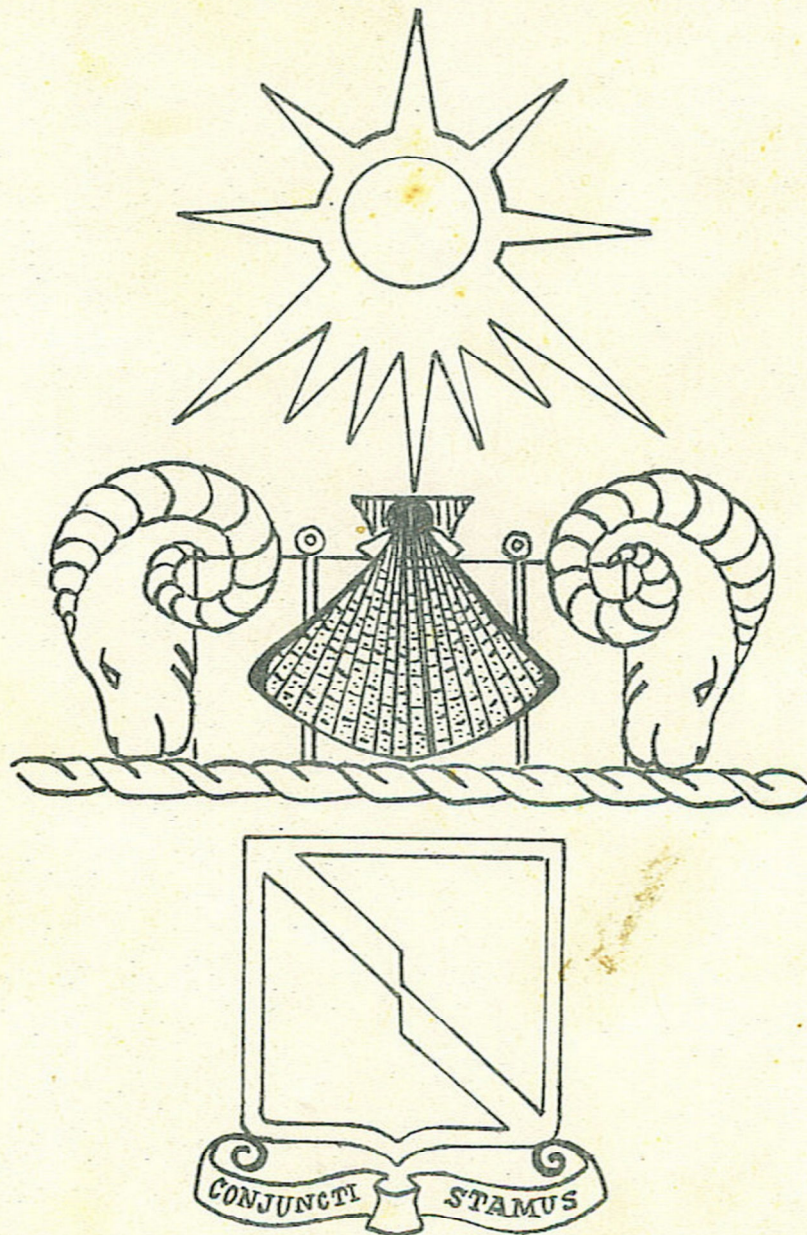


A LEGACY OF HONOR



6th BATTALION, 27th ARTILLERY

3rd Edition - April 2015

A Note of Explanation

On June 26, 2005 I received the following email from Fred Holbrook:

"I have 'A LEGACY OF HONOR 6THBATTALION, 27TH ARTILLERY', By SP4 Paul R. Frederick, 15 June 1967, Phuoc Vinh, Republic Of Vietnam given to me by my brother [Jerry Mike] who was in 'A' Battery - spending most of his time as ammo runner truck driver."

In response to my email Fred wrote in part:

"The publication is 58 typed pages ... written by SP4 Paul R. Frederick dated 15 June 1967, while on duty at Headquarters 6/27 ARTY, Phuoc Vinh, Vietnam. It is a history beginning in WWI and ends in 1967... Thought that the booklet might fill in the History page on your website. My brother Jerry Mike was with the battery from 1966-1967."

After having emailed fifty-eight pages to me with a few of the usual expected snafus, Fred wrote on August 1, 2005:

"I am glad to have saved the document, Legacy Of Honor. I have looked for the 6/27th ARTY on the Internet for years. My brother was assigned to Ft. Carson, Colorado to finish out his two years active duty time. He was in a company that was training and drilling to go and serve in Viet. Nam and they did not need an experienced person and were indifferent to his memories of Lessons Learned.

He left the battery with a swagger stick and a bong."

Note: The originals of each page of the history were tattooed with that classic Quan Loi orange dirt and printed on yellow paper or at least paper that yellowed from the 30 plus years. The PDF pages have been cleaned up and the paper "whitened as much as possible in the event that you want to print copies of this history. Anyone desiring copies of the original orange tinted pages should download the original jpeg pages

August, 2005

John Wavra

Webmaster, www.quanloi.org

PREFACE TO THIS 3RD EDITION

This, for all intents and purposes, is the third edition of A Legacy of Honor. The last edition uploaded to www.quanloi.org in 2005 consisted of jpg picture file copies emailed to me by Fred Holbrook of his brother, Jerry Mike Holbrook's original copy. In the rush to make this "History of the 6th Battalion 27th Artillery" available as quickly as possible on the website, the jpg files were combined and printed as one pdf file. Groups of pages were made available for easy download. This meant that what you got was not a searchable document, but rather pages in a graphical format, i.e. pictures of the original pages. It worked, but it was not satisfactory.

It has long been a goal of mine to re-type the entire history as a searchable text document. Well, it was a long process that was not without its benefits, in that it at last forced me to read the entire document while typing it from the first to the last word. I have tried to remain as faithful to the original document with this copy, correcting only minor errors where discovered. Due to the differences used by SP4 Frederick's manual typewriter page layout and today's computer edition there may be some slight differences in page numbering. In this edition footnotes have been numbered consecutively rather than by section.

SP4 Paul R. Frederick's History of the 6/27th Artillery is a remarkable document, especially when you consider the conditions of where and when it was researched and written – on the battlefield per se – Phuoc Vinh, Vietnam in 1966 and 1967. Regrettably SP4 Frederick's history ends in the middle of 1967. The 6/27th Artillery remained in Vietnam for another four years serving in heroic ways. No history of these remaining years has yet to come to light. Perhaps one day one will.

John A. Wavra
Webmaster, www.quanloi.org
April 14, 2015

FORWARD

This volume is dedicated to those men who served in the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery and its parent units. The heritage of this organization is long and valorous, spanning more than thirty years of stateside duty, seven World War II campaigns and the present conflict in Vietnam. It is a history of which every participant should be justly proud. We should remember, however, that the outstanding accomplishments of the "United We Stand" Battalion would not have been achieved without the valor, diligence and dedicated labor of every man. It is you, the individual soldier who has created, truly, a "Legacy of Honor". I salute you all.

A special note of thanks should be given here to SP4 Paul R. Frederick, whose diligent research and scholarship enabled this volume to be the comprehensive work that it is. He handled this project alone from start to finish, spending long hours in research and composition. The results speak for themselves.

(SIGNATURE HERE OF)

EDWARD C. O'CONNOR
LTC, Artillery
Commanding

PART ONE

PROGRESS AND HONOR 1918-1965

The year 1918 saw the United States deeply embroiled in a World War. The European balance of power, which for most of the 19th century had kept that continent tolerably free of large conflicts, finally collapsed in 1914, resulting in World War I. Eventually almost every nation on the European Continent had become involved. The United States, secure behind its protective wall of ocean, at first adopted a course of isolationism, preferring to let the European powers fight it out amongst themselves. The nation soon found, however, that its ties with the Allied powers were stronger than originally assumed. Public sentiment was clearly on the side of England and France. When the Germans perpetrated a series of warlike incidents against American shipping, the citizenry became incensed. Ever depending economic ties with the allies brought America still closer to entry into the war. Finally, when it became apparent that our support and become necessary for the Allied cause to win, President Wilson brought the United States into the war so that "the world would be made safe for democracy".

The US Army was unprepared to enter into actual conflict. It was woefully short of men and equipment, and was for the most part untested in battle. The draft was initiated to bring the manpower level up to the required standard. Purchases of munitions and war goods increased manifold. Old units were re-equipped and enlarged, and many new units were formed. One of these units was an organization known as Battery F, 27th Field Artillery. It was organized at Camp McClellan, Alabama on August 2, 1918 as an element of the 9th Division.¹ It was from this organization that the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery is descended.

America's entry into the war turned the tide of battle in favor of the Allies. Their enthusiasm and fighting skill soon put the Germans to the rout. Hostilities ceased, and the armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. Battery F had remained at Camp McClellan throughout the entire war period.

With the end of the conflict the Army was reduced to a fraction of its former size. Once again the Americans began to feel secure behind their protective oceans. They had just fought and won "the war to end all wars;" the League of Nations now stood watch over the world situation to settle all potential conflicts at the conference table rather than on the battlefield. A large Army was felt to be unnecessary; consequently many units were drastically reduced in size or

¹ HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty ltr, AKCHO-CA-27-R, Subj: History of the 27th Artillery, dtd 22 Oct 63. P.1.

disbanded completely. Battery F did not escape this axe; it was disbanded and demobilized on the 8th of February 1919, at Camp McClellan.²

Throughout the 1920's and 1930's the size of the Army remained at a low level. The spirit of isolationism had again reappeared and effectively stifled the few proponents of preparedness. America's interests were turned inward during this period. Even during the 1930's, when the rise of Hitler and Mussolini signaled the beginning of a new period of tenseness in international relations, the government concentrated its efforts towards solving internal problems rather than strengthening its armed forces.

During this period Battery F went through several changes in status that mirrored the changing attitudes towards the military. On March 25, 1923 it was taken off demobilized status and again reconstituted in the Regular Army. However, it was designated as an inactive unit which meant that the change was mostly for records purposes and had little meaning in terms of men and equipment. Fourteen years later, on October 1, 1937, it was relieved from assignment to the 9th Division and inactivated.³

Events in Europe deteriorated rapidly in the late 1930's. Hitler's invasion of Poland in August, 1939 precipitated the Second World War of the century. By the end of 1940 Hitler controlled all of continental Europe, with only the British Isles escaping his grasp. The hard pressed English then called for American assistance. The lend-lease program and other economic measures were the result, with actual American entry into the war coming after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

The Second World War again caught the US Army unprepared. Once again millions of men were drafted into the armed services. The war industries began producing prodigious amounts of war material. A vast military training program was begun, for increased technology required advanced skills of the Army's soldiers. Enlarge, refurbish, mobilize. The Army worked overtime preparing itself for future battles.

Battery F, 27th Field Artillery found itself in the midst of these feverish preparations. It was recalled to active duty on July 15, 1940 and was absorbed by Battery C, 27th Field Artillery Battalion, which was then assigned to the 1st Armored Division, then at Ft Knox, Kentucky.⁴ The years 1940-1942 saw the 27th Artillery Battalion busily engaged in training its men at Ft. Knox, Ft Dix and in Louisiana and North Carolina. In the spring of 1942 the battalion received its

² Ibid. p. 1.

³ Ibid. p. 1.

⁴ Ibid. p. 1.

guns, 105mm self- propelled howitzers. Shortly thereafter it was shipped to Ireland with other elements of the 1st Armored Division.⁵ Further training took place in Ireland that summer.

The first major offensive begun by the Allies in the European theater was a series of amphibious landings on the North African coast. These provided Battery C with its first taste of combat. The events that followed thereafter wrote one of the finest chapters in the history of the 27th Artillery.

Battery C was designated as part of Task Force Green, commanded by Colonel Paul M. Robinett, which landed on the beach at Mersa Bou Zedjar at 0136 hours, November 8, 1942. This was approximately 30 miles west of Oran, in Algeria. The remainder of the 27th Artillery Battalion landed at a point 20 miles east of Oran, as part of Task Force Red, Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, under the command of Brigadier General Lunsford H. Oliver.⁶

Approximately a month later the entire battalion found itself in Tunisia. It had aided in capturing a sector straddling the Mejeg-Tbourba road. Batteries B and C were ordered to support this line, which was in an exposed area near the town of Medjeg-el-bab, Tunisia. On the 6th of December, 1942 Battery C's area was strafed by 10 Messerschmitts for 10 minutes. Immediately thereafter a German force of some 30 tanks and truck-borne infantry was spotted heading for an area nearby known as "Hill 148," and for the town of Djebel-el-gueseaa. This enemy force tried to penetrate between the Americans and their line of withdrawal. Battery C, firing in support, found that its fires had drawn the enemy armored force onto its own position. The battery was forced to withdraw into a natural cul-de-sac or blind alley. All the battery guns fired direct fire into the superior force, but to no avail; for at 1120 hours the tanks overran the battery's position. They passed completely through the battery area, then returned and passed back through the battery's position again, raking it with fire.

Eventually all the battery's 105mm guns were destroyed by shelling from the tanks. Every gun continued in action until the piece was destroyed or the gun crew dispersed, injured or killed by machine gun fire. The last section seen in action discharged its gun simultaneously with fire from a tank. Each was destroyed by the other's direct hit.

At this point Battery B arrived on the scene. It fired directly at the tanks causing their withdrawal. This enabled C Battery to reassemble its scattered remnants. During the fight all members of the battery remained at their position until killed, injured or their equipment destroyed. The battery lost all of its half-track mounted 105mm howitzers, but destroyed eight German Mar IV tanks.

⁵ Ibid. p. 1.

⁶ Ibid. p. 2.

For this action Battery C was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation and the Battery Commander, Captain William H. Harrison, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.⁷

Withdrawal of American units from Taborba began a few days later. The remnants of the 2nd Hampshires, together with remnants of other units, moved south along the river bank and thence towards Taborba Gap. The column of vehicles was subjected to heavy enemy artillery and machine gun fire. A few vehicles at the head of the column were hit and set on fire, causing the column to stop. The bombardment then intensified and further forward movement became almost impossible. Eventually field guns, trucks, tractors and much ammunition were abandoned at the site, with the troops infiltrating across the countryside in small groups to Tebourba Gap. Fortunately, the surrounding hills had already been cleared and secured by Company C, US 6th Armored Infantry with strong supporting fire from Battery A, 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. This "sharp, short action" had occurred the previous morning.⁸

The 27th Artillery, which had lost 13 of its 18 105mm howitzers in December 1942, was in drastic need of replacement guns. In a short time four 105 mm self-propelled howitzers, plus several towed, did in fact arrive. The Battalion was thus able to accompany the 1st Armored Division to Morocco for a period of rest and recuperation in May 1943.⁹

The North African campaign having been brought to a successful conclusion, the Battalion next saw action in Italy. The night of September 9, 1943 saw the men of the Battalion, along with troops from three different divisions, stage an amphibious landing on the beach at Salerno, Italy. Starting from a transport nine miles offshore, the men of the 27th landed on the southern section of the Salerno beach. They continued inland one-half mile under constant strafing from German FW-109 airplanes. In spite of the constant enemy fire they were able to hold their position. Two days later the 105mm howitzers were landed and were able to return enemy fire that night.¹⁰

The Germans staged a bitter counterattack against the Salerno beach-head on the night of September 13-14, 1943. It was noted later that the Americans would probably have been pushed back into the ocean had the 27th's guns

⁷ Ibid, p. 1.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 2-3.

⁹ Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

not been there.¹¹ The fires of the 27th were “of critical importance” in stopping this counterattack. Following this battle the Battalion moved to the north through Eboli, supporting three different divisions, primarily the 45th, as they moved up the peninsula.¹²

The Battalion then participated in the Anzio Campaign, firing in support of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division. At one point the British forces, then near Campoleone station, were preparing a move to the north. The fires of the 27th Artillery enabled the British 1st Division to gain a line of departure. In another battle at Anzio, the 27th's preparation fires were vitally important in exterminating a strong enemy force caught in an Allied ladder barrage.¹³

The Battalion followed the advancing Allied forces as they continued their march into Northern Italy. In crossing the Arno line, the 27th supported Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division. This support continued through the crossing of the Gothic line. The Battalion was in general support of the Division for the crossing of the Po. It then became part of Task Force Howze, which left Castiglione on the 27th of April, 1945 for Bergamo. Upon arrival there, it then continued on to Brivio, a village on the Adda River about halfway between Bergamo and Como.¹⁴ The 27th did not see any more action after World War II, for the progress of the war elsewhere soon brought the European conflict to an end. While it had been engaged in the Italian campaign, a huge force under General Dwight D. Eisenhower had landed at Normandy, in France, and had succeeded in bringing the German forces into submission. After this Army and a similar force from Russia had occupied the German homeland, the war in Europe was over. The enemy had been completely vanquished.

The 27th Artillery had compiled a long and enviable record of achievements during World War II. By the end of the war it had spent more than 550 days in firing positions, had fired a total of 380,115 rounds of 105mm ammunition, and had more combat action than any other single unit in the 1st Armored Division.¹⁵

Any discussion of the record of this battalion's performance during World War II is not complete unless it includes a discussion of its most illustrious Battery Commander, Major William H. Harrison. Born in Louisville, Ken-

¹¹ Ibid, p. 3.

¹² Ibid, p. 3.

¹³ Ibid, p.3.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 4.

tucky, and educated at Princeton University, the future here accepted a commission in the Army Reserves in 1935. He went on active duty on May 31, 1941 as Battery Operator, 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion at Ft Knox, Kentucky. He left the continental United States with his unit in May, 1942, and was promoted to Captain at the same time. Captain Harrison was appointed as Commander of Battery C, 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion during the Tunisian campaign mentioned earlier. He was captured by the Germans during the fight of December 6, 1942 and was a prisoner of war of the Italian government until the 31st of October 1942 when he escaped and returned to allied military control. Captain Harrison was then sent to the United States and became, first, a student at the Armor School at Ft Knox, Kentucky, then an instructor at the same school. He then attended the University of California at Berkeley until mid-1945 when once again he went overseas, this time to fight in the India-Burma Theater. Following the end of the war he was assigned to Camp Atterbury, Indiana until he was released from active duty. After being promoted to Major in the Army Reserve in 1947, he was discharged on December 30, 1952. Major Harrison was awarded the Silver Star "for gallantry in action against the enemy near La Senia, Algeria."¹⁶

He also won the Distinguished Service Cross "for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy."¹⁷ He also won the European African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with three Bronze Service Stars for participation in this campaign.¹⁸

Following the war many of the organizations sent to Europe remained on the Continent to serve as occupation forces in Germany. Postwar agreements had divided that war-ravaged nation into four sectors, each controlled by one of the four major Allied powers (England, France, Russian and the United States). The 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, after being re-designated the 27th Constabulary Squadron, became one of the many units occupying the American sector. This was begun on May 1, 1946 and remained in effect until December 30, 1948. At that time it was once again renamed the 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, reassigned to the 1st Armored Division, and placed on inactive status.¹⁹

The Truman administration, like most post-war administrations, was forced by public opinion to reduce the size of the armed forces. This drawdown was done in spite of the fact that the Cold War had entered upon the world scene, presenting a strong Communist threat to the democratic nations of the

¹⁶ GO No. 6, HQ, Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, dtd 17 Nov 42.

¹⁷ GO No. 5, Allied Force Headquarters, APO 512, dtd 12 Jan 43.

¹⁸ Ltr, DA AG to 6/27, AGAC-SS-S, Subj: Harrison, William H. 0323218 dtd 22 May 63, p. 1.

¹⁹ History of the 27th Arty, 1963, p. 4.

world. Once again the American people had yielded to their strong wish to “get their boys back home,” and had placed perhaps too much faith in the peace keeping abilities of the fledgling United Nations. At any rate, when the Korean War broke out in 1950, the US Army was faced once again with a massive re-mobilization and rebuilding program.

The 27th Artillery’s history reflects this national sequence. Though inactivated in 1948, it was recalled into the Active Army with rest of the 1st Armored Division in March, 1951. From that date until December, 1952 the Battalion was engaged in a training mission at Ft Hood, Texas. Between December, 1952 and July, 1953 the Battalion was relegated to caretaker status, with limited number of personnel.²⁰

With the end of the conflict in Korea (July 1953) the Cold War resumed. Now, however, the United States was aware that they had to maintain a constantly alert defense posture. The Soviet Union had by this time perfected their nuclear weaponry. The threat of a nuclear holocaust, one that would render the entire world unfit for habitation by man, became very real. The only way to deter this disaster, it seemed, was for the United States to maintain an armed force so strong that any attack by the enemy would become so costly for them as to be unthinkable. Thus the Army, in contrast to its actions in previous peacetime periods, remained at a high level of manpower and readiness throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s.

The 27th Artillery, true to form, played an active role in this national sequence. Following reorganization in July, 1953 the Battalion was restored to its training mission with the 1st Armored Division. While engaged in this mission, the Battalion took part in a number of training exercises, specifically Exercise Longhorn (1952), Exercise Spearhead (1953), and Exercise Sagebrush (1955). After completing the last of these, the Battalion was transferred to Ft Polk, Louisiana where it was de-activated in February, 1957.²¹

In 1957 the Army reorganized its elements into what was called the regimental system. Under this system the 27th Artillery Battalion became the 27th Artillery Regiment. Subordinate elements were then constituted under the regimental banner. The first of these was the 2d Howitzer Battalion, 27th Artillery, which was reactivated and re-designated in October, 1957 and was assigned to the 3d Armored Division in Friedberg, Germany. Though little information is available on it, the 1st Howitzer Battalion, 27th Artillery was activated during this same period and was stationed at Ft Benning, Georgia until 1963 when it was

²⁰ Ibid, p. 4.

²¹ Ibid, p. 4.

de-activated.²² The third organization in the 27th Artillery was the 6th Howitzer Battalion, 27th Artillery. We will explore the history of this organization in detail.

The 6th Howitzer Battalion, 27th Artillery was activated on August 23, 1962 at Ft Chaffee, Arkansas.²³ The first man (an officer) was assigned on the 8th of October, and the first morning report was submitted on that date. The first Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Paul T. Long, was assigned and joined on the 26th of October. The following this officers and men were assigned and joined at a rapid rate. By January 29, 1963 the Battalion had 13 officers, one warrant officer and 105 enlisted men, with an additional seven officers and 37 men slated for arrival very shortly thereafter.²⁴ Each of the subordinate units that comprised the Battalion were activated in the following few months. The dates of activation for each battery were as follows:

Headquarters & Headquarters Battery	- 23 Aug 62
"A: Battery	- 6 Feb 63
Service Battery	- 6 Feb 63
"B" Battery	- 1 May 63
"C" Battery	- 4 Sep 63 ²⁵

Formal training in the Battalion was begun in accordance with a prescribed schedule. Each battery upon activation entered into an interim training period until it reached 75% of its assigned strength. Upon reaching that level, a period of more formalized training was initiated. Each battery was brought to full strength before the next one began training. Thus the batteries attained operational readiness at different times.²⁶

Early activities were of course limited due to the shortage of personnel. The initial effort was directed towards the improvements of the buildings and grounds. The S-4 opened accounts with post and technical services, property books were prepared, equipment (including 8" towed howitzers) was drawn, training aids were ordered and work orders prepared and submitted. Six enlisted men with clerical MOS's were sent to clerk-typist school. Considerable early effort was directed towards obtaining publications.²⁷

²² Ibid, p. 4.

²³ Ltr, CCMP to 6/27, Subj: Unit History, dtd 23 Aug 66, Incl 1 (Lineage and Honors, 6th Bn, 27th Arty).

²⁴ Ltr, AKCHO-CA-27-R, 6/27 to CG III Corps Arty, Subj: Battalion Activities, dtd 29 Jan 63, p. 1.

²⁵ Annual Historical Summary (AKCHO-CA-27-R), HQ, 6th Bn (8") (SP), 27th Arty, 1 Jan 63 – 31 Dec 63, -p. 1.

²⁶ Battalion Activities, p. 1.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

Mid-August 1963 saw the battalion take part in its first training exercise. Code-named Operation Swift Strike III, the exercise was staged by the US Strike Command. The Battalion sent 8 officers and 60 enlisted men on these maneuvers. These personnel were attached to other subordinate units of the III Corps Artillery.²⁸

The year 1963 also saw the 6/27th celebrate its founding on the first anniversary of its activation. This celebration, called Organization Day was scheduled for 23 August 1963. Due to the fact that many of the Battalion's personnel were absent on that date (due to their participation in Operation Swift Strike III), the Organization Day Celebrations was postponed to the 27th and 28th of September. A Military Stakes Competition was held on these dates; this included contests in assembly of weapons, tire changing on one-quarter ton vehicles, erection of radio antennas, erection of command post tents and dismounted drill. Battery "B" was selected as the winner. A parade, open house and various games were also held.²⁹ It should be pointed out that the date for subsequent Organization Day Celebration was changed in accordance with a request from the Office of the Chief of Military History, who requested that the date selected for this celebration reflect regimental, not battalion, significance.³⁰ Through correspondence with the other battalions in the regiment, August 2 (the anniversary of the organization of the parent unit – Battery F, 27th Field Artillery – on August 2, 1918) was selected as Organization Day.³¹

A series of inspections were held during 1963. A Command Maintenance Management Inspection was held on the 9th and 10th of October. The overall rating of the Battalion was satisfactory. A team from III Corps in Ft Hood, Texas conducted an Adjutant General Inspection November 18-23, 1963. The overall rating was excellent. In addition, the inspection team made the following important observations: that the Battalion was not capable of performing its mission because of a shortage of personnel and of certain items of equipment, that some training objectives were not met, and that an effective chain of command had been established.³²

The year 1964 saw the Battalion reorganized and re-designated. General Order Number 22, Headquarters, Ft Chaffee, Arkansas, dated 19 March 1964 designated the Battalion as the 6th Battalion (8") (SP), 27th Artillery dropping the word "Howitzer" from the title. It was also reorganized in accordance with TO&E 6-445E. The Battalion was assigned to the III USA Corps and at-

²⁸ Annual Historical Summary, 1963, p. 5.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 5

³⁰ 1st Ind, OCMR, Subj: Selection of Unit Day, dtd 9 Jul 64 to Ltr, 6/27 to OCMH, same subject, datd 26 Jun 64.

³¹ Ltr, OCMH to 6/27, Subj: Unit Day Certificate, dtd 16 Jul 65.

³² Report, HQ, III Corps & Ft Hood Office of the IG, Subj: Annual General Inspection, FY 19674, of the 6th Bn, 27th Arty, dtd 5 Dec 65, extracted in Annual Historical Summary (AK-CHO-CA-27-R), HQ, 6th Ben, 27th Arty, 1 Jan 63 to 31 Dec 63, p. 7.

tached to Headquarters, III Corps Artillery with station at Ft Chaffee, Arkansas. Its priority status assignment was C-3.³³

The training program of the Battalion was greatly accelerated, beginning with the arrival on January 17-19, 1964 of approximately 155 men from basic training centers. The Battalion then put these men through an eight week cycle of AIT training; teaching fire direction, communications, cannoneers drill and survey. This training program was interrupted, however, by Operation Desert Strike.³⁴

Exercise Desert Strike was a mammoth training operation in the Mohave Desert. The Battalion was included on the troop list for this exercise as "a player unit with Joint Task Force Phoenix attached to III Corps Artillery." The assigned strength of the Battalion at that time was 23 officers, 3 warrant officers and 419 enlisted men. The period March 21, 1964 to May 3, 1964 was devoted to preparation and training for desert operations. Some essential items of equipment and certain individuals with critical skills were borrowed from other organizations and integrated into the Battalion for this exercise.

The Battalion left Ft Chaffee on May 3, 1965 on two passenger trains, arriving at Utting, Arizona 44 hours later. The advance party had preceded them by seven days. The equipment train arrived on May 7th. Two M11F towed howitzers were assigned to each battery, with MB tractors as prime movers. All of the M8 tractors eventually broke down in the desert sands, forcing the Battalion to utilize 5-ton trucks as prime movers. During the two-week exercise, the Battalion displaced 21 times, fired in support of the 2nd Armored Division, and crossed the Colorado River on a floating bridge on 18 May. There were no casualties, one minor injury (a soldier was bitten by a rat) and three vehicle accidents during the exercise. The Battalion was attached to the 2nd Howitzer Battalion (155mm)(T), 31st Artillery and Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 31st Artillery was attached to the 6/27th. Altogether the Battalion logged over 125,000 vehicular miles during this exercise. The return train trip brought the Battalion home, complete, on June 9, 1964.³⁵

On July 14, 1964 the Battalion received orders to move from Ft Chaffee, Arkansas to Ft Bliss, Texas.³⁶ Strength at the time was 26 officers, 3 warrant officers and 519 enlisted men. All TO&E equipment and personnel departed Ft Chaffee for their new duty station on the 23rd of July. The equipment was shipped by rail with the personnel traveling by air. Upon arrival at Ft Bliss, an area in the Logan Heights section of the fort was selected as the Battalion's new home.³⁷ The Battalion was attached to the 6th Artillery Group (Air De-

³³ Annual Historical Supplement (AKBAASG-W-R), 1 Jan 64 to 31 Dec 64, HQ 6th Ben (8th)(SP), 27th Arty, p. 3.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 3.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

³⁶ LO M-7-16, HQ, Ft Chaffee, Ark., dtd 14 Jul 64.

³⁷ Annual Historical Supplement, 1964, p. 5.

fense).³⁸ It was also attached to the 1st Air Defense Guided Missile Brigade (Training) for rations purposes.³⁹

As soon as the men and equipment had become settled in their new home, the Battalion worked at bringing itself up to an operational posture through normal training operations. The first battery Army Training Test was given to "A" Battery on December 8, 1964 to Battery "B" on December 10, 1964 and to Battery "C" on December 14, 1964⁴⁰ These tests continued through January, 1965, all resulting in a determination of "Combat Ready." Following the conclusion of these tests the Battalion received the new M110 self-propelled howitzers. After considerable training with these new guns the Battalion was administered a battalion test March, 1965. Again the Battalion showed itself to be "Combat Ready." Continuous training was conducted thereafter, some involving TPI procedures. In June the 6/27th successfully completed an MTEX consisting of preparing and loading all equipment for overseas movement.⁴¹

³⁸ GO No. 80, HQ, USAADCEN, Ft Bliss, Tex, dtd 19 Aut 64.

³⁹ GO No. 70, HQ USAADCEN, Ft Bliss, Tex, datd 31 Jul 64.

⁴⁰ Unit Historical Report, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, dtd 15 Jun 66, p. 1.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 1.

PART TWO

DESTINATION VIETNAM

The year 1965 saw the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery busily engaged in improving its new home in Ft Bliss and in bringing its level of readiness for combat to ever higher levels. However, the Battalion's days as a stateside unit engaged in peacetime pursuits had become numbered, for events in the far off country of Vietnam were soon to profoundly affect its course and history.

Vietnam, a small country in Southeast Asia, had been troubled for years by a Communist insurgency movement. Led by a fiery patriot named Ho Chi Minh, a revolutionary organization known as the Viet Minh had been trying to overthrow the status quo and establish their own government for Vietnam ever since the Japanese occupation of that country in World War II. In 1945, in fact, Ho had succeeded in wresting control of the country from the Japanese puppet, the Emperor Bao Dai. When the French returned to Vietnam to re-establish its colonial control over that country, the Viet Minh saw that their only hope for a place in the future of Vietnam was through military conflict (a series of attempted accommodations with the French having failed). Thus, in December 1946 the "Indochina War" was begun.

The war lasted eight years, from 1946 to 1954. Ho's rebels capitalized on the anti-colonial feelings of the people. Their cause took on the added luster of a war of liberation from the supposed French oppressors. The French, meanwhile, encouraged the anti-communist Vietnamese nationalists to side with them in the struggle against the Viet Minh. This maneuver failed in spite of the fact that France granted self-government for Vietnam within the French union in 1949. The dissident nationalists refused to unite behind the French appointed chief of State, the Emperor Bao Dai. They felt that the French had not offered complete independence.⁴²

In 1950 the French were defeated in a number of strategic locations due to the fact that the Viet Minh had begun to receive assistance from Communist China. The communist advance was temporarily halted in 1951 with the arrival of increased material aid for the French from the United States.

The years 1952-1954 saw the French position become precarious. The Viet Minh, using the techniques of guerrilla warfare, increasingly gained control of the countryside while the more conventional French forces were restricted to the larger towns and places accessible by road. At this point, negotiations aimed at achieving a cease-fire were begun at Geneva Switzerland. France, the Soviet Union, Communist China, Laos, Cambodia, the State of Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (the Viet Minh) and the United States were

⁴² Fact Sheet - 2, IHQ, III Field Force, AVX-10, Subj: South Vietnam, p. 5.

represented.⁴³ Negotiations at first proved fruitless, for though France had proclaimed Vietnam to be fully independent, the communists still fought on. The Viet Minh then won a convincing victory at Dien Bien Phu. This stunning blow demonstrated to the world how ineffective the French effort had become, and how the French people had become distinctly unconcerned about achieving Vietnamese goals. Indochina had become a liability for France that was depleting its Army and undermining its prestige in Europe and Africa. As a result the negotiations at Geneva reflected the French desire for a cease fire more than the Vietnamese desire for territorial unity. The eventual treaty, signed on July 21, 1954, divided Vietnam into two separate entities, the north governed by the Viet Minh, with a more democratic regime set up in the south. Throughout the Indochina War, American influence was minor. The United States, not wanting to become involved in another Asian conflict so soon after the Korean War, did little more than observe the proceedings in spite of the fact that its delegates were under pressure from home not to give the impression of “approving a surrender to Communism.”⁴⁴

The years following the cease fire sowed the seeds of future problems for Vietnam. Under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, North Vietnam became “a full-fledged Communist state, backed by a strong army and ubiquitous party.”⁴⁵ The government in the South, under Ngo Dinh Diem, was weak, snarled by red tape and unable to cope with the tremendous economic problems that beset the country. Moreover, the people were displeased with Diem’s dictatorial policies and abolition of village councils and open elections. The Hanoi government saw that the Diem regime was so weak that it could easily be overthrown through subversion. It also noted that the American advisers (a huge program of economic and military aid was begun) had succeeded in convincing themselves that Diem was “spectacularly successful” in bringing the country onto solid footing. As the real situation was much worse than the Americans believed, Hanoi may well have concluded that a rebellion might easily succeed before the ponderous American program could get into high gear.⁴⁶ An organization called the National Liberation Front was created in 1960 to accomplish this. Its members became the “Viet Cong.”

Though forced to operate in the underground for a few years, the NLF began its program of open subversion. It concentrated at first on a systematic assassination of village chiefs and other prominent officials. These increased in frequency until in May 1961 President Kennedy stated in both houses of Congress that the Viet Cong had killed more than 4,000 civil officers during the previous year, or about 10 a day.⁴⁷ By isolating the outlying villages from control by the central (i.e. Saigon) government, the Viet Cong were allowed to operate

⁴³ Bernard B. Fall, Vietnam Witness 1953-66 (New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), pp. 51-67.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 71.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 127

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 237-238.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 283

almost at will in the rural areas. By late 1962 the insurgents had extended their control in varying degrees to about 80% of the Vietnamese countryside.⁴⁸ The Diem regime reacted by vastly increasing the size of the armed forces. America provided considerable material support and virtually trained the entire army with its MAAG (Military Assistance Advisory Group) advisers. However, when deployed in tactical situations, it was discovered that this army was trained for "conventional" warfare, rendering it singularly ineffective when fighting guerillas such as the Viet Cong.⁴⁹ Thus the communist terror continued basically unchecked.

President Diem's regime was toppled in 1963 by a military coup. The country was no better off, however, for this government (and a whole series of subsequent governments) proved to be even more inept and weak than its predecessors. National instability, caused by the feuding political and religious factions, was predominant. Meanwhile the Viet Cong increased in numbers, both by recruitment from within South Vietnam and by infiltration from the North. Although the government forces implemented some guerilla tactics, they still could not provide a tolerable degree of security for its people.

As the Viet Cong threat increased, American support of the government of South Vietnam increased also. Washington admitted in March, 1962, that American pilots were flying combat missions in Vietnam. Time magazine stated on May 11, 1962 that the decision to "hold South Viet-Nam at all costs had been made in October, 1961. In February, 1963 American advisers to the Vietnamese Army were authorized to "shoot first." Still, the American commitment was piecemeal, with troops being assigned only as advisers.⁵⁰

The United States' position slowly became intractable. Aircraft and troops began to stream into the little country. On August 2, 1964 an incident occurred which solidified America's intentions in Vietnam. Two US Navy destroyers on patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin (just off the North Vietnamese coast) were attacked by North Vietnamese patrol boats. The US craft repelled two attacks and sank a least two attackers. President Johnson ordered a series of reprisal raids against North Vietnamese shore installations. On August 7th Congress voted a resolution which "left no doubt in anyone's mind as to "America's intentions."⁵¹ It also left no doubt that America could thereafter never renege on its promise without suffering considerable National loss of face throughout the world.

The increased American commitment took the form of a tremendous increase in the number of US troops assigned to Vietnam. From a mid-1965 level of about 60,000 men,⁵² Free World Forces had increased to over 224,000

⁴⁸ Bernard B. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams (New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1963, p. 325.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 325

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 333.

⁵¹ Fall, Witness, p. 337

⁵² Ibid, p. 312.

by the end of that year.⁵³ This is in addition to the ARVN (Army of Vietnam) forces, which by this time had grown to approximately 635,000.⁵⁴ The Viet Cong increased their commitment right along with the Americans. VC strength on January 1, 1965 was estimated at 103,000 men. By the beginning of 1966 their numbers had risen to 230,000 despite their loss of 34,000 dead and 11,000 captured.⁵⁵

The war grew vastly in scope, though still remaining a limited conflict. Massive air strikes against North Vietnam rained destruction upon the enemy's war industries. His lines of infiltration and supply to the south were hit hard by the same means. Large, mobile battalions and divisions of American infantry scoured the countryside, forcing the VC from his jungle redoubts. In many ways it seemed that the huge American presence had seized the initiative from the VC; yet the enemy refused to fight unless it was to his advantage to do so. Many American combat operations produced only light contact with the enemy. As early as the last quarter of 1965, it had become apparent that the war would not be easily ended by throwing large numbers of Americans into the conflict. The VC still remained a remarkably effective military organization. Neither a dramatic, quick communist victory nor a crushing VC defeat seemed in the offing, but rather a long, dirty conflict in which the outcome would be vague, satisfying to neither side.

It was into such a situation that the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery was to find itself. The Battalion was alerted for eventual movement to Vietnam on July 19, 1965.⁵⁶ This time frame was right in the midst of the first large call-up of forces for the Vietnam conflict.

Feverish preparation[s] for movement were begun. On the 26th of July LTC Robert J. McKay assumed command of the Battalion. On August 2 the 27th was notified that they would be assigned to USARPAC upon embarkation. All equipment was to be ready for shipment by August 15th; all personnel had to be ready by September 18th. From the date of the alert until the date of embarkation, replacement and filler personnel plus more equipment were received. Included in this was the augmentation of six forward observer sections, two air observers and a metro section. On October 26th the Battalion was assigned to the 23d Artillery Group.⁵⁷

First to depart Ft Bliss were two officers and seven enlisted men designated as equipment guards. They left Ft. Bliss at 1845 hours, September 17, 1965, on the equipment train. After a trip of 32 ½ hours, the train arrived at Beaumont, Texas with all equipment intact. Several loads, particularly the huge

⁵³ Ltr, MACOI-C, Subj: Summary of Evens, First Quarter, Calendar Year 1966, dtd 11 May 66, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Fall, Witness, p. 337.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 340.

⁵⁶ Unit Historical Report, 1966, p. 1

⁵⁷ Ibid, P. 2.

boxes that contained the Battalion aircraft (an O-1 "Birdog" and an OH-13 helicopter) had shifted and come loose, forcing the guards to re-lash the boxes. The equipment guards then observed the loading of the equipment onto the USNS Dick Lykes. Seven days later the Dick Lykes weighed anchor and was on its way. It passed through the Panama Canal on October 2 and arrived off Vung Tau, RVN on October 31st. It began discharging its cargo at Saigon on November 4th completing unloading on the 7th.⁵⁸

En masse movement of personnel was begun shortly thereafter on October 2, 1965. Two increments of the main body were flown via American Airlines from the El Paso International Airport to the San Francisco International Airport. The first group of 75 left El Paso at 1700 hours, October 2nd, with the second group of 43 following 24 hours later. Both parties were transported by bus directly to shipside at the Oakland Army Terminal. Some of the men were carried first class. American Airlines required that each soldier have his rifle wrapped in paper before boarding. Each man was instructed not to tell any civilian where he was from, where he was going or what unit he was in. All personnel wore fatigues, soft caps, pistol belts and carried a combat cargo pack.⁵⁹

The main body – 24 officer, 3 warrant officers and 544 enlisted men left Ft Bliss at 1820 hours, October 1, 1965 by train for Oakland Army Terminal. The trip took 38 ½ hours. To prevent civilian demonstrations against troop movements, the southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroads prohibited telegraphic notification of the movement to any railroad dispatchers or minor officials. All arrangements were made by phone. The passenger agent on the train made frequent reports when the train stopped. The train passed through politically tense Berkeley, California at 0300 hours, October 3d. Squads of civilian police guarded each railroad crossing. A few hecklers were seen yelling at the troops in Berkeley. Finally, at 0930 hours, October 3, 1965 the train pulled into the Oakland Army Terminal onto a pier next to the troopship USNS W. S. Gordon. There were no accidents or incidents throughout the trip.⁶⁰ Of the total assigned strength, fifteen (15) personnel remained at Ft Bliss because of approved deferments for various reasons. Three personnel were placed under the control of the 6th Artillery Group (AD).⁶¹

The USNS Gordon set sail from the Oakland Army Terminal at 1700 hours, October 4, 1965. It was the ship's second voyage since coming out of the mothball fleet. Over 3900 troops were aboard, including the personnel from the other battalions in the 23d Artillery Group. Living conditions were extremely crowded, with troops being stacked in bunks four layers high. Company grade officers were fourteen (14) to a stateroom, field grade officers six (6) to a room. The Battalion had planned an extensive training program, but some of these efforts were cancelled due to the crowded conditions. Physical training was conducted daily for all officers and enlisted men. PT was cancelled only four

⁵⁸ Unit Historical Report, 1966, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 4.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 4.

times during the voyage due to bad weather. By October 19th, the Gordon reached White Beach Naval Station, Okinawa. The men were granted shore leave in the immediate area of the naval station. At 1900 hours that day a fire broke out in the brig. PFC Luis Rodriguez, US51532324, of Battery "A" died of smoke inhalation. SGT Richard W. Harmon Jr. and Sp5 Thomas F. McDermott were hospitalized for smoke inhalation, and later released. SGT Harmon was later awarded the Army Commendation Medal for his heroic actions in rescuing personnel. The Gordon dropped anchor at Qui Nhon, Republic of Vietnam, on October 23, departing October 31. It then sailed to Vung Tau, RVN, stopping at Cam Ranh Bay enroute. It arrived at Vung Tau on November 2, with the personnel debarking the following day.⁶²

At 0900 hours November 3, LCM's (Landing Craft Medium) began taking personnel from the USNS Gordon. Personnel had been on board ship 33 days. The LCM's landed at a US Army beach. The troops marched ashore in two single file columns and boarded waiting 2 ½ ton trucks for a ride to the Vung Tau Army Air Field. There they were directed by waiting USAF personnel to stand behind one of five numbered signs. A shuttle fleet of five C-130's began to arrive. While the engine continued to run, 78 soldiers boarded each aircraft. Baggage was stacked in the center aisle. The heat inside the aircraft (estimated by the Battalion Surgeon to be 112 degrees) was stifling. After landing at Bien Hoa Air Base the troops then boarded another fleet of 2 ½ ton trucks which took them to the staging area on the grounds of the Saigon University.⁶³

The equipment ship, the USNS Dick Lykes, arrived in Saigon harbor on November 4. Details were sent to shipside to assist in unloading. Ten vehicles already available were driven to the Battalion area. The howitzers were unloaded by heavy crane onto barges in the Saigon River. These were then moved to a pier area near the famous Saigon floating restaurant. The APC's were similarly moved to the same location. These tracked vehicles then proceeded by convoy to the staging area. This occurred early on the morning of November 6 (local law required that convoys move through Saigon only during curfew hours to avoid the thick city traffic).⁶⁴

The Battalion spent 16 days altogether in the staging area. While there they processed vehicles, drew supplies and made preparations for movement to tactical areas. The men also used the time to relax and unlimber from their long voyage.

"A" and Service Batteries were the first to assume their tactical positions, departing the staging area on November 10th. These two batteries jointly occupied an area east of Bien Hoa, near the "Widow's Village." Though this area was supposed to be a permanent location, it was not, for the battery's fires were found to disrupt the air traffic of the Bien Hoa Air Base. Air traffic had to be stopped whenever the battery fired to the north. Soon better locations for

⁶² Unit Historical Report, 1966, p. 2.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

the two batteries were found adjacent to the base camp area of the 173d Airborne Brigade. The batteries moved on December 9th.⁶⁵

The organization became a composite battalion on November 15, 1965. On that day four 8" howitzers were transferred to the 2nd Battalion (175) (SP), 32d Artillery, with the 6/27th receiving four 175mm guns in return. The 13th howitzer, which the Battalion had brought from Ft Bliss as a "float", was also transferred to the 32d Artillery.⁶⁶

Bravo, Charlie and Headquarters Batteries displaced to their tactical positions near the town of Phuoc Vinh on November 19th. The wheeled vehicles moved by armed convoy from the 1st Division staging area to Phuoc Vinh, while the tracked vehicles went by convoy to the Song Be River crossing where a 50 ton ferry (provided by the 1st Engineer Brigade, 1st Infantry Division) took them across the river. The track vehicles closed into Phuoc Vinh on the 21st.

All three batteries in Phuoc Vinh at first occupied temporary positions near the airstrip. As these areas were untenable from a ground defensive standpoint, with a week new areas were found. Headquarters Battery moved to an area between the District Chief's compound and the Phuoc Vinh School, while Bravo Battery occupied the old Headquarters Battery area. This move was accomplished in one day, with the Battalion reassuming its mission that afternoon.⁶⁷

The Battalion's personnel section moved with the 1st Infantry Division staging area at Di An into the area occupied by the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Artillery. This was in preparation for the projected consolidation of all the 23d Artillery Group personnel sections. This consolidation did in fact occur, with the 6/27th and 2/32nd joining the other sections at Tan Son Nhut Airbase on December 9th.⁶⁸

General Harold K. Johnson, Chief of Staff, US Army visited Charlie Battery at Phuoc Vinh on December 23d, staying 10 minutes. General Johnson talked to Lieutenant Colonel McKay, Captain McCallum and many of the men of the battery. He conveyed a personal message from President Johnson "that the people of the United States were behind the fine effort of the troops in Vietnam." He extended the President's best wishes for a Merry Christmas.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Unit Historical Report, 1966, p. 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid, P. 4.

PART THREE

ON THE LINE

The Battalion found itself in a combat situation wholly unlike the more conventional patterns of past wars. The usual breakdown of embattled areas into front lines and rear areas did not apply in the Vietnam situation. The Viet Cong could ((and did) strike both rear elements and forward units with equal impunity. Sustained contact with the enemy seldom occurred for the guerillas regularly vanished into their jungle hideouts and VC dominated villages after each skirmish. The American's major problem was one of target acquisition. To give order to the search for the enemy, the TACR (Tactical Area of Responsibility) concept was evolved. This theory gave certain units responsibility for finding and destroying enemy units within a certain specific area (generally in the geographic vicinity of base camps). The entire country was thus placed under specific control. ARVN organizations as well as free world forces were given TAORs. Supporting units within the area assisted the primary organization in dispensing the responsibility. When unusual situations in a particular area arose, assistance was easily obtained from forces in other TAORs.

The 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery became very familiar with this mode of operation. Bravo Battery, Charlie Battery and Battalion Headquarters found themselves in the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division TAOR. Alpha Battery, at Bien Hoa, was in the area of operation of the 173d Airborne Brigade. Yet the battalion's fires were not limited to a single TAOR. A system of coordination of fire was worked out by Battalion Headquarters at Phuoc Vinh. In this system Battery "A", 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery at Bien Hoa, Battery "A", 2nd Battalion, 32d Artillery at Bien Hoa and Battery "B", 2nd Battalion, 32d Artillery at Lai Khe furnished interlocking and overlapping fires for each other. This enabled all three batteries to better support the elements in their area of responsibility.⁷⁰

Artillery support was supplied to Popular Forces Hamlets, ARVN units and Special Forces camps.⁷¹ Forward observers were on occasion sent to all these type units, particularly to the Special Forces "A" teams. While engaged in defending the latter's base camps, these forward observers in some instances directed fire to within 600 meters of their own positions.⁷²

Several airmobile operations conducted by the Special Forces were supported by the Battalion. One of these netted a total of 20 VC killed, with a probable 40

⁷⁰ Unit Historical Report, 1966, p. 8.

⁷¹ The Popular Forces were an organization of local defenders.

⁷² Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, Subj: Meritorious Unit Commendation, dtd 2 Jan 67, p. 2.

more. All of these casualties were directly attributable to artillery.⁷³ Because of this support the VC operations in these areas were very effectively hindered. The long range capabilities of the 175mm gun were well utilized as these camps were a considerable distance from the Battalion's firing positions.⁷⁴

Battery "A" formed plans for long range interdiction fire in War Zone "D" in addition to furnishing artillery fires on call. Cable communications were established between the battery and the Dong Nai sensitive area so that the battery could receive intelligence information and furnish fire quickly.⁷⁵

The Battalion discovered that a circular line of contact was the usual method of operation in Vietnam. It was found that the batteries could operate effectively throughout their entire 6400 mil range (though the fire direction centers had to modify their standard operating procedure a bit). One chart was used for both 8" gun and 175mm gun plots. Two different grid scales were used on the same chart; 8" grid squares were in red, 175mm grid squares were in black. Deflection corrections were recorded on the graphical firing tables (GFT). Four sets of GFT's, each labelled for a different direction of fire, were maintained. It was not unusual for each piece in a firing battery to be pointed in a different direction. In the batteries, two aiming circles were set up. Although this system was complex and required close supervision, it was very effective.⁷⁶

Intelligence information was received primarily from 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division Overlays, Intelligence Summaries and Special Forces reports. Personal contacts were established with the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division S-2, Special Forces, Criminal Investigation Division and the Military Assistance Command adviser in Phuoc Vinh. A liaison was effected with the US Air Force Forward Air Controllers.⁷⁷ Unfortunately some reports received by the Battalion were old and outdated, some by as much as five days. This severely impeded their usefulness. The problem was solved by the 1st Brigade's more frequent use of long range patrols.⁷⁸

A prime source of intelligence information was the Battalion's aviation program. Using two O-1 "Bird dogs", (small observation planes), and an OH-13 helicopter, the area around Phuoc Vinh was thoroughly scanned daily for signs of VC activity. This proved to be a frustrating as well as hazardous undertaking. Because of the dense jungle (large areas were covered with double and triple tree canopies), the aircraft at times had to be flown at an altitude of 50'

⁷³ Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-Y, Subj: Operational Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 Jul 1966, Reports Control Symbol CSFOB-65 (U), p. 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 4

⁷⁵ Unit Historical Report, 1966, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-Y, Subj: Operational Report on Lessons Learned (RCS CSGPG-0-28)(R1)(U), dtd 9 May 66, p. 9.

⁷⁷ Unit Historical Report, 1966, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Quarterly Report, 31 Jul 66, p. 7.

above treetop level in order for the observer to see through the dense foliage. Daylight visual reconnaissance seldom yielded positive identifications, for the VC preferred to move under cover of darkness.⁷⁹ Night flights were then scheduled to increase the chances of observing "live" targets. In spite of the obvious difficulties inherent in nighttime operation, this proved to be the case. By the second quarter of 1966, over 14% of all flights were at night. Landings and takeoffs under cover of darkness were hazardous. Night lights on the planes could not be used because of the tactical situation (the threat of sniper fire near the airstrip was great). Battery operated runway lights could not be used without exposing ground personnel to sniper fire. Departures were usually instrument take-offs. Landings were accomplished either by moonlight or by use of flare illumination fired by mortars on order of the pilot. The results of these visual reconnaissance missions were sent to the 23d Artillery Group and the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division in intelligence summaries, and posted on the Battalion activity overlay.⁸⁰

Experience soon proved that the O-1 aircraft was far superior to the OH-13 for observation and adjustment of artillery fire. This was due to its higher inherent stability, lessened crew fatigue, ability to remain aloft and the fact that it could more easily fly at night and in poor weather. The helicopter proved invaluable to the Battalion Commander for reconnaissance and instantly available transportation to subordinate units.⁸¹

Night flights took on added significance with the addition of a Starlight Scope to the visual reconnaissance program. This light intensification device enabled the aerial observers to detect VC personnel and vehicular movements more easily at night.⁸²

Immediately upon arrival in Phuoc Vinh the Battalion's communications section found that one of their first priorities was the construction of a battalion communications center. A structure had to be designed that would afford protection against attack for the switchboard and AM radio sets. The problem was solved through the use of "GI" ingenuity. Empty 175mm and 8" powder cans were filled with dirt and welded together end to end in groups of three and six. These were set vertically to form the walls. Beams were then laid across the tops to form a roof. Four layers with a plastic sheet (for waterproofing) sandwiched between the second and third layers were laid on the roof to provide protection. One layer of sandbags was placed around the walls for additional protection. The result was a bunker that could withstand any attack the enemy in the area was capable of launching. The radio bunker, located adjacent to the switchboard bunker, was of similar construction. Space inside the bunker was reserved for two conex transporters in which the AN/GRC 46 radios were placed. Holes were drilled in the transporters for cable hookup. Space was also reserved for parking a M37B1 three-quarter ton truck to be used as an

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 5.

⁸⁰ Ibid,

⁸¹ Operational Report, 31 May 66, p. 10.

⁸² Ibid, p. 8.

emergency power source. Construction of the walls and roof of the bunker itself was the same as that used for the switchboard bunker.⁸³

Wire lines were laid out in both the Phuoc Vinh and Bien Hoa areas as soon as the batteries assumed their positions. Wires were laid so as to use a minimum of routes. There was a scarcity of trees in both areas and poles were not obtainable. Substitute poles, made by welding together two eight foot engineer stakes, were used to put all wires overhead. The placing of wire lines along common routes enabled the wires to be "cabled", providing a stronger line run, reducing the maintenance required, and presenting a neater appearance. A total of 42 miles of wire were laid in the construction of the Battalion wire lines.⁸⁴

The firing batteries discovered immediately upon arrival that their firing pads were inadequate. A variety of materials were used to solve the problem. Each was shown to have certain disadvantages. Crushed rock damaged the road wheels and caused tracks to be thrown; concrete slabs did not provide enough cushioning. Laterite proved adequate during the dry season, but it was observed that these pads would turn into a quagmire with onset of the monsoon season.⁸⁵

To better serve both segments of the Battalion, the Battalion's supply section was divided into two parts. The S-4 Officer, Assistant Battalion Supply Sergeant, Supply Clerk, two Assistant Supply Clerks, and one heavy truck driver operated the supply section at Service Battery (or South Camp, as the Bien Hoa areas of "A" and Service Batteries were called). The Battalion Supply Technician, Supply Sergeant and a heavy truck driver operated the Phuoc Vinh (or North Camp) supply section. A 1200 gallon diesel fuel tank was installed in Phuoc Vinh for the Battalion as well as a 600 gallon pod for gasoline. Service Battery installed a 1200 gallon tank for gasoline, which it filled from a filling station to which they had access. Trucks necessary for transporting this fuel were also brought to both locations.⁸⁶

Logistical support for the Battalion was initially from the 1st Logistical Command and from stock control and issuing services in Saigon. After November 14, 1965 support was provided by the 1st Infantry Division Support Command for all items except Class V supplies. Batteries "A" and Service at Bien Hoa were serviced by the 2d Forward Support Detachment.⁸⁷

Because of its isolation, supplies could be brought to Phuoc Vinh only by armed convoys or airplane. The initial convoy (November 19-22, 1965) brought organizational supplies, equipment, Class V and enough other supplies

⁸³ Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVAC-Y, Subj: Unit Historical Report, dtd 5 Jan 66, p. 12.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 12.

⁸⁵ Operational Report, May 66, p. 4.

⁸⁶ Unit Historical Report, 5 Jan 66, p. 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 9.

to keep the Battalion's Phuoc Vinh elements supplied for 40 days. A second convoy (December 26-30, 1965) brought in similar supplies for a 45 day interval.⁸⁸ Convoys were then scheduled at monthly or bi-monthly intervals thereafter. Batteries "A" and Service were located close to sources of supply, enabling them to resupply themselves almost at will. Ammunition resupply was the responsibility of the Battalion ammunition section, which had eighteen five-ton trucks for this purpose. The ammunition supply point was at Long Binh, approximately 21 kilometers from Service Battery. Ammunition was brought to the firing batteries in Phuoc Vinh mainly by convoy, usually at the same time that other supplies were trucked to Phuoc Vinh. Additional rounds were frequently flown in, especially when stockpiles ran low.⁸⁹

Overloading of trucks caused some problems on these resupply convoys. As the Army permitted a 100% overload on all trucks, the Battalion's vehicles often carried loads far in excess of the norm. It was discovered, however, that a 100% overload should be applied only on hard, smooth surfaced roads. Operation of overloaded trucks on secondary roads caused damage to the frame, springs and steering linkage. Ammunition trucks caused the most concern, for most types of ammunition overloaded a vehicle far before the volumetric capacity of its cargo area was reached.⁹⁰

Some supply problems were caused by inefficient packing before the Battalion's departure from Ft Bliss. Many unseparated, unrelated items were packed together in boxes. Others were not packed in a neat and orderly manner. Some items were exchanged for newer equipment at the last moment, causing packing and unpacking problems. Not all conex inserts were placed in trucks, which caused considerable damage to the cargo carried in them.⁹¹

The Battalion discovered upon arrival that many unnecessary items were lacking and that procuring these items was difficult. The meteorological section arrived in Vietnam with a sixty day supply of expendable items such as balloons and radiosondes. Though numerous requisitions for resupply were submitted, they were not filled until months later. The meteorological section also had extreme difficulty in getting repair parts for its equipment. Their radio antennas and other pieces of equipment were rare items in Vietnam and were not similar to other items in greater supply. Thus these weather men experienced long delays in repair of their equipment. Radio teletype parts were also in extremely short supply. Malfunctions in these particular pieces of equipment severely hampered communication within the Battalion, for these frequently were the only means of communication with the outlying firing batteries. Building materials were in short supply, as were sandbags. Gun carriages (M107 and M110) were often non-operational due to lack of repair parts. Hydraulic

⁸⁸ Unit Historical Report, 5 Jan 66, p. 9.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 10.

⁹⁰ Operation Report, July 1966, p. 7.

⁹¹ Unit Historical Report, Jan 66, p. 10.

line leaks, broken spade braces and elevation and traverse gears were the major causes of breakdowns.⁹²

The 6/27th was not alone in experiencing supply difficulties. The rapid influx of many units into Vietnam undeniably placed some strain upon the supply system. Yet it is to the credit of logisticians involved that this Battalion at least was never significantly hampered by the lack of supplies.

Ordnance support was at first provided by the 85th Ordnance Company. On November 19, 1965 this support was taken over by the 701st Maintenance Battalion. Company "B" of the 701st supported Service and "A" Batteries at Bien Hoa, while Company "D" supported the other batteries at Phuoc Vinh. Both companies provided direct support for all equipment; i. e. automotive, armament, signal, chemical, engineer and quartermaster.⁹³

Vehicle maintenance was performed at both the battalion and battery levels. The Battalion maintenance section at Phuoc Vinh took care of problems the individual battery maintenance sections could not resolve. Teams were sent to Bien Hoa to solve maintenance problems in "A" and Service Batteries. Periodic inspections of all equipment, as well as quarterly and semi-annual maintenance services were performed by all maintenance sections.⁹⁴

Procurement of replacement personnel was never a problem; in fact eleven men were received while the Battalion was still in the staging area. It was found that frequent trips had to be made to the 90th Replacement Battalion to determine if the personnel assigned to the Battalion had arrived in-country. If this check was not done these personnel were liable to be assigned to another organization. This information could not be determined by telephone as this type of communication was seldom reliable. In spite of these problems the system worked so well that acute personnel turbulence never resulted in a lack of suitable replacement personnel.⁹⁵

The flow of administrative correspondence was greatly hindered by the separation of the personnel section from the Battalion headquarters element. As this correspondence had to be flow out of Phuoc Vinh the number of distribution runs was limited by the number of available flights. Use of the Battalion's TO&E aircraft to move correspondence insured its delivery, but such flights were few as combat requirements for these aircraft came first. Field telephones were used to the maximum, but this method was inefficient and time consuming. Connections were weak and often lost in the middle of a conversation. The radio teletype was used, but combat use of this instrument took priority, limiting its administrative use.⁹⁶

⁹² Operational Report, May 1966, p. 11.

⁹³ Unit Historical Report, Jan 66, p. 11.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 11.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 6.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 5.

Distribution of publications was very slow. Directives and regulations from higher headquarters were often sent but never received. Compliance with these regulations was thus made difficult.

Efficiency reports were prepared by the S1 (Adjutant) instead of by the Personnel Officer who, due to his separation from Battalion Headquarters, could not meet suspense dates. Deadlines were not always met because there was only one clerk, a converted wireman. He was not accustomed to such meticulous work. Paperwork increased in the combat zone, instead of decreased as was originally assumed.⁹⁷

Casualty reporting was done on an abbreviated form due to the separation of the personnel section from the Battalion Headquarters. Basic information, immediately available at the batteries, was placed on this form. The balance of the information was supplied from the 201 file by the personnel section. This procedure resulted in timely, accurate casualty reporting.⁹⁸

APO 96307 was assigned to the Battalion prior to its departure from the United States. Due to the wide dispersion of the various Battalion elements the Battalion Mail Clerk was stationed at Tan Son Nhut Airbase.

He was thus able to pick up the mail directly from the Base Post Office, one of the large central mail breakdown points. He then broke the mail down by batteries and placed the mail for Headquarters, Bravo and Charlie Batteries onto a mail helicopter. Service and Alpha Batteries picked up their mail directly from the clerk at Tan Son Nhut. He monitored address changes of new arrivals, personnel who departed from the Battalion and those who transferred within the Battalion. A sub-APO in Phuoc Vinh distributed the mail to the Battalion's elements there.⁹⁹

Promotions were readily available to the men who deserved them with one major exception. The Battalion had left the United States with an excess of five Staff Sergeants (E6) because the forward observer augmentation to the TO&E was staffed with five men who were one rank above what was authorized. This created a bottleneck and a deterrent to morale. This augmentation should have been filled with E-4's.¹⁰⁰

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the American Army's presence in Vietnam was its emphasis upon establishing and maintaining good will with the Vietnamese people. America's goal was to assist the Vietnamese people in their struggle against the communist aggression from the north and to aid in the creation of a strong regime in the south, one that could cope with the massive economic and social problems of the country. Thus considerable energy was

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 5.

⁹⁸ Operational Report, May 66, p. 5.

⁹⁹ Unit Historical Report, Jan 66, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Operational Report, July 66, p. 5

devoted to civic action and other "nation building" projects. All units in Vietnam contributed in some way.

Civil affairs occupied a large place in the Battalion's affairs. Cordial relations were established with the MACV Advisory team and the local District Chief. On November 28, 1965 it was decided to assist the Phuoc Vinh school (located adjacent to the Headquarters Battery area) in several projects. As the school was located in a low lying area, soil was trucked in by Headquarters Battery to eliminate stagnant pools. A flagpole, a fence and a volleyball court were constructed, mainly by volunteer labor.¹⁰¹ The well was repaired, as were the pump and cistern. The Battalion S-5 (Civil Affairs) Officer arranged for the hiring of a janitor for the school. He was paid on a daily basis from indigenous labor funds allocated to the area commander.¹⁰²

Phuoc Vinh, like most Vietnamese towns, was woefully short of medical treatment facilities for its citizens. To alleviate this the Battalion Surgeon held sick call for the townspeople once a week at a small civilian dispensary. Between 50-75 patients were seen on each visit. The Surgeon found that many health problems were caused by the simple lack of soap. This problem was alleviated by the men of the Battalion. Entirely on their own, they requested their families and friends at home to send bars of soap. The response to this campaign was excellent. Enough soap was received to give one cake to each patient at these weekly sessions.¹⁰³

The Battalion was well established by the end of 1965. Its positions were well fortified and it had adopted methods of operation that were well suited to the situation at hand. Moreover, in two months of operation the Battalion had made a large contribution to the war effort in the Phuoc Vinh area. The presence of heavy artillery in the Phuoc Vinh base camp made a direct attack on the camp by the enemy more difficult. VC operations within range of the big guns became risky endeavors for them. Harassment and interdiction fire kept him at considerable distances from the base camp. Reconnaissance patrols became more effective, for destructive artillery fire could easily be brought upon the enemy when contact was made.

This reflected the situation throughout Vietnam by the end of the Vietnam Defense Campaign (December 24, 1965). By this date the American presence was of such size that much of the initiative of battle was wrested from the VC. The enemy was simply not equipped to pose a real challenge to the overall strength of the friendly forces. He was forced to concentrate on what he could do best - effective harassment of friendly forces and villages. His only real hope now laid in his ability to wear down the American's will to fight. Assuming that the voice of the protest marchers was the voice of the people as whole, the enemy may well have concluded that the men in the Vietnam would tire easily of the war and would crack and commit errors under the pressure of combat. He was wrong. The American soldier was able to see instances of

¹⁰¹ Unit Historical Report, Jan 66, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰² Operational Report, May 66, p. 4.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 5.

Communist aggression not noted by the critics at home. It was painfully obvious to him that if the Americans were not in Vietnam, the Communists would be, and that the South Vietnamese stood a far greater chance of determining their own destiny under an American hegemony than under Communist influence. He justified his own presence in Vietnam by faith in freedom and explicit promise of the American government that self-determination for South Vietnam would be accomplished as soon as the Communist threat was erased. This faith went deep in a surprising number of American soldiers, and gave them a resolve and determination far beyond what the Viet Cong expected him to have.

The year 1966 dawned with a faint burst of hope on the Vietnamese horizon. A large, strong, well equipped, dedicated Army now stood on Vietnamese soil, ready and more than willing to fight the VC. The next phase of the war, the Vietnamese Counteroffensive Campaign, was exactly that.

PART FOUR

THE VIETNAM COUNTEROFFENSIVE CAMPAIGN

With the beginning of the Vietnam Counteroffensive Campaign in January 1966, the first effects of the American buildup began to be felt. Though it was slow and laborious process, the friendly forces did eventually succeed in wresting the initiative of battle from the enemy.¹⁰⁴ Yet progress was difficult to chart due to the unusual nature of the war.

American strategy in Vietnam was a complex blending of several different programs. One of these involved the creation and deployment of large, mobile ground forces. These were deployed in various tactical situations, aiming primarily at destroying the enemy's ability to fight. The emphasis was on mobility. Throughout the use of helicopters, ground forces could be airlifted rapidly into areas of VC dominance, often giving the Americans the advantage of surprise in their attacks. When the tide of battle turned against the Americans, reinforcements were easily brought to the scene by the same means, many times altering the outcome of the battle. Use of helicopters also, by and large, freed ground forces from being tied down to their lines of supply. Artillery and other support elements could (and often did) accompany the infantryman on these missions. This of course greatly increased the firepower and effectiveness of the aggregate force. The helicopter assault proved to be the most prevalent, most successful means of deployment in the Vietnam War.

The size of these heliborne units was as a rule kept small (generally battalion size or smaller) for two primary reasons: to retain mobility and because the VC elements encountered by them generally were below division size themselves. It was a war of small engagements. Large scale confrontations of entire armies never occurred at this stage in the conflict. Achievement of large tactical objectives was accomplished by well organized, pre-planned combat operations. These were generally of battalion size or larger, and were code named. Ground forces were deployed by both air and ground means and usually stayed in the field for several days to several weeks. It was by this means primarily that the war [was] brought to the enemy.

The 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery furnished fire support for a large number of these operations. On most occasions the batteries did not have to leave their base camps to furnish this fire due to the great range of the 175mm gun (it could reach targets in excess of 20 miles). Thus the Battalion's total number of tactical moves was low. The 8" platoon accompanied the infantry units to the field more readily than the 175mm platoons (particularly in Alpha Battery).

The Battalion's first operation was JINGLE BELLS, held appropriately during the Christmas season, 19 – 20 December 1965.¹⁰⁵ It was followed by

¹⁰⁴ Ltr, MA COI-C, Subj: Summary of Events, First Quarter, Calendar Year 1966, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ Commander's Daily Situation Reports, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, 19 Dec 65 and 20 Dec 65.

LAVENDER HILL, notable chiefly for the fact that the Battalion's fires produced a large secondary explosion,¹⁰⁶ and by Operation BLUE BALL.¹⁰⁷ RED BALL IV saw the batteries at Phuoc Vinh provide support fire for the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division as the latter staged a resupply convoy to Phuoc Vinh.¹⁰⁸ After supporting QUICK KICK II, Battery "B" displaced to the village of Bo Mau II (1 ½ miles east of Phuoc Vinh) in support of Operation QUICK KICK IV from 24 January 1966 to 11 February 1966.¹⁰⁹ Battery "A" moved from Bien Hoa to Long Thanh in support of Operation MALLETT on 29 January 1966. It assumed a new position during the same operation on 11 February 1966.¹¹⁰ Another resupply convoy operation, RED BALL V, followed on 29 January 1966 to 1 February 1966.¹¹¹

One of the Battalion's finest hours occurred during Operation ROLLING STONE, 10 February 1966 to 20 February 1966. This operation produced the first major contact between the VC and the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. Three confirmed, and possibly five battalions of VC had tried to overrun the field position of the 1st Brigade. The 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery (at Phuoc Vinh) was called upon to fire numerous counter mortar plots located by the counter mortar radar of the 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery. These fires effectively silenced the enemy mortars. The Battalion's guns also fired at numerous suspected VC troop locations, and placed a ring of defensive fires around the 1st Brigade perimeter. The combination of all these fires contributed significantly towards the 1st Brigade's repulsing the enemy attack. A body count made the next morning disclosed that over 140 VC had been killed in the battle. Many of these casualties were attributed to artillery fire.¹¹²

Operation SILVER CITY was a joint operation with the 1st Infantry Division, 173d Airborne Brigade and the 10th ARVN Division. The 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery served as a general support headquarters throughout the entire operation. Battery "D", 8th Battalion, 6th Artillery was attached to the Battalion with Battery "B", 2d Battalion, 32d Artillery providing reinforcing fire for the Battalion. All in all the Battalion tactically controlled the fires of five widely separated heavy artillery batteries during SILVER CITY. This control was exercised through the use of FM/AM radios and by sole use/common use VHF circuits. At one point in the operation a battalion of the 173d Airborne was nearly surrounded by VC. The Battalion massed the fires of Battery "C", 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery and Battery "D", 8th Battalion, 6th Artillery onto a whole series of concentrations that surrounded the 173d Airborne's perimeter. In the resultant firefight

¹⁰⁶ SITREP, dtd 3 - 7 Jan 66.

¹⁰⁷ SITREP, dtd 12 - 14, 14 Jan 66.

¹⁰⁸ SITREP, dtd 15 - 19 Jan 66.

¹⁰⁹ SITREP, dtd 24 Jan 66 - 18 Feb 66.

¹¹⁰ SITREP, dtd 29 Jan 66 - 18 Feb 66.

¹¹¹ SITREP, dtd 29 Jan 66 - 1 Feb 66.

¹¹² Meritorious Unit Commendation, dtd 26 Nov 66 p. 2.

artillery and air strikes were credited with a VC body count of over 350.¹¹³ Battery "D", 8th Battalion, 6th Artillery received mortar fire during Operation SILVER CITY on 9 March 1966. One man from their battery was killed in action, and two men from the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery were wounded. One vehicle from the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery was damaged during the attack.¹¹⁴

On 30 March 1966, Battery "A" moved to Cam Tam in support of Operation ABILENE. It assumed a slightly different position in support of the same operations the following day, and returned to base camp shortly thereafter.¹¹⁵ The Battalion then supported a series of small operations from its base camps. These were: MIAMI (16 April 1966 to 20 April 1966),¹¹⁶ WILDWOOD (17 April 1966 to 24 April 1966),¹¹⁷ and CHATTANOOGA (22 April 1966 to 24 April 1966).¹¹⁸ Resupply convoys (RED BALL VI and RED BALL VII) also occupied Batteries "B" and "C" during this period.¹¹⁹

Operation BIRMINGHAM saw Battery "A" move to Tay Ninh Province to support the 1st Infantry Division's search and destroy efforts in that area. The Battery was attached to the 1st Division Artillery on 6 May 1966 and moved to Cu Chi that same day in preparation for the move further north. Battery "A" remained under the operational control of the 1st Infantry Division Artillery until the termination of BIRMINGHAM on 17 May 1966.¹²⁰ The battery's effectiveness during the operation was hampered by the onset of the torrential rains of the monsoon season. At one point the spade of an 8" howitzer was completely buried in mud due to the digging effect of a night of particularly hard shooting.¹²¹

The first half of 1966 was completed by the Battalion's participation in a number of smaller operations from their base camps. These were: ADELAIDE I (31 May 1966 to 9 June 1966), ADELAIDE II (7 June 1966 to 10 June 1966) ADELAIDE III (& June 1966 to 10 June 1966).¹²²

Yet in spite of this considerable support of operations, the Battalion was engaged in other aspects of fire support that proved of equal importance. The Battalion supported Special Forces camps in its area. This proved of primary

¹¹³ Meritorious Unit Commendation, dtd 26 Nov 66 p. 2.

¹¹⁴ SITREP, dtd 10 Mar 66.

¹¹⁵ SITREP, dtd 30 Mar 66 and 31 Mar 66.

¹¹⁶ SITREP, dtd 16 Apr 66 and 20 Apr 66

¹¹⁷ SITREP, dtd 17 Apr 66 to 24 Apr 66.

¹¹⁸ SITREP, dtd 22 Apr 66 and 24 Apr 66.

¹¹⁹ SITREP, dtd 5 Mar 66, 6 Mar 66, 28 Mar 66 and 1 Apr 66.

¹²⁰ SITREP, dtd 6 May 66 and 27 May 66.

¹²¹ Interview, 1LT John D. Klaitz, A Btry XO, 25 Aug 66.

¹²² Meritorious Unit Commendation, dtd 26 Nov 66, p. 1.

importance, for the instantly available firepower made each camp much less vulnerable to frontal attack by the VC. The Battalion made the cost (in terms of VC casualties) of such an attack too high for the VC to attempt. The net result was that each camp so supported by the Battalion remained secure throughout 1966.¹²³ Fire support was extended to new camps as they were built in range of the Battalion's weapons.

The Battalion supported numerous operations conducted by the Special Forces personnel, six during the summer and fall of 1966 alone.¹²⁴ On one occasion the Battalion's air observer sighted yellow smoke and small explosions in an area in which the Special Forces were conducting an operation. An estimated VC force of two battalions was sighted. Radio contact with Special Forces personnel on the ground was withheld until they requested a fire mission. Artillery was used to mark enemy positions for the bombers that were called in by the US Air Force Forward Air Controller (who had also arrived on the scene). Artillery pounded the enemy both before and after the bombers had dealt their destruction. Routes of enemy approach and withdrawal were sealed by artillery. In all sixty 8" rounds and fifty-seven 175mm rounds were expended.¹²⁵

Artillery support was extended to various Popular Forces outposts and hamlets in the Battalion's area. On at least two occasions its support played a large role in preventing these camps from being overrun. On May 17, 1966 the Popular Forces outpost at AP Bo La began receiving mortar and small arms fire from three different locations. Four 8" rounds were placed on all three targets, effectively silencing the enemy fire. Avenues of escape were also blocked by artillery fire. When the attack was over, the garrison commander commended the Battalion on its speed and accuracy of fire.¹²⁶ On June 19, 1966 the village of AP Bo La began to receive small arms fire. The battalion responded almost instantaneously with 26 rounds. Contact was broken immediately. The same night the Battalion fired at the location of three VC companies in the immediate area.¹²⁷

Defense of the Phuoc Vinh base camp on occasion occupied the 6/27th. Nightly harassment and interdiction fire from the Battalion, as well as from the 105 howitzer and 4.2 mortar units also in Phuoc Vinh, was an effective deterrent against a major ground attack. Because of this, and because of the extensive program of patrols launched by the 1st Brigade and the various ARVN units in the area, Phuoc Vinh was never hit by large ground offensive in 1966. HQ, B and C Batteries all maintained a system of outposts to protect their perimeters. The guards in these outposts seldom reported enemy activity. C Battery did

¹²³ Interview, LTC Edward C. O'Connor, Bn Cmdr, 19 May 67.

¹²⁴ Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-YC, Subj: Operational Report on Lessons Learned (U), dtd 31 Oct 66, p. 1.

¹²⁵ SITREP, dtd 11 Jul 66.

¹²⁶ SITREP, dtd 17 May 66.

¹²⁷ SITREP, dtd 19 Jun 66.

receive sniper fire on the evening of December 6, 1965. The perimeter guards spotted the sniper, fired at him, and reported that he had dropped to the ground. However a check made the following morning could not locate the body.¹²⁸

Phuoc Vinh did receive a number of minor mortar attacks in 1966. During the mortar attack of February 24, 1966 the Battalion received five direct hits within its area. There was no damage or injuries.¹²⁹ On March 8, 1966 a large mortar attack hit the camp beginning at 2230 hours. The Aviation Officer from the 23d Artillery Group (who happened to be flying in the area) observed lights. He directed the firing of illumination and HE rounds at lights and extinguished them. After expending 30 rounds in a counter mortar program, the enemy mortars were extinguished.¹³⁰ Another mortar attack came on the evening of April 8, 1966. Battery "B" received eight rounds in its battery area. A total of 104 eight inch rounds were fired by the Battalion at likely mortar positions and avenues of withdrawal during the attack.¹³¹ Four days later, on April 12, seven rounds from a 175mm recoilless rifle were fired at Phuoc Vinh.¹³² None of these attacks inflicted many casualties or caused much damage.

The Battalion's personnel section completed a permanent change of station on June 8, 1966, moving from Tan Son Nhut to Long Binh, collocating with the personnel sections from the other battalions in the 23d Artillery Group.¹³³ Battery "A" moved also, from Bien Hoa to Bearcat. This occurred on June 9, 1966. The battery assumed a new mission there, that of general support/reinforcing the 1st Battalion, 7th Artillery. This was a permanent change in both location and mission. On June 19th the battery converted one 8" howitzer to a 175mm gun.¹³⁴

Due to normal rotation of personnel and the distinct lack of school trained replacements, the Battalion faced an acute shortage of FDC and firing battery personnel in mid-1966. This problem was solved by conducting an intensive on-the-job training program for the new personnel.¹³⁵ Training in the art of jungle fighting was provided to the men of the 6/27th by the Jungle Devil School, operated by the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division.¹³⁶ Training new air observers proved to be rather difficult, taking much longer than was anticipated

¹²⁸ SITREP, dtd 6 Dec 65.

¹²⁹ SITREP, dtd 25 Feb 66.

¹³⁰ SITREP, dtd 25 Feb 66

¹³¹ SITREP, dtd 8 Apr 66.

¹³² SITREP, dtd 12 Apr 66.

¹³³ Operational Report, Jul 66, p. 9.

¹³⁴ SITREP, dtd 10 Aug 66.

¹³⁵ Operational Report, Jul 66, p. 9.

¹³⁶ Battle Journal, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, dtd 15 Oct 66.

(40 to 70 hours). These new observers had to become so familiar with the terrain below that they could notice subtle day to day changes. He also had to be able to sense the gun-target line, as often the firing battery was out of sight. Additional training had to be given for night flights.¹³⁷

The Battalion continued to actively participate in the Civic Action Program. The men of "B" Battery repaired the furniture of the Phuoc Vinh School. A box of hospital women's supplies donated by Albion Women's Club, Albion, Michigan was given to the Phuoc Vinh dispensary. A box of children's clothing donated by relatives of the Headquarters Battery Commander was distributed to the needy children of Phuoc Vinh. Vietnamese laborers were utilized to clean the classroom of the school and to police the schoolyard. Over 200 pounds of soap were donated to an orphanage in Saigon.¹³⁸ The medical section engaged actively in the Medical Civic Action Program (MEDCAP). Visits were made to various villages in the Phuoc Vinh area to conduct clinics for those Vietnamese stricken by illness or injury. Technical assistance and vital medical supplies were given to the Phuoc Vinh dispensary.¹³⁹

The Battalion experienced a period of severe personnel turbulence in September and October 1966, when large numbers of personnel who had served with the Battalion since its arrival in Vietnam completed their tours of duty and returned to the United States. Among those who departed was the Battalion Commander, Colonel Robert J. McKay. He was replaced by Major Edward C. O'Connor, who assumed command of the Battalion on September 1, 1966.

Troop morale (though always high) took a bit of an upswing in the third quarter of 1966. This was attributed to: an increase in the operational and material readiness posture, the R & R Program, Special Services activities and the Battalion's building program. An Enlisted Man's Council was established. Two men were chosen from each battery to bring the grievances of the enlisted men to the Battalion Commander. These monthly meetings often brought legitimate problem areas out into the open. An increase in troop morale was the result.

In spite of the fact that the Battalion was in a combat zone, considerable emphasis was placed on individual and unit training. Beginning in December 1966 gunner's tests and maintenance exams were administered by-monthly to the gun sections. To increase motivation and sense of competition among the gun sections, an award system was devised whereby the section with the highest score on these examinations received the "Best Gun Section in the Battalion" Plaque. Should the same section win this award three consecutive times, that section retained permanent possession of the plaque. Fire Direction Tests were similarly given. In this test an actual mission was given to each of the battery Fire Direction Centers. Both batteries fired at the same target, which was of equal distance from both. The batteries were scored on speed of computed data, accuracy of computed data (checked by the Battalion FDC) and accuracy

¹³⁷ Operational Report, May 66, p. 4.

¹³⁸ Operational Report, July 66, p. 5.

¹³⁹ Meritorious Unit Commendation, Nov 66, p. 2.

of the actual round. A plaque was given monthly to the FDC that scored highest, with permanent possession being retained by the FDC that won the award three consecutive times. Additionally, a gunnery exam was administered monthly to all company grad artillery officers in the Battalion to keep these officers current in the artillerymen's specialty. The only difficulty experienced in administering these tests in a combat zone was due to occasional interruptions caused by tactical commitments.¹⁴⁰

Other aspects of training were conducted as well. Maintenance classes on the 175mm gun were conducted by representatives from the Artillery Transport Detachment at Ft Sill. Additional classes were given by various technical representatives. Weapons familiarization firing for all personnel was conducted on a monthly basis. Personnel fired at TO&E weapons to include hand grenades.¹⁴¹

On September 19, 1966 the Battalion was alerted by higher headquarters to prepare a heavy artillery battery for rapid movement to Quang Tri Province (near the DMZ). It had been decided that the Marine elements operating in the area desperately needed heavy artillery support. As the Marines did not have a weapon as large and as powerful as the 17mm gun in their arsenal, it was up to the Army to provide this weapon.

In order to send the best possible unit to the DMZ, Major O'Connor created an amalgamated battery at Phuoc Vinh, mating the best portions of "B" and "C" batteries. The result was called Task Force 6/27 (or "B" Battery, from whence the major portion of its men and equipment came). The Task Force left Phuoc Vinh on September 23, 1966 and went to a position just south of the Song Be Bridge, where it remained for two days. It then moved to the Service Battery location at Long Binh where it was completely resupplied and the vehicles rechecked. Two 8" howitzers were converted to 175mm guns during this period. On September 29th the battery's equipment was driven to Saigon and loaded onto an LST (Loading Ship Transport). Altogether 26 vehicles were loaded onto this boat, marking the first time a 175mm gun was transported anywhere by LST.¹⁴²

The LST then sailed to Da Nang, taking four days to do so. At Da Nang the equipment was transferred from the LST to six LCU's (Landing Craft Utility) for further shipment to Dong Ha. This was necessary as the LST was too large to sail up the Cam Lo River to Dong Ha, whereas the smaller LCU's could. The major portion of the battery's personnel was flown to Dong Ha and met the equipment ships there. Following unloading, the battery moved overland to their new home at Camp J. J. Carroll, on the "artillery plateau" near Cam Lo.

¹⁴⁰ Interview, CPT George P. Palladino, Bn S-3, 6 Jun 67.

¹⁴¹ Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-YC, Subj: Operational Report Lessons Learned (RSC-CSFOR-65)(U), dtd 7 Feb 67, p. 7.

¹⁴² The Redleg Courier, Vol 1, No. 7, dtd 1 May 67, pp. 1-2

Approximately two and one-half hours later the battery fired the first heavy artillery round in support of Marines in the I Corps tactical unit by an Army unit.¹⁴³

On October 19, 1966 the 2nd Battalion, 94th Artillery arrived on the artillery plateau. "B" Battery was attached to this organization shortly thereafter, eventually becoming known as Delta Battery, 2nd Battalion, 94th Artillery. An unfortunate side effect of this was the loss of the battery's and former 6/27's call sign, "Redleg". Interestingly, the 6/27th taught the 2/94th a great deal about combat operations in Vietnam. The latter unit was newly arrived in Vietnam from Ft Sill and knew little about 6400 mil operation., They eventually adopted almost all of the standard operating procedures used by the "B" Battery Commander, CPT Gary E. Vanderslice.¹⁴⁴

The battery received little control from the 2/94th on fire missions. The battalion usually supplied only the coordinates of the targets to be shot. All computing and checking of the fire data was done entirely within the battery's own fire direction center. Some missions came directly from the Marine elements.¹⁴⁵

In October and November 1966 "B" Battery's operations became somewhat hampered by the onset of the monsoon season. Torrential rains created great discomfort and prodigious amounts of mud. The men were not equipped with adequate wet weather apparel, compounding the problem. Further discomfort was caused by the plummeting temperatures (readings in the 30° - 40° range were recorded). The battery could do little building because of the constant rain. Eventually the 2/94th supplied "hardbacks" (wooden tent frames and floors) which got the men out of the mud at least.

Bravo Battery experienced a number of other minor problems during its first few months at Camp Carroll. Ordnance support was negligible even though a team from the 185th Maintenance Battalion accompanied the battery on its trip to the I Corps area. Supplies were hard to come by. "B" Battery received its supplies through Marine channels at first. In spite of this an adequate supply system was not placed in operation for the battery until other Army units arrived in the area.¹⁴⁶

Meanwhile the rest of the Battalion continued its normal operations. In order to keep the Battalion Commander informed of daily progress in the various areas of endeavor within the Battalion, morning and evening reports were begun in the fall of 1966. The Battalion Commander, Executive Officer, S-2 and S-3 attended the evening briefing. The morning meeting was a review of the previous day's activities, current status report and a review of future plans. It allowed the Battalion Commander to pinpoint problem areas and to coordi-

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 3

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 3.

nate action to correct these areas. As all the primary staff personnel were in attendance, they were all informed of what was going on within the Battalion. The evening briefing was a review of the Battalion's tactical operations. The harassment and interdiction fire plan for that evening was discussed and appropriate change made based upon the tactical worth of the targets. Ground maneuvers of friendly troops were discussed as well. Aerial reconnaissance and fire support of these operations were planned at that time.¹⁴⁷

A comprehensive maintenance program was initiated in mid-September. The battery and battalion maintenance sections were collected in Phuoc Vinh to insure proper supervision and utilization of all maintenance personnel. Formal motor stables were conducted. Maintenance records were examined and instructions given on proper methods of keeping records. The USARV (US Army Vietnam) Readiness Assistance Team (R&T) tested maintenance procedures and assisted in establishing correct maintenance procedures and Prescribed Load Lists.¹⁴⁸

Beginning in the fall of 1966 the 6/27th launched a major building program to get its men out of tents and into substantial buildings. It proved to be a prodigious undertaking, spanning many months. Building materials were received through both official (primarily the 168th Engineers) and unofficial channels. Troop labor was used almost exclusively in this self-help program. Direct engineer support was minor throughout. Though the labor involved was prodigious, the program was so successful that "HQ" and "C" Batteries were out of tents by April, 1967. The same feat was accomplished by Service Battery by June, 1967, while "A" Battery succeeded in housing all of its men in tents with wooden frames (considerably more substantial than their predecessors) by May 1967. It should be noted that semi-permanent buildings could not be built at Quan Loi; tent frames were the best that could be provided.

Progress of the building program can be gauged by progress in Headquarters Battery. By October 19, 1966 the battery had built Quonset huts for the operations section, the medical section and the orderly room. A mess hall, three small BOQs and the framework for the Headquarters building completed the battery's substantial structures. Personnel at that time lived in 18 tent BEQs and two tent BOQs. By June 6, 1967 the battery had constructed 11 troop billets, 2 BOQs, 1 BEQ (for NCOs), and Officer's Club, and EM Club, remodeled a Quonset for an NCO Club and completed an orderly room, a mess hall extension, a metro building, the Battalion Headquarters building, Battalion maintenance building and large apron pad and a hospital at Nuoc Vang. All this was done by a crew of six to eight men, primarily from the wire section. Captain Charles M. Rood, the Base Development Officer, drew the blueprints and determined the location of buildings. The plans were in accordance with directives from USARV. Laying the pads was greatly facilitated by the use of a cement mixer procured by the Service Battery Commander. Originally the build-

¹⁴⁷ Interview, CPT George P. Palladino, BN S-3, 6 Jun 67.

¹⁴⁸ Operational Report, Oct 66, p. 4.

ing crew comprised of men from all batteries. After these personnel rotated home, "HQ" Battery provided all of its labor.¹⁴⁹

The "C" Battery building program was equally comprehensive. Beginning in late November, 1966, the battery built steadily until April when they began to experience a shortage of materials. Eight troop billets, a supply Quonset, a mess hall, a shower-latrine complex, and NCO Club, and EM Club, an executive post and an FDC were all built by troop labor with engineer assistance. In addition, wooden gun pads were constructed. These kept the guns clean, improved maintenance by keeping mud from the working parts of the guns and provided a level firing program.¹⁵⁰

"A" Battery's building program was plagued by its many moves. While at Bearcat, the battery had constructed a mess hall, an orderly room-NCO Club, an EM Club, an XO Post-FDC, a BOQ and ten wooden tent frames. All this was left at Bearcat when the battery moved to Lai Khe in December 1966. Building was not renewed until after the battery became settled at Quan Loi on February 4, 1967. There they built 20 ten frame billets, a communications center, an XO Post, an underground, cement structure FDC, a mess hall (only on at Quan Loi), an Officers-NCO Club and an EM Club. Here too troop labor was used exclusively. Materials were brought from Service Battery by plane or convoy, or purchased on the local economy through the club funds.¹⁵¹

Service Battery's building program was in two distinct stages. The battery built a large building to house the 23d Artillery Group personnel section, another to house the Battalion S-4, a mess hall, a BOQ, an orderly room-supply room, a building for battery maintenance, and NCO Club and an EM Club. These projects were begun immediately after the battery's arrival in Long Binh and were completed by September, 1966. Further building was hampered, however, by the fact that the permanent location of the battery had not yet been firmly decided. A permanent home for the battery was established in February, 1967 through a series of conferences between the Battalion Commander, 23d Artillery Group Commander and the Long Binh Post Commander. The new area was immediately adjacent to the old area and was part of Long Binh Post, a huge complex which was slated to become the headquarters of the US Army in Vietnam. From that date onward Service Battery began erection of Adams huts. These were personnel billets made of light-weight, highly reflective aluminum and were highly reflective. These billets were designed especially for use in Vietnam and boasted extraordinary coolness on the inside. By June, 1967 eight Adams huts had been built. In addition the EM and NCO Clubs were remodeled. The building crew received engineer assistance only on the first hut. Three men from "HQ" Battery were sent to Service Battery to augment the building crew.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Interview, 1SG Emanuel T. Petite, 1st Sgt, HQ Btry, 6 Jun 67.

¹⁵⁰ Interview, 1LT Hubert E. Edenfield Jr., C Btry XO, 6 Jun 67.

¹⁵¹ Interview, CPT Ervin F. Kamm Jr., A Btry CO, 7 Jun 67.

¹⁵² The Redleg Courier, Vol. 1, No. 6, dtd 1 Apr 67, pp. 1-5.

The Battalion began controlling the fires of the batteries from the battalion FDC in September 1966. An elaborate system of double checks was devised whereby both battery and battalion Fire Direction Centers double checked their computations. The battalion FDC then checked the batteries' computations and made the decision to fire. This system worked well and did not cause any loss in reaction time. If communication with the batteries was lost, they assumed tactical control of their own fires after two minutes. The 6/27th was the only known organization in Vietnam to tactically control its fires by this system. It resulted in a complete elimination of artillery incidents (several were detected at the battalion level and stopped before any damage was done). It also placed the battalion's most experienced officers at the decision-making area, thus fully utilizing the knowledge they possessed.¹⁵³

Other safety checks were instituted. The lay of each piece was checked by an officer or by the Chief of Section. Prior to the firing of each round, the Chiefs of Section were instructed to read back the quadrant, deflection and azimuth to the Executive Officer.¹⁵⁴

An Adjutant General Inspection was held in the Battalion in October, 1966. Preliminary inspections were conducted by teams from within the Battalion and from II Field Forces in preparation for this inspection from USARV. The results of the AGI were quite gratifying. Periodic re-inspections were conducted in the following month by teams from the Battalion and from the 23d Artillery Group. Maintenance inspections were generally held concurrently. A continually high state of materiel and personnel readiness was the result.

In order to improve the quality of intelligence information within the Battalion's area of operations, a series of meetings were conducted in the fall of 1966 and the spring of 1967. In attendance were the Battalion's organic aviators, observers and intelligence personnel, representatives from other units in the Phuoc Vinh base camp, the various supported Special Forces camps and the Air Force Forward Air Controllers, ARVN Advisers and others. These meetings resulted in a closer working relationship. Information was passed among these personnel at more frequent intervals. New methods of improving artillery support were discussed.¹⁵⁵

The 6/27th continued its civic action program throughout the last quarter of 1966. The medical section conducted seven METCAP operations during that period, examining a total of 309 patients. Of these more than 40 were reported to be seriously ill. This program received increased [value] with the arrival of a replacement surgeon. A Thanksgiving Day dinner was served to 50 children of the Phuoc Vinh School. A Christmas party was held for 320 children from the same school. The children were given refreshments and a gift. A third party was held on 30 January 1967, in celebration of TET, the Vietnamese New Year.

¹⁵³ Interview, CPT George F. Palladino, S-3, 6 Jun 67.

¹⁵⁴ Operational Report, Oct 66, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ Operational Report, Feb 67, p. 6.

The Battalion provided musical entertainment and each child received a gift.¹⁵⁶ In a small way, each of these affairs aided in bridging the gap between the Americans and the Vietnamese.

Even greater opportunities for international good-will occurred when the Battalion launched an extensive program of hiring indigenous personnel to serve as laborers and KPs. Both Americans and Vietnamese gained knowledge of the mannerisms and mores of the other's culture through daily contact. Some relief from the poor economic situation of the Phuoc Vinh villagers was afforded these laborers. In addition, the men of the Battalion were freed from having to perform some of the more odious tasks that had to be done. This program was eventually extended to include all the batteries of the Battalion.

A gradual improvement in the Battalion's supply picture was noted by October 1966, due to improvements in port facilities and stock accounting procedures. All units began to receive more adequate rations. Munition supplies flowed in regularly and were never in short supply. Some problems were still experienced in direct exchange of clothing, as stockpiles of clothing were inadequate. Construction materials for troop billets were as a rule not available through official sources for self-help projects (yet the building program pushed on anyway).¹⁵⁷ By February 1967, replacement clothing began to be received in large quantities. The only difficulty remaining was that popular sizes were still in short supply. The Battalion received five frozen food cabinets, four 65-70 cu. ft. reefers and two ice making machines. These aided mess hall operation considerably. A new supply problem had arisen by that time. The Battalion's usage of electricity had increased considerably, creating a requirement for three 15kw generators. Considerable difficulty was experienced in obtaining these.¹⁵⁸ Many of these supplies were brought to the Battalion's Phuoc Vinh elements by large convoys that were controlled directly by the Battalion itself. Of the eight convoys that brought supplies to Phuoc Vinh between September 1966 and May 1967, three were controlled directly the 6/27th (the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division controlled the others). Each of these convoys was a large logistical operation, involving as many as 450 vehicles, and averaging four to ten days in duration. Routes 13 and 16 had to be secured by infantry units each time the convoy ran. In addition a cavalry troop generally provided tanks and armored personnel carriers to provide security for each march [.]

Battalion control of these convoys was exercised from a helicopter which flew surveillance over the entire length of the convoy for as long as it was on the road. Constant monitoring of its progress from this aerial observation post enabled the Convoy Commander to keep it moving at all times. Rapid de-

¹⁵⁶ Ltr AVGE-YC, Subj: Operational Report – Lessons Learned (RCS-CSFOR-65)(U), dtd 7 Feb 67, pp. 12-13.

¹⁵⁷ Ltr AVGE-YC, Subj: Operational Report – Lessons Learned (RCS-CSFOR-65)(U), dtd 7 Feb 67, pp. 12-13.

¹⁵⁸ Ltr AVGE-YC, Subj: Operational Report – Lessons Learned (RCS-SCFOR-65)(U), dtd 7 Feb 67, p. 11.

ployment of security forces or medical evacuation aircraft could also be easily accomplished from this helicopter. In addition the Battalion's operations center relayed information of possible trouble spots to each march unit commander, forewarning them to be especially watchful. The 6/27th never lost a vehicle or suffered a serious injury on the convoys it controlled. Occasionally vehicles were damaged by mines, and at least one medical evacuation flight was required on one occasion, but units other than the 6/27th were involved in every case.¹⁵⁹

A prime booster of morale for the Battalion was the R & R (Rest and Recreation) program. Through this program each soldier was given the opportunity to visit one of several Far Eastern cities (later Hawaii was added to the list) for five to seven day periods, with transportation provided free by the government. In order to determine if the program was being adequately utilized, the Battalion conducted a survey. It was found in this comparative study that during the period June, 1966 to January, 1967 only 172 of 331 R & R quotas were used. This low percentage of use (51%) demonstrated that an increase in R & R quotas does not necessarily cause an increase in the financial capacity and desire of individuals for recreation.¹⁶⁰

Charlie Battery added a new term to artilleryman's vocabulary beginning in November, 1966, when it engaged in a number of "turkey shoots". These were a series of moves by the battery to positions outside the base camp, made to bring new targets into range that would otherwise have been out of reach. An average gain of 5000 meters was gained on each turkey shoot. A total of five shoots were conducted by "C" Battery during December and January. MEDCAPS were held in conjunction with three of these firings. On one occasion a direct fire exercise was held. Both the 8" platoon and the 175mm platoon participated. Four VC base camps were destroyed by these [of these] exercises. Net results were: increased proficiency of units, an increase in morale (by allowing the cannoneers to move out of a static firing position), and destruction of the enemy's belief that he could operate with immunity outside the range of the big guns.¹⁶¹

In October, 1966 "A" Battery was relieved from its mission of general/reinforcing the 1st Battalion, 7th Artillery and was assigned the mission of general support/reinforcing the 2nd Battalion, 77th Artillery. This change came about as a result of the transfer of the Bearcat base camp from the 1st Infantry Division to the 4th Infantry Division. The battery was also given the mission of general support/reinforcing the 54th Artillery Group.¹⁶²

Battery "A" also engaged in a series of moves. The first occurred on December 27, 1966, when they moved from Bearcat to Lai Khe. No

¹⁵⁹ Interview, MSG Austin Price Jr., Bn Opns Sgt, 7 Jun 67.

¹⁶⁰ Operational Report, Feb 67, p. 13.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 14.

¹⁶² Operational Report, Oct 66, p. 3.

incidents occurred during this move. A second permanent change of station occurred on February 3, 1967, when the battery moved to Quan Loi. Again no incidents occurred.¹⁶³

During November and December, 1966 the Battalion conducted tests with the 175mm gun to determine the effectiveness of the various types of fuzes (quick and delay) in the jungle. Rounds were fired into single canopy jungle, double canopy jungle and triple canopy jungle, and into open areas. An evaluation team consisting of the Battalion Commander, the S-3 Officer and EOD personnel entered the test area in each type of jungle after each type of fuze was fired to see which was the most effective. It was found that fuze quick was better than fuze delay in single canopy jungle. It avoided the deep burrowing action prevalent with the latter. Fuze delay was better in double and triple canopy jungle as it penetrated the primary growth. The effect of fire was not absorbed by foliage. Fuze quick yielded tree bursts.¹⁶⁴

The target area survey project was begun in December 1966 and enabled the Battalion to produce more accurate firing data. The project worked in the following manner: the Battalion survey team set up a series of known survey points on towers throughout the Battalion's tactical area. These points were visible from the air. An air observer then flew in a helicopter to certain prominent terrain features. When the aircraft reached a point directly above the target area, the air observer instructed the pilot to hover at that point. The OH-13 (visible from the towers) was then intersected by two ground observers at the command of "Mark". The coordinates of the aircraft and the target below were then sent to the Fire Direction Centers as a registration point. This system was fully operational by the spring of 1967.

In January, 1967 the Battalion Commander read in a magazine about a new, sophisticated target acquisition device known as the Manpack Personnel Detector (Chemical). This device was able to locate personnel by detection of their body odors. Nicknamed the "sniffer", it reacted to the ammonia emitted by humans, and to smoke. Shortly thereafter LTC O'Connor and CPT Jack Jones (then the Battalion's Aviation Officer) secured two of these machines from ACTIV in Saigon to test their effectiveness in the Battalion aerial reconnaissance program. As the Personnel Detector was at the time still in the experimental stages, the Battalion had no previous experience from which to draw. The De[te]ctor was mounted behind the back seat in the L-19 aircraft, with the detector probe being mounted on the wing strut. The air observer then monitored the dial as the pilot flew at low level over suspected enemy locations. When the dial indicated the presence of personnel below, the pilot then flew back and forth over the "hot" area to determine the exact enemy location. Readings were generally downwind from the actual enemy location. Results of use of the sniffer were generally encouraging. Several base camps were discovered by the sniffer. It was used to support several operations conducted by the Special Forces and the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. The Battalion suggested two modifications to the machine. The dial was moved from its original position on the probe to a new location inside the aircraft, and the sound indicator (which

¹⁶³ Operational Report, Feb 67, p. 8.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 10

gave an audio indication of the same information as appeared on the dial) was modified so that it could be comfortably used inside the aircraft. Both of these modifications were adopted by ACTIV. The Manpack Personnel Detector proved useful enough to be utilized by many other units, including the 1st and 9th Infantry Division. The Battalion's experiences with the detector undoubtedly aided other units in their own use of the machine.¹⁶⁵

The 6/27th steadily improved its ability to communicate throughout early 1967. A 70' high FM mast was constructed on the Battalion Headquarters building. It increased the range of the FM radios and improved the clarity of transmission by 75%. The KW-7/TSEC radios were modified so that daily settings could be accomplished in two minutes instead of twenty. Wire lines were laid to some of the RF/PF outposts near Phuoc Vinh. The radio repairmen in "HQ" Battery constructed control boxes for the Battalion FDC. These enabled one operator to operate and transmit from any one of three radios. They also constructed a "Cease Fire" alarm system so that the operations section could rapidly inform the FDC of a check fire. A training program for new radioteletype operators was begun. These men were refreshed on tuning procedures, teletype procedures and given practice for two weeks before being put on the job.

In January, 1967 ground was broken for the Battalion's biggest civil affairs project to date – the construction of a small hospital for the villagers of Nuoc Vang. This hamlet, like most in Vietnam, had been troubled for many years by the lack of medical care for its citizens. Though the dispensary at Phuoc Vinh was only four miles away, the villagers could make the trip to it only with the utmost difficulty. Thus the idea of the hospital was conceived to alleviate this situation. It was a cooperative project between the men of the Battalion and the villagers. Assistance was given by the Phu Giao District Chief, Major Lu Yem, and by the MACV adviser for this area, Major James Hall. The project was placed under the overall control of the Battalion Surgeon, with the "HQ" Battery Commander in charge of the actual construction.

This building was not constructed without interference from the VC. Although the villagers cooperated willingly with the Americans at first, the VC stepped up their campaign of intimidation in Nuoc Vang, hoping to undo with coercion what the Americans would do with friendship and cooperation. The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry conducted a search and seal operation in the Nuoc Vang area to provide temporary security.¹⁶⁶ A permanent solution did not occur, however, until a Popular Forces outpost was constructed near the village. This project was initiated by the 6/27th. "HQ" Battery's wire section laid an eight mile long wire line between this outpost and the District Chief's compound[d] in Phuoc Vinh. The wire was placed overhead the entire eight miles. The schoolhouse adjacent to the hospital was painted the same time by the men of Headquarters Battery. The hospital was dedicated in a ribbon-cutting ceremony on May 24, 1967. This was the same day that the Battalion fired its 125,000th round in Vietnam, and its 100,000th round in the III Corps Tactical Zone. A 175mm gun was brought to Nuoc Vang for this commemorative firing. This

¹⁶⁵ Interview, CPT Ronald F. Williamson, Bn AVn Off, 6 Jun 67.

¹⁶⁶ The Redleg Courier, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 1 and p. 6.

ceremony effectively demonstrated the contrast between war and peace that was typical of the war in Vietnam. As LTC O'Connor explained, "Nuoc Van typifies the reason, the justification, of the human and financial effort involved in firing 125,000 rounds." Largely through the efforts of the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery, the residents of this village were able to live with a considerably higher degree of security. Moreover, the hospital stood ready to give modern medical treatment to those that were sick. The hospital was a symbol of the friendship of the Americans of the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery for the Vietnamese of Nuoc Vang, a symbol that would endure long after the smoke of the Battalion's guns had blown away.¹⁶⁷

Though there was a promise of hope at Nuoc Vang, progress in bringing a better life and more security to other areas seemed slight. A great increase in the tempo of Free World Forces operations supported by the 6/27th Artillery could be noted in the last quarter of 1966 and first half of 1967. In the eleven month period between November, 1965 and September, 1966 the Battalion fired approximately 47,000 rounds. From October, 1966 through June, 1967 the Battalion fired over 87,000 rounds. Thirty thousand of these rounds were fired in the I Corps Tactical Zone, with the remainder being fired in the III Corps Tactical Zone.¹⁶⁸

The Battalion continued its support of combat operations through the latter part of 1966 and into 1967. CEDAR RAPIDS I (18 July 1966 to 24 July 1966), CEDAR RAPIDS II (24 July 1966 to 25 July 1966), UNIONTOWN (9 August 1966 to 14 August 1966) and CALLUP (16 August 1966 to 21 August 1966) were all operations which the Battalion supported from its base camps.

On Operation AMARILLO, the Battalion supported the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, the Phu Giao District Forces and the 48th ARVN Regiment in clearing and securing Route 16. This was a search and destroy operation. On the morning of August 24, 1966 contact was made with the famed Phu Loi Battalion, who were then in their base camp. The 6/27th fired 1,396 rounds at this base camp in support of friendly forces in the next 48 hours. Many of the 178 VC who were killed in this battle were attributed to artillery fire.¹⁶⁹

Operations LINCOLN (8 September 1966 to 12 September 1966), LONGVIEW (24 September 1966 to 30 September 1966) and TULSA (2 October 1966 – 15 October 1966) followed. The Battalion was assigned the mission of general BATTLECREEK (10 November 1966 to 19 November 1966) and BISMARCK (25 November 1966 to 9 December 1966). The latter operation secured Route Red for resupply convoy from Phuoc Vinh to Di An.

During Operation CANARY (11 December 1966 to 19 December 1966) Battery "A" displaced an 8" howitzer platoon to an area south of Bearcat to support the 173 Airborne Brigade. Operation CEDAR FALLS (8 January 1967 to

¹⁶⁷ Extracted from draft of speech delivered by LTC O'Connor at Nuoc Vang, 24 May 67.

¹⁶⁸ Operational Status, 13 June 1967.

¹⁶⁹ Meritorious Unit Commendation, 26 Nov 66, p. 1.

17 January 1967) was a huge push into the famed "Iron Triangle", a hitherto unapproachable bastion that was the headquarters of the Phu Loi Battalion. It was the largest operation of the war to date. Battery "A" moved from Bearcat to Lai Khe to participate in it. On January 6, 1967 the battery exchanged two of its 8" howitzers with crews for two 175mm guns with crews from Bravo Battery, 2d Battalion, 32nd Artillery. This was directed by II Field Force in order to better support Operation CEDAR FALLS. Both the 8" and 175mm gun sections of Battery "A" fired extensively in support of this operation, performing in a general support/reinforcing role for the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions. During Operation [SARATOGA] (25 January 1967 to 29 January 1967 the Battalion supported the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division in its search of the Bong Trang jungle. This was followed by a resupply convoy.¹⁷⁰

Support of Special Forces camps by the Battalion was considerably intensified throughout the winter and spring of 1967. The target area survey was expanded to each camp. The survey section from Headquarters Battery visited each camp in the Phuoc Vinh – Quan Loi area (five in all) and determined the exact coordinates of a series of points in and around each camp. These were then plotted on an overlay. Use of these overlays by the Camp Commander enabled him to supply the Battalion FDC with exact coordinates when his camp was under attack. This significantly improved the Battalion's reaction time during one of these attacks.

In May, 1967 the Battalion S-3 conducted a series of classes at each supported Special Forces camp. Artillery techniques and tactics (to include fire planning) were informally discussed. Four points were emphasized: how to get a round to the target area, what to do with it once it was there, and how to plan fires and characteristics of heavy artillery. These classes enabled the Forces Special personnel to effectively plan artillery fire without the aid of a liaison officer from the Battalion.¹⁷¹

Support of Special Forces patrols and operations increased in this same time frame. The 6/27th determined future Special Forces operations through frequent liaison visits to each camp. This advance notice enabled the Battalion to pre-lay a tube in the direction of the future operation area, cutting the Battalion's reaction time and gave the Special Forces better artillery support. Liaison officers, and in some cases forward observers, were sent from the Battalion to the Special Forces elements to assist in fire planning. This resulted in more timely artillery support and better utilization of effective firepower. On one occasion the presence of a liaison officer at the Tong Le Chan Special Forces camp greatly reduced the time lapse lost in retransmission of fire data to the fire support headquarters. That camp's China Boy element had been nearly surrounded by an enemy force, but rapid utilization of artillery broke the back of the attack.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷¹ Interview, CPT George F. Palladino, BN S-3, 6 Jun 67.

¹⁷² Interview, CPT George F. Palladino, BN S-3, 6 Jun 67.

On the evening of February 1, 1967 a patrol from the Dong Xoai camp made contact with a small VC force. Artillery was immediately called in. The first round landed squarely upon the trail that the VC were using. A short while later this same patrol began receiving machine gun fire. Artillery was again called in, but contact was broken before the second volley could be fired.¹⁷³

On May 7, 1967 the Special Forces "Sigma" detachment made contact with an estimated VC platoon north of Dong Xoai. Contact was brief, but intense. The forward observer team consisting of two officers and two enlisted men from the 6/27th immediately called for close artillery support. As there were no 105mm howitzers with range, 175mm guns from Charlie Battery, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery had to be utilized in a close support role. Rounds were directed to within 400-600 meters of friendly positions. Ten rounds were fired, all of which landed squarely on target. These defensive fires of the 175mm gun were felt to be very effective.¹⁷⁴

On May 11, 1967 another Special Forces patrol (the Sigma detachment) made contact with an estimated 400 VC. According to reports this enemy force was enroute to one of its base camps and had become lost in the jungle. Artillery and air strikes were called in. Charlie Battery fired 130 eight inch rounds and 179 one seven five millimeter rounds. LTC O'Connor directed the firing of these rounds from his OH-13 helicopter. A total of 43 enemy dead was the result of the severe pounding of the area by air and artillery. The Sigma force was able to capture 2 ½ tons of medical supplies from this enemy unit.¹⁷⁵

On May 27, 1967 a patrol consisting of 85 CIDG personnel and two advisers was attacked by an estimated two VC companies. The Battalion Commander immediately flew to the home base of this patrol (Chi Linh Special Forces Camp) to gather information. He found that this patrol was overrun by the enemy, resulting in three friendly casualties. Battery "C" had fired in support of this patrol, but was forced to cease fire due to a denial of air clearance.¹⁷⁶ Two days later the Chi Linh camp requested preparatory fires on two locations. The Battalion S-2 flew over the target area three hours previous to the beginning of the fires. He noted immediately that the friendly forces were not in the area given as their location by the Company Commander. He ordered the friendly troops to mark their location by smoke. The S-2 then ordered an immediate check fire, probably saving lives by his alertness.¹⁷⁷

One of the Battalion's more notable accomplishments was its continued destruction of VC base camps. A total of 14 of these camps were destroyed in

¹⁷³ BC & Staff Call, 2 Feb 67.

¹⁷⁴ SITREP, dtd 7 May 67.

¹⁷⁵ Interview, MSG Austin Price Jr., Bn Opns Sgt, 12 May 67.

¹⁷⁶ SITREP, dtd 28 May 67.

¹⁷⁷ SITREP, dtd 2 Jun 67.

December, 1966 alone, with an additional 11 more in January, 1967.¹⁷⁸ Though most of these were small, consisting mainly of a few huts and bunkers, an occasional battalion sized base camp was found. One of these was discovered in a remarkably preserved state (even after it had been fired upon). This particular camp was visited by approximately 24 persons from the Battalion on January 29, 1967. This was done so that these personnel would have a clearer picture of what they were shooting at. This base camp then partially destroyed by artillery directed to the camp by these personnel from a position some 800 meters distant.¹⁷⁹

On March 19, 1967 The Popular Forces outpost at An Linh (some three miles from Phuoc Vinh) was subjected to intense mortar and small arms fire from a large enemy force. Several casualties were sustained, creating a necessity for ground medical evacuation. The Battalion Command dispatched a medical aid team and small security force to the scene. This force was able to successfully extract the wounded Popular Forces soldiers in spite of the fact that they were exposed to hostile fire. No friendly casualties were sustained during this extraction.¹⁸⁰ A few days later the Popular Forces outpost at Nuoc Vang received a similar attack. Again friendly casualties were sustained. The Battalion's medical section plus a two APC security force from Charlie Battery was dispatched to the scene. The casualties were successfully brought to Phuoc Vinh by this force.¹⁸¹

Charlie Battery continued to go on turkey shoots throughout the winter and spring of 1967, displacing a total of six times to various locations around Phuoc Vinh. On two occasions they displaced to the village of An Linh to support Special Forces operations, firing preparatory fires against a VC base camp. The most spectacular turkey shoot occurred on May 28, 1967 when the "C" Battery 8" platoon displaced to a position south of the Song Be River to support Operation DALLAS. Although the battery was scheduled to shoot preparation fires around a landing zone to be used later in the day, it [could] not do this as they had no air clearance. Meanwhile the Sigma team of Special Forces reported an estimated two VC battalions dug in north of Phuoc Vinh. The Battalion Commander immediately requested and received permission to withdraw the battery's support of operation DALLAS. The 8" platoon was then taken to Nuoc Vang where they joined the 175mm guns (in base camp) in firing at this enemy force. A total of forty five 175mm rounds and fifty-three 8" rounds were fired at twenty-five targets in the area of the two battalions.¹⁸²

Battery "A" participated in turkey shoots also, displacing a total of 11 times. During some of their turkey shoots the battery stayed in the field for pe-

¹⁷⁸ As reported on the "Redleg Scoreboard", a daily summary of battalion accomplishments.

¹⁷⁹ The Redleg Courier, Vol. 1, No. 6, dtd 12 Feb 67, p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ GO 3480, HQ, 1st Inf Div, datd 21 May 67.

¹⁸¹ GO 3342, HQ, 1st Inf Div, dtd 17 May 67.

¹⁸² SITREP, dtd 19 May 67.

riods of up to a week. The battery supported a road clearing operation during Operation JUNCTION CITY and supported at various times the Special Forces Camps of Tong Le Chan, Minh Thanh, Chon Thanh and Bo Duc. On one occasion the battery's fires were able to break the back of a mortar attack against Tong Le Chan. On another occasion (May 18, 1967) the 8" platoon, then in the field south of Quan Loi, fired 70 rounds in 20 minutes supporting an element of the 9th Division. This friendly force was engaged in brutal combat with a medium sized VC force. Twenty-seven VC were killed and fourteen bunkers were destroyed.¹⁸³

On March 17-19, 1967 the Battalion stumbled onto some good shooting quite by accident. By monitoring the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division radio frequency, the Battalion was able to find that the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry was receiving intense contact near the village of Bau Bang. The S-3 immediately offered the Battalion's services, which resulted in approximately 300 rounds of 8" and 175mm fire against the enemy's position. Other artillery units from Phuoc Vinh as well as from the base at Lai Khe joined in the melee. Over 200 VC were killed in action. The 6/27th fired blocking fires and defensive concentrations.¹⁸⁴

The Phuoc Vinh base camp was hit by three consecutive mortar attacks on the evenings of May 11-13, 1967. No direct hits were received by either Headquarters or Charlie Batteries, though several rounds landed close. The worst of the attacks occurred on May 11, 1967, when nine helicopters from the 162nd Assault Helicopter Company were destroyed by mortars. Twelve persons were wounded by shrapnel. Two persons from Headquarters Battery received shrapnel wounds in the attack of May 12, 1967. The bubble on the Battalion's OH-13 helicopter was damaged that same night.

The Phuoc Vinh base camp's countermortar program was controlled directly from the Battalion's operations center during the absence of direct support artillery headquarters. The response of the various artillery units to these enemy mortars was rapid and impressive. Direct communications had been established between the Battalion's operations center and all other fire direction centers in Phuoc Vinh. The first countermortar round was launched against the VC positions on an average of three minutes after the first enemy rounds had landed within the Phuoc Vinh perimeter. A total of 511 rounds of countermortar fire were expended the first night, 1,980 the second night and 1,909 the third night. It was felt that the countermortar program of May 12, 1967 triggered the enemy's attack prematurely, causing it to be erratic and of short duration. Air strikes and gunships also pounded the VC mortar positions. This continued US offensive eventually silenced the enemy mortars. Continued practice of the countermortar program resulted in even better reaction times for the participating artillery units.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Interview, CPT Ervin F. Kamm, A Btry CO, 7 Jun 67.

¹⁸⁴ Interview, MAJ Carl W. Haustein Jr., Bn XO, 6 Jun 67.

¹⁸⁵ Interview, MSG Austin Price Jr., Bn Opns Sgt, 6 Jun 67.

Bravo Battery continued its operations in the north throughout this period. On February 20, 1967, 2314 hours, this battery became the first US artillery unit to fire into North Vietnam. The targets were a series of anti-aircraft weapons that were firing at a US spotter plane. The battery was credited with destroying one anti-aircraft weapon and damaging an additional three others.¹⁸⁶

Battery "B" supported at least two operations conducted by the Marines. On February 2, 1967 a platoon of 175mm guns plus the FDC section displaced to Dong Ha to support the 12th Marines on Operation CHINNOK. They stayed 12 days. ON March 24, 1967 the battery displaced to Gio Linh, two miles south of the DMZ. This was to relieve another battery of the 2d Battalion, 94th Artillery on Operation HIGHRISE.¹⁸⁷

The war along the DMZ significantly escalated during March, 1967. As a result, Battery "B" was hit by a number of large mortar and rocket attacks. On March 6, 1967 the battery, still at Camp J. J. Carroll, was hit by over 450 incoming mortar rounds. Approximately 45 rounds landed in the battery area itself. Some guns and vehicles were slightly damaged and four men were wounded by shrapnel (none seriously). Several tents received direct hits and all were damaged by shrapnel. One man was in one end of a tent when a round landed in the other end. He was uninjured. Some of these rounds were 140mm fin stabilized rockets.¹⁸⁸

"B" Battery received more of the same treatment after their arrival at Gio Linh. They averaged 20 incoming mortar rounds a night for the first two weeks. To protect themselves, the battery moved underground. Only the guns and the mess tent remained on the surface. This procedure afforded fairly adequate protection for the men, as shown by the battery's low casualty figures (as of April 24, 1967 no significant casualties had been sustained).¹⁸⁹

As a result of the severe mental pressure of living under the constant threat of mortar attacks, and because of the primitive living conditions, morale of the men of Battery "B" began to slip a bit. Several men approached nervous breakdowns, and one man was sent to a psychiatrist for consultation. In order to give the men as much respite as was possible from their hard lives, the R&R program was emphasized, field showers and additional fortifications were constructed. Religious services were held and a good program of keeping the men informed of the situation around them w[as] instituted.

Shortly thereafter Battery "B" became involved in some spectacular action. On May 2, 1967 the North Vietnamese hit Gio Linh with 1,000 rounds of artillery fire from 11 different in North Vietnam and in the DMZ. The communists fired 105mm artillery and 82mm mortar rounds onto the hilltop base,

¹⁸⁶ The Redleg Courier, Vol. 1, No. 7, dtd 1 May 67, p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ Ltr, CPT Albert R. Pannell to LTC Edward C. O'Connor, dtd 26 Feb 67.

¹⁸⁸ The Redleg Courier, Vol. 1, No. 7, dtd 1 May 67, p. 4.

¹⁸⁹ The Redleg Courier, Vol. 1, NO. 7, dtd 1 May 67, p. 4.

aiming specifically at the 175mm "Long Toms" used to fire across the DMZ into North Vietnam. Two Marines were killed and 73 wounded during the attack. A second attack just after midnight poured fifty 82mm mortar rounds onto Gio Linh, wounding four Marines. At the same time the Marine base at Dong Ha was hit by 50 rounds of Russian made 140 mm rockets and 82mm mortars. Eleven Americans were killed and 67 wounded at Dong Ha. Marines swept into the Communist positions after the attacks and found 50 rockets and 30 rocket sites. A third attack that same evening hit the Phu Bai airfield with 100 rounds of 82mm mortars.¹⁹⁰

A week later the battery was involved in the pitched battle for the Special Forces camp at Con Thien, two miles south of the DMZ. While two reinforced North Vietnamese battalions attacked Con Thien, mortar and rocket attacks were launched simultaneously against three nearby artillery bases in an attempt to disrupt artillery support of that camp. Battery "B" received 150 mortar rounds that inflicted light damage to US artillery. Camp Carroll was hit by 20 Chinese 100mm rockets and Dong Ha was hit by 30 Russian Made 240mm rockets. Highway One from Dong Ha to Gio Linh was cut off at the same time. The attack on Con Thien was repulsed after a three hour battle during which the North Vietnamese broke through part of the perimeter defense, destroying a number of bunkers by throwing satchel charges into them. As the enemy withdrew, heavy artillery fire from Dong Ha and Gio Linh blasted their escape routes, along with air strikes. Information received from ten captured NVA soldiers indicated that artillery scored direct hits on the communists. Friendly casualties at Con Thien included 35 persons killed and 109 wounded, while the enemy suffered 179 killed. Over 100 enemy weapons were captured.¹⁹¹

Battery "B" received two more attacks shortly thereafter. On May 10, 1967 twenty Americans were wounded in a series of mortar, artillery and rocket attacks on Gio Linh and Con Thien. Hardest hit was Gio Linh, where 66 artillery rounds and thirty 82mm mortar rounds landed inside the camp at 1020 hours.¹⁹² The next night a similar attack pelted Gio Linh with 85mm, 100mm and 122mm artillery fires, some from guns with ranges of up to 12 miles. Some of these weapons were fired by the enemy for the first time in the war. Ten Americans were wounded during the attacks.¹⁹³

Battery "B"s two months at Gio Linh had resulted in their firing of an amazing number of rounds. From March 23d to May 18th the battery fired 13,056 rounds, many of which were into North Vietnam.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Stars & Stripes, 8 May 67.

¹⁹¹ Stars & Stripes, 10 May 67.

¹⁹² Stars & Stripes, 14 May 67.

¹⁹³ Stars & Stripes, 15 May 67.

¹⁹⁴ Ltr, CPT John H. Hiser to CPT Robert L. Koska, dtd 17 May 67.

EPILOGUE

As of this writing the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery is continuing to serve valiantly in Vietnam. The story of this battalion is far from a complete one at this time, yet certain truths are obvious even now. In spite of the fact that the US Army was well into the missile age in 1966-1967, the Redleg Battalion has provided the kind of definitive, usable firepower that was necessary to provide security to American and Vietnamese units in the Vietnam war. Its "8" howitzers and 175mm guns seemed something of an anachronism, yet they were able to place explosive charges easily and accurately where they were needed (even at long distances). The results could not but be noticed in the Battalion's areas of operation. Small, lightly fortified camps became fortresses when surrounded by the battalion's protective ring of fire. The outcome of ground contact with the enemy was many times swayed by the judicious placing of heavy artillery rounds. Harassment and interdiction fire kept the VC on the move and denied him the use of secure base camps. The net result of this artillery fire, plus continued engagement by the ground forces, plus overwhelming American air superiority was such that a weakening of VC strength could be noted by May, 1967. The enemy found it increasingly difficult to mount an offensive, for his munitions, foodstuffs, medical supplies, even manpower, all seemed to be in short supply. His life was one of constant harassment, and his morale suffered because of it.

The introduction of certain new weapons and supplies served to relieve the situation a bit for the VC. He now had rockets at his disposal, and he used them with impunity, particularly along the DMZ and against large installations such as Da Nang and the Bien Hoa Air Base. There also seemed to be an increase in the number of North Vietnamese (as opposed to indigenous VC) combatants. There seemed to be a slight shift in the characteristics of the war in some areas. The enemy seemed less of a guerilla and more of a conventional soldier (this trend it must be admitted was slight if perceptible at all by May, 1967). The enemy remained as elusive, as cunning, as jungle wise as ever. However, the American presence was immovable also.

The situation faced by the Battalion in May, 1967 seemed fairly typical of the situation throughout Vietnam. After 17 months of combat, real progress for the American cause seemed slight. The enemy was clearly under more stress, but had been able to keep up the pace of combat. There was some progress in the psychological and ideological aspects of the war, for the CVN's position remained stable throughout the entire 17 month period. This gave the government an aura of strength that aided considerably in the government's gaining popular support for itself. Many of the more pragmatic Vietnamese supported the government because America's support of it offered obvious economic advantages to him that the communists could not hope to match. Ideological commitment was bound to follow.

Thus, the outlook was one of hope in both the military and ideological conflicts. The goal of a strong, stable, free government for the people of South Vietnam did seem more attainable by mid-1967. There was still no easy, painless solution to the problems of Vietnam, for the communist element within the

country seemed strong enough in May, 1967 to harass the populace for many years. Yet diligence and persistence could see the Vietnamese and their American friends through to the realization of both their aspirations. The 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery would of course continue to do its part, as it had done in the past.

SP4 Paul R. Frederick
15 June 1967
Headquarters 6/27th Artillery
Phuoc Vinh, Vietnam.

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