chu Lai.

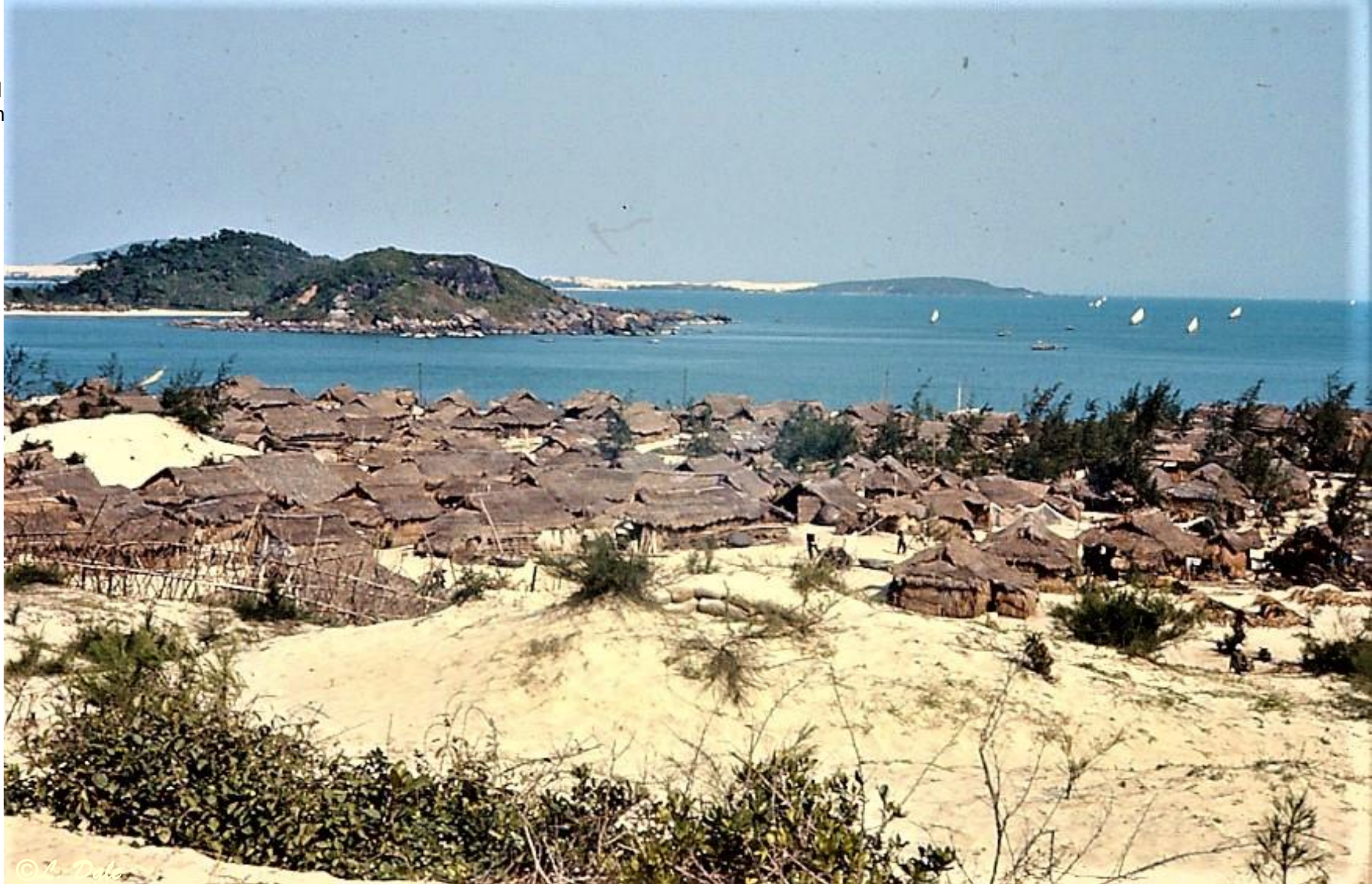
Under the M-60
muzzle is a
village which the
VC destroyed in
1968.

1st Bn, 7th Marines'
HQ was located
south of the river,
just beyond the
right edge of the
photo.



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This is the village
that was destroyed
by the VC less than
a year after this
photo was made.



South of Chu Lai, looking south:

The area on the left above the M-60 barrel was part of the SOR of Company C, up to the north bank of the Song Tra Bong.

At the upper right, across the river, is the Phu Long Peninsula, where the VC were active, and C Co. sometimes inserted platoon-size multi-day patrols.

The site on the hill below the muzzle of the M-60 may be the HQ of the 2nd Bn, 7th Marines. Not sure about that.



Troops of C Company,
1/7, patrolling a tribu-
tary of the Song Tra
Bong, south of Chu Lai.
July 1966.



Wading through the
water coconut palms.
July 1966



Showing great interval. Patrolling south of Chu Lai, July 1966. That long antenna made the radioman a prime sniper target.



Paying the troops,
beside the Song
Tra Bong.
October 1966



VN has great beaches. This one, being crossed by a couple of ONTOS, is near the mouth of the Song Tra Bong.



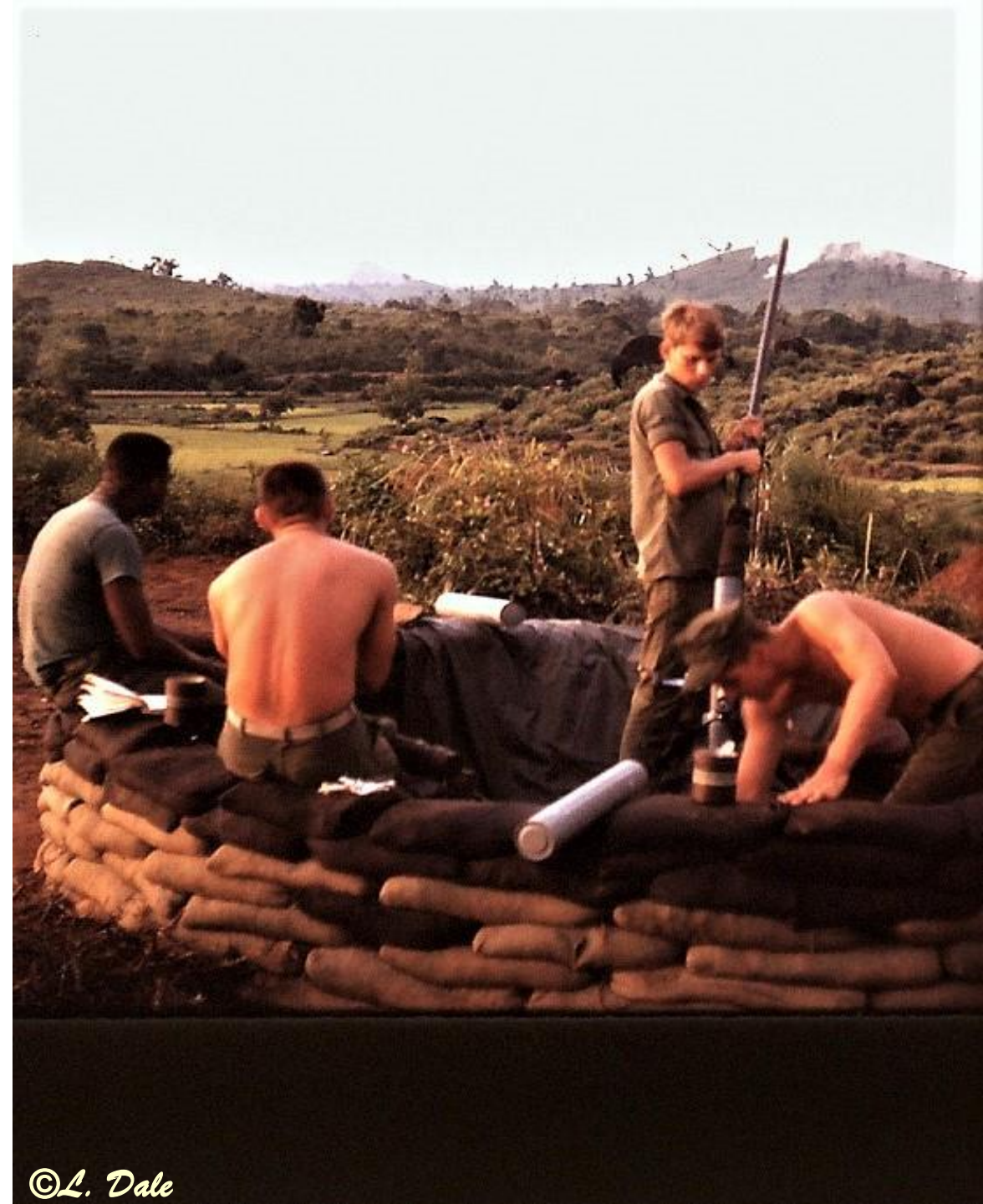
In August 1966, 2nd Plt, C Co., 1/7 was serving as part of a provisional company providing security to Korean Marine engineers, while they built a base camp for the Koreans' Blue Dragon brigade. This area was 2 or 3 clicks north of where the My Lai incident took place a couple of years later.

My provisional company commander ordered me to establish an observation post on the hill you see in the distance on the right. My platoon sergeant wisely suggested I request a fire mission to detonate any VC booby traps that might be on such a conspicuous spot. That made sense to me. I suggested the fire mission to my company CO. He told me it was in the ARVN's area, and that would be too complicated. I asked why the ARVN had not established an OP there. He was not amused, and told me to get the OP established.

Since we were in Indian country, I went with a squad and our platoon guide. When we got to the top of the hill, we spread out a bit. On a very hot, humid day, the logical place for Marines to head was under a tree. The VC knew this, and if I'd been in country more than three weeks, I might have too. We had not been on the hill more than ten minutes when a daisy chain of ChiCom grenades exploded, wounding five men, requiring all to be med-evaced.

Med-evacing five men during a hover on a very hot day was problematic. There was concern that the UH-34 rotor wash might set off other booby traps, but trying to set down was riskier. We finally got the wounded men onboard, and away they went, with no further incident, to my great relief. I had a 25 foot nylon ski rope in my pack. My platoon guide got down on his hands and knees and crawled around until he found another fishing line stretched low between two shrubs. He tied the ski rope to the line. We backed off, unsure of which way to go, but decided to give a pull anyway. Boom! Another three or four grenades went off. We decide then and there we had pretty good seats for observing the surrounding countryside and needed no further exploration.

Oh, and when we got back, the company commander approved the fire mission that you can see being fired in the photo by the 81 mm mortar crew.



The most notable event from our time with the Korean Marine engineers was an ambush that bagged a couple of VC and liberated three weapons, including a Russian sniper rifle with scope and two ChiCom model 53 rifles, shown in the photo.

L to R:
Sergeant Wallace G. Estes
2nd Lt. Dale
Pfc Tom Chasteen
Sergeant Nicholas Navarro
Cpl. Biskey

Five months later, Sgt. Navarro was killed on a Sparrow Hawk mission in the Duc Pho area, to retrieve the body of a dead pilot.

Cpl Biskey was awarded a Silver Star for actions on Operation UTAH in March 1966.



Early September 1966:

This was the first Rough Rider, a convoy, to travel Highway 1 from Chu Lai to DaNang in several months. At least, that's what we were told, and we had a noted journalist with us. As I recall, it was Peter Arnett.

I was thankful not to be in a vehicle right behind that ONTOS leading the pack. Those 106 mm rifles had a nasty tendency to cookoff occasionally, and the back blast was vicious. The trip was relatively uneventful with only a couple of sniper incidents.



One of the sights we saw on the Rough Rider. The structure looks several centuries old. Have no idea what its purpose might have been.



On September 8, 1966, 1/7 launched Operation FRESNO in the Mo Duc area of Quang Ngai Province. We had impressive naval gunfire and close air support. It was a nine-day operation which then morphed into GOLDEN FLEECE 7-1.

One of the main purposes of FRESNO was to provide security for voters for the September 11th election for South Vietnam's 117 – member Constituent Assembly, the first such election since the military coup and murders of Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother in November 1963, just a few days before JFK's assassination. The VC made violent efforts to intimidate and/or kill voters and to destroy voting locations. We made those efforts, at least in the Mo Duc District, much more difficult and riskier for them.

We were told it was a great success.



Operation FRESNO

Vietnam had greener greens than I had ever seen, with a variety of shades. Rice fields were especially lush in the growing season.

In this photo, you can see a wealthy landowner's pastel shaded home in the distance.



A little closer up, you can see Marines and local police paying a call on the relatively wealthy landowners.



Operation FRESNO

When Marines and blue-clad local police checked out this hamlet, we discovered evidence of the civil war that was also plaguing Vietnam. One son was fighting for the VC, and one, for the RVN.

Here, 1st Lt. Paul Dolwick, XO of Charlie Company, directs a search of the premises, while police discuss the situation with one of the families.



Operation FRESNO

Rice harvesting in the ancient way is very labor intensive. Here, workers are cutting the rice with sickles or scythes while another worker threshes the rice by flailing it in the odd structure which keeps the kernels from escaping or blowing away. This rice was then taken to Highway 1, a few yards away, where women winnowed the rice by tossing it into the air in large, flat, round bamboo baskets, letting the chaff blow away.

In 1966 VN farmers did back-breaking work in a way hardly changed from centuries earlier. Fifty years later, Vietnam is the second largest rice exporter in the world, after Thailand, owed mainly to production in the Mekong and Red River deltas.



Operation FRESNO

Troops of C Company patrol Highway One outside Mo Duc protecting rice harvesters.

1st Lt. Dolwick (with towel) supervising. Sgt. Navarro on the right.



©L. Dale

Highway 1 / MoDuc / 9/66

Operation FRESNO

Small children like these could manage water buffalo handily and make them seem almost docile. But when the big animals smelled Marines, they became agitated and would often charge. Many buffalo thus met their maker, resulting in the USMC paying a farmer far more for the dead animal than he could have gotten at market.



Operation FRESNO

Marines of 2nd Platoon,
C Company, 1/7, settling
down in a hamlet near Mo Duc.

HM3 Mancini, Pfc Chasteen, Sgt.
Navarro, S/Sgt Malone, Cpl.
Romero and one unidentified
Marine, beginning distribution of
delicious "Cs". Note socks drying
on the roof thatch.



Operation FRESNO

2nd Lt. Dale hosting tea party for members of his platoon in hamlet near Mo Duc.



Operation FRESNO

The matriarch of this hamlet was tolerant of our presence, and we shared meals. Hers tasted better, maybe because of fish blood or fish eyes or lizard or dog meat. Here, Doc Mancini studies the meal, while I reach for seconds.

Mama san was adamant about our not messing around her well.

I doubt the VC treated her or her family kindly after our departure.

Platoon Sergeant Eddie J. Cooper in the background probably thinking about his nightclub singing days. S/Sgt. Cooper was WIA in November 1966.



Operation FRESNO

Sgt. Navarro watches while a local police chief looks for evidence of VC activity.



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Operation FRESNO

A recurring problem in VN was civilian casualties. Here, our two corpsmen are treating an elderly man who had been caught in the crossfire between VC snipers and our platoon position.



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Operation FRESNO morphed into Golden FLEECE 7-1 on September 18, 1966.

On September 22, 1st Battalion was ordered to sweep what was described as a VC fortified village Van Ha (1), located a few miles south of Mo Duc, a couple of miles east of Highway One and a like distance from the sea. F-8 Crusaders, A-4 Skyhawks and F-4 Phantoms "prepped" Van Ha (1) and did extensive damage, occasionally using 2,000 lb. bombs. We got up early to start the long walk to the village. Charlie Company moved in the trace of Alpha Company and watched from a low hill as Alpha went on line at the outskirts of the village and began the sweep.

I liked my view better than theirs, but as it turned out, the aerial assault had done an effective job of eliminating opposition.



On the long, hot
walk into Van
Ha (1). Good
interval.



Operation
GOLDEN FLEECE 7-1:

As VC suspects (VCS) are rounded up, Marines continue to sweep Van Ha (1).

The extensive bomb damage is easy to see. Van Ha (1) was a thoroughly devastated village. Nevertheless, we had to post a double perimeter around the village at night, one line looking out; the other looking in, because there were still VC in the tunnel complex who had not been flushed out.

Brave souls, they were heavily out-numbered, but still would come out at night to chuck grenades and sometimes shout epithets in broken English. It reminded me a bit of those WWII movies – "You die Marine."



GOLDEN
FLEECE
7-1

Van Ha (1)

More of
The
Devastation



©L. Dale

Operation GOLDEN FLEECE 7-1

Local farmers (VCS) being held at bayonet point for later interrogation by the ARVN.



This photo from Van Ha reminds me of one of the more memorable American cultural adjustments that began taking place in Vietnam in the mid-1960's, a time of great racial ferment and violence in the U.S.

In news reports back home, far more emphasis was placed on fragging incidents, especially black enlisted attacking white officers. Here is undramatic evidence of the other side of the coin, but not the kind that creates profitable headlines. Sgt. Wallace Estes, from North Carolina, and a U.S. Marine squad leader, is helping the red-haired Marine PFC from Kentucky fix up his temporary sleeping quarters.

I don't recall any racial incidents in my platoon, but I became increasingly mindful that the blacks in my platoon, including my platoon sergeant, platoon guide, a squad leader and a couple of fireteam leaders could not then have gone into restaurants, hotels or clubs with me back home in Nashville. Yet at no time did these men ever flinch or waver in carrying out their duties. They served their country with honor. The same can be said of the Hispanics, one an excellent squad leader of Mexican descent who gave his life (Sgt. Navarro). You may be sure I never asked him whether he was a documented U.S. citizen.



Operation GOLDEN FLEECE 7-1

Vietnamese came from other villages to obtain rice that the VC had taken in taxes from the area and stored in Van Ha (1).

They (mostly women) slowly but steadily removed tons of rice using the primitive method you see in the photo. Virtually all were barefoot. Their large conical hats make eminent good sense at the 14th Parallel.



Operation GOLDEN FLEECE
7-1

Marines of Charlie, 1/7,
in time-honored way, have
requisitioned novel, naval
transport out of Van Ha (1).
Not sure of the purpose of
the fire in the rear boat. It
was not a cold morning.



A new mascot



©L. Dale

Sergeant Xuan, our translator – cool head in a firefight. Wonder How he weathered the takeover of his country.



While we were in Van Ha (1), the VC were in Mo Duc wreaking a bunch of havoc themselves.

Doc Mancini sits among some of the wreckage.

However, the violence has not kept the locals from going to market, as you can see in the background.



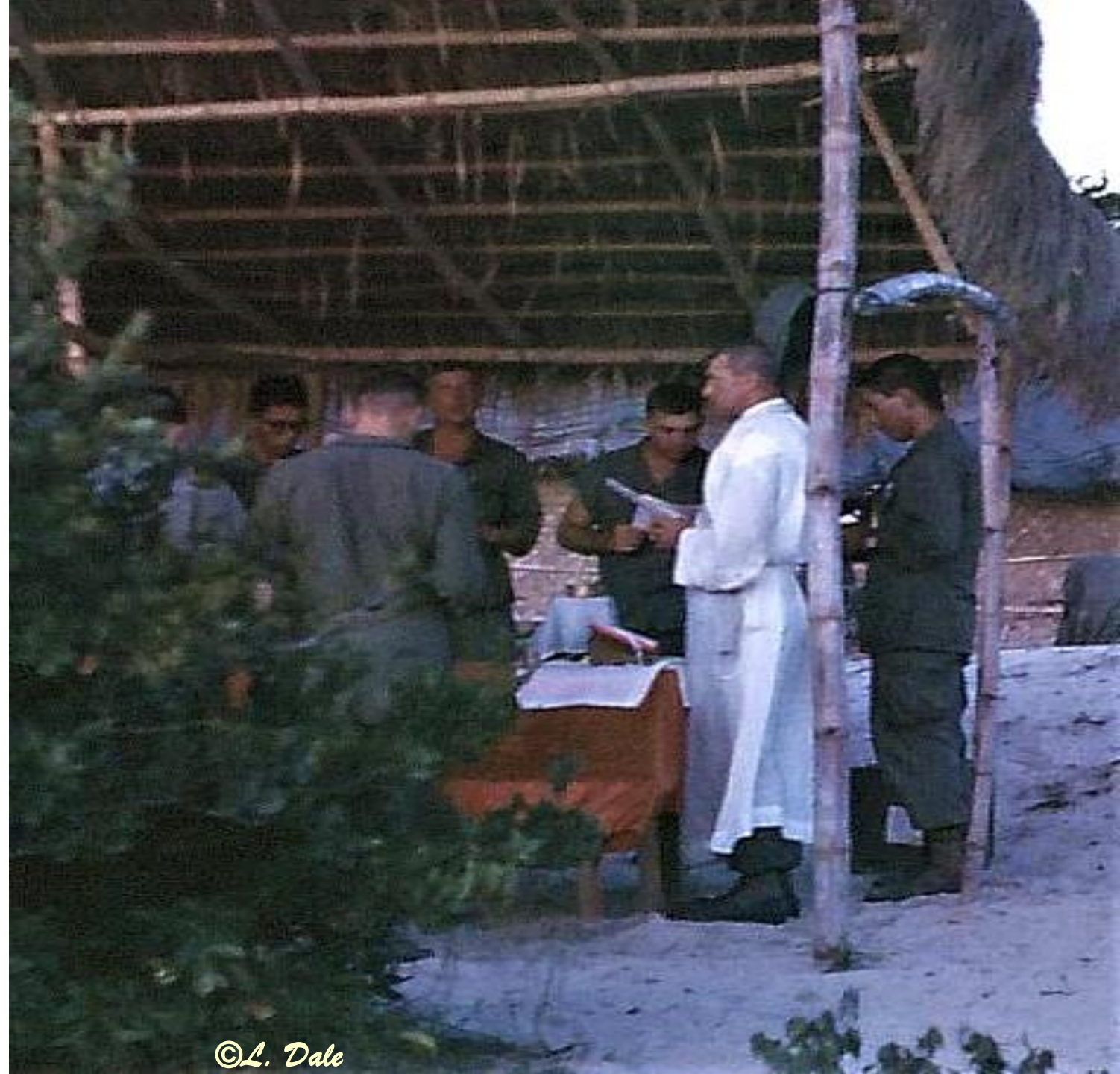
Troops of 2nd Plt.,
C Co., 1/7, heading
home after
Operation FRESNO/
GOLDEN FLEECE 7-1,
near Mo Duc, Quang
Ngai Province.
September 1966



Father Vincent Capodonna, Lt., USN, holding mass for C Co, 1/7 at the company base, probably in October 1966.

Less than a year later, Father Capodonna, having extended six months and transferred to 3rd Bn, 5th Marines, to be its chaplain, was killed on Operation SWIFT. He was awarded the Medal of Honor. His citation can be seen at the link below. He was a true Man of God.

<https://themedalofhonor.com/recipients/lieutenant-vincent-capodanno-u-s-navy-chaplain-corps-3d-battalion-5th-marines-1st-mar/>



VC inside C Co
base.

We lived in the
middle of a VN
graveyard. Huge
lizards scurried around
the grounds and
poisonous snakes would
sometimes be found
curled up in a Marine's
pack.

At night, rats would
come up out of the
graves and invade our
luxurious hooches.
Plenty of hooch rats, but
no hooch mice.

On one of his first days
with C Co., Steve Bowen
complained that the rats
had held the Olympics
on his chest the
previous night.



Vietnam was fascinating from the air, so long as no one was shooting at you. Village layouts and rice paddy designs were interesting subjects, viewed from the bird's eye perspective of a UH-34.



©L. Dale

©L. Dale

A good-sized fishing village.
I'm not sure where I took this photo,
and I'm not sure what the little
circles represent – perhaps something
to do with rice cultivation or graves ??



Rice fields divided by thorn bushes and shrubs and treelines. Tough sledding for infantry, with many opportunities for ambushes and snipers. But not easy on the VC either, because supporting arms were usually within range.



Heli-landing with a lot of open space between treelines and not much cover.

A grunt's delight -- not.



Flying above a Cessna, O-1 Bird Dog. It's on a recon or spotting for artillery or attack aircraft. During the war, 469 of these planes were lost by all services. Seven were Marine pilots.



In November 1966, my platoon was the U.S. part of a joint Marine/ARVN mission which led directly to Operation RIO BLANCO, a 7th Marines regimental search and destroy operation west of Quang Ngai City on the Song Tra Kuch.

It consisted of only two platoons – one Marine and one ARVN. Captain David L. Walker, CO of Company C, commanded the joint activity.

We were looking for the 48th VC Battalion which was thought to be active in the area. Basically, we were set down on a sandbar between two river channels as bait, although it wasn't stated that way.

We had artillery on call, and we had a FAC to boot, with first rate radios, to call in fixed wing and/or helicopter gunships. It was Clear this was not intended to be a mere stroll on the bar.

This action ended up on a slow news day in *Stars & Stripes* and *Leatherneck* magazine.

Here, a Caribou rolls down the runway of the airstrip west of Quang Ngai City where we hung out the night before our insertion.



For reconnaissance, we relied on U.S. Army helicopters. Riding into VC country, in a UH1D (Huey) like a duck in a shooting gallery, with doors wide open, skimming upriver little more than treetop level, and sometimes lower, anticipating potshots all the way, is pretty exciting.

Army pilots flew Captain Walker, 2nd Lt. Steve Bowen, our artillery forward observer (FO), and me to a Montagnard post on an isolated hill, from which we had a good view of the sand bar we were to land on, in a helicopter insertion, the next morning.



This was the
Montagnard
installation dug
into the top of a
prominent hill
overlooking the
Song Tra Khuc,
west of Quang
Ngai City.
Nov. 1966



November 1966:
2nd Lt. Steve Bowen,
BC 3-66,
FO assigned to Co. C,
on recon mission prior
to Opn. RIO BLANCO,
west of Quang Ngai
City.

Steve was one hell of
an artilleryist. For his
first fire mission in
combat, with my
platoon on the gun-
target line and not that
far from the target, he
called "fire for effect"
on the first try and
obliterated the target.
That was impressive.



Going through the motions of looking for enemy weapons on the sandbar, assuming if any VC are around, they'll let us know.

Shortly after this photo, the VC opened up from three locations on the right bank of the river. In addition, a fair-sized unit could be seen coming down a ridgeline on the left side.

Bowen put them out of commission with a couple of barrages of VT.



The photogrpaher
here was
from *Stars & Stripes*.



©L. Dale

Close air support makes a difference. an A-4 has just laid a 250-pound bomb on a VC position just across the river. This stopped the VC attack, until we had to cross the sandbar to board CH-46's that had come to extract us.



Dec 1966-
Jan 1967:

Self-propelled
155 mm howitzer
in westernmost
artillery position
in Chu Lai TAOR.
2nd platoon, C Co.
1/7 had security
duty for this
position, while
F Co., 2/7 was
away on an
operation.

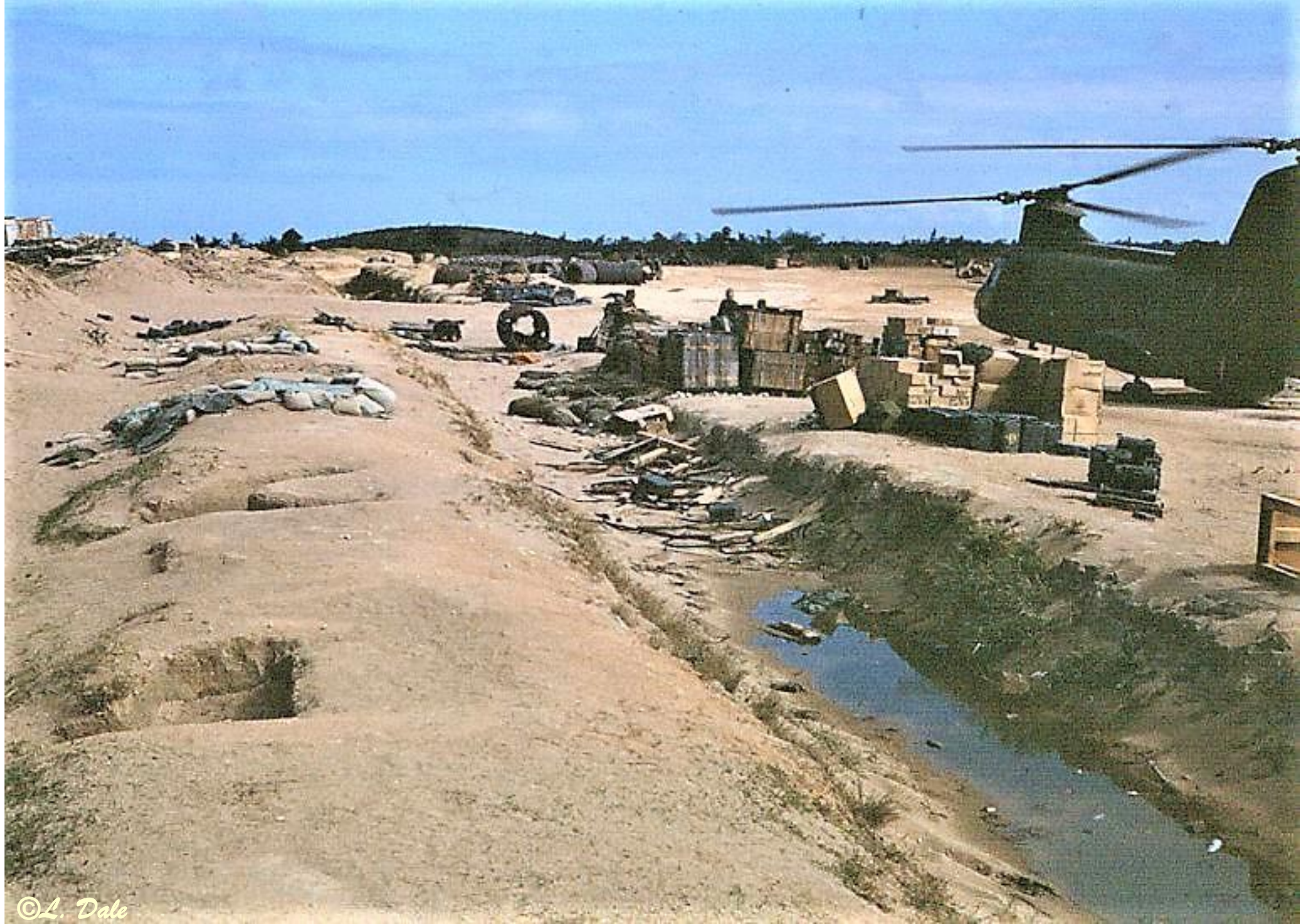
2nd Lt
Tom Cartlidge,
BC 3-66,
was with F Co.,
2/7.

In addition to the
plt of 155s, there
were two self-
propelled 8 inch
guns and a 105
mm battery.



Operation DESOTO/
DECKHOUSE VI
Duc Pho
February 1967:

All logistical support for this
operation was provided by
helicopters.



©L. Dale

Duc Pho,
February
1967:

You could
always tell
Where the
Korean
Marines
were. They
burned as
they went.
That was
their version
of winning
hearts and
minds.



Major Ed Fitzgerald, S-3, 7th Marines, consults with UH-34 pilots.

7th Marines staff flew to Hill 55 From Chu Lai in February 1967, to check out facilities in preparation for a move north that materialized in April.



Hill 55 looking
east toward the
South China Sea

Hill 55 is about
10 miles southwest
Of Da Nang.



Another feature of Da Nang Bay was the constant and huge logistics flow associated with the war.



Shades of Shangri-La –
the magnificent view
looking southwest across
Da Nang Bay, May 1967.

In the center of the photo,
you can see the dropped
spans of the Nam O Bridge.
This location was next door
to several large ESSO fuel
tanks.



©L. Dale

On April 13, a VC underwater demolition team, with about 400 pounds of explosives, dropped two 70 meter spans of the Nam O Bridge into the Song Cu De, seen in this photo I took on a recon of the area. This exploit inconvenienced travel north of Da Nang toward Hue for only a short while.

VC handiwork dropped the Bridge just three days after 7th Marines moved to the Da Nang area. 7th Engineer Bn, 1st Division engineers quickly installed the pontoon substitute.

Click the link at the top of the page and get a motor-cycle ride from Da Nang to the current Nam O Bridge.



The dropped spans of
the Nam O Bridge



Construction by 7th
Engineer BN
1st Marine Division



Marine sandbags top a concrete pillbox constructed either by the French or the Japanese during its WWII occupation of Indochina.

I saw similar installations in Taiwan which was ruled by Japan from 1895-1945.

Of course, the French were also pretty good with cement, as evidenced in the Maginot Line.





**The pic on
The left is
Of the ESSO
fuel tanks
overlooking
Da Nang Bay,
a prime
target for
VC rockets.**

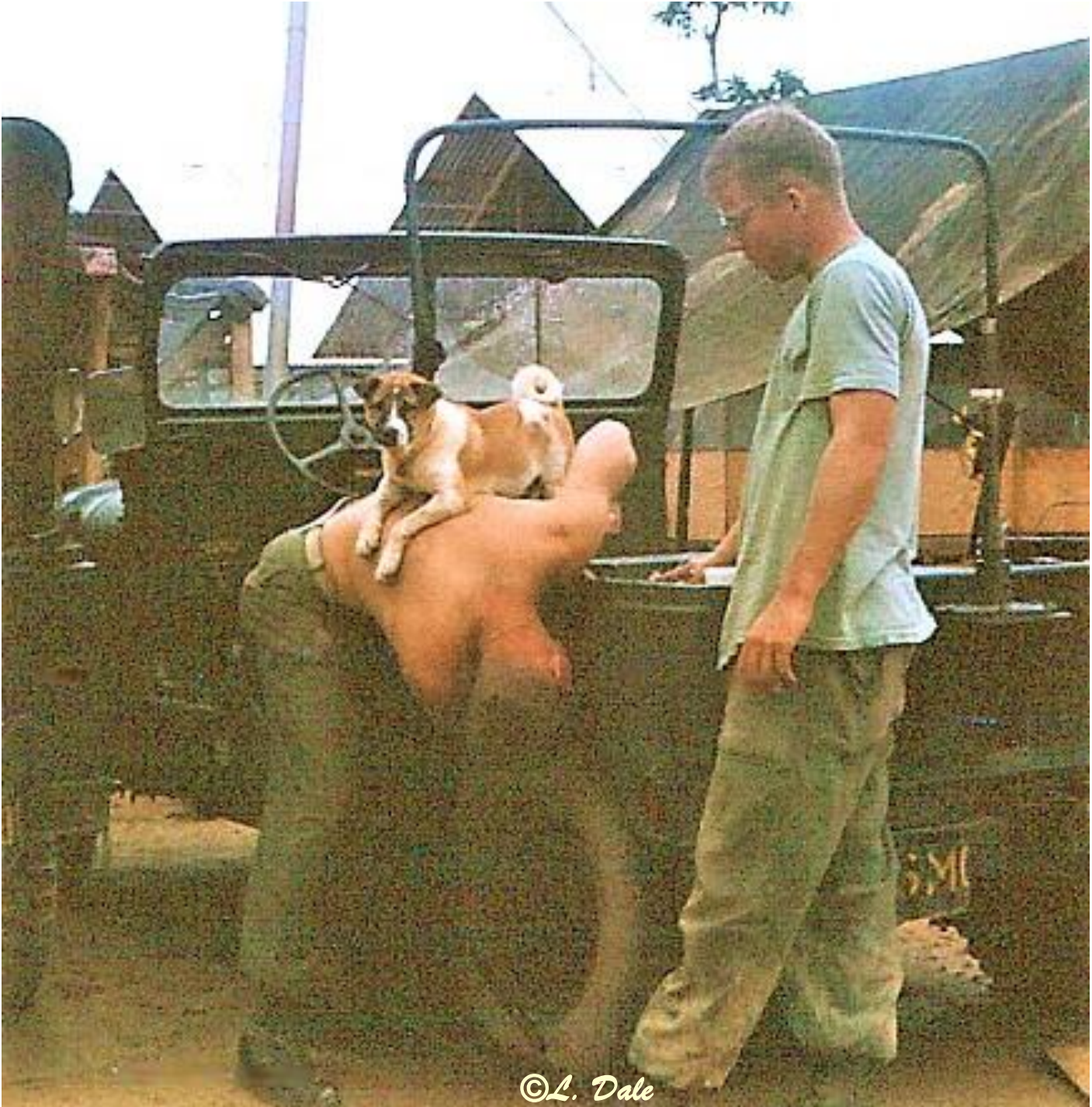
The Marine with the Thompson is also holding onto a 140 MM rocket the VC used to blast Da Nang airbase. On July 14, 1967, at around midnight, the VC launched a rocket attack on Da Nang, firing at least fifty 140mm rockets, destroying 10 aircraft, a barracks and an ammunition dump, and also damaging another 40 aircraft, killing eight Americans and wounding 173. I recall hearing explosions, stepping out of the Combat Operations Center and seeing a huge fireball rising into the sky from what had to have been the destroyed dump.



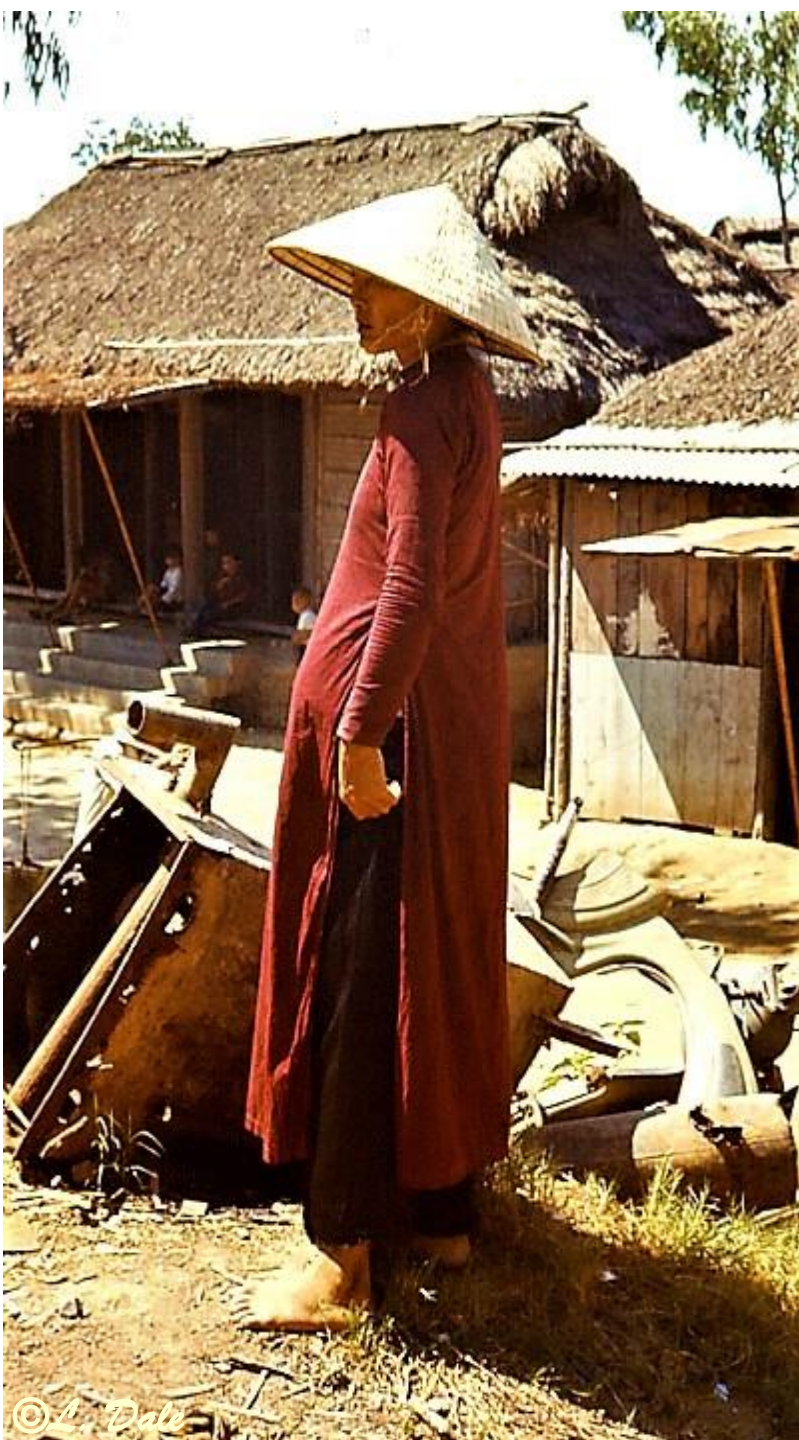
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A Marine and his dog



Nine months into my tour, these ladies were beginning to exhibit charms I had not previously noticed.



The most notable thing to me about illumination rounds was the eerie sound they emitted. None of the videos of illum rounds I've found online reproduce that sound.



FORT PAGE

In May 1967, one of my duties as an assistant operations officer of the 7th Marines was to inspect the 12 Combined Action Platoons in the DaNang area.

In September 1966, the security failure at Fort Page, about two miles south of the Chu Lai defense perimeter, showed just how vulnerable Combined Action units were, and how well prepared the VC were to capitalize on Marine tactics, mistakes, oversights and operations.

In a well executed raid, while Charlie Company was away on Operation FRESNO, the VC killed five young Marines at Fort Page, all of whom at one time had been with our Company.

Francis J. West, Jr., a personal representative of the Commandant, also knew the Fort Page Marines well and wrote a book *The Village* to tell their story. It's a tribute to the young Marines who volunteered for this dangerous duty.



This was another Combined Action position in the Chu Lai TAOR, south of the Tra Bong River.

Most CAP positions were quite vulnerable, both because they were isolated, and because any VC assault was likely to be both violent and fast. Reaction forces were hard pressed to arrive before the damage was done, and the VC had escaped.

In addition, there were cases where inside information from a PF helped the VC make an easier and more rapid penetration.



CAP B2-2, 13 May 1966

On 13 May, CAP Bravo 2-2, overlooking the Song Vu Gia, southwest of DaNang, was hard hit by an estimated 100 VC in a highly coordinated attack using supporting arms, including a 57 mm recoilless rifle and mortars. A satchel charge was slung at the command bunker. The assault was fast and furious, no more than about ten minutes. Two Marines and four PFs were killed, and four Marines and two PFs wounded. A 17-man reaction force with tanks from India Company, 3/7, on nearby Hill 65, responded rapidly. They claimed 20 VC KIA "probable" based mainly on "blood trails", a somewhat unreliable standard.

Here, 7th Marines CO Colonel Charles Crossfield is arriving shortly after the attack.



The violence of the attack on Bravo 2-2 is clearly visible in the chunks taken out of this building by a variety of weapons.



Over 20 unexploded Chicom grenades were found around the CAP Bravo 2-2 position. A few with wood handles are shown, along with a couple of worse-for-wear M-16s which had jammed.

Introducing that weapon to troops in the combat zone who had been trained on the M-14 and were not yet well trained on the M-16 was highly ill-advised on the part of the McNamara DoD. This scene was repeated too many times and killed too many Marines.

Our Basic School classmate Jud Blakely was XO of India Company, which had operational responsibility for Bravo 2-2. A few months later, India Co. got a new commanding officer – LBJ's son-in-law Captain Chuck Robb.



Tanks were often a feature of a reaction force. Of course, it was not hard to hear them coming, and by the time the tanks arrived on the scene, the VC were long gone.



The showpiece for the Combined Action Program was CAP Bravo 3-2, near Da Nang.

The compound included a day school for over 200 children as well as a rice storage facility for the village nearby. This was the CA program as General Walt wanted it to operate. Thus many distinguished visitors came to see Bravo 3-2, and the Marines there had learned to turn out in clean utilities and spit-shined boots on 15 minutes notice.



Then Maj Gen. Herman Nickerson, CG, 1st MarDiv, escorts Maj Gen. (ret) Graves Erskine, who commanded the 3rd MarDiv at Iwo Jima, on a visit to CAP Bravo 3-2.

Gen. Erskine and Gen. Nickerson had long and distinguished Marine careers. Check them out on Wikipedia.

Lt.Gen. Nickerson got his 3rd star and became Deputy Chief of Staff (Manpower) and later CG, III MAF.

In 1968, I was Admin Asst. to Lt.Gen. Nickerson at HQMC.



Here are a few of the 200 students whose School was inside the Combined Action compound.

It's a little hard to believe that these students now would be over 60 years old.



The VC understood the significance of the Combined Action concept and its potential much better than did MACV. That potential is represented to an extent by this photo. Thus the CAPs were high priority targets, and much effort was devoted by the Communists to destroying them.

The CAPs were generally located near a village, and the CAP Marines got involved in the life of that village. They dug wells, built fences, stored rice, and on one evening that I spent at this site, a corpsman delivered a baby.

Just in the last few years, I have read accounts of CAP Marines re-visiting their villages and receiving warm welcomes.



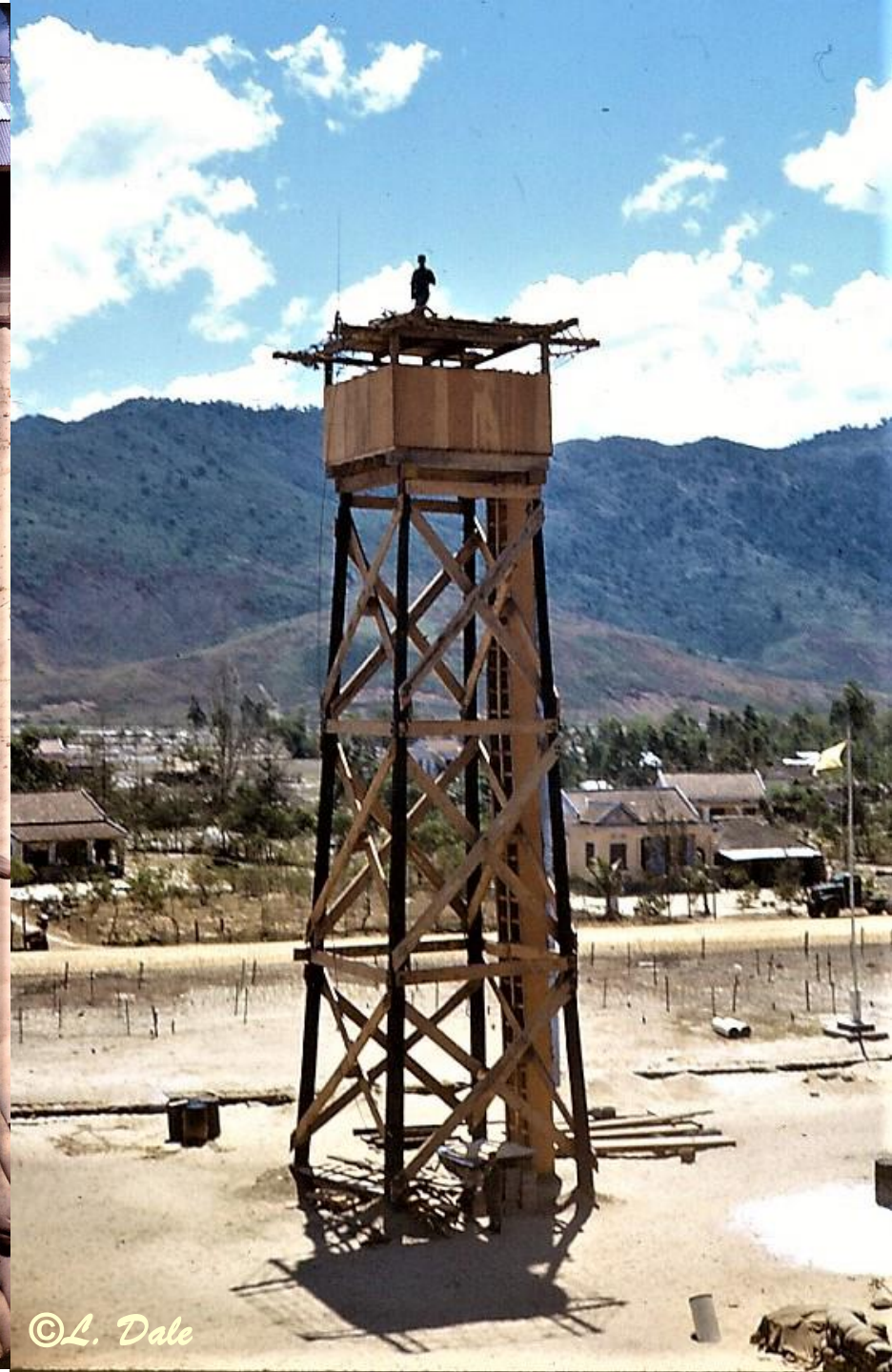
Marines here are laying apron wire to help improve the defenses of B 3-2.



A CAP near Da Nang Bay. Don't recall the designation. This one had all the bells and whistles insofar as defenses were concerned – interconnecting trenches and strongpoints, amply sandbagged, and a watch tower.

This apparently smacked of the Maginot Mentality Lt. Gen. Walt did not want in the Combined Action Program. He wanted his Marines to be outside the wire, patrolling, ambushing and showing the PFs how it's done.

Regardless, in February 1968, Da Nang was the only significant SVN city that the NVA did not penetrate. That was, in part, owed to a few of the 12 CAPs in the Da Nang TAOR on which large NVA units stubbed their toes and wasted critical time trying to overwhelm. Without adequate preparation of these sites' defenses, that delay of the NVA might not have happened.



Same CAP - this shows the tangle of apron wire and concertina VC units would have to penetrate, which in too many cases they were able to do. CAP Marines had to learn how to plan their defenses in depth. This meant, for example, rather than siting all claymore mines at the wire facing out, some would be placed back, say, against the building on the left to sweep the open space inside the wire. These lessons were learned the hard way.



A County Fair being held near the CAP. The County Fair was a cordon and search operation conducted by a battalion to take an informal census in the area, as well as to identify any suspicious persons. Medical and Dental services, as well as entertainment, were also provided.



At County Fairs, children were provided entertainment, and their health needs, such as dental issues, were addressed.




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In April 1967, Task Force XRAY, including the 7th Marines moved to Hill 55, southwest of Da Nang. This transition involved a lot of work and long hours, and in late May, the S-3 suggested his staff take, one-at-a-time, a couple of days at China Beach.

Since I knew Swift boats operated Out of Da Nang, I ask to go on a Swift patrol. This was arranged,

A photograph showing two men from behind, sitting on the edge of a Swift boat. They are looking out over a body of water towards a distant shoreline where several plumes of white smoke or steam are rising into the air. The sky is overcast and grey. The boat's railing and a dark object, possibly a bag or equipment, are visible in the foreground.

Swift boat patrol
South of DaNang
May 1967

The Reynolds Wrap Wonder

The Swift boat, or Patrol Craft Fast (PCF) was an all aluminum, shallow-draft vessel purpose designed for coastal and interior waterway patrolling in the Vietnam War.

The idea was to interdict VC movement of weapons, munitions and other supplies, as well as to provide water-based insertion and extraction for counter-insurgency teams.

The boats had a pair of General Motors' Detroit Diesel engines rated at 480 horses each, capable of driving the vessel at 21 knots for almost 350 miles.



An especially interesting feature of this patrol was our rendezvous with the USS Taylor DD 468, the first U.S. destroyer to anchor in Japanese coastal waters at the end of World War II. It was named for Rear Admiral William Rogers Taylor, the great-grandfather of our Swift boat skipper Lt. Anthony Rogers Taylor.



We got a cordial welcome and ate lunch in the wardroom – air-conditioned, with cloth napkins and real silverware, the Navy types in their khakis, and me in old jungle utilities that had not been washed in a couple of weeks. But, as one of my brothers, a former naval person, would have said had he been there, “What else would you expect of a Jarhead !”



The Swift boat seemed to fascinate some of the destroyer sailors, and they asked for a ride. Lt. Taylor obliged them, while I enjoyed looking around the bigger boat –
- I know, it's a ship.



After leaving the destroyer, interdiction activities were continued. Experience said that hostile packages could come in all sizes, so whatever floated, was inspected.

The Swift would pull alongside a vessel and ask for the occupants' *can kuks*. Having their civilian IDs did not always preclude boarding and inspecting their cargo, but the Swift sailors had become pretty good judges of potential problems over the course of their many patrols



Twin 50's mounted in the turret of a Swift boat overlook a passing Vietnamese craft under sail. It's like a meeting of two different eras. But such vessels might contain goods and weapons for the VC and were generally stopped and searched.



This man and his son just appear to be trying to make a living and feed their family. But a hard look was taken anyway.



No craft was too small to be searched. The man on the right had his *can kuk*.

The fisherman on the left is pretty far offshore. That's a long paddle in a basket boat.



Our boat has pulled up alongside another Swift boat, which has taken on board a basket boat and its occupant.

I don't know why they had decided to bring the fisherman and his little craft aboard the Swift boat. It may have been lack of an ID.

One other point worth mentioning is the weapons system in the middle of the photo. It's an over-and-under 50 caliber machine gun and 81 mm mortar. The mortar was not a gravity-firing weapon such as those used by Marine infantry companies. Instead, it was fired by a lanyard at such time as the gunner chose to fire it. In other words, the projectile could sit in the muzzle until fired.

I was told this system had led to a number of unfortunate incidents, but one obvious drawback was the inability to use both weapons at the same time.



Vietnam had some secluded beaches that were very beckoning. Had a Bali Ha'i look.

Probably would not have been a good idea to try to follow Lt. Joe Cable's example.



This was quickly becoming my idea of how to fight a war. No snakes, no long, hot walks in the sun, no snipers or booby traps.

However, my future brother-in-law commanded a Swift boat. Only, he was in riverine operations. That's a whole 'nother story.

In addition, the Da Nang based Swifts often had more dangerous missions to the north.



