

Section 2: Central I Corps in 1966 and 1967

Quang Nam, Da Nang, Hill 55, Dodge City, Shasta, Thuy Bo, Go Noi Island, Chu Lai, and Hill 190

September 27, 1966

After Deckhouse IV, the 1st Battalion 26th Marines replaces 1/9 in the Hill 55 TAOR south of Da Nang. 1/26 is placed under the operational control of the 9th Marine Regiment and is responsible for the northern sector of the 9th Marines TAOR.

The assignment of the 9th Marine Regiment is the opening of Liberty Road, which runs through the hill 55 TAOR south to An Hoa. A daily task of Delta Co. is to provide security for the morning mine sweep, south to the Charlie Co. position at Route 4, and for the Seabees building the road. Enemy activity consists of sniper action in squad size or less and booby trapping. Friendly activity consists of daylight saturation patrols, reconnaissance patrols, road security patrols, and night ambushes.

The first patrols of Delta Co. are four or five-day patrols north of Hill 55. Their objective is to sweep and clear hamlets and to support ARVN and Marine pacification programs. This is a contested area, and Marine casualties are encountered from booby traps, mines, and snipers. During these first patrols, the following Delta Co. Marines are killed:

Pfc. Benny Wimberly, 9/28/66 - Killed by sniper north of Hill 55

Pfc. Richard Malaspina, 9/29/66 - Killed by mine north of Hill 55

Pfc. Edward D. Larson, 10/8/66 - Died of wounds on 9/21/66 south of DMZ

October 11-12, 1966

A County Fair is held in Le Son (5). The following Delta Co. Marine is killed:

Pfc. Bryant Powell, 10/11/66 - Killed by sniper north of Hill 55

October 18, 1966

The pontoon bridge position south of Hill 55 is probed by the VC. This is also the water point for Hill 55.

October 21- 24, 1966

Heavy rains flood the area, suspending operations and causing the evacuation of the Bravo Co. CP south of Hill 55. Constant mud, flooding, wetness, trench foot and lousy weather are the norm for many weeks to come.

October 24, 1966

LtCol. Monti is replaced by LtCol. Newton as the 1/26 Battalion Commander.

November 2, 1966

The perimeter area around Hill 55 is active with occasional probes by the VC and frequent sniper activity. One of the Hill 55 perimeter positions manned at night by Delta Co. is finger 3, and these bunkers are in close sniper range from Duc Key (1). The sniper is nicknamed "Zorro". In the weeks since Delta Co.'s arrival at Hill 55, Zorro has killed one Marine and wounded another. The following Delta Co. Marine is killed:

Pvt. Samuel Lightman, 11/02/66 - Killed by sniper off finger three at Hill 55

November 10, 1966

The Marine Corps birthday is a grand meal of turkey, mashed potatoes, cake and beer. 2nd Platoon is holding the bunker positions at the bridge, and the Gunny Sergeant sends some beer down to the river. Somebody starts the fun by tossing a smoke grenade, and somebody else responds. This starts a round of popup flares back and forth across the river and firing into the darkness.

November 12, 1966

The Delta Co. CP receives mortar rounds and automatic weapons fire. Three Marines are wounded. The whole Da Nang TAOR is active that night. Northeast of Hill 55, a VC sapper unit has attacked the position of India 3/1; the 1st Platoon of Delta Co. is transported by tanks (in the dark) to reinforce the India Co. position. The attack causes a number of dead and wounded 3/1 Marines.

Mid-November 1966

Delta Co is part of Operation Shasta, which is a multi-company sweep in the "Dodge City" area. Reports from the Dai Loc District Headquarters indicate that a Main-Force VC company has moved into the area just north of the Thu Bon River to join with to local guerrilla units that operate in the area of La Huan (1) and Duc Ky (1) east of Liberty Road. Operation Shasta involves companies from 1/26 as well as units from 2/3 and 2/1. The operation covers the territory between Go Noi Island north to Hill 55.

Operation Shasta is conducted in two phases from November 5 - 19, 1966. The enemy's tactic is to conduct delaying and harassing actions. After withdrawal from an area, mines and booby traps are left behind to delay the Marine attack.

November 7-10, 1966

Delta Co. serves as a blocking force north of the Thu Bon River.

November 14, 1966

Operation Shasta continues. Delta Co. links up with Charlie Co. in Thuy Bo at midday. A medevac helicopter has been shot down that morning and the pilot wounded. A second medevac helicopter is hit but is able to pick up the casualties and fly out again. Artillery is called on the VC firing positions. In the afternoon, a Huey is shot down while covering the landing of another UH 34D. Artillery and air strikes are called on the area east of La Huan (1) and Thuy Bo (1) towards the railroad tracks.

After the Huey crash-landed close by, LCpl. Kirby of 2nd Platoon retrieves one of the M-60 machine guns from the helicopter. Amtracs eventually drag the choppers out.

November 15, 1966

In the morning, Delta Co. detonates a shaped charge mine rigged as a surprise-firing device at Thuy Bo (1) close to the railroad tracks. Three Marines from a platoon of Alpha Co. attached to Delta Co. are killed:

LCpl. Joseph Craft, 11/15/66 - Killed by bobby trap south of Hill 55

Pfc. Eddie Peoples, 11/15/66 - Killed by bobby trap south of Hill 55

Pfc. Wesley Shimoda, 11/15/66 - Killed by bobby trap south of Hill 55

At midday, the company receives sniper fire and about 50 rounds of small arms fire. One Marine who has just joined Delta Co. is killed with another wounded.

Pfc. Gerald Johnson, 11/15/66 - Killed by sniper south of Hill 55

November 19, 1966

Delta Co. makes a sweep of the villes south of the bridge that runs east along the south bank of the Song La Tho. At midday, during a sweep of La Huan (2), Delta Co. receives about 250 rounds of small arms fire and mortars. The company returns fire as well as seven 90mm rounds from the accompanying tank. Air strikes are called as well. A round from the tank hits a nearby metal post or tree and explodes, killing one nearby Marine and wounding several others. The following Delta Co. Marine is killed:

LCpl. David West, 11/19/66 - Killed by short round from tank south of Hill 55

Operation Shasta is terminated at the end of the day. Marine casualties are 13 KIA and 66 WIA. VC losses are 22 KIA.

November or December, 1966

One patrol by a squad from second Platoon is pretty amazing. Cpl. Hawkins leads a night patrol into Chau Son (2). This hamlet is close to Hill 55 but is at the fork of two rivers, which means easy movement for the VC. Part of the squad sets up a defensive position just inside the ville, while Cpl. Hawkins leads the rest towards the center to check things out. As it turns out there are VC in the village, and the Marines and VC literally bump into each other. Cpl. Hawkins grabs one of the VC, shooting breaks out, and the Marines withdraw. The squad makes it back with no casualties and turns the VC over to battalion.

December 9, 1966

Capt. R. J. Weidner is replaced by Capt. G. D. Johnson as the Delta Company Commander.

Mid-December 1966

A sweep is conducted by the 1st Platoon in the Lo Son area north of Hill 55 in an operation with Alpha 1/26. The patrol takes several casualties. The 2nd Platoon kills a VC traveling by boat along the Lo Tho River south of Hill 55. Also, Delta Co. begins to work the area south of the bridge with more frequent platoon and squad patrols.

The 1st Platoon Commander, Lt. C.R. Dennis, is severely wounded by a mine and evacuated.

December 20-21, 1966

Delta Co. is OpCon to 2/1 Marines. The second and third platoons are the blocking force for an operation in Thuy Bo area south of hill 55. The 2nd Platoon comes under fire from a tree line and advances towards the direction of fire. The platoon gets caught in a minefield, and Bouncing Betty mines kill two Marines. Many others are wounded, including the Machine Gun Squad Leader, Cpl. Carver. The 1st Platoon, still on Hill 55, is the reaction force and mounts up on amtracs to join the rest of the Company in this action.

Because of the number of helicopters shot down in the area, no medevac flight is made and the wounded and killed are transported by amtracs back to Hill 55 for evacuation. The following Marines are killed during this action:

Pfc. Wayne Burkhardt, 12/20/66 - Killed by mine explosion south of Hill 55

Cpl. Richard Kosky, 12/20/66 - Killed by mine explosion south of Hill 55

Late December 1966

Due to heavy rain, Route 4, which connects Liberty Road North and South, is impassable to wheeled vehicles for the greater part of the month.

1967

January 8, 1967

The Commandant, Gen. Green, visits Hill 55.

Mid-January 1967

Delta Co. continues to conduct numerous platoon and squad patrols and night ambushes. During one of these engagements north of Hill 55, acting 1st Platoon Commander SSgt. Fernandez and another Marine are seriously wounded.

January 27-29, 1967

Delta Co. is OpCon to the 2/5 Marines in support of support Operation Tuscaloosa north of An Hoa in the "Arizona" area. The Company is helilifted by CH 46 choppers south of the Thu Bon River near the vicinity of Le Lam (3). In the proceeding days, the Marines of 2/5 have engaged the VC Main-Force in heavy fighting throughout the area. Delta Co. sweeps the area looking for the retreating VC but encounters only sporadic fire.

January 31, 1967

In an early morning attack, Delta Co. (1st and 3rd Platoons) through Duc Ky (2) forces a VC Main-force unit to retreat towards the La Tho River south and east of Hill 55. This is a very successful operation. To establish predawn positions outside the ville, an early AM river crossing north of Hill 55 precedes the attack by Delta Co. The Charlie Co. blocking force (La Huan (2)) observes 16 VC attempting to swim the Ai Nghai River to escape and has a turkey shoot as they ambush the fleeing VC, killing 14. Delta Co. also kills one VC during their advance.

At midday, a squad of 3rd Platoon is sent out to the Charlie Co. ambush site. En route, this squad comes under fire from around La Huan (2) by the remnants of the VC Main-Force unit involved in the early morning fight. The squad engages the VC and takes several casualties. As reaction force, the remainder of 3rd Platoon still on Hill 55 mounts up on amtracs and proceeds to the area of the firefight. The fighting continues, and two Marines are killed -- the artillery FO and his radioman. More are wounded, including the 3rd Platoon Commander, Lt. Murray. The following artillery Marines from Alpha Battery 1st Battalion 13th Marines are killed:

2nd Lt. John Filpi, 1/31/67, 1967 - Killed by gunshot south of Hill 55

LCpl. Edward Hanshaw, 1/31/67 - Killed by gunshot south of Hill 55

Because of the number of helicopters shot down in the area, no medevac flight is made, and the wounded and killed are transported by amtracs back to Hill 55 for evacuation.

Hotel Co., 2/1 comes under heavy fire from a Main-Force VC unit in the Thuy Bo area. VC weapons include a 50-caliber machine gun and many automatic rifles. The Thuy Bo hamlets are located on the boundary between the 1/26 and 2/1 TAOR, and both Marine battalions patrolled a portion of Thuy Bo village. On the following morning, 2/1 Marines assault Thuy Bo. Marine casualties for the two-day fight are 6 KIA and 26 WIA. There are also many civilian casualties.

February 1-3, 1967

Delta Co. is OpCon to 2/4 Marines for Operation Independence west of An Hoa. That morning the company is lifted out on CH 46 choppers to the Independence AO. This operation is commanded by the 9th Marines and involves elements of all three Marine Divisions (1st, 3rd and 5th).

February 3, 1967

Delta Co. is withdrawn from Operation Independence and relieved by 2/4 Marines returning from Okinawa. At this time, the company is OpCon to Task Force XRAY, which is the ad-hoc command structure for the remaining four battalions of the 1st MarDiv at Chu Lai. CH 46 helicopters lift the company to Da Nang air transit center for a C-130 flight to Chu Lai. There is no advance word of this event.

The mission of Delta Co. is to work the base areas of the Chu Lai TAOR while Task Force XRAY units are engaged in Operation Desoto, which started on January 27, 1967.

Early February 1967

At Chu Lai, the first position for Delta Co. is the CP covering the northern coastal approaches to the Chu Lai vital area. This CP is located in and around secure hamlets close to the Chu Lai airstrip. This area is totally different from Hill 55 TAOR, where the war is all the time and everywhere. At Chu Lai the people are more prosperous and seem friendly. The Delta Co. Marines are amazed; instead of being shot off Hill 55, the company is spending Tet 1967 among these friendly Vietnamese. Some of the families even invite Marines to join them to share a Tet holiday meal.

February 12-22, 1967

There is a continued rise in VC Main-Force activity around the Hill 55 TAOR, and Operation Stone is conducted by 2/1 Marines. The first part is a sweep of Go Noi Island, south of the 1/26 TAOR, conducted by elements of three battalions. The second part is a sweep of Thuy Bo, which is conducted by 2/1 reinforced. Operation Stone claims 291 VC killed with 9 Marine KIA and 76 WIA.

Some Delta Co. Marines still on Hill 55 and from H&S Co. Marines serve as a blocking force along the River and villages east of the water point bridge near Duc Ky (1).

February 14, 1967

On Valentine's Day, Jane Mansfield visits Hill 55. A stage is built with proper decorations, and LtCol. Newton is the master of ceremonies. Unfortunately, the Delta Co. Marines in Chu Lai miss the show.

Mid-February 1967

The second position for Delta Co. is the CP south of Chu Lai. This is a peninsula area with fishing villages and sandy beaches. The VC is active, and the 1st platoon takes some casualties.

Late February 1967

The next CP for Delta Co. is inland west of Route 1. The truck convoy into the CP hits mines and two trucks are destroyed. Fortunately, there are no serious injuries except for ringing ears and shrapnel. Actor Robert Mitchum makes a visit to the area and talks to some of the company. A series of long night patrols and sweeps through the foothills is conducted. Delta Co. also provides security for truck convoys to Quang Ngai City to the south.

March 5-7, 1967

All good things must come to an end, and Delta Co. is flown back to Da Nang and returned to Hill 55. During the company's absence, someone has gone through the platoon area, ransacked the personal gear stored in Willie Peter bags, and pretty much made a mess of things.

Several transfers are made for rotation date mixing. After these changes, there are fewer than 30 of the original Delta 1/26 Marines left. It has been one year since BLT 1/26 started its training cycle at Camp Pendleton and seven months since the battalion's first landing in Vietnam. The stay on Hill 55 is only several days' duration; just long enough to get new boots, utilities, visit a few people, and make a couple patrols.

March 8, 1967

Delta Co. is OpCon to the 2/26 Marines to defend the northwest Da Nang TAOR while three companies of 1/26 are committed to Operation Prairie I & II. The company is trucked to Hill 190 north of Da Nang near Cho Mai. This village lies just south of the Cu De River. Hill 190 is the site of an old French outpost and the VC, wild boars and tigers inhabit the area. A Popular Force CAC unit is located nearby. The 1st and 3rd Platoons operate from this location while the 2nd Platoon is located on Hill 60 which is southwest of Hill 190.

Mid-March 1967

Delta Co. immediately begins patrols through the villages east of Hill 190. The VC are active in this area. Day patrols and night ambushes are initiated. Mine sweep activities are conducted every day. The 2nd Platoon is located in a sparsely populated area on Hill 60. Squad sized patrols are also conducted from this position.

March 10, 1967

A fire team ambush east of Hill 190 near Ap Thuy Tu (1) observes a VC approaching on a trail engaged the enemy. The following Delta Co. Marine was killed:

LCpl Lester Bell, 3/10/67 - Killed by gunshot east of Hill 190

Several days later another Marine is badly wounded by a mine in this area.

March 17, 1967

A 2nd Platoon patrol northwest of Hill 60 engages an enemy force of unknown size. The squad engages the enemy and called an artillery fire mission. The following Delta Co. Marine was killed:

Pvt. Lawrence Barisic, 3/17/67 - Killed by gunshot in the vicinity of Hill 60

March 18, 1967

A tank on the daily mine sweep hits a mine. Five Delta Co. Marines are wounded.

March 30, 1967

A Delta Co. ambush observes two VC crossing the river. The ambush opens fire and during the following sweep finds a grenade and rifle.

Late March 1967

The 1st and 3rd Platoons of Delta Co. conducts an amphibious operation (sort of) with amtracs. The amtracs carries the two platoons back up the Cu De River, where the Marines go ashore and proceed to sweep the area of a suspected VC camp. The VC do not put up a fight. Canoes are found at the site and a large cache of food and ammunition is discovered and brought back Hill 190 by the amtracs.

In the second part of this action, 1st Platoon proceeds to climb hill 444 in search of a French-Vietnamese gunrunner in the area. Hill 444 is north of the Cu De River. After that hump, the 1st Platoon is lifted by helicopters to a mountaintop on the seacoast dubbed "Stud Mountain." Unfortunately, the Marines have a friendly fire incident with a swift boat and a Navy barge. The good news is that no damage is done.

Delta Co. turns in reliable M-14 rifles for the less reliable M-16 rifles, which have a tendency to jam due to a stuck round in the chamber. To clear the rifle, a Marine has to assemble the cleaning rod and poke it through its barrel. The word is given to make sure that the chambers of the rifles are very clean. The new M-16s are referred to as Mattel Toys.

Early April 1967

Delta Co. returns to Hill 55. During the company's absence from the area, the VC are able to build new punji pits, place more mines, and to dig new trenches and spider holes. This results in numerous casualties for Delta Company as patrol activity recommences in the vicinity of Hill 55.

April 22, 1967

Delta Co. is OpCon to 2/1 and is transported by truck to the 2/1 CP located northeast of Hill 55 near the Village of Phong Luc (2). The 2/1 CP is located east of Highway 1 and accessed by a military road called Anderson Trail. South of the intersection of Highway 1 and Anderson Trail is a RF compound on Highway 1 at the Than Quit River crossing. The company's assignment is to patrol the 2/1 area while this battalion is deployed south on Operation Union in the Que Son Valley and Nui Loc Son.

Late April 1967

Delta Co. patrols both sides of Route 1 and along the 1/26 TAOR boundary with day patrols and night ambushes. The 2nd Platoon is at the RF fort when it is mortared. During this incident, there are one ARVN KIA and two Marines WIA.

May 4, 1967

1/26 Marines are given the word to prepare for movement north to join the rest of the 3rd MarDiv. At the same time, the 1st MarDiv is being replaced at Chu Lai by units of the US Army Americal Division. Delta Co. is returned to Hill 55 to transition 1/7 Marines as they arrive from Chu Lai to replace 1/26.

May 6, 1967

Delta Co is lifted by CH 46 helicopters to Phu Bia as forward staging. The company is taken to an area away from the Phu Bia base, where they dig in and wait for the word. The "original word" is that 1/26 will provide security for engineers building a road right across Vietnam to Laos. This is to be called Operation Cumberland. However, the new word is Khe Sanh. At that time, the hill fights are still ongoing.