

entered the hamlet of Bich Bac, nine miles south of Da Nang, interrogated a civilian who revealed the presence of several Viet Cong in the hamlet. The local resident explained that the Viet Cong were part of a larger force which operated west of Bich Bac. He elaborated that when Marine Corps patrols passed through the hamlets of Bich Bac and its western neighbor Thai Cam, the Viet Cong always fled on the trails leading southward from the hamlets.(22)

Using the information obtained from the face-to-face discussion of a well instructed patrol leader with a civilian who had decided to support the allies of his government, HQ, Company K spent several days planning an operation against the hamlets. Following careful planning, the company sent into the area a large patrol which purposely rested south of the hamlets and operated from there for the rest of the day. The patrol departed late in the afternoon but left behind south of the hamlets an ambush group which methodically and quietly moved into positions covering the southern trails from the hamlets. One small team spent approximately 18 hours within a few meters of a Vietnamese home without being detected. The next day the company sent another patrol into the hamlets from the east. Precisely as described by the friendly civilian the Viet Cong moved out towards the south. Walking swiftly and remaining extraordinarily well spaced, the Viet Cong blundered into the various ambush teams. Surprise was complete. The teams captured ten persons without a single shot being fired. The company commander had combined civic action and careful tactical planning to consummate an unusually successful ambush south of Bich Bac.(23)

A Growing Humanitarian Tradition

Throughout the Marine Corps TAORs individual efforts at civic action continued in what was becoming a growing Marine Corps tradition of humanitarianism. It would be unreasonable to say all or even most Marines were innately, positively oriented towards the individual type of civic action. A careful study by psychologists, military officers, statisticians, etc., would be required to establish the generality that all or most Marines were inherently compassionate ambassadors of good will. But, enough Marines were contributing special efforts on an individual basis to lend reality to the propaganda which proclaimed the beneficent purposes of the allies. Simultaneously the hard, purposeful civic action in support of security and rural construction was made more effective by the gentleness and commiseration of a substantial number of Marines. For example, in Company K alone of the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines more than 150 dollars had been spent by Marines on clothing for children in the area of Yen Ne (1) by the end of November 1965. The purchases had been an individual effort and they supported the well developed propaganda which emphasized that

Marines were friends of the Vietnamese people. In addition, a medical corpsman from the company paid the annual tuition fee enabling an 11-year old child to attend a Catholic girls' school in Da Nang. (24) Examples of individual efforts similar to those in Company K could be multiplied by the number of Marine Corps companies throughout ICTZ.

The 3d Battalion, 9th Marines distributed representative quantities and types of civic action materials also. Various sources, including U. S. private and governmental organizations provided the basic materials in most cases. The battalion distributed several hundred pounds of liquid and bar soap and approximately 1,800 pounds of cornmeal and bulgar. The battalion also contributed in support of its civic action program 42 gallons of cooking oil and small quantities of salt, sugar, candy, soft drink mix, and assorted toys. A private source in the United States contributed a particularly humble offering-- 50 rubber balls for children. Company I gave 25 pounds of garbage daily during the month of November 1965 to the peasants of Bo Mung for animal feed. The material distributed by the battalion was moderate in quantity and disparate in usefulness, e.g., rubber balls, garbage, wheat, and soft drink mix, but it effectively supported medical assistance, psychological warfare, face-to-face persuasion, and several hundred patrols and ambushes. During November 1965, the battalion received an increased amount of intelligence from the Vietnamese peasants including that which led to the Bich Bac ambush and the identification or destruction of booby traps on five separate occasions by the villagers at An Trach (1). (25) Finally, on 18 November 1965, a Viet Cong defected to the Regional Forces 703d Company, located within the battalion's TAOR, and explained that a psychological warfare leaflet had been instrumental in his defection. The leaflet was one of several hundred thousand laboriously produced by the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines.

The End of the Year: December 1965

By December 1965, III MAF and its predecessor the 9th MEB had operated for almost one year in Vietnam. Civic action had initially been a weakly developed effort with limited command emphasis. The complex process of landing and building up strength had taken most of the Marine Corps time and effort. Once the landing areas had been secured and logistics support ensured, HQ, III MAF began to stress the expansion of its TAORs in order to carry out its combat missions more effectively. Each of the numerous expansions involved a change of positions and a reconstruction of the FEBAs. General Walt placed heavy emphasis on a well developed FEBA and a supporting Combat Outpost Line. When the Marine Corps mission was expanded to one of unilateral offensive action within its TAORs, the concentration of effort was on the detection and destruction of

main force Viet Cong units. The physical expansion of the TAORs in July 1965 also marked the beginning of more effective civic action. With the move into the more densely populated areas, competition began with the Viet Cong infrastructure in areas which neither side could afford to lose. The Headquarters of both FMFPac and III MAF became aware of the frustrating reality that successful actions against the main force of the Viet Cong would prevent the Republic's fall but victory would be achieved only with the success of the government's rural construction plan.

A Pattern of Civic Action

The following pattern of civic action supported the view that progress was slow at first, but as the importance of the struggle for the people was revealed, an increase in civic action began which only tapered off as III MAF reached the limits imposed by the necessary balance between military and civic action:

Activity	<u>Time Periods and Approximate Strengths (26)</u>			
	<u>7-30 May 65</u> <u>(13,000)</u>	<u>14 Aug-30 Sep 65</u> <u>(38,000)</u>	<u>1-31 Oct 65</u> <u>(42,000)</u>	<u>1-31 Dec 65</u> <u>(44,000)</u>
Medical Aid (Civilians)-----	4,500	28,465	43,092	60,814
Food Distributed (pounds)-----		59,975	28,168	13,759
Clothing Distributed (pounds)-----		7,820	108,717	13,299
Small Unit Operations-----			5,662	7,208
Large Unit Operations-----			7	4
Enemy (KIA)-----	37	915	253	678

The most important gauges of activity were the numbers of civilians treated medically and small unit operations. These actions were dependent on the emphasis which commanders placed on them. The numbers of civilians treated and the number of small unit operations increased (44 and 28 percent respectively) even during the periods of October and December 1965 when the strength of III MAF remained almost stationary. In contrast, the distribution of food and clothing depended largely upon the receipt of the material from sources outside ICTZ and many cases within the continental limits of the United States. The uneven flow of material from the United States resulted in the uneven receipt and distribution in ICTZ. For example, the large quantity of 54.3 tons of clothing was received during October 1965, while two months later in December only 6.5 tons

were received.(27)

By December 1965, III MAF had developed patterns of civic action which would continue through the following year. The I Corps JCC ensured coordination between the headquarters and directors of III MAF, I Corps, U. S. Operations Mission, and the U. S. private relief agencies. High level coordination remained effective although it was sensitive to political unrest within Vietnam. The working committees of the I Corps JCC focused the attention of the highest leadership on the problems of coordination at the hamlet/village level. But for numerous reasons coordination remained less effective at the lower levels. Coordination at the battalion level with the local government should have been all-encompassing. But the Marine Corps emphasized a coherent FEBA and a supporting Combat Outpost Line of Resistance to keep the main force of the Viet Cong at bay. In conjunction with the FEBA and the large unit operations conducted forward of it, HQ, III MAF placed emphasis on patrols and ambushes forward in the TAORs to suppress the guerrilla activity of the VC infrastructure. The heavy patrolling and the ubiquitous pressures of maintaining a cohesive FEBA/COPL and launching large unit operations gave the Marine Corps battalions little time for civic action in direct support of local government in the great area between the air installations and the forward combat positions.(28)

The Overriding Importance of Security for Effective Civic Action

Lieutenant Colonel Ludwig of the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines had formed a joint security council for his battalion's TAOR in the summer of 1965, but this worthwhile experiment was not emulated by other battalions. Marine Corps civic action functioned as an effective services and supply effort in support of Vietnamese villagers who continued to be heavily influenced by the Viet Cong throughout the Marine Corps TAORs. In addition to the purely humanitarian motives, Marine Corps civic action had become a purposeful attempt to extract information from the rural population about the presence and movements of the Viet Cong. But in spite of an extraordinarily well developed medical aid program, a massive program of food supply, and the general tone of compassion and benevolence in Marine Corps operations, civic action remained defective in the most important particular--security.(29)

The Vietnamese peasant would not commit himself to the support of the GVN unless he and his family were adequately protected. Rural security had to take two forms. First the peasant had to be assured psychologically that the GVN and its powerful ally, the Marine Corps, were committed to a fight to a victorious conclusion. Second, the peasant had to be assured by the presence and execution of superior physical force that

his chances of survival after exposing the presence of the Viet Cong or supporting the GVN/USMC were reasonable. Without giving these assurances to the peasantry, the Marine Corps could expect meager returns from its efforts in services and supply because of the continuing fear of retribution. Without security, the peasantry would remain an uncommitted mass of humanity among which the Viet Cong could continue to operate.

The importance of security was highlighted by the civic action program of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines in the Chu Lai TAOR. This battalion had a particularly effective program of might be defined as "soft" civic action consisting largely of medical action and face-to-face contact with the people with extensive distribution of commodities.(30) Within the TAOR of the battalion, an outstanding hamlet chief came to light. Mr. Truong, the chief of Tri Binh (1) (see Map Number Two) was a fearless man who committed himself unequivocally to the Republican cause. Here was a man who was capable of winning the active support of his large hamlet and neighboring area close to Highway One in the southern part of the Chu Lai TAOR for the same Republican cause. He was a potential catalyst for a devastating reaction against Viet Cong influence in the Quang Tin district. On 3 December 1965, the medical aid team which visited Tri Binh (1) noted that he had posted several anti-Viet Cong signs in conspicuous locations in the hamlet. Near the entrance was a sign which stated, "Civilians and Soldiers Unite to Fight the Viet Cong." Another unusually provocative one stated, "What Have the Viet Cong Done for You--Nothing." The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines supported the chief with numerous medical visits and at the end of December helped in the construction of a pole for the Republican flag. The Marine Corps was pleased with the progress in Tri Binh (1). The people were happier and somewhat cleaner than in the neighboring areas, and sickness was decreasing. A patrol leader from Company L, remarked spontaneously to his gunnery sergeant after an initial visit to Mr. Truong's area: "You know, gunny, this is the first village we came into and found the people laughing and happy." It would be difficult to exaggerate the beneficial effects of a committed leader at the hamlet level; a way was opening up before the battalion which led to real control over part of Vietnam.

Unfortunately, the battalion report of 1 January 1966 read as follows:

Mr. Truong, the hamlet chief of Tri Binh (1) was killed at approximately 310800 H $\frac{1}{8}$ A.M. 31 December 1965 local time/ on the trail leading into Tri Binh (1). Four shots had been fired at him and one hit in the back of the head according to the assistant chief...footprints at 565985 showed that at least two murderers waited by the drainage ditch at 565985 to ambush the chief. The ID card had been removed from the...body...The villagers buried their chief at 311400 H.(31)



Fun and games I: This lad enjoys himself near DaNang on 2Dec65 while waiting for medical aid. Lt W.F.Space is providing the irregular basketball assistance. (USMC A421636)



Fun and games II: here the boy of the photo at left is playing hopscotch. Lt Space instigated this affair also and is effectively combatting VC propaganda which portrays Marines as ruthless mercenaries. The young lad may soon have to be treated for exhaustion. (USMC A421637)

With this brief passage the brave Mr. Truong passed into oblivion, but so did the chances of an effective civic action program for the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines. The chances of creating a rural population committed to the Republic in the battalion's TAOR receded into the distant future. Civic action in Tri Binh (1) again became the furnishing of medical assistance, food, clothing, candy, charms, all for a few bits of information snatched from terrified mouths. The flag continued to fly but without Mr. Truong it was a symbol of frustration instead of a rallying point for resistance against the terror.

What might have been done to protect the lion of Tri Binh (1) so that he could have led the peasants to a decisive annihilation of the Viet Cong in his area? A joint security council for the area probably would have revealed the isolated aspect of each hamlet and led to a communications network between the hamlets and between the local leaders and battalion headquarters. The joint security council could have dictated and enforced basic security measures by mutual agreement. For example, Mr. Truong was alone and unarmed when he was assassinated. As a committed hamlet chief, he should have been protected by a 24-hour guard of trusted men, preferably blood relations. This guard would have served almost naturally as the nucleus for a hamlet self-defense force. None of these measures would have guaranteed Mr. Truong's life. But the Viet Cong would have had an immensely more difficult task of assassination than having a few political killers loll along the trail into Tri Binh (1) and almost casually dispatch the unarmed and unaccompanied hamlet chief.(32)

Security and the Quang Nam Pacification Project: December 1965

In the Da Nang area, the Quang Nam Pacification Project took a dramatic turn for the worse. The effort was designed to reestablish government control in the densely populated area south of Da Nang and was the major rural construction effort in the ICTZ. The importance of the effort was based on the following factor: Da Nang, with its extensive resources in port and communications facilities, repair shops, machine tools, etc., and surrounding air installations was the hub of Republican activity in the north. But the Viet Cong infrastructure was entrenched from the southern outskirts of the port outward into the countryside and served as an opposing axis for insurgent operations in ICTZ. The powerful Viet Cong influence also carried with it the danger of serving as a springboard for a successful raid against Da Nang in the event of any shift of Allied strength out of the area. As a result, the nine villages south of Da Nang had been designated as one of four national priority areas for rural construction. The program had begun in November and immediately ran into stiff Viet Cong resistance. The Viet Cong were forced to react

because the center of their strength lay not in the main force units in the uninhabited hills but in the political infrastructure and supporting guerrilla fighters of the rich lowlands. The Viet Cong recognized the Quang Nam Pacification Project as a crucial development. Years of patient, bedrock organizing were threatened by the government campaign.

Marine Corps civic action was clustered rather closely around Da Nang (see Map Number One for a representative day of Marine Corps activity in the Da Nang TAOR) and served as a natural adjunct to the activities of the Vietnamese Rural Construction Cadres of the People's Action Teams. Marine Corps medical assistance and the distribution of food and clothing were a form of rural construction themselves. A calculated blending of civic action and the formal Vietnamese program of rural construction might have had decisive results. But from the beginning the Vietnamese effort lacked satisfactory security forces; and the orientation of the Marine Corps towards combat forward in the TAORs prevented a conclusive reinforcing of the rural construction program by III MAF. The ARVN provided only a penny packet security force; and the end result was that the program foundered on the rocks of inadequate security.(33)

The Viet Cong broke the back of the campaign during the period 21-28 December 1965. Marine Corps civic action was especially active during this time, and the campaign area lay completely within the Marine Corps TAOR. But the activity was in the soft form of the distribution of commodities and the provision of services rather than in the hard form of a security program wherein services and commodities were supporting appendages rather than the central issue. The Vietnamese operators of the rural construction program were largely members of the People's Action Teams sent into the area. These political units had only a limited capability of self-defense although they could be called paramilitary organizations as well as political. They existed primarily, however, to lead the rural population in self-help projects of a peaceful political and economic nature in areas where the Viet Cong guerrilla fighters had been eliminated.(34) The campaign began with difficulties in supply, coordination, and changes of leadership, and progress during the first two months was only moderate. But the Viet Cong feared any progress and was painfully aware of the importance of its infrastructure in the Da Nang area.

On 21 December 1965, the Viet Cong launched several attacks specifically against the rural construction program and ominously maneuvered through the area. At 0300, the People's Action Team at 016660 (see Map Number One which has a 10,000 meter grid square on it and read to the right 016, and upwards 660) was hit by a Viet Cong guerrilla force which killed four PAT members and carried off two automatic weapons.

Fifteen minutes prior to this strike, the Communists had launched a mortar attack against campaign headquarters at 011661. Then, at 0315 a contact was made by the 594th Regional Forces Company with a group of Viet Cong maneuvering through the campaign area; the Regional Forces killed three of the enemy. On the afternoon of the same day, the Viet Cong launched a sharp attack against the 593d Regional Forces Company, a unit whose specific mission was to protect the PATs. The Viet Cong killed seven of the Regional Forces as well as capturing three automatic weapons and two AN/PRC-10 radios (medium range radios carried on packs).(35)

Instead of reinforcing the campaign area with adequate security forces, the GVN replaced the campaign chief on 24 December 1965 with an ARVN regimental commander who moved the campaign headquarters and required precious days to become an effective leader in the new assignment. Even more important, the direct leadership of the PATs devolved on no single assistant to the new chief, and rural construction began to grind to a halt because of the lack of security and leadership. The Viet Cong, however, were far from finished with their activity. At 1700 on 28 December 1965, at 037704, a sniper deliberately picked out and killed a member of a PAT. Later on the same day, at 1930, the People's Action Team at 041721 was attacked by the Viet Cong who killed two team members and wounded a third. Approximately two weeks after these events, Lieutenant Colonel Loc, the new rural construction chief, was replaced by yet another man. The Viet Cong in a series of purposeful attacks had set back progress in the Quang Nam Pacification Project to an indeterminate future date.(36)

Marine Corps "Power"

Security was the most important part of any civic action program carried out by the Marine Corps which was intended either to support rural construction or to gain the willing support of the populace. It was so basic a part of successful civic action that in many cases it was overlooked as the indispensable factor in progress towards a committed Vietnamese population. As far in the past as May 1965, Lieutenant Colonel Clement had seen that in order to be in control of his TAOR, he would have to fight his battle within the hard-core Viet Cong village complex of Le My. He was fortunate in his location. His battalion's TAOR and mission coincided in such a way that the rifle companies were available for security throughout the village complex. Faced with an effective effort to destroy its infrastructure, the Viet Cong was forced to fight to maintain its influence within Le My. But the rifle companies and a reviving Popular Force organization were too strong for the Viet Cong and Le My village fell under the control of the Republican government. The neighboring village

chief, Mr. Tac-Bac of Hoa Thanh, expressed his feelings about the civic action of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines in a manner which stood out like a beacon in expressing what was important about the battalion's activities:

We the people of Northwest Hoa Vang District wish to express our feelings toward...the 2d Battalion, 3rd Marines who...are now acting in our Northwest Zone.... We are very pleased with the battalion. We believe in US Marine Corps power. /The Marine Corps/ came to our country, landed, and cleared our zone of Viet Cong. Then with its power it defended and held our zone, keeping the Viet Cong from invading us...To present an example of the fighting power and will of the American Government, the Viet Cong in Hoa Lac /Le My/ village have all been flushed out...the Viet Cong have not dared come back to harrass us any more...Also we are very happy because you helped us rebuild our bridges in Hoa Lac...And we are very thankful towards your doctors.(37)

Mr. Tac-Bac's letter was a guide to successful civic action in Vietnam. The guide emphasized two vital points. First, ensure the security of any area in which successful civic action was contemplated. Then, support the reviving local government in projects chosen by that government. By December 1965, the Combined Action Company of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines in the Hue/Phu Bai area struck an ideal balance between hard and soft civic action, or effective security and distribution of services and supplies. Marine rifle squads actually lived with the Popular Force platoons in Vietnamese hamlets and ensured the domination of the countryside by fire and physical presence. Communications between the CAC and the battalion Combat Operations Center ensured the use of most of the weapons in the Marine Corps armory against the Viet Cong. The closeness of the Marine rifle squad to the villagers resulted in an unusually effective medical program and the provision of various bits of assistance to the local government officials. Probably though, the rapport which developed between the Marine rifle squads and the Popular Forces and villagers was based on the supreme camaraderie of sharing real danger and overcoming it. By the time the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines left Hue/Phu Bai, on 22 December 1965, a close bond had been forged between the Marines and the Vietnamese villagers. "The people were sad and heartbroken" and they lined "the road for three hundred meters watching...the Marines leave. The Marines noted that many of the people were crying...."(38)

By the end of the first calendar year for major Marine Corps forces in Vietnam, other shreds of evidence supported the importance of security for civic action. Early in December 1965, several Marine Corps units contributed to a sweep of the Phong Bac area located only a few thousand meters south of the

Da Nang Airbase and close to Route One. Phong Bac had been well within the Marine Corps TAOR for many months and had been the object of civic action efforts by several Marine Corps units. The 3d Motor Transport, 3d Tank, and 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalions had carried on civic action programs in the hamlet which had become a saturated area for medical service and the distribution of commodities (see Map Number One for a representative day of civic action in the Da Nang TAOR). During the sweep, about 160 villagers were interrogated concerning Viet Cong activities in the area. The peasants' lingering fear of the Viet Cong was sharply etched in the report of the questioning. The 3d Tank Battalion's report noted that the "villagers seemed to be grateful for our concern over their safety."(39)

The villagers had good reason for concern over their safety. Although retribution took a while, the Viet Cong managed to extract it from people who had consorted with their own government and its allies. The report of the 3d Tank Battalion on 2 December 1965 took on an ominous cast when set next to the following: "25 January 1966. The Battalion CAO talked to the various people of Phong Bac concerning the assassination of Nguyen Tang, youth director of Hoa Tho Village /which included Phong Bac/." From the information received, the Youth Director was evidently taken from his home near Phong Bac by a Viet Cong assassination squad which led him to Route One, several hundred meters above the Hoa Tho Village headquarters and shot him. The 3d Tank Battalion report concluded with the masterful understatement that "this /murder/ will create serious difficulties in the village."(40)

Farther south, in the Chu Lai TAOR, the Vietnamese also sought protection from the Viet Cong and were grateful for Marine Corps security. The peasants of Nuoc Man hamlet in the area of responsibility of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines spontaneously carried out a people-to-people project of their own. In order to provide shelter for Marines located near the hamlet, they built a grass and bamboo building which was completed on 2 December 1965. The villagers then donated the building specifically to the Marines who were manning the nearby security outpost. One month later in the TAOR of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, Company D conducted a survey in the Ky Xuan village complex (487103) to gather information on the people's reaction to the Marine Corps civic action program. The sweep was similar to the one conducted by the 3d Tank Battalion at Phong Bac in the Da Nang TAOR and revealed the same ominous concern of the peasants for their lives. "The villagers of Ky Xuan felt that they /were/ safe from the Viet Cong during the day but still not at night. They wanted Marines or some troops to stay in the village at all times."(41) The peasants also wanted their children to go to school and felt that the Marine Corps medical assistance was helpful. But the primary concern of the peasants was security.

Christmas 1965: "Peace on Earth, Good Will Towards Man"

The Christmas season presented opportunities for increased contact between Marines and the local population. Christmas parties for children of neighboring hamlets, refugee centers, orphanages, and hospitals burgeoned and reinforced the normal medical assistance and distribution of commodities. The 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion originated an imaginative program using its enormous LVTP-5s (Landing Vehicle Tracked, Personnel, Model Number 5). The battalion painted one of the vehicles white, placed a Santa Claus, sled, reindeer, and a Christmas tree on top and painted various Christmas designs around the LVTP-5. The slogan, "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Man," was painted on both sides of the vehicle in Vietnamese, and the LVT was outfitted with a sound system that played Christmas carols continuously while the vehicle was on the move.(42)

On 23 December 1965, the white LVT went to the Sampan Community of Khue Trung (036757) where Santa Claus distributed candy and toys to approximately 200 children of that unusual floating community. During the next two days, Santa continued his benevolent rounds, making one trip through downtown Da Nang to Marble Mountain on 24 December, and another trip through Hoa Yen (990770) and the Hoa Cam Training Center for Popular Forces (985718) on Christmas Day. During the three days of his travels, the hard-working Santa Claus distributed about 500 pounds of candy to approximately 2,500 children. Adults as well as children "were overjoyed at seeing Santa and his sleigh and reindeer." The inscription on the sides of the LVT --Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Man--was also well received by a violence-weary population.(43)



Clothes for little boys: Vietnamese children were generally poorly protected from ground and weather. Punctures of the feet and infestation by worms were by-products of missing foot wear. The danger of overexposure to the sun was great and the early morning chill turned colds into pneumonia amongst scantily-clad children. (USMC A184605)



Clothes for little girls (and boys): lightweight clothes were welcomed by the needy in Vietnam. These were received from U.S. charity and are being presented by Sgt Kurt L. Cordes to two relaxed youngsters. In a parallel program the Marine Reserve and CARE contributed sewing kits and cloth which helped to balance charity with self-help. 1966 (USMC A421367)

Chapter VII

A New Calendar Year: Patterns of Civic Action in January-March 1966

The new year, 1966, opened with the rural construction campaign of the GVN stalled in the Ngu Hanh Son area, south of Da Nang. The Viet Cong attacks of 21-28 December 1965 had forced a reorganization of the program. The GVN had originally scheduled the campaign to be completed by 31 December 1965, but early in January 1966, Major Nhat, the "current pacification chief," who had replaced Lieutenant Colonel Loc, noted that a new three-phase concept was in effect for rural construction in the area of the nine villages. The GVN scheduled five of the villages in the area for pacification during April 1966. Major Nhat prepared for the future effort by reorganizing the civilian teams which lacked a clear-cut chain of command. But he was unable to reinforce the security forces enough to assure the safety of the People's Action Teams. Security forces comprised an understrength battalion of the Regional Forces, four platoons of Popular Forces, and a single company of the ARVN. The 2d Battalion, 9th Marines was to assist in providing security in the forward fringe of the rural construction area. But the Marine Corps and the ARVN continued to focus most of their attention on the main force of the Viet Cong.(1)

Security within the Marine Corps TAOR and behind the FEBA remained inadequate to support the Vietnamese rural construction effort. The Vietnamese government lost its initial, driving interest in the campaign and the ARVN continued to neglect the effort in any calculations of the allotment of resources. For example, the single ARVN company supporting the campaign was no more than a token force and was hard-pressed to provide for the security of the campaign headquarters. In the meantime, during the last four months of 1965, the national government at Saigon had begun to plan for rural construction in 1966. The failures of 1965 and the gains of the Viet Cong from 1963-1965 dictated more emphasis on winning the peasantry at the hamlet level and changing the bland term rural construction. The words revolutionary development (RD) began to be used for the better-coordinated 1966 program in place of the former uninspired terminology.(2) In February 1966, the national government revived its interest in winning the Quang Nam peasantry by political, social, and economic action, and renamed the Quang Nam Pacification Project area the Revolutionary Development National Priority Area of I Corps. But the GVN decided to complete Phase I of the new program during April 1966, i.e., in the indeterminate future. Civil strife, however, wracked the ICTZ during the months of March-May 1966

and cancelled any efforts at revolutionary development in the Ngu Hanh Son area. A policy of drift had set in after the Viet Cong attacks of late December 1965. The policy resulted from the lack of resources to protect the political teams and set back progress in the campaign beyond the middle of 1966.

Nevertheless, HQ, III MAF cooperated with the GVN on certain lesser projects around Da Nang short of an area campaign. Planning began on 19 January 1966 for the construction of the Cam Ne/Yen Ne New Life Hamlet. The plans for the hamlet were well coordinated; planners included the Quang Nam Province Chief, Commanding Officer, Ninth Marines, G-5, III MAF, and the Provincial Representative of USAID. The Vietnamese government was firmly in control of the project but needed bits and pieces of Marine Corps assistance. The Vietnamese required a TD-18 type earth moving tractor for leveling the proposed site. After the original coordinating meeting the G-5, 3d Marine Division and the Division Engineer took up the precise details of support.(3) This important project, which actually formed one small part of the Quang Nam Pacification Project, went forward in fits and starts. The Vietnamese officials had a difficult time in choosing a location for the hamlet; the original site which included part of a cemetery proved unacceptable to the future inhabitants. They had come to believe that the past death of so many people near the site was an unfavorable omen for the future. The Marine Corps played its proper civic action role in this affair. It faithfully supported the GVN with engineer equipment and patiently relocated its equipment after the tractor operators had begun work on the superstition-laden first site.

Operation MALLARD:

Civic Action in Support of Large Unit Operations

Southwest of the Da Nang TAOR, and early in January 1966, the 3d Marines conducted Operation MALLARD, a search and destroy mission in an area which provided an ideal testing ground for civic action during a large unit tactical operation. The area was densely populated and had been under Viet Cong control for two years. Several challenges to civic action existed. The Marine Corps would have to subject a large population to an intense, short-term civic action program; and, voluntary refugees would have to be retrieved. The 3d Marines gathered a vast quantity of food, MEDCAP supplies, clothing, soap, and candy. The supplies were placed in the Logistics Support Area (LSA) for the operation and were available at the call of the commander. HQ, 3d Marines directed its subordinate units to establish civilian collection points. These were locations where the civilians would be relatively safe from the hazards of formal combat and where they would not interfere with the tactical maneuver. The supplies available on call at the LSA were used to care for the civilians who were temporarily

separated from their homes, food supplies, cooking facilities, etc., and to support a combined civic action and psychological warfare effort which would influence the population favorably towards the GVN. Civilians at the collection points who requested to leave the areas controlled by the Viet Cong were transported to the GVN district headquarters to begin a new life.(4)

The Vietnamese peasants responded in the usual favorable way to relief from the harsh control of the Viet Cong. Significant numbers stated that they were tired of the war and wished to escape the rigors of Viet Cong domination. The 3d Marines exploited the anticipated unrest with aerial broadcasts urging the people to leave their homes for resettlement in government-controlled areas. Approximately 1,000 civilians responded to the call in spite of the challenge of resettlement.(5)

The operation revealed another reason for the dissatisfaction of the peasantry besides ruthless administration. The Viet Cong were exploiting the entire area as a food supply and storage area. Enormous quantities of rice had been taken from the peasantry to support the Viet Cong apparatus not only for local guerrillas, but also for larger units operating in distant areas. The 3d Marines uncovered more than 35 tons of hidden rice and transported it to the Dai Loc district headquarters for government use. The favorable psychological impact of 35 tons of rice arriving at the district headquarters for distribution by the local government was a major victory for Marine Corps civic action.(6)

Operations of the I Corps JCC

During and after Operation MALLARD, at the highest level of civic action coordination, the I Corps JCC concentrated on plans for the distribution of the supplies received through the Christmas collection campaign in the United States. Americans contributed supplies through the American Christmas Trucks and Trains program (ACTT) for the needy in Vietnam. The material had to be distributed efficiently and fairly throughout the ICTZ. The I Corps Joint Coordinating Council was ideally suited to coordinate the distribution, and the Commodities Distribution Committee handled the manifold details. Those details provided an insight into the complexities of the Vietnamese situation and the problems of inertia at the various levels of government. Upon the recommendation of the committee, the I Corps JCC set up province-level Commodities Distribution Committees to estimate province needs in accordance with the following priorities system:(7)

1. Needy families in newly pacified hamlets.
2. Refugees and ralliers (VC defectors) in resettlement centers.