

Vietnamese general commanding I Corps (the First Region) in August 1965. Subordinate to the Vietnamese Corps Commanders were the Provincial Chiefs who directed the efforts of the District Chiefs and carried out the functions of government at the provincial level. The Province Chiefs, who were advised by elected Provincial Councils, provided extensive services for the Vietnamese people and were supported by technical assistants from the national ministries. Below the provinces (43 in number) were ranged districts (234), grouped villages (2558), and hamlets (13,211). Most of the population of Vietnam was rural and resided in the hamlets. The national government ultimately contacted most of the population at the hamlet level, i.e., the grouped villages were units of administrative convenience and were comprised of a certain number of hamlets, usually four to six.(6)

The Viet Cong

The Viet Cong had concentrated their attack on the Government of Vietnam by destroying the governing officials at the hamlet and village levels. The Viet Cong emphasized the political aspects of the struggle and replaced slain, kidnapped, and terrorized officials with communist or communist-appointed officials. The communists formed a government within a government and literally stole the bodies and minds of the peasants by a combination of armed force and astute rural propaganda. But the appeal to force is central in the Viet Cong movement and has remained, in combination with superlative organization, the main strength of the movement. The following comment illustrated the strength of the Viet Cong appeal to the peasantry but also revealed striking weaknesses. A village elder characterized their rule by saying:

If you do as the Viet Cong say they are very correct.
They never steal. They tax.
If they take a chicken they pay.
If you do not cooperate, they shoot you in the stomach.(7)

The Viet Cong generated much fear amongst the rural population of South Vietnam by their policy of balanced ruthlessness. In areas where the Government of Vietnam was unable to provide security for its citizens, the Viet Cong were able to swim undetected in a sea of terrorized humanity. Simultaneously, the Viet Cong made exaggerated promises of a better life for the Vietnamese peasant. Government projects were ridiculed, harassed, and destroyed by the rural Robin Hoods who had to produce no results until they were in power. The Viet Cong used promises of a better future with the reality of present violence to erode the influence of the Republican government. The Republic could succeed against the movement only by the implementation of a more effective program designed to win back the fearful rural masses. The harsh geographical reality of a

hostile border abutting on Vietnam in the North made the chances of unsupported government success against the Viet Cong problematical.(8)

Vietnamese Rural Construction (1965)
and Revolutionary Development (1966)

In 1965 with disaster staring it in the face, the Vietnamese government, with the urging of the U. S. Mission Council in Vietnam, executed a well-conceived rural pacification plan. Improved civil/military coordination was achieved and significant changes in terminology were made during the year. For example, on 5 April 1965 the government supplanted the term pacification with the new one, rural construction. But the instability of the government during the first half of 1965 slowed the release of funds for the rural construction program. The national government did not release monies until April 1965, and the program was further slowed by changes in the national organization for rural construction and finally the death of the Minister of Rural Construction in August 1965. As a result, the government's accomplishments in rural construction in 1965 were slight. But the combination of the Ky military government and massive U. S. ground and air forces prevented decisive Viet Cong success even though the allies produced no forward momentum of their own.(9)

Prime Minister Ky initiated planning for 1966 rural construction in September 1965 when he requested that the U. S. Mission Liaison Group help to determine the National Priority Areas for Rural Construction in 1966. The reason for the establishment of those areas was to ensure the concentration of national resources in vital areas of the country. The government established four priority areas for the calendar year 1966. The area around Da Nang, Quang Nam Province, became one of them.(10)

Planning continued in November and December 1965 and on 15 December 1965, the Vietnamese Joint General Staff published Directive AB 140 as the basic military plan for support of rural construction in 1966. The directive assigned Corps Priority Areas in addition to the national areas and directed the holders of real power in Vietnam, the Corps Commanders, to support rural construction in their areas. The combined campaign for 1966 was published by the U. S. Military Assistance Command and the Vietnamese Joint General Staff on 31 December 1965 and linked the U. S. and Vietnamese military plans with rural construction. But progress was slow in 1966. Civilian rural construction activities suffered from the lack of trained cadres, i.e., organizing personnel, to provide the leadership at the hamlet level for the reestablishment of government control. But the government continued to press for rural improvement and its determination was revealed in the change of the

term rural construction to the more forceful expression, revolutionary development. With the graduation of the first revolutionary development cadres in May 1966, and the aggressive leadership of the Minister of Revolutionary Development, the government's program began to edge forward after the middle of 1966. Military activities proved to be the vital flaw in the revolutionary development program. The government planners had not given enough firm and precise direction to the armed forces regarding their role. The Vietnamese armed forces continued to carry out the task of combatting the main force of the Viet Cong and failed to provide the security required to ensure the success of the revolutionary development groups. Security devolved on the Regional and Popular Forces; but, they remained too weak to provide adequate security without substantial reinforcement by the Vietnamese army.

Rural construction had become by December 1965 the thread which productively held together the military and the civil efforts of the Republic. The plans for rural construction not only coordinated the Republican military and civil activities but also related them to the U. S. and Free World military, political, and humanitarian aid programs. Rural construction became the government's coordinated plan for survival. No Ministry of Rural Construction existed in Vietnam throughout 1965. By 12 October 1965, however, a Secretary of State for Rural Construction had been created and Aspirant General Nguyen Duc Thang became first holder of the position. Later, in the national government's reorganization of 21 February 1966, General Thang became Secretary of State for Revolutionary Development within the Ministry of War and Construction. By July 1966, however, Thang had become Minister of Revolutionary Development with two secretaries of state operating under his direction. (11)

Rural construction evolved from late 1965 onwards as the attempt of the national government to reestablish its control over the basic, traditional Vietnamese political groupment--the hamlet. Hamlets had been part of Vietnamese peasant life for over two millenniums; they were political bedrock for the Vietnamese nation. The importance of the hamlet was shown in the late 1940's when the Viet Minh, rural revolutionaries extraordinary, were forced to create the grouped village, an administrative superstructure used to control the hamlets. But the grouped village existed in Vietnam only insofar as it was comprised of a certain number of hamlets. The war has been fought around the latter which have borne the brunt of destruction. General Thang, with a keen sense of historical reality, recognized their importance for both sides in the present struggle. He designed the revolutionary development program to rebuild the basic structure of traditional Vietnamese life and at the same time bring about beneficial change in the life of the Vietnamese peasant. (12)

The spearhead of the rural construction program had been the People's Action Teams (PATs), 40-man groups which began the process of political and social change in secured areas. At the end of 1965 the Vietnamese began to train more effective personnel called Revolutionary Development Cadre (RD Cadre) who were organized into 59-man Revolutionary Development Groups (RD Groups). General Thang's most important task, outside of coordinating the support of the Vietnamese and the U. S. governments behind revolutionary development, has been the training of the young men who would drive the program into the political and social foundation of Vietnam. The battlefield of the struggle for change in 1965 and 1966 was in the areas where the PATs and later the RD Groups were committed. The Marine Corps quickly sensed the importance of revolutionary development and by the turn of 1966 emphasized civic action and psychological warfare in direct support of revolutionary development.

Chapter III

Military Civic Action in Vietnam

Military civic action is something which used the formidable potential of armed and disciplined military organizations to accomplish difficult civil tasks. History had shown that men could do anything with bayonets except sit on them, and this general notice was well taken in the case of Vietnam.(1) In Vietnam, sitting on bayonets in the 1960s would have been using the Allied armed forces only for large unit actions against the elusive main forces of the Viet Cong. But had the Allies followed that course of action, the struggle for control of the Vietnamese peasantry by the GVN would have remained unaffected because the Viet Cong infrastructure would have been more than a match for the local Vietnamese government. The Allied armed forces were the most effective organizations for the suppression of the guerrilla terror and had to be used in a concept which was balanced between combat against the main forces of the Viet Cong and security for local government.

Well before intervening with major ground forces at the request of the GVN in 1965, the U. S. Government had realized the importance of military organizations in accomplishing beneficial change in countries which were modernizing themselves. By 1962, "U. S. military and assistance legislation and directives provided that military assistance programs should encourage the use of local military and paramilitary forces in developing countries on projects helpful to social and economic development."(2) The U. S. Government encouraged the use of the ARVN for operations in support of pacification. But the ARVN operations were weakly developed because of the expressed view that economic and social aid by the armed forces should not "detract from capabilities to perform primary military missions."(3)

Operations against the main force of the Viet Cong, however, were only one part of the ARVN struggle to support the central objective of the war in Vietnam. That objective--the creation of a Government of the Republic of Vietnam viable enough to crush the insurgency and to resist future aggression--was too difficult to tie up the ARVN simply in the defense of fixed installations and actions against the main force of the Viet Cong. In the existing war the immediate objective was to create a civilian population confident enough of the protection of the GVN to expose the presence and movements of the insurgents. The central reality of the war was a Vietnamese population which was overwhelmingly rural. As a result, both the ARVN and the Marine Corps had to support local, rural government scattered through myriad hamlets and connected by a primitive communications

network. Marine Corps support, for example, had to range far beyond the static defense of air installations.

Rural Construction

The Marine Corps, however, was an organization which did not exist to create a program for viable government in a foreign state. That program lay with the GVN, and existed in spite of the dislocation of 1963-1965. In 1965, rural construction was the term describing the government's program to secure the central objective of the war.(4) The government's plan was a sound one which concentrated on the central reality of life in the new state--a primitive, rural way of existence.(5) The program was of paramount importance to the Marine Corps. Success of the program promised victory over the Viet Cong, stability for the Republic, and the release of U. S. military forces. The rural construction program was comprised of:

The integrated military and civil process to restore, consolidate, and expand governmental control so that nation building could progress throughout the Republic of Vietnam. It consist/ed/ of those coordinated military and civil actions to liberate the people from VC control, restore public security, initiate political and economic development, extend effective government authority and win the willing support of the people towards those ends.(6)

The definition was dry but the program was important. How was military civic action related to rural construction? Civic action was largely the friendly military plan of support for rural construction. It existed in close coordination with large and small unit combat operations against the Viet Cong. Military civic action in March 1965 was by theoretical definition primarily a function of the ARVN. But no directives existed discouraging U. S. military participation in civic action; to the contrary, U. S. military forces were encouraged to participate. The following Marine Corps definition of military civic action concentrates on the role of the indigenous armed forces in the support of government but it also ties in the efforts of U. S. forces:

The use of preponderantly indigenous military forces on projects useful to the local population at all levels in fields such as education, training, public works, agriculture, transportation, communications, health, sanitation, and other contributing to economic and social development, which would also serve to improve the standing of the military forces with the population (U. S. forces may at any time/ advise or engage in military civic actions in overseas areas).(7)



Combined Action Companies had two missions. The first was that of providing security for Vietnamese peasants. The second, shown here, was the encouraging of self-help projects among the villagers. In this scene Cpl Earl J. Suter helps to build a shelter for his CAC squad at Thuy Luong two miles south of Hue/Phu Bai on 25 September 1965. (USMC A185707)



Food for the needy: the distribution of food began to reach major proportions by the end of 1965. In this photograph taken at Tra Kieu near Da Nang on 17 August 1965, two officers of MAG-16 present supplies received from the U.S. Agency for International Development to the village priest for distribution to the local orphanage and old people's home. (USMC A184979)

This general definition was valid for the military organizations of states throughout the world in the process of peaceful technical change. But the definition was not precise enough for the Vietnamese situation. In Vietnam, military civic action served to link together the formal combat effort of the military forces with the political, social, and economic reconstruction efforts of the GVN. Civic action harnessed energies of both the ARVN and the Marine Corps, which remained after the formal combat commitments, to the tasks of rural construction.

The Place of Marine Corps Civic Action in the Vietnamese War

The question then arose: where did Marine Corps civic action fit in with the overall struggle in Vietnam? This question had to be answered before the civic actions of the Marine Corps could have real meaning. Chart Number One presents the situation graphically. The total Marine Corps effort in the triple sense of large unit, counter guerrilla, and civic actions was part of a larger effort to control and reconstruct Vietnam and to defeat the Viet Cong. The Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force (CG, III MAF) was highly placed in the U. S. chain of military command and after August 1965, he functioned as Senior Military Advisor to the Vietnamese general commanding the First Military Region. Additionally, the CG, III MAF, coordinated his operations with the programs of the various U. S. Government agencies and departments. The Vietnamese political effort was controlled by the general commanding the First Military Region; but that effort functioned largely through the local civilian officials who were supported technically by the national ministeries.(8)

Marine Corps civic action also had to be set in the political context of U. S. involvement in a revolutionary situation in a sovereign state.(9) The basic premise of U. S. involvement was the protection of U. S. and Free World interests in SE Asia. These interests were best served by the support of the existing Government of Vietnam. But because of the political sovereignty of Vietnam, U. S. support for the Vietnamese government had to take the form of support for that government's chosen plan for survival. For example, large unit ground actions by the Marine Corps were ultimately effective only if they reinforced the stability of the South Vietnamese government and advanced its survival plan.

The Coordination of Civic Action and Vietnamese Plans for Survival

Marine Corps civic action had to be coordinated with all of the activities supporting Vietnamese revolutionary development and had to take into account the total availability of resources to be really effective.(10) For example, Marine assistance in the construction of a hamlet schoolhouse was a frustrating event for the local population and the Marine Corps alike if no teachers were available to grace the school. The Marine Corps was unable to create Vietnamese teachers, and the local hamlet or village government was also unable to manufacture them. Coordination with the higher levels of government concerning the availability of both human and material resources was one of the keys to success. Generally the Marine Corps had to coordinate with the following general entities: (1) the Vietnamese government (district, provincial, regional levels), (2) U. S. Government agencies and departments, and (3) private U. S. relief organizations. Coordination was mandatory if any lasting effect were to be obtained from civic action. It was probably accurate to say that effective Marine Corps civic action began with Major General Lewis W. Walt's formation in August 1965 of a Joint Coordinating Council for the I Corps Tactical Zone (ICTZ). General Walt, who had become commanding general of the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) in June 1965, was aware of the immense process of historical change taking place in Vietnam and was determined to join that process and reinforce in a direction favorable to the Vietnamese government.(11)

The direction which was sensed by him as being decisive in midsummer 1965 was support of Vietnamese rural construction. By August 1965, with his appointment as Senior Military Advisor to the Commanding General, I Corps, General Walt began to implement a coordinated civic action program with the formation of a council which would include representatives of all of the organizations in the I Corps Tactical Zone supporting rural construction. The purpose of the council was to coordinate the **services and resources** of all organizations, military, civilian and private, in support of rural construction. The thread which began to run through Marine Corps civic action after August 1965 was that of self-effacing support for Vietnamese rural construction.

Chapter IV

The Landing of Major Marine Corps Air and Ground Forces in South Vietnam and the Early Development of Civic Action: March-July 1965

Background

By March 1964, the United States Government realized that its hopes of an early ending to the conflict in South Vietnam were premature. General Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that the Viet Cong had taken **advantage** of the instability of the Vietnamese Government and the lack of coordination and diffusion in the strategic hamlet program (the forerunner of revolutionary development) to make vast gains.(1) The Viet Cong had negated the strategic hamlet operations and had passed over to the offensive, launching major daylight attacks against the ARVN. The situation was plainly deteriorating and by the end of 1964 the U. S. advisory effort was built up to a total of 20,000 personnel. The situation in Southeast Asia had deteriorated in other ways also. Various ties had existed between the Viet Cong and the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam since the beginning of the struggle in 1956; but, in 1964 North Vietnamese assistance had become concrete in the form of massive infiltration by the North Vietnamese Army into the south. A precarious balance, at best, had existed in South Vietnam late in 1963. By late 1964, North Vietnamese intervention and the gains of the Viet Cong in combination with the internal instability in the south, threatened to destroy the balance.(2)

At the turn of 1965, the Viet Cong supported by elements of the North Vietnamese Army including the major part of the 325th Division maintained heavy military pressure against the GVN. The full measure of Viet Cong confidence was revealed in the impolitic attack on the U. S. military compound at Pleiku. The Viet Cong, for whom the essence of the struggle was political, took leave of sound political judgement in creating the incident. President Lyndon B. Johnson had made it clear that the communist tactics of force and intimidation against the GVN were not an acceptable means of social and economic change even though change was the common goal of both the United States and the two Vietnams. The attack at Pleiku focused violence against the U. S. Government, furnished stark evidence of the method of advance by force, and resulted in a reaction so powerful that the heady smell of communist victory turned to one of aid-station antiseptic. Roses turned to iodine as the Viet Cong realized that force indeed was the ultimate arbiter in the world of competing sovereign states.

The Landing of Major Marine Combat Forces

The United States began to bomb "selected" targets in North Vietnam in February 1965, and under the pressure of bold Viet Cong advances, sent the first major ground combatant forces into the Republic. Early on Monday morning 8 March 1965, Marines under the direction of the Headquarters, 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) landed by sea and air close to Da Nang, Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam. Although the intervention of ground forces ultimately ensured the survival of the Republic, the immediate physical effect on military operations in Vietnam was negligible. Brigadier General Frederick C. Karch, Commanding General, 9th MEB had only two battalion landing teams (BLTs) under his command with supporting and reinforcing air, artillery, antiaircraft, engineer, and logistics organizations. The most significant factor, though, which restricted Marine Corps operations was the Vietnamese government's fear concerning its own sovereignty. The 9th MEB was originally restricted to a few square miles of territory in several different locations. The locations became known as Tactical Areas of Responsibility (TAORs) and the Vietnamese restricted Marine Corps operations to those areas. The mission of the 9th MEB was strictly defensive--to secure the Da Nang Airbase. And the defense, in deference to the wishes of the Vietnamese government was to extend no farther than the tight limits of the assigned TAORs.(3)

Neither the national nor the local Vietnamese government was able to predict the reaction of the populace to the Marine Corps--a foreign ground combat force. The unpredictability of the civilian reaction forced a gradualist approach on the GVN. The government isolated the Marines first within the perimeter of the uninhabited airbase and then to Hills 327 and 268 (heights in meters) immediately west of the base. The hills were also practically uninhabited.(4) The TAOR, which was physically divided into two parts, had an area of only eight square miles and included the sparse population of 1,930 civilians. The Marines outnumbered the civilian population within the TAOR and remained sealed off from the rest of the people. The Marines were separated psychologically from the people by the limited defensive mission and physically by wire obstacles and cleared fields of fire.(5)

The Beginnings of Marine Corps Civic Action

Marine Corps civic action during the period 8 March-20 April 1965 was sharply restricted by the Marine Corps isolation. Civic action consisted primarily of spontaneous acts of commiseration and charity by individual Marines towards a small population whose pacification was largely extraneous to the tightly circumscribed Marine Corps mission. The concept of purposeful Marine Corps civic action to support the GVN was absent during March 1965 and most of April. The 9th MEB was

keenly aware of the importance of popularizing the presence of Marines in Vietnam but with the continuing buildup and the emphasis on static positions in the absence of room for maneuver, neither the need nor the opportunity for civic action arose. Marine Corps efforts to popularize the presence of the 9th MEB could be characterized by the words limited people-to-people contact. No full-time Civil Affairs Officers existed at battalion or squadron level. And the Civil Affairs Officers at brigade level, and after 15 April 1965, with the 3d Marines, were simply not in the mainstream of concern in March and April 1965. The Marine Corps was busy getting ashore. And during the first two months, "ashore" was a humble area divorced from the great struggle for the loyalty of the Vietnamese people. (6)

The Vietnamese government was only gradually relieved of its nervousness about the presence of Marines. By early April 1965, however, the general indifference of the civilian population to the Marine Corps landing was apparent. The care taken by the Marine Corps to reduce friction between Marines and Vietnamese civilians made a favorable impression which was reinforced by the embryonic but positive and sincere efforts of the individual Marine to relieve misery wherever it was present. At the same time it became apparent that the Marine Corps needed to establish control over areas well beyond the fixed perimeter of the Da Nang Airbase to ensure its security. On 20 April 1965, after discussion and coordination between the CG, 9th MEB and the CG, ICTZ, the Marine Corps began to patrol forward in its TAORs beyond the wire and other obstacles of the static positions. Soldiers and civil affairs personnel of the ARVN accompanied the Marine patrols which were intended to make the local villagers aware of the presence of the Marine Corps and to allow the Marines to meet the local governing officials on a face-to-face basis. (7)

On 10 April 1965, several days prior to the time that units of the 9th MEB began to patrol forward in their TAORs, the Da Nang area of responsibility was expanded from eight to twelve square miles. Although the total area of responsibility remained small, the population jumped several hundred percent to the substantial total of 11,441 civilians. On the same day, the number of BLTs in Vietnam rose from two to three with the arrival of BLT 2/3, i.e., the BLT formed around the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines. One day later, elements of that organization were lifted by helicopter to the village of Hue/Phu Bai (see Map Number Three) with the mission of temporarily securing the airfield and the radio station located there. On 14-15 April 1965, the strength of the 9th MEB rose to a total of four BLTs with the arrival of BLT 3/4. This combat organization was committed in the Hue/Bhu Bai area and relieved the units which had temporarily secured the air and radio installations. The two additional battalions accentuated the lack of room for maneuver for the Marine Corps units within the enlarged but

still sharply restricted TAORs.(8)

Summary: March-April 1965

The Marine Corps carried out a combat mission in March 1965 which entailed an extensive buildup of strength and the simultaneous orientation to the realities of war in Vietnam. The initial problems of building from a void in ground combat strength at the water's (and airfield's) edge to strength capable of carrying out the assigned mission were those simply of getting ashore. Although the landing was unopposed and several hundred Marines had been ashore in various missions prior to the landing of the 9th MEB, the task demanded the full concentration of the Headquarters, 9th MEB, and the maneuver and supporting elements.

The strictly circumscribed mission of the Marine Corps and the low population of the operating areas limited contact with the civilian population. Both the mission and the operating areas permitted by the sovereign Republic of Vietnam reflected profound fear of U. S. military strength. The Republic had no way of gauging the reaction of a restless, war-weary peasantry to the intrusion of an obviously foreign, e.g., caucasian/negro, ground force. The ARVN, which had become partly separated from the population through its emphasis on operations against the main force of the Viet Cong, did not offer a comforting precedent for the arrival of a new military force in the country. The Republican government and the ARVN expected and were prepared for difficulty and reduced the contact between Marines and the peasantry to a minimum. The Marine Corps preoccupation with the buildup of strength and the Vietnamese concern over protecting the sovereignty of the Republic permitted only a moderate amount of spontaneous civic action and practically no well-organized activity in March-April 1965.

The Expanding Marine Corps Effort: Formation of the III Marine Amphibious Force

Late in April 1965 the decision was made to establish a new TAOR for the Marine Corps which would include the area eventually known as Chu Lai, a sandy uncultivated waste near An Tan, Quang Tin Province, lying approximately 75 miles south-east of Da Nang by road. The Marine Corps chose this uninhabited area for use as an airbase for Marine Corps fighter and attack aircraft and a center for the support of the GVN in the nearby heavily populated coastal areas of Northern Quang Ngai Province and Central Quang Tin.(9) To secure the Chu Lai area the Marine Corps had to commit a force substantial enough to move the center of gravity of the 3d Marine Division from Okinawa to the Republic of Vietnam. The results of the commitment of the 3d Marine Expeditionary Brigade at Chu Lai on 7 May 1965 were

far-reaching. The place of the division commander was in Vietnam with the bulk of his division. The Marine Corps concept of the air-ground team also required the presence of an equivalent air element. In a swift rush of events, the HQ, III MEF a command element senior enough to control a division-wing organization, established itself ashore at Da Nang at 0800, 6 May 1965. Almost simultaneously the Headquarters, 3d Marine Division (-) (Reinforced) (Forward) arrived and was activated at Da Nang. One day later on 7 May 1965, III Marine Expeditionary Force was redesignated III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) for political reasons. The word, expeditionary, smacked too much of the gunboat imperialism of a bygone era and had been used by the French forces which entered Vietnam at the end of the Second World War. Less than one week later the Headquarters, 1st Marine Air Wing (MAW) (Advanced) was established at the Da Nang Airbase. On 12 May 1965, when the Chu Lai amphibious operation terminated, command of all of the Marine Corps landing force elements in Vietnam passed to the CG, III MAF.(10)

The massive buildup of early May shifted the Marine Corps mission away from a tightly circumscribed defensive one. By 12 May 1965, seven battalions stood in Vietnam and were deployed within three TAORs totalling the modest area of 15 square miles. The battalions were more than capable of defending their assigned areas. Therein lay the inefficiency of the situation. They had the mobility, firepower, and numbers to keep the Viet Cong at far greater distances than those involved in holding 15 square miles. Additionally, the presence of the Viet Cong infrastructure became familiar to Marines as an enemy closer and more real than the main force of the Viet Cong. III MAF required room for offensive maneuver forward of the tight perimeters which had been established around the airfields and radio installations. And the GVN needed the security that the Marine Corps combat units could provide in support of rural construction and the offensive strength which could be used against the main force of the Viet Cong. The situation in which more than 14,000 Marines were defending several square miles containing approximately 14,000 civilians was untenable in the light of the desperate situation of the GVN.

In May 1965, a civic action effort began which was advanced beyond the stage of spontaneous people-to-people contact between Marines and Vietnamese civilians. Between 4-10 May 1965, BLT 2/3, which was assigned the TAOR northwest of Da Nang, cleared the village of Le My (also known as Hoa Loc) (see Map Number One) For the following reason, however, the experience was a frustrating one which served to introduce more advanced Marine Corps civic action into Vietnam. Lieutenant Colonel David A. Clement, Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, who had cooperated closely with the Chief of the Hoa Vang District during the clearing operation, realized almost instinctively that his strenuous efforts would be negated unless continuing pressure was brought to bear on the remnants of the Viet Cong

infrastructure in Le My village. Accordingly, the first complete pacification in which Marines were involved began in earnest on 11 May 1965 after the elimination of most of the Viet Cong from Le My. (11)

Farther south in the TAOR located at Chu Lai, the arrival of a third BLT on 12 May 1965 gave the Marine Corps a chance to conduct offensive action in support of Vietnamese rural construction. The airfield which was being constructed at Chu Lai from Airfield Matting, AM2 (aluminum alloy material), was located only a few hundred meters from the South China Sea. The perimeter was unusually easy to defend with one side being close to the sea, the immediate area uninhabited, and the general area sparsely peopled. As a result, the three BLTs were more than adequate for the defense and were able to conduct offensive operations both along the coast and inland.

Effective 25 May 1965, the GVN authorized the first major expansion of the Marine Corps TAORs. Until that date the Marine Corps landing force had been literally bulging out of its operating areas especially in the Chu Lai area. The Da Nang TAOR was expanded to the impressive total of 156 square miles and included a civilian population of 46,146 persons. The GVN also expanded the Chu Lai and the Hue/Phu Bai TAORs, and the Marine Corps became responsible for the protection of a total area of 239 square miles with a civilian population of approximately 77,000 persons. (12) In the Chu Lai area, favorable opportunities arose for civic action, and the 4th Regimental Landing Team (redesignated on 12 May 1965 as 4th Marines) produced results on the basis of local initiative. The 4th Marines directed its efforts towards building civilian confidence in the Marine Corps and acquiring intelligence about the Viet Cong.

Advancing Concepts of Civic Action: May-June 1965

Early in May 1965, the Civil Affairs Officer of III MAF, Major Charles J Keever, had arrived in Vietnam and had proposed a concept for civic action. Additionally, he began to write instructions for the reporting of civic action activities. But coordination with the U. S. and Vietnamese government agencies and the U S private relief organizations in order to formulate an effective civic action program was a time consuming task. The Civil Affairs Officer made staff visits in the Chu Lai and Da Nang areas to get information about the Vietnamese people and the details of their home life as well as the civic action activities of the Marine Corps combat and supporting units. HQ, III MAF greatly expanded its functions of coordination within its TAORs as a result of the Letter of Instruction of 29 May 1965 from the Commander, U. S. Military Advisory Command, Vietnam (ComUSMACV), appointing the CG, III MAF, as Special Area Coordinator for the Da Nang area. The CG,

III MAF, became responsible for liaison with local military and civilian leaders concerning matters involving U. S. military personnel.(13) By the end of May, the Civil Affairs Officer of III MAF was functioning within a large area permeated by the clandestine Viet Cong political apparatus. The Marine Corps began to rub shoulders with the Viet Cong infrastructure and the friction which was created helped to impress on HQ, III MAF, the importance of Vietnamese rural construction. The CG, III MAF, and his Civil Affairs Officer (CAO) began to realize the importance of directing Marine Corps civic action towards support of the governing officials of the Republic and the Vietnamese program of rural construction.

On 7 June 1965, HQ, III MAF, now under the leadership of Major General Lewis W. Walt, promulgated concepts of civic action for the Republic of Vietnam.(14) General Walt had arrived in Vietnam on 30 May 1965 and had assumed command of III MAF on 4 June 1965 from Major General William R. Collins. As events would show, he was extraordinarily interested in supporting Vietnamese plans for rural construction. The instructions issued under his authority proved unusually durable. HQ, III MAF, correctly identified the government's rural problems and began to establish the mission and the concept of operations to assist the Republic in overcoming the attack on its authority.(15) The order of III MAF left little doubt that civic action in support of the hard pressed local government and not "civil affairs/military government operations as that term is normally understood" would be the basis of Marine Corps action.(16) The spirit came out strongly in the following part of the concept of operations:

Civic action will be conducted as needed and/or requested in a guest-host relationship with the government of the Republic of Vietnam. Reliance will be placed upon agreement and cooperation for the achievement of mutually advantageous objectives of the two governments.(17)

Civic Action in Vietnam: the Picture at the End of June 1965

In June 1965, however, civic action in Vietnam at the battalion level remained in the advanced stages of a people-to-people program. The complete cycle of rural construction was being carried out only in Le My where unusually favorably circumstances had permitted the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, to occupy the village and to cooperate with the district and village governing authorities. Elsewhere in June in the ICTZ, the Vietnamese government approved a massive expansion of the Marine Corps TAORs. As a direct result, the Marine Corps began an aggressive program of counter guerrilla operations in the midst of a moderately dense civilian population.(18) As the Marine