

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."

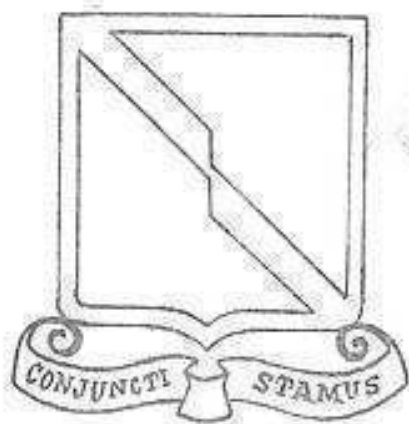
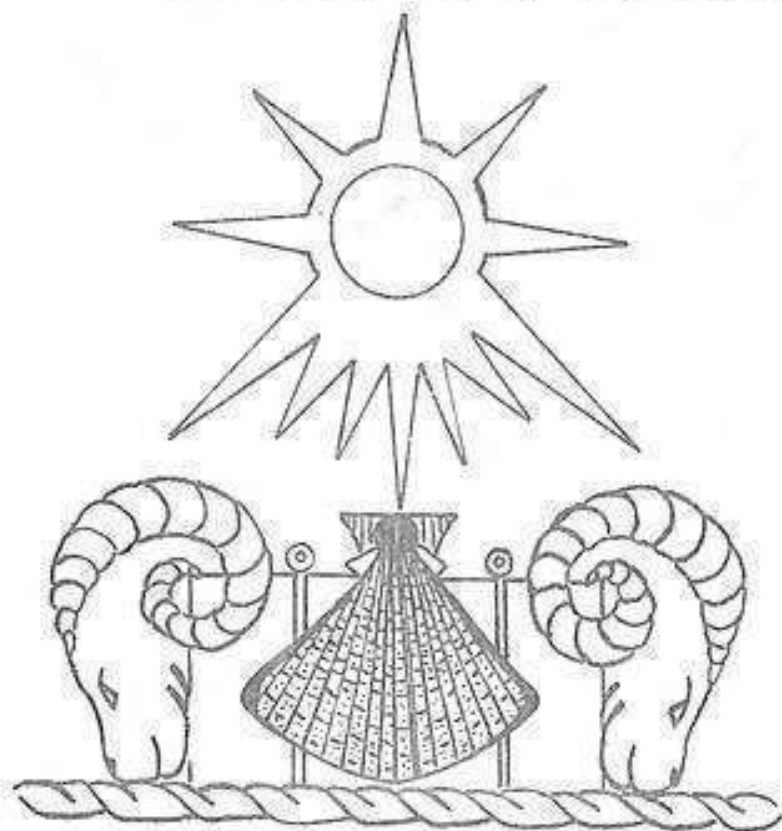
Note: The originals of each page of the history were tattooed with that classic Quan Loi orange dirt and printed on yellow paper or at least paper that yellowed from the 30 plus years. The PDF pages have been cleaned up and the paper "whitened as much as possible up in the event that you want to print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

A LEGACY OF HONOR



6th BATTALION, 27th ARTILLERY

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 deepening economic ties with the allies brought America still closer to entry into the war. Finally, when it became apparent that our support had 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 manyfold. 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 McCellan, 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 McCellan 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 drastic-

ally reduced in size or disbanded completely. Battery F did not escape this axe; it was disbanded and demobilized on the 8th of February 1919, at Camp McCellan.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 materiel. 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 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 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

²Ibid, p. 1.

³Ibid, p. 1.

⁴Ibid, p. 1.

⁵Ibid, p. 1.

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 Medjeg-Tebourba 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-guessa. 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 Mark IV tanks. 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 Tebourba began a few days later. The remnants of the 2d Hampshires, together with remnants of other units, moved south along the river bank and thence towards Tebourba 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

⁶ Ibid, p. 1.

⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

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, this 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 105mm self-propelled howitzers, plus several towed, did in fact arrive. The Battalion was thus able to accompany the 1st Armored Division throughout the rest of the Tunisian campaign. It accompanied the 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 beachhead 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 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 2d 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

⁸Ibid, pp. 2-3.

⁹Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁰Ibid, p. 3.

¹¹Ibid, p. 3.

¹²Ibid, p. 3.

¹³Ibid, p. 3.

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 Castigliene on the 27th of April, 1945 for Bergamo. Upon arrival there, it then continued on to Erivio, 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, Kentucky, and educated at Princeton University, the future hero accepted a commission in the Army Reserves in 1935. He went on active duty on March 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 1943 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

¹⁴Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 4.

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

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, Russia and the United States). The 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, after being redesignated 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 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 remobilization and rebuilding program.

The 27th Artillery's history reflects this national sequence. Though inactivated in 1948, it was recalled into the Active Army with the 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 a 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

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

¹⁸Ltr, DA AG to 6/27, AGAC-SS-S, Subj: Harrison, William H. O324218 dtd 22 May 63, p. 1.

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

²⁰Ibid, p. 4.

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, 1957.²²

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 redesignated in October, 1957 and 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 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. 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

²¹Ibid, p. 4.

²²Ibid, p. 4.

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

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

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

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

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 Celebration 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 Celebrations 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

²⁶Battalion Activities, p. 1.

²⁷Ibid, p. 2.

²⁸Annual Historical Summary, 1963, p. 5.

²⁹Ibid, p. 5.

³⁰1st Ind, OCMH, Subj: Selection of Unit Day, dtd 9 Jul 64 to Ltr, 6/27 to OCMH, same subject, dtd 26 Jun 64.

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 redesignated. 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 attached 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 as 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, 1964 on two passenger trains, arriving at Utting, Arizona 44 hours later. The advance party had preceded

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

³²Report, HQ, III Corps & Ft Hood Office of the IG, Subj: Annual General Inspection, FY 1964, of the 6th Bn, 27th Arty, dtd 5 Dec 65, extracted in Annual Historical Summary (AKCHO-CA-27-R), HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, 1 Jan 63 to 31 Dec 63, p. 7.

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

³⁴Ibid, p. 3.

them by seven days. The equipment train arrived on May 7th. Two M115 towed howitzers were assigned to each battery, with M8 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 2d 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 2d Armored Division. Battery B was detached from the 6/27th and attached to the 2d Howitzer Battalion (155mm)(T), 31st Artillery and Battery B, 2d Battalion, 31st Artillery was attached to the 6/27th. Altogether the Battalion logged over 125,000 vehicular miles during the 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 23d 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 Defense).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, 1964.⁴⁰ 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

³⁵Ibid, p. 5.

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

³⁷Annual Historical Supplement, 1964, p. 5.

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

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

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

⁴¹Ibid, 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.¹

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 guerilla warfare, increasingly gained control of the countryside while the more conventional French forces were

¹Fact Sheet # 2, HQ, II Field Force, AVX-IO, Subj: South Vietnam, p. 5.

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 represented.² 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."⁴

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 an ubiquitous party."⁵ 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.⁶ An organization called the National Liberation Front was created in 1960 to accomplish this. Its members became the "Viet Cong."

²Ibid, p. 6.

³Bernard B. Fall, Vietnam Witness 1953-66 (New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), pp. 51-67.

⁴Ibid, p. 71.

⁵Ibid, p. 127.

⁶Ibid, pp. 237-238.

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.⁷ By isolating the outlying villages from control by the central (i.e. Saigon) government, the Viet Cong were allowed to operate 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.⁸ The Diem regime reacted by vastly increasing the size of the armed forces. America provided considerable materiel 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

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.

⁷Ibid, p. 283.

⁸Bernard B. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams (New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), p. 325.

⁹Ibid, p. 325.

¹⁰Ibid, p. 333.

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 at 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."¹¹ 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,¹² Free World Forces had increased to over 224,000 by the end of that year.¹³ This is in addition to the ARVN (Army of Vietnam) forces, which by this time had grown to approximately 635,000.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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, still adhering to the rules of revolutionary warfare, often 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

¹¹Fall, Witness, p. 337.

¹²Ibid, p. 312.

¹³Ltr, MACOI-C, Subj: Summary of Events, First Quarter, Calendar Year 1966, dtd 11 May 66, p. 1.

¹⁴Fall, Witness, p. 337.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 340.

on July 19, 1965.¹⁶ This time frame was right in the midst of the first large call-up of forces for the Vietnam conflict.

Feverish preparation 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.¹⁷

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 32½ hours, the train arrived at Beaumont, Texas with all equipment intact. Several loads, particularly the huge boxes that contained the Battalion aircraft (an O-1 "Birdog" and an OH-13 helicopter) had shifted and come loose, forcing the guards to relash 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.¹⁸

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.¹⁹

The main body - 24 officers, 3 warrant officers and 544 enlisted men left Ft Bliss at 1820 hours, October 1, 1965 by train for the Oakland Army

¹⁶Unit Historical Report, 1966, p. 1.

¹⁷Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁸Ibid, pp. 2-3.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 2.

Terminal. The trip took 38½ 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.²⁰ Of the total assigned strength, fifteen (15) personnel remained at Ft Bliss because of approved deferments for various reasons. These personnel were placed under the control of the 6th Artillery Group (AD).²¹

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 times during the voyage due to bad weather. By October 19th, the Gordon had 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.²²

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 2½ 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 (est-

²¹Ibid, p. 4.

²²Ibid, p. 2.

imated by the Battalion Surgeon to be 112 degrees) was stifling. After landing at the Bien Hoa Air Base the troops then boarded another fleet of 2½ ton trucks which took them to the staging area on the grounds of the Saigon University.²³

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).²⁴

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 the two batteries were found adjacent to the base camp area of the 173d Airborne Brigade. The batteries moved on December 9th.²⁵

The organization became a composite battalion on November 15, 1965. On that day four 8" howitzers were transferred to the 2d 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 32nd Artillery.²⁶

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.²⁷

²³Ibid, p. 2.

²⁴Unit Historical Report, 1966, p. 5.

²⁵Ibid, p. 4.

²⁶Ibid, p. 4.

²⁷Ibid, p. 3.

All three of the batteries in Phuoc Vinh at first occupied temporary positions near the airstrip. As these areas were untenable from a ground defensive standpoint, within 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 re-assuming its mission that afternoon.²⁸

The Battalion's personnel section moved within the 1st Infantry Division staging area at Di An into the area occupied by the 2d 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 the 2/32nd joining the other sections at Tan Son Nhut Airbase on December 9th.²⁹

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.³⁰

²⁸Ibid, p. 3.

²⁹Ibid, p. 4.

³⁰Ibid, p. 4.

PART III

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 TAOR (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 its 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", 2d Battalion, 32d Artillery at Bien Hoa and Battery "B", 2d 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.¹

Artillery support was supplied to Popular Forces Hamlets, ARVN units and Special Forces camps.² 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.³

¹Unit Historical Report, 1966, p. 8.

²The Popular Forces were an organization of local defenders.

³Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, Subj: Meritorious Unit Commendation, dtd 2 Jan 67, p. 2.

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 more. All of these casualties were directly attributable to artillery.⁴ 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.⁵

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.⁶

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.⁷

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.⁸ 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.⁹

⁴Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-Y, Subj: Operational Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 July 1966, Reports Control Symbol CSFOB-65 (U), p. 1.

⁵Ibid, p. 4.

⁶Unit Historical Report, 1966, p. 4.

⁷Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-Y, Subj: Operational Report on Lessons Learned (RCS CSGPO-28)(R1)(U), dtd 9 May 66 p. 9.

⁸Unit Historical Report, 1966, p. 6.

⁹Quarterly Report, 31 Jul 66, p. 7.

A prime source of intelligence information was the Battalion's aviation program. Using two O-1 "Birddogs" (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' 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹

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.¹²

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.¹³

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

¹¹Ibid, p. 5.

¹²Operational Report, 31 May 66, p. 10.

¹³Ibid, p. 8.

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 were capable of launching. The radio bunker, located adjacent to the switchboard bunker, was of similar construction. Space inside the bunker was reserved for two conax 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 of a M37B1 three-quarter ton truck to be used as an emergency power source. Construction of the walls and roof of the bunker itself was the same as that used for the switchboard bunker.¹⁴

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.¹⁵

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 the onset of the monsoon season.¹⁶

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

¹⁴Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVAC-Y, Subj: Unit Historical Report, dtd 5 Jan 66, p. 12.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 12.

¹⁶Operational Report, May 66, p. 4.

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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

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 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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.²¹

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

¹⁷Unit Historical Report, 5 Jan 66, p. 9.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 9.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 9.

²⁰Ibid, p. 10.

²¹Operation Report, July 1966, p. 7.

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.²²

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 ballons 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. Radioteletype 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 sandbars. Gun carriages (M107 and M110) were often non-operational due to lack of repair parts. Hydraulic line leaks, broken spade braces and broken elevation and traverse gears were the major causes of breakdowns.²³

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 the 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.²⁴

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.²⁵

²²Unit Historical Report, Jan 66, p. 10.

²³Operational Report, May 1966, p. 11.

²⁴Unit Historical Report, Jan 66, p. 11.

²⁵Ibid, p. 11.

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.²⁶

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 flown 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 radioteletype was used, but combat use of this instrument took priority, limiting its administrative use.²⁷

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.²⁸

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.²⁹

APC 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.

²⁶Ibid, p. 6.

²⁷Ibid, p. 5.

²⁸Ibid, p. 5.

²⁹Operational Report, May 66, p. 5.

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.³⁰

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.³¹

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 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 flap pole, a fence and a volleyball court were constructed, mainly by volunteer labor.³² 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.³³

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

³⁰Unit Historical Report, Jan 66, p. 5.

³¹Operational Report, July 66, p. 5.

³²Unit Historical Report, Jan 66, pp. 14-15.

³³Operational Report, May 66, p. 4.

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 clinical sessions.³⁴

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 that camp by the enemy more difficult. VC operations within range of the big guns became risky endeavors for them. Harrassment 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 harrassment 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 a whole, the enemy may well have concluded that the men in 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 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 the 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, saw exactly that.

³⁴Ibid, p. 5.

PART IV

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 a slow and laborious process, the friendly forces did eventually succeed in wresting the initiative of battle from the enemy.¹ 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. Through 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 larger 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 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

¹Ltr, MACOI-C, Subj: Summary of Events, First Quarter, Calendar Year 1966, p. 3.

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 1965.² It was followed by LAVENDER HILL, notable chiefly for the fact that the Battalion's fires produced a large secondary explosion,³ and by Operation BLUE BALL.⁴ 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.⁵ After supporting QUICK KICK II, Battery "B" displaced to the village of Bo Mau II (1½ miles east of Phuoc Vinh) in support of Operation QUICK KICK IV from 24 January 1966 to 11 February 1966.⁶ Battery "A" moved from Bien Hoa to Long Thanh in support of Operation MALLET on 29 January 1966. It assumed a new position during the same operation on 11 February and returned to base camp on 18 February 1966.⁷ Another resupply convoy operation, RED BALL V, followed on 29 January 1966 to 1 February 1966.⁸

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 countermortar plots located by the countermortar 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

²Commander's Daily Situation Reports, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, 19 Dec 65 and 20 Dec 65.

³SITREP, dtd 3 - 7 Jan 66.

⁴SITREP, dtd 12 - 14 Jan 66.

⁵SITREP, dtd 15 - 19 Jan 66.

⁶SITREP, dtd 24 Jan 66 - 11 Feb 66.

⁷SITREP, dtd 29 Jan 66 - 18 Feb 66.

⁸SITREP, dtd 29 Jan 66 - 1 Feb 66.

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.⁹

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 artillery and air strikes were credited with a VC body count of over 350.¹⁰ 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.¹¹

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 operation the following day, and returned to base camp shortly thereafter.¹² The Battalion then supported a series of small operations from its base camps. These were: MIAMI (16 April 1966 to 20 April 1966),¹³ WILDWOOD (17 April 1966 to 24 April 1966),¹⁴ and CHATTANCOGA (22 April 1966 to 24 April 1966).¹⁵ Resupply

⁹Meritorious Unit Commendation, dtd 26 Nov 66 p. 2.

¹⁰Meritorious Unit Commendation, dtd 26 Nov 66 p. 2.

¹¹SITREP, dtd 10 Mar 66

¹²SITREP, dtd 30 Mar 66 and 31 Mar 66.

¹³SITREP, dtd 16 Apr 66 and 20 Apr 66.

¹⁴SITREP, dtd 17 Apr 66 and 24 Apr 66.

¹⁵SITREP, dtd 22 Apr 66 and 24 Apr 66.

convoys (RED BALL VI AND RED BALL VII) also occupied Batteries "B" and "C" during this period.¹⁶

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 Division Artillery until the termination of BIRMINGHAM on 17 May 1966.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

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 (7 June 1966 to 10 June 1966).¹⁹

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 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 1966.²⁰ 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.²¹ 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 the 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.

¹⁶SITREP, dtd 5 Mar 66, 6 Mar 66, 28 Mar 66 and 1 Apr 66.

¹⁷SITREP, dtd 6 May 66 and 17 May 66.

¹⁸Interview, liT John D. Klaitz, A Btry XO, 25 Aug 66.

¹⁹Meritorious Unit Commendation, dtd 26 Nov 66, p. 1.

²⁰Interview, LTC Edward C. O'Connor, Bn Cmdr, 19 May 67.

²¹ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-YC, Subj: Operational Report on Lessons Learned (U), dtd 31 Oct 66, p.

In all sixty 8" rounds and fifty-seven 175mm rounds were expended.²²

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.²³ 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.²⁴

Defense of the Phuoc Vinh base camp on occasion occupied the 6/27th. Nightly harrassment and interdiction fire from the Battalion, as well as from the 105mm 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 a 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 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.²⁵

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.²⁶ 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 these lights and extinguished them. After expending 30 rounds in a countermortar program, the enemy mortars were extinguished.²⁷ Another

²²SITREP, dtd 11 Jul 66,

²³SITREP, dtd 17 May 66.

²⁴SITREP, dtd 19 Jun 66.

²⁵SITREP, dtd 6 Dec 65.

²⁶SITREP, dtd 25 Feb 66.

²⁷SITREP, dtd 25 Feb 66.

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.²⁸ Four days later, on April 12, seven rounds from a 175mm recoilless rifle were fired at Phuoc Vinh.²⁹ None of these attacks inflicted many casualties or caused much damage.

As the months passed by, the 6/27th was engaged in many other projects outside of its tactical missions. Base camp areas were improved, living conditions were bettered and relations with the Vietnamese citizenry were promoted.

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.³⁰ 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.³¹

Due to normal rotation of personnel and the distinct lack of school trained replacements, the Battalion faced an acute shortage of FFC and firing battery personnel in mid-1966. This problem was solved by conducting an intensive on-the-job training program for the new personnel.³² 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.³³ Training new air observers proved to be rather difficult, taking much longer than was anticipated (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.³⁴

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 the Albion Women's

²⁸SITREP, dtd 8 Apr 66.

²⁹SITREP, dtd 12 Apr 66.

³⁰Operational Report, July 66, p. 2.

³¹SITREP, dtd 10 Aug 66.

³²Operational Report, Jul 66, p. 9.

³³Battle Journal, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, dtd 15 Oct 66.

³⁴Operational Report, May 66, p. 4.

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.³⁵ 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.³⁶

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 materiel 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 a 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 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 grade artillery officers

³⁵Operational Report, Jul 66, p. 5.

³⁶Meritorious Unit Commendation, Nov 66, p. 2.

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.³⁷

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 all TO&E weapons to include hand grenades.³⁸

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 that area desperately needed heavy artillery support. As the Marines did not have a weapon as large and as powerful as the 175mm 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.³⁹

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. 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.⁴⁰

³⁷Interview, CPT George F. Palladino, Bn S-3, 6 Jun 67.

³⁸Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-YC, Subj: Operational Report-Lessons Learned (RSC-CSFOR-65)(U), dtd 7 Feb 67, p. 7.

³⁹The Redleg Courier, Vol. 1, No. 7, dtd 1 May 67, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁰Ibid, p. 2.

On October 19, 1966 the 2d Battalion, 94th Artillery arrived on the artillery plateau. "B" Battery was attached to this organization shortly thereafter, eventually becoming known as Delta Battery, 2d 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.⁴¹

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.⁴²

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.⁴³

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-1, S-2, S-3, Communication Officer, Motor Officer, Aviation Officer, Surgeon, Battery Commanders (when in the Phuoc Vinh area) and the Sergeant Major attended the morning briefing. 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 coordinate action to correct these areas. As all the primary staff personnel were in attendance, they were all informed

⁴¹Ibid, p. 3.

⁴²Ibid, p. 3.

⁴³Ibid, p. 3.

of what was going on within the Battalion. The evening briefings were a review of the Battalion's tactical operations. The harassment and interdiction fire plan for that evening was discussed and appropriate changes 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.⁴⁴

A comprehensive maintenance program was initiated in mid-September. The battery and battalion maintenance sections were collocated in Phuoc Vinh to insure proper supervision and utilization of all maintenance personnel. Formal motor stables were conducted. Maintenance records were examined and instruction 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.⁴⁵

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 168 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), an Officer's Club, an 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. Hood, the Base Development Officer, drew the blueprints and determined the location of buildings. The plans were in accordance with directives from USARV. Laying of pads was greatly facilitated by the use of a cement mixer procured by the Service Battery Commander. Originally the building crew was comprised of men from

⁴⁴Interview, CPT George F. Palladino, Bn S-3, 6 Jun 67.

⁴⁵Operational Report, Oct 66, p. 4.

all batteries. After these personnel rotated home, "HQ" Battery provided all of its labor.⁴⁶

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, an NCO Club, an 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 on the guns and provided a level firing program.⁴⁷

"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 tent frame billets, a communications center, an XO Post, an underground, cement structure FDC, a mess hall (only one 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.⁴⁸

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, an 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 lightweight, highly reflective aluminium 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.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Interview, 1SG Emanuel T. Petite, 1st Sgt, HQ Btry, 6 Jun 67.

⁴⁷Interview, 1LT Hubert E. Edenfield Jr., C Btry XO, 6 Jun 67.

⁴⁸Interview, CPT Ervin F. Kamm Jr., A Btry CO, 7 Jun 67.

⁴⁹The 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.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹

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 months 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 operation, 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.⁵²

The 6/27th continued its civic action program throughout the last quarter of 1966. The medical section conducted seven MEDCAP 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 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

⁵⁰Interview, CPT George F. Palladino, S-3, 6 Jun 67.

⁵¹Operational Report, Oct 66, p. 2.

⁵²Operational Report, Feb 67, p. 6.

and a gift. A third party was held on 30 January 1967, in celebration of TET, the Vietnamese New Year. The Battalion provided musical entertainment and each child received a gift.⁵³ 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 indigeneous 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 the 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).⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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 by 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

⁵³Ltr AVGE-YC, Subj: Operational Report - Lessons Learned (RCS-CSFCR-65) (U), dtd 7 Feb 67, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁴Ltr AVGE-YC, Subj: Operational Report - Lessons Learned (U), dtd 13 Oct 66

⁵⁵Ltr AVGE-YC, Subj: Operational Report - Lessons Learned (RCS-CSFCR-65) (U), dtd 7 Feb 67, p. 11.

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 deployment 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.⁵⁶

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.⁵⁷

Charlie Battery added a new term to the artilleryman's vocabulary beginning in November, 1966, when it engaged in an 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.⁵⁸

In October, 1966 "A" Battery was relieved from its mission of general support/reinforcing the 1st Battalion, 7th Artillery and was assigned the mission of general support/reinforcing the 2d Battalion, 77th Artillery.

⁵⁶Interview, MSG Austin Price Jr., En Opns Sgt, 7 Jun 67.

⁵⁷Operational Report, Feb 67, p. 13.

⁵⁸Ibid, p. 14.

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.⁵⁹

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 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.⁶⁰

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.⁶¹

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 of 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

⁵⁹Operational Report, Oct 66, p. 3.

⁶⁰Operational Report, Feb 67, p. 8.

⁶¹Ibid, p. 10.

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's aerial reconnaissance program. As the Personnel Detector was at that time still in the experimental stages, the Battalion had no previous experience from which to draw. The Dector 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 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 Divisions. The Battalion's experiences with the detector undoubtedly aided other units in their own use of the machine.⁶²

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.⁶³

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

⁶²Interview, CPT Ronald F. Williamson, Bn Avn Off, 6 Jun 67.

⁶³Interview, MSG Robert L. Hughes, Bn Comm Off, 6 Jun 67.

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.⁶⁴ 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 in Phuoc Vinh. The wire was placed overhead the entire eight miles. The school-house adjacent to the hospital was painted at 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 ceremony effectively demonstrated the contrast between war and peace that was typical of the war in Vietnam. As LTC O'Connor explained, Nuoc Vang 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.⁶⁵

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 the 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.

⁶⁴The Redleg Courier, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 1 and p. 6.

⁶⁵Extracted from draft of speech delivered by LTC O'Connor at Nuoc Vang, 24 May 67.

Thirty thousand of these rounds were fired in the I Corps Tactical Zone, with the remainder being fired in the III Corps Tactical Zone.⁶⁶

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.⁶⁷

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 support/reinforcing the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division during Operations BATTLECREEK (10 November 1966 to 19 November 1966) and BISMARCK (25 November 1966 to 9 December 1966). The latter operation secured Route Red for a 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 173d Airborne Brigade. Operation CEDAR FALLS (8 January 1967 to 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.⁶⁸

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

⁶⁶Operational Status, 13 June 1967.

⁶⁷Meritorious Unit Commendation, 26 Nov 66, p. 1.

⁶⁸Ibid, pp. 1-2.

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 Special Forces personnel to effectively plan artillery fire without the aid of a liaison officer from the Battalion.⁶⁹

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.⁷⁰

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.⁷¹

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 within 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.

⁶⁹Interview, CPT George F. Palladino, Bn S-3, 6 Jun 67.

⁷⁰Interview, CPT George F. Palladino, Bn S-3, 6 Jun 67.

⁷¹BC & Staff Call, 2 Feb 67.

Ten rounds were fired, all of which landed squarely on target. These defensive fires of the 175mm gun were felt to be very effective.⁷²

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 2½ tons of medical supplies from this enemy unit.⁷³

On May 27, May, 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.⁷⁴ 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 Camp 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.⁷⁵

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 December, 1966 alone, with an additional 11 more in January, 1967.⁷⁶ 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 was then

⁷²SITREP, dtd 7 May 67.

⁷³Interview, MSG Austin Price Jr., En Opns Sgt, 12 May 67.

⁷⁴SITREP, dtd 28 May 67.

⁷⁵SITREP, dtd 2 Jun 67.

⁷⁶As reported on the "Redleg Scoreboard", a daily summary of battalion accomplishments.

partially destroyed by artillery directed to the camp by these personnel from a position some 800 meters distant.⁷⁷

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 Commander 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 the extraction.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹

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 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.⁸⁰

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 periods 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 (March 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

⁷⁷The Redleg Courier, Vol. 1, No. 6, dtd 12 Feb 67, p. 3.

⁷⁸GO 3480, HQ, 1st Inf Div, dtd 21 May 67.

⁷⁹GO 3342, HQ, 1st Inf Div, dtd 17 May 67.

⁸⁰SITREP, dtd 19 May 67.

with a medium sized VC force. Twenty-seven VC were killed and fourteen bunkers were destroyed.⁸¹

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.⁸²

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 162d 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.⁸³

Bravo Battery continued its operations in the north throughout this period. On February 20, 1967, at 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

⁸¹Interview, CPT Ervin F. Kamm, A Btry CO, 7 Jun 67.

⁸²Interview, MAJ Carl W. Haustein Jr., Bn XO, 6 Jun 67.

⁸³Interview, MSG Austin Price Jr., Bn Opns Sgt, 6 Jun 67.

battery was credited with destroying one anti-aircraft weapon and damaging an additional three others.⁸⁴

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 CHINOOK. 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.⁸⁵

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.⁸⁶

"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).⁸⁷

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 were instituted.⁸⁸

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, 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 140mm rockets and 82mm mortars. Eleven Americans were killed and 67 wounded at Dong Ha. Marines swept

⁸⁴The Redleg Courier, Vol. 1, No. 7, dtd 1 May 67, p. 4.

⁸⁵Ltr, CPT Albert R. Parnell to LTC Edward C. O'Connor, dtd 26 Feb 67.

⁸⁶The Redleg Courier, Vol. 1, No. 7, dtd 1 May 67, p. 4.

⁸⁷Ibid, p. 4.

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.⁸⁸

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 140mm 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.⁸⁹

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.⁹⁰ 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.⁹¹

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.⁹²

⁸⁸Stars & Stripes, 8 May 67.

⁸⁹Stars & Stripes, 10 May 67.

⁹⁰Stars & Stripes, 14 May 67.

⁹¹Stars & Stripes, 15 May 67.

⁹²Ltr, 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. Harrassment 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 GVN'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 would 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.

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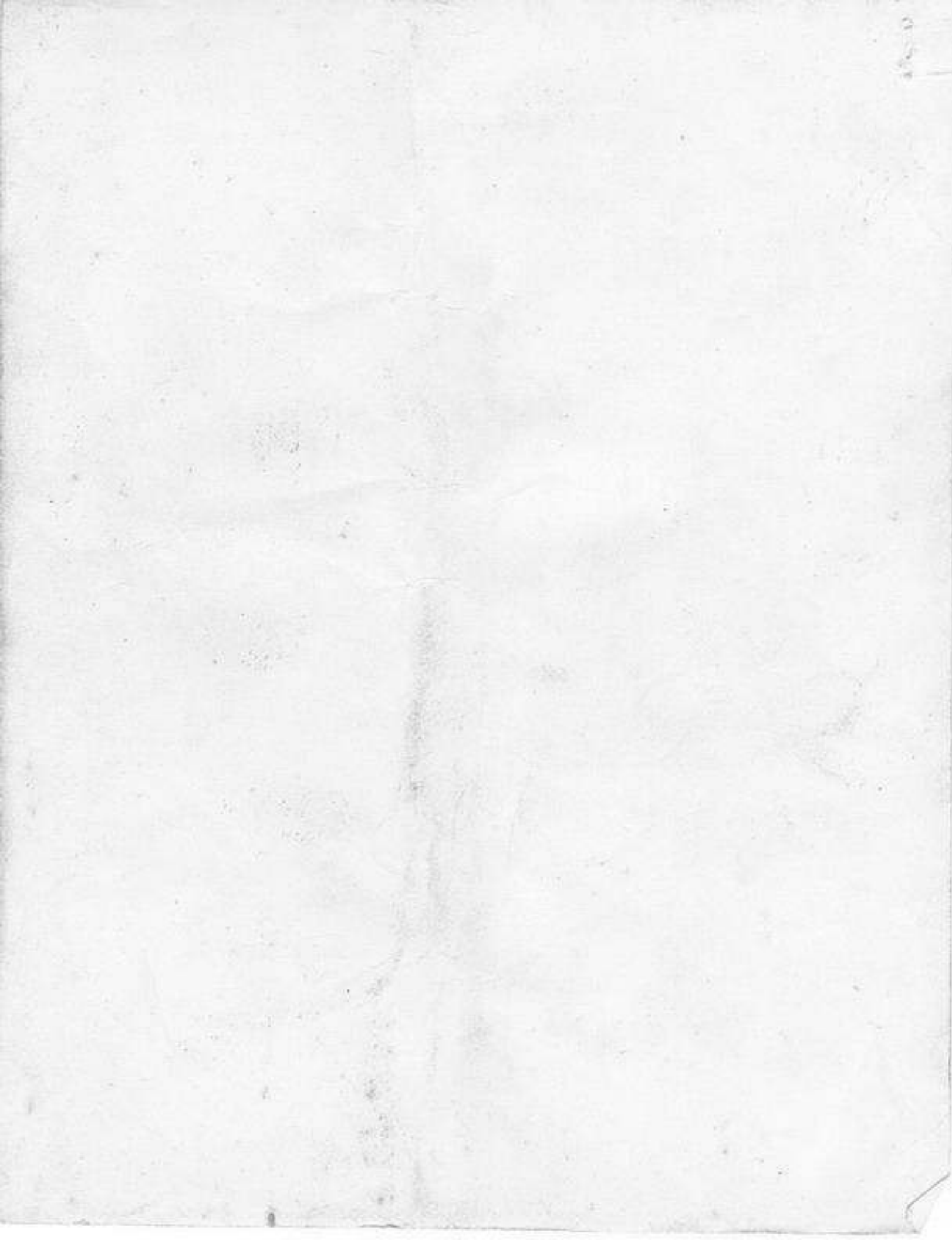
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Bravo Battery continued to mark many "firsts" in Vietnam History, in that they were the first 175 millimeter/8 inch howitzer artillery unit to fire into North Vietnam and destroy surface to air missile bases; they were the first army artillery unit to fire in support of marine operations; and they were the first heavy artillery unit to fire direct fire while under attack. The battery's impressive record of fire support brought favorable comment from all concerned, including General D.A. Hocmuth, Commanding General of 3d Marine Amphibious Force, upon their departure from the I Corps Tactical Area and their release from attachment, which occurred September 11, 1967.⁹³

During Bravo Battery's detachment from the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery, they were acting as a semi-independent unit, making moves from Camp J J Carroll to Da Nang to Hue to Gio Linh and return. While making these moves, they were engaged in the following campaigns: HIGHRISE, KINGFISHER, CUMBERLAND, CROCKETT AND CIMARRON. They returned to Bien Hoa, a battle-worn but high spirited fighting force, on September 15, 1967.⁹⁴

On September 15, 1967, the same day that Bravo Battery, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery returned from the I Corps Tactical Zone, Bravo Battery, 7th Battalion, 8th Artillery was attached to the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery. An immediate tactical requirement called for a heavy artillery unit at Phuoc Binh, Republic of Vietnam to support Special Forces units in the surrounding area. Bravo Battery, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery, had been designated for this task, however due to their worn condition, they could not feasibly meet the suspense date. For the first time in the history of the Vietnam campaign, a heavy artillery unit was airlifted from Bien Hoa, Republic of Vietnam to Phuoc Binh, Republic of Vietnam, as Bravo Battery, 7th Battalion, 8th Artillery took the commitment. This took an amazing 27 C-130 sorties, and was accomplished in a staggering minimum time of 12 hours from first sortie to complete operational status.⁹⁵

On October 19, 1967, the personnel of Bravo Battery, 7th Battalion, 6th Artillery and Bravo Battery, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery were exchanged and Bravo Battery, 7th Battalion, 8th Artillery was released from attachment. Bravo Battery, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery assumed control of the fire support base.⁹⁶

Two months later, December 19, 1967, the fire support base occupied by Bravo Battery, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery was designated as "Camp Martin". The order reads in part:

"Present area occupied by Battery "B", 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery in the vicinity of Phuoc Binh, Republic of Vietnam, Camp Martin dedicated to the memory of Private First Class Leonard J. Martin; US 52 663 862, who while serving with Battery "B", 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery, was killed by hostile artillery fire at Gio Linh on the 30th day of April, 1967."⁹⁷

⁹³Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-Y, Subj: Meritorious Unit Commendation, dtd 7 Feb 68.

⁹⁴Ibid, p.2.

⁹⁵Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-YC, Subj: ORLL (C), Dtd 31 Oct 67.

⁹⁶MFR, History of the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery

⁹⁷GO #7, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, HQ, dtd 19 Dec 67.

During the period Bravo Battery conducted its moves, all other batteries remained stationary except for displacements to conduct artillery assaults. Notable among these were: Rapid Fire II, 6-10 November, 1967; Rapid Fire IV, 14-27 November, 1967; Yellowstone I, 8-23 December, 1967; and ST Nick, 18-25 December, 1967.⁹⁸

Everything remained quiet, and harrassing mortar fire was the only action experienced by any of the batteries of the Battalion except for Alpha 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery. While all remained quiet, the batteries participated in numerous civic action programs to include MEDCAPS (Medical Civic Action Program), Boy Scouts, recreational activities and construction programs.

The Battalion continued a strong civic action program. Staff Sergeant Son, the Battalion Interpreter, continued to instruct the local nationals in English.

During this period, the Battalion staff continued to test new ways of chemical analysis toward water purification of the streams and water around Phuoc Vinh. The Battalion continued an active MEDCAP program conducting 10 MEDCAPS during the fourth quarter of 1967.⁹⁹

On July 11, 1967, there was a well coordinated attack against the Quan Loi base camp and Alpha Battery, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery. During the early morning hours, several Viet Cong elements entered the camp through the perimeter barricade. Number three gun was destroyed by satchel charges and there were 6 casualties within the battery. There were 7 Viet Cong dead by actual body count, and an estimated 10 more when the attack was finally brought under control.¹⁰¹

In late December "C" Battery, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery, began a series of moves that took them first from Phuoc Vinh, Republic of Vietnam to Phu Loi, Republic of Vietnam. From Phu Loi, several gun sections were displaced to fire heavy artillery support for ARVN (Army Republic of Vietnam) and Special Forces operations. The word to move again reached Charlie Battery during the first week of January 1968, and while the headquarters and two gun sections prepared to move from Phu Loi to their supporting activities and begin a motor convoy to the rendezvous point, Quan Loi, Republic of Vietnam.¹⁰²

⁹⁸Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-Yc, Subj: ORLL (C), dtd 31 Jan 68

⁹⁹Interview, CPT John A. Loper, HHB, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, S-1, dtd 2 Sep 68

¹⁰⁰Ltr, HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, Avge-YB, Subj: ORLL (C), dtd 31 Jan 68

¹⁰¹Interview, SSG Phillip H. Huff, Chief of Section Gun #4, A Btry, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, dtd 15 Sep 68.

¹⁰²Interview, SP5 Michael J. Hartung, C Btry, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, Btry Ck, dtd 1 Sep 68.

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As the convoy moved out, morale and Esprit De Corps was high; but, the next two months were to be the most trying days of commanders and subordinates alike. All elements of Charlie Battery merged at Quan Loi and continued Northeast to Loc Ninh, Republic of Vietnam. Everyone had heard of the small battle ground of a few months previous, and now, they were to defend it. The fire base was no larger than the battery's Compound, and the Viet Cong found the range within one week.¹⁰³

Work began to carve a livable area from the face of the jungle. Engineer support from the 82nd Engineer Battalion was moved into Loc Ninh just 36 hours after the battery became operational, and troops from "A" Battery, Headquarters Battery, and Service Battery were airlifted or conveyed from Quan Loi and Long Binh to assist the engineer unit under the self help program. Within three weeks, the fire support base became known as "The Quarter of a Million Dollar Project". Not only a vast amount of supplies and manpower had been poured into the area, but with each round fired, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army supply routes were severely damaged.

Suddenly the order to move out came again, and "C" Battery left Loc Ninh and all the work behind as the road worn trucks began their long haul to the Bien Hoa area. Although the order to move came unexpectedly, even more unexpected was the order to detach two gun sections to the First Infantry Division base camp at Di An. A total of five moves within a month had left the battery in a still unbelievably high state of morale. Then, suddenly in the first week of February the TEF Offensive shook South Vietnam.

In order to more effectively control and communicate with the outlying batteries, the Battalion Headquarters had moved to Quan Loi on 8-9 January 1968. The newly assigned position which had been part of the battery's area had few underground living quarters, only fighting bunkers and slit trench bunkers when the TEF Offensive struck. With an unbelievable professional attitude for a non-combat element, the Headquarters Battery continued to coordinate counter/rocket, counter/mortar fires, support fires for the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division and close artillery support for the Regular Force/ Popular Force Special Forces groups. Although not involved in an actual conflict, the strain of sleepless nights and full workdays could be seen in officers and enlisted men alike. The dark hours of TEF extended to all of Vietnam and no one was left unscarred.¹⁰⁴

Service Battery supported Headquarters II Field Force Vietnam with an aerial observer, and "A" Battery supplied two forward Observers for the plantation perimeter. Because of their accurate reconnaissance and artillery fire adjustment, many serious incidents were avoided. Even though the TEF Offensive kept roads closed in the Saigon, Cholon, Long Binh and Bien Hoa areas, Service Battery still moved ammunition via airlift and motor convoy to all batteries. On February 5, an ammunition convoy from Long Binh arrived at Quan Loi. At 2100 hours 5 February, the Quan Loi base

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, MAJ Ross W. Crossley, HBB, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, S-3, 21 Aug 68.

camp came under one of the most savage rocket and mortar attacks of the TET Offensive. The ammunition trucks with Service Battery personnel were dispersed throughout the area of "A" Battery's motor park, when a communist 122 mm rocket exploded as a direct hit on two 5 ton trucks. Shrapnel damaged several Service Battery trucks, which were still loaded with 175mm/8 inch howitzer projectiles. Fire exploded the gas tanks and "A" Battery and Service Battery personnel fought the fire while rounds continued to fall in the area. As one citation reads in part:

"The Viet Cong launched a mortar and rocket attack, and a direct hit set fire to vehicles in the motor pool. Despite the potential danger of exploding gas tanks and the continuing attack, he fought the gasoline fires with dirt, sand and water. His fearless efforts helped bring the fire under control, saved much valuable equipment and averted possible disaster."¹⁰⁶

The immediate action on the part of personnel from both batteries limited the equipment loss to two of "A" Battery's 5 ton trucks. This is just one example of the hardships suffered and the valorous manner in which batteries worked together to overcome these troubled times.

The communist offensive ended and the Vietnamese began the slow, never ending task of rebuilding their homes and lives from the rubble and waste left behind. The batteries of the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery assisted with materials, instruction and manpower, while at the same time rebuilding and renovating their respective areas. Everyone was busily engaged in construction on a massive scale, except "C" Battery, which was still split. As a tenant rather than a permanent unit, "C" Battery conducted fire support from Di An and Bien Hoa.

One of the two firing sections at Di An were moved to Cu Chi and one section from Bien Hoa was moved to the area around Trung Bang, since these two areas were still experiencing direct effects of the TET Offensive.¹⁰⁷

Liaison Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers were attached to the Regional Force/Popular Force Special Forces units, which the detached "C" Battery elements were supporting. The 8 inch howitzer platoon at Di An continued to fire support for the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions, 5th Infantry Division (ARVN) and the Capital Military District. On February 23, 1968, the battery minus at Bien Hoa motor marched to Di An and joined the 8 inch platoon. The battery supported operations from Di An until 10 March, at which time the battery moved to their original position at Phuoc Vinh. Thus ended a three month period of almost continuous moves. A tired, convoy-weary and strained crew had returned after being rejoined as a complete unit in Di An.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Interview, 1Lt McLenore, CO, HEB, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, 11 Sep 68.

¹⁰⁶ GO #1771, HQ, USARV, dtd 17 Apr 68

¹⁰⁷ Interview, MAJ Ross W. Crossley, HEB, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, S-3, 21 Aug 68

¹⁰⁸ Ltr, HEB 23rd Gp, AVGE-C, Subj: ORLL (C), dtd 1 Apr 68.

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On March 13, 1968, Alpha Battery, 2nd Battalion, 11th Artillery was attached to the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery and began support fire with their 155 mm guns of the 101st Airborne Division, 3rd Brigade. Firing in coordination with "C" Battery from Phuoc Vinh, the team of heavy and medium artillery began dealing death blows to the units, operations and supply routes of the Viet Cong/ North Vietnamese Army units.

On June 4, 1968, The Battalion Operations Section moved to Phuoc Vinh from Quan Loi to coordinate the artillery fires in the base camp defense of Phuoc Vinh. Elements of the 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division were displaced to Pleiku, and returned to Phuoc Vinh on June 9, 1968. At this time the operations returned to Quan Loi. They were again moved to Phuoc Vinh on July 24, 1968, where they assumed responsibility for the Air Warning Control Center (AWCC), Fire Support Coordination Center (FSCC) and artillery fires of the defense plan. Each move was accomplished by airlift using C-130 and CH-47 aircraft.

On August 1, 1968, the Battalion fired its quarter-millionth round against Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army forces in Vietnam.¹⁰⁹ Also on this date, LTC Richard S. Bullock assumed command of the Battalion replacing LTC Eugene J. O'Grady.

This was a period of intense activity for the Battalion. Command and control were much more difficult than normal due to the three way split of Headquarters: Supply at Long Binh, Operations at Phuoc Vinh, and Administration at Quan Loi. The firing batteries too remained widely scattered, covering over 10,000 square kilometers of territory with their combined range fans.¹¹⁰

In addition to the duties mentioned above, the Operations section of the Battalion assumed the responsibility of clearing all fires in the 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division area of operations around Phuoc Vinh. Replacing the 2nd Battalion, 319th Artillery which moved North with the 101st, "C" Battery and Alpha Battery, 2nd Battalion, 11th Artillery assumed the duties of direct support artillery for the remaining maneuver Battalion of the Division in this area. Concurrent with this unique role the fires of all organic batteries were planned and controlled from Phuoc Vinh.¹¹¹

"A" Battery, 2nd Battalion, 11th Artillery, which has been attached from the 101st, was also extremely busy. Most of the Division was moving North. Their Battalion was already at the Demilitarized Zone and the battery's status was somewhat unsettled. This did not stop the battery from participating in several operations however.

¹⁰⁹ Interview, MAJ Ross W. Crossley, HMB, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, S-3, 21 Aug 68.

¹¹⁰ Interview, MAJ John B. Zimmerman, HMB, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, S-3, 15 Nov 68.

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From July 26 to August 9, a platoon of the battery's 155mm howitzer supported operation CHINA BOY II from a position at Bu Don, Republic of Vietnam. On the 9th, they moved back to Phuoc Vinh via CH-54 and C-130 aircraft. Another platoon moved to the vicinity of Tong Le Chon on August 13 and established a firing position outside the Special Forces camp to provide direct support to Detachments A-334 and B-36, Company "A", 5th Special Forces Group in the conduct of Operation CHINA BOY IV. This operation ended with the platoon's lift by C-123 and C-130 aircraft to rejoin the battery at Phuoc Vinh.¹¹²

For over one month, until October 2, the battery remained in position-- almost an R&R compared to their usual move, shoot and move again operations. Then one platoon moved to support Detachment B-34, Company "A", Special Forces Group in Operation CHINA BOY VII. They arrived in position and that night fired direct fire on what was a relatively quiet night for the Thien Ngon Special Forces camp. The next morning found two Battalions of Mobile Strike Force in contact with a large enemy element near the Cambodian border on the Lo Go Road.¹¹³

According to the U.S. Advisor to these Mobile Strike Battalions and the U.S. Commander of the B-34 Detachment, the rapid accurate fire of the platoon was responsible for saving many friendly lives and holding the enemy force at bay until TAC Air arrived and the two Battalions joined forces after approximately six hours of heavy contact.¹¹⁴

On October 4, the platoon moved to Trang Sup and continued to support the operation until October 9 when it displaced to Tay Ninh and then onto Di An the following day by convoy. On October 13 they were joined by the remaining four guns of the battery and assumed the mission of General Support Reinforcing the 1st Infantry Division.

Both during CHINA BOY IV and CHINA BOY VII, a liaison team operated with the Strike Force, B Detachment to perform the duties of fire support coordinator.¹¹⁵

In the other batteries of the Battalion this was also a busy time. In addition to providing heavy artillery fire support, the Battalion was preparing for the Annual General Inspection. A series of courtesy inspections implemented by Battalion and Group teams and, by request, from the 610 Maintenance Battalion. These inspections and much hard work brought the Battalion to the end of September completely prepared for the Inspector General's visit from September 30 to October 4. Based on a rating of Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory only, the Battalion was judged Satisfactory with many areas rated excellent and called to special attention.¹¹⁶

This period from August to October, was one of continued Civic Action projects also. Notable among these were the extensive repair and rehabilitation of the An Loc Montagnard Boarding School, (the number of boys enrolled has grown from 28 to 300 in the past several months), the Loi An Kindergarden and the Vietnamese Orphanage in An Loc. The Battalion continued, also, to support the An Loc Boy Scout troop, which has doubled its size (75 to 150 boys) in the last three months, by providing, among other items, uniforms for the troop.¹¹⁷

¹¹²Ibid, pp.2-3.

¹¹³Interview, CPT Glennon E. Hennenger Jr, HEB, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, IHD, 15 Nov 68.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵RCS CSFOR-65 (RI) (C), op. cit., P. 3.

¹¹⁶Annual General Inspection, FY 69, of 6th Bn, 27th Arty, Exit Interview, ITC Hoseneyer

¹¹⁷Interview, 1LT Jay R. Taylor, HEB, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, S-5, 15 Nov 68.

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On 1 November 1968, Battery F, 16th Artillery displaced from Phuoc Vinh, RVN, to Tong Le Chon, RVN, closing at 2400 hours. The assigned mission was GSR to 1st Infantry Division Artillery in operation "Fish Hook". The personnel and equipment were transported by C-130 aircraft. A fire base was established nearby the US Special Forces camp at Long Le Chon, secured initially by the 36th ARVN Ranger Battalion. Extensive engineer assistance was required to clear fields of fire and cut out additional area from the jungle. On 12 November 1968, the mission was changed to GSR 1st Cav Division Artillery, and the security of the fire base was provided by one company of the 5/7 Cav Battalion. The Battery has remained at Tong Le Chon throughout the period.¹¹⁸

With the arrival of the 1st Division (AM) into the III Corps Tactical Zone in early November, the mission of the Battalion was changed. The 1st Cav Division (AM) replaced the 1st Infantry Division in the area surrounding all firing batteries of the Battalion. On 12 Nov 1968, the mission of the batteries were assigned as shown:

Battery A, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery: GSR 1st Cav Division
 Battery B, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery: GSR 1st Cav Division
 Battery C, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery: GS IIFFOR-CEV
 Battery F, 16th Artillery: GSR 1st Cav Division Arty

On 1 November, one forward observer party was provided to the 5th ARVN Division to assist in fire planning and artillery adjustment. The party returned on November 8 1968.

The responsibility for the operation of the aircraft warning control center and fire support coordination center at Phuoc Vinh was transferred from the 23rd Artillery Group to the 1st Cav Division (AM). Consequently, on 15 Nov 1968, two officers and six EM rejoined the Battalion operations section at Quan Loi, RVN.

On 5 November 1968, plans were submitted to II FFORCEV Artillery. The Battery was assigned the responsibility of being prepared to move two howitzers and required fire direction equipment by fixed wing or rotary wing aircraft to any point within the II FFORCEV area of interest within thirty (30) minutes of notification. To date, the final plans have not yet been approved.

On 25 November 1968, the 260th and 234th Field Artillery Detachments (Radar) assumed operations at Quan Loi and Phuoc Vinh respectively. Although attached to the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery, they were under the operational control of the unit responsible for base camp defense.¹¹⁹

On 26 November 1968, the 234th (UIC:FKX) and the 260th (UIC:G35) Field Artillery Detachments were attached to the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery for all purposes, to include promotion, transfer and requisitioning of personnel, by General Order 104, Headquarters, 23rd Artillery Group. Effective 30 Nov 1968, Battery A, 2nd Battalion 11th Artillery (UIC:A2H) was detached from the 23rd Artillery Group and subsequently, the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery, by United States Army, Vietnam, General 5590, dated 4 December 1968. By the same

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Lt HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-YC, Subj: ORLL, p.3, 8 Feb 69.

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Ibid., p.4.

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General Order, Battery F, 16th Artillery (UIC:A2K) was assigned to the 23rd Artillery Group, and further attached to the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery. There was no change of personnel involved, only a change in unit designation. The 234th Field Artillery Detachment (Radar) was detached from the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery by the 23rd Artillery Group General Order 122, dated 26 December 1968, effective 26 December 1968.¹²⁰

On 30 November 1968, the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery completed one of the most successful months while serving in Vietnam. The batteries of the battalion fired in support of US forces in contact missions that resulted in 206 enemy killed by artillery, tactical air strikes and maneuver forces. The 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery received direct credit for 47 KRL.¹²¹

On 1 December 1968, a platoon of 8 inch howitzers from Battery A, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery displaced from Quan Loi to Loc Ninh, RVN by surface convoy. The mission remained the same; however, the displacement enabled the platoon to more effectively attack hard target complexes in the area, and to further assist the 3rd Brigade, 1st Cav Division (AM). The platoon occupied "Kelly" (XU732084) which was secured by the 2/12 Cav Battalion. Enroute the convoy was ambushed, with negative casualties or damage; however, it demonstrated the requirement for adequate convoy security. Artillery coverage was readily available and the rapid response prevented any damage. Resupply of class was accomplished by C-130 aircraft. On 6 December 1968, the platoon returned to Quan Loi where it rejoined its battery.¹²²

In the midst of battle, Christmas came to Vietnam. The morale of soldiers away from home was lifted considerably by "Operation Vietnam 1968". This patriotic program was started by the students of E.W. Thurston Junior High School, Westwood Massachusetts. For the past four years these patriotic young Americans have sent Christmas gifts to the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery. On 7 November 1968, the students of E.W. Thurston Junior High School mailed thirty-four (34) packages, weighing 700 pounds total. The postage for mailing the gifts was paid for by local civic action groups such as Lions Club and Womens' Organizations. All of the packages arrived prior to Christmas unscathed. On Christmas Eve, the presents were distributed to front line infantry of the 1st Cav Division; to Air Force personnel and the officer and enlisted men of the Battalion. On 2 January 1969, this Battalion fired its 300,000th round in support of Free World Forces in the Republic of Vietnam. An appropriate ceremony was conducted and this round was dedicated to the E.W. Thurston Junior High School. A citation and appropriate Battalion plaque commemorating the event were sent to the students and faculty. Through the outstanding efforts of the 23rd Artillery Group PIO section, this very worthwhile project received wide press and radio coverage in the Westwood, Massachusetts area.¹²³

121

List of tasks performed, S-3, ___th Bn 27th Arty.

122

Lt HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-YC, Subj: ORLL, 8 Feb 69, p.4.

123

Ibid.; p.7.

During this period, B Battery, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery was awarded the meritorious Unit Citation for action from October 1966 to June 1967 during which time Bravo was credited with being the first United States Artillery element to fire into North Vietnam. The Citation reads in part:

"Their resourcefulness and determination were key factors in the devastating fire which they placed upon Communist forces. During the 9 month period from October 1966 to June 1967, Battery B, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery fired thirty-thousand rounds in the I Corps Tactical Zone, inflicting heavy casualties upon the hostile elements. Through their exemplary courage, esprit de corps and total dedication to mission accomplishment, the Battery's personnel contributed immeasurably to the United States military effort in the Republic Of Vietnam."¹²⁴

In the field of civic action, the Battalion has continued to exert great effort in the continuing battle to build a healthy, educated society that will be less vulnerable to the false promises of Communism. During the last quarter over 400 Vietnamese civilians have been treated in the Battalion dispensary. All schools supported by the Battalion have received extensive aid in construction projects. A new school has been added to the program sponsored by the Service Battery near Saigon. The Tan Loi school at Quan Loi has been expanded from a kindergarden to include the first through the third grades. Two English language classes have been added to the Tan Loi and An Loc schools.¹²⁵

124

GO# 73; Department of the Army, 27 Nov 1968.

125

Ibid., p.7.

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The new year saw a continued emphasis being placed on gun crew drill and FDC section training. A gunnery evaluation team was organized within the battalion operations section. The longer range aim of the evaluation team was to conduct monthly inspections of each firing battery, assist each unit in developing sound gunnery procedures, and the detecting of errors in procedures.¹²⁶ By eliminating mechanical, mental, and physical faults, the team would be a safeguard against artillery incidents and an insurance of safe, responsive, timely, and accurate artillery fire.

On 11 Feb 69, Battery B expended 285 rounds of 8" and 175mm ammunition against an estimated two (2) battalions of NVA troops. While flying an aerial reconnaissance mission in Phuoc Long Province, an aircraft from the 1st Cav Division (AM) was shot down. The 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery, monitoring this aircraft's control frequency for possible targets, immediately directed an AF FAC flying for the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery to the scene of the downed chopper. Several rescue aircraft received ground fire and were damaged. To assist during the extraction of the aircraft, Battery B expended 120 rounds as suppressive fires on the two (2) VC battalions. Battery B fired a total of two hundred eighty-five (285) rounds of heavy artillery and was credited with thirty (30) confirmed KBA. Continuous firing by Battery B, and air strikes throughout the night resulted in a total of sixty-five (65) enemy KBA.¹²⁷

With the start of the enemy Lunar New Year Offensive (TET Offensive) on 23 Feb 69, all batteries experienced increased operations. An early morning ground attack on the Phuoc Long Province capital at Song Be City required Battery B to provide close support fires for several days. When the MACV TOC was destroyed, Battery B, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery temporarily assumed the role of AWCC and assisted the MACV personnel in reestablishing communication and control in the area. Several days of heavy fighting ensued while Battery B was the only artillery support available. A 1st Cav Division (AM) maneuver battalion was moved into the area and with fire support provided by Battery B, was able to undertake a very successful campaign against the VC holding portions of the district. The battery's 8" howitzers and four (4) Quad .50 caliber machine guns located around the battery position provided close support for both US and ARVN forces in the area. Because of its knowledge of the area and of artillery and aircraft control procedures, Battery B was able to lend maximum assistance in order to restore control and security in the area.¹²⁸

126

Lt HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-YC, Subj: ORLL, 8 Feb 69, p.5.

127

Recommendation for MUC, 7 Sep 69, p.2.

128

Ibid., p. 2.

At the start of the new year, Battery F, 16th Artillery, was located at Tong Le Chon, RVN. On 28 February, with the closing of the 1st Cav Division (AM) operations in the area of the "Fish Hook", Battery F, 16th Artillery displaced from Tong Le Chon to the Quan Loi Base Camp. The personnel and equipment were transported by C-130 aircraft. The firing battery initially occupied a 105mm howitzer position and then moved into their new permanent location. On 25 Mar 69, the battery rear departed Phuoc Vinh and all elements of Battery F were together for the first time since 1 Nov 68 at Quan Loi.¹²⁹

13 Mar 69 saw the 1st Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division return to Quan Loi and assume responsibility for the area. Once again the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery faced the situation of supporting the tactics and procedures of another division. Extensive coordination with the 1st Brigade was required because of numerous personnel changes and a four (4) month period of disassociation with the brigade. Immediately, artillery liaison was established with the direct support artillery battalion to continue the excellent artillery support rendered by Batteries A and F to the Brigade at Quan Loi. Both batteries had their missions changed to GS-R, 1st Infantry Division Artillery and began rendering valuable firepower to the 1st Brigade maneuver elements.¹³⁰

The period of 18 Mar-26 Mar 69, the battalion was involved in Operation "ATLAS WEDGE". A platoon of 8" howitzers from Battery A displaced by convoy to Fire Support Base "THUNDER III" to participate in a multi-division operation in the vicinity of the Michelin Rubber Plantation. Its mission was GS-R, 8th Battalion, 6th Artillery which was in DS of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR). The main US effort was a sweep of the Michelin, driving the VC out of their established base camps. Although the main ground contact remained outside the platoon's range capabilities, the heavy artillery support provided by the 8" platoon influenced the operation by denying the enemy the use of familiar infiltration routes and routes of withdrawal.

129

Lt HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-YC, Subj: ORLL, 5 May 69, p.3.

130

Recommendation for MUC, 20 June 69, p.5.



65 65

One unique fact about the Vietnam Conflict is its great demand for rapid movement of both men and equipment. Mobility has been the key to success enjoyed by the US Army in Vietnam. The 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery with its heavy artillery has also been a part of this new trend and tactic -- AIRMOBILE ARTILLERY.¹³¹

On 15 Apr 69, a platoon of 155mm howitzers from Battery F, 16th Artillery was displaced to Loc Ninh Special Forces Camp to be in Direct Support (DS) of a Special Forces Camp Strike Force Operation. The move of the howitzers and trucks was by rotary wing (3 CH-54 sorties and 3 CH-47 sorties) from Quan Loi. Necessary supplies were flown by C-130 aircraft from Bien Hoa to Loc Ninh. The platoon supported a combat assault by the Camp Strike Force and provided support for two days. On 17 Apr 69, the platoon returned to Quan Loi by C-130 aircraft.¹³²

Operation "MONTANA SCOUT" (23 Apr-12 May) saw the battalion once again involved in a complex military operation. A platoon of 8" howitzers from Battery A displaced by convoy from Quan Loi to LZ "JOE" near Minh Thanh, to provide heavy artillery support for elements of the 1st Cav Division (AM). The operation was very successful because of the heavy artillery's devastating firepower on jungle base camps deep in War Zone C. In many engagements it was the close artillery support of Battery A that prevented US forces from receiving heavy fire by enemy firmly entrenched in well constructed bunker complexes.¹³³

All six (6) batteries of the battalion successfully completed a USARV CMMI and received commendable ratings during the period 27 Jan-30 Apr 69. It is especially noteworthy that the inspectors used CONUS standards in a combat zone.

At 0100 hours, 12 May 69, the Quan Loi Base Camp received an intense mortar/RPG attack followed by a ground attack. Although attacked directly by VC infiltrators, Headquarters Battery and Battery A fought bravely. Gallantly defending their guns and position areas by rapidly deploying reaction forces, both batteries successfully repulsed the enemy attack, killing five (5) VC and capturing large quantities of munitions and equipment. At approximately 0333 hours, Battery B, located at Phuoc Binh, came under a heavy ground attack. Early detection of two (2) attacking

131

"AIRMOBILE ARTILLERY", Captain David L. Cole, September 1969.

132

Lt HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-YC, Subj: CRLL, 5 May 69, p.4.

133

Recommendation for MUC, 7 Sep 69, p.3.

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columns of VC and the rapid deployment of artillerymen around the camp perimeter stopped the main attack. Providing illumination with its 81mm mortars, the battery delivered devastating firepower repulsing the VC attack. As a result, twenty-eight (28) VC were killed in the perimeter wire, two (2) VC surrendered, and large quantities of arms and equipment were captured to include flame throwers, radios and torpedoes. A careful search of the area found a VC command post and wire lines indicating a well coordinated VC attack had been defeated. Both actions on this date can only be described as superb. Officers and men courageously defended their guns in keeping with the highest traditions of the artillery.¹³⁴

15 May-30 May 69 found a platoon of two (2) 155mm howitzers of Battery F, 16th Artillery was airlifted to Bu Dop Special Forces Camp to provide support for an encircled Camp Strike Force. Receiving the tactical emergency mission at 1500 hours, the platoon had the first of thirteen (13) C-123 sorties in the air at 1630 hours. With speed and precision gained from numerous such moves, the men of Battery F had the last sortie on the ground at the new location at 1830 hours. The platoon occupied the position rapidly, was laid and registered by 1800 hours, and maintained constant readiness throughout the operation while continually improving their firing positions. The operation terminated on 19 May, and the platoon immediately prepared to support a second Camp Strike Force Operation. The Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) force with a forward observer from the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery conducted operations adjacent to the Cambodian border, deep into enemy held jungle. Although the force did not establish contact with VC forces, valuable information was gathered from extensive ground reconnaissance of the area and bomb damage assessment of recent B-52 bombing missions.¹³⁵

The early morning hours of 6 June revealed an intense mortar/RPG attack followed by a ground attack directed at the Quan Loi Base Camp. Headquarters Battery and Battery A again deployed reaction forces that prevented penetration into the battery areas although the perimeter wire had been breached. Ten (10) NVA were killed short of the battery wire, arms and munitions were found nearby, and four (4) NVA, WIA were captured.¹³⁶

134

Ibid., p.3.

135

Ibid., p.4.

136

Ibid., p.4.

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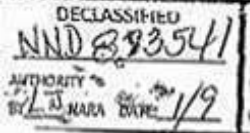
On 23 Jun 69, the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery assumed the responsibility for the AWCC at Quan Loi and the artillery portion of the base defense. Concurrent with the placement of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment OPCON to the 1st Cav Division (AM) on 23 Jun 69, the 6/27 Arty's mission of GS II FFORCEV and GS-R 1st Cav Division (AM) Artillery was modified. Due to the proximity of the 6/27 Arty to the 11th ACR this battalion was tasked with the added mission of coordinating the fires of the 11th ACR organic howitzer batteries and the fires of batteries of the 23d Artillery Group positioned within the Tactical Area of Responsibility of the 11th ACR. Direct coordination and liaison were established with the 1st Cav Division (AM) Artillery. On 27 June, the responsibility for the artillery portion of the base defense was transferred to the 1st Battalion (AM), 21st Artillery.¹³⁷

The 1st Infantry Division*departed from Quan Loi, passing responsibility for the area to the 1st Cav Division (AM). The mission of Battery A, 6/27 Arty and Battery E, 16th Artillery was changed to GS-R 1st Cav Division (AM) Artillery. The mission of Batteries B and C remained GS II FFORCEV.¹³⁸

On 27 Jul 69, Lieutenant Colonel Leonard F.B. Reed Jr. assumed command of the battalion succeeding LTC Richard S. Bullock. Immediately, Colonel Reed faced the myriad of duties and responsibilities involved in leading the largest artillery battalion in South Vietnam.

On 31 Jul 69, a 175mm Gun Platoon, Battery C, 6/27 Arty* displaced by convoy from Phuoc Vinh (Camp Gorvad) for a "HIP SHOOT" in the vicinity of Grid YT 030631. The mission of the 175mm Gun Platoon was GS-R, 1st Cav Division (AM) Artillery. The platoon placed eighty (80) rounds on suspect base camps in the vicinity of Grid YT 2474. The platoon returned to Phuoc Vinh before nightfall the same day.¹³⁹

137
Ibid., p.4.
 138
Ibid., p.4.
 139
Ibid., p.4.



66 68

10 Aug 69 found one (1) 175mm gun from Battery B, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery, displaced by convoy from LZ "BUTTONS" (Camp Martin) to the vicinity of Grid YU 183115 for a one (1) day operation of "psychological operations" by placing 175mm artillery rounds in the Bu Gi Map area--a VC haven which heretofore had never received an artillery round from allied guns.¹⁴⁰

During the hours 0110 to 0600, the morning of 12 Aug 69, LZ "ANDY" (Quan Loi) received an unknown number of RPG, 82mm mortar and 107mm rocket rounds, AK-47 rifle fire, automatic weapons fire and five (5) ground probes by an estimated 800-1,000 NVA/VC infantry and a VC Sapper company. The main attack was directed at the southwest end of the perimeter where an estimated enemy force of 200 NVA/VC channeled their attack on a complex of five (5) bunkers. They were beaten back by automatic weapons and small arms fire from personnel of the 11th ACR with ground and aerial rocket artillery and USAF "Spooky" support. An estimated 70-80 NVA/VC enemy breached the base camp perimeter wire west of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery and Battery A, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery. The enemy force penetrated towards the batteries' perimeter wire but were stopped by personnel of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery and Battery A. Numerous other ground probes were reported from bunkers around the perimeter. At 0600 hours, a sniper located west of Battery A's position fired across the battery area and into the battalion's Tactical Operation Center (TOC). A reactionary force from Battery A spotted and killed the sniper. Enemy casualties were 73 NVA/VC KIA and 7 NVA/VC POW'S. Friendly casualties were three (3) KIA and 23 WIA; only four WIA were personnel of the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery.¹⁴¹

The battalion TOC coordinated and directed the artillery fires of nine (9) artillery batteries. The unique operations of the TOC coordinated and checked the fires of two (2) 105mm howitzer batteries, four (4) 155mm howitzer batteries, and three (3) 8"/175mm batteries. Approximately 11,000 rounds of all types of artillery were placed on the enemy in defense of American and ARVN forces throughout the Bing Long and Phuoc Long Provinces and contributed to the approximately 612 NVA/VC enemy killed in action during the 12 Aug-15 Aug period.

140

Ibid., p.4.

141

Ibid., p.5.

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The 8-12 Sep period saw the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery undergo the USARV Annual General Inspection. Weeks of preparation finally resulted in the battalion attaining an excellent rating out of 2141 areas inspected. The battalion's excellence in all aspects of its mission was noted by USARV recognition and ranked it as the highest artillery unit in the 23d Artillery Group.

The 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery, a composite 8"/175mm howitzer battalion and its attached 155mm artillery firing battery, Battery F, 16th Artillery, have been recommended for a Meritorious Unit Citation (MUC) for service performed during the period 1 Feb-31 Aug 69 for supporting numerous combat operations in RVN and an active participation in an aggressive Civic Action program. In supporting US and ARVN forces during this seven month span, the battalion fired 87,233 rounds of 155mm, 175mm, and 8" ammunition during 26,355 missions without a single artillery incident.¹⁴² During this period, the battalion was credited with 192 NVA/VC confirmed KBA, 98 possible KBA, 614 bunkers destroyed and 88 secondary explosions. The batteries sustained 194 enemy rocket/mortar and ground attacks receiving an estimated total of 2,147 rounds causing 3 KIA and 45 WIA among personnel of the battalion.¹⁴³ The battalion's Civic Action Program provided support, assistance, and guidance for the Vietnamese people. Two Girl Scout and two Boy Scout troops were established, a Montagnard boarding school was built, and a vigorous MEDCAPS program was inaugurated in conjunction with MACV advisors and province health teams.

As of this writing, the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery continues to serve valiantly in Vietnam. The active role of the battalion is evidenced by its total expenditures of 420,070 rounds of 155mm, 175mm, and 8" ammunition fired in counter rocket/ mortar and support fires for the 1st Cav Division (AM), 1st Infantry Division, 101st Airborne Division, 5th ARVN Division, 11th ACR, and close artillery support for Regular Force/Popular Force Special Forces Camps during its 4 years here in Vietnam. This total surpassed the 383,562 total rounds of 75mm and 155mm ammunition fired during the 27th's three years of participation in World War II.¹⁴⁴

The 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery has indeed compiled a long and enviable record of achievement during the Vietnam Conflict. The "Cannon Kings" illuminated by past glory look forward to continued service in the cause of freedom.

142
Ibid., p.1.

143
Ibid., p.1.

144
 Ammunition Status Chart, 31 Aug 69.

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On 17 October, the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery was relieved from command and control of the 23rd Artillery Group and was assigned directly to the II Field Force Vietnam Artillery. Battery F, 16th Artillery was detached from command and control of the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery and was then attached to the 2nd Battalion, 12th Artillery, 23rd Field Artillery Group. The mission of Battery A, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery was changed to General Support, IIFORCEV. The mission of Battery B and Battery C, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery remained unchanged. Service Battery, 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery moved by convoy from Long Binh, Republic of Vietnam to Plantation, RVN as a result of reassignment from the 23rd Artillery Group. With the move, Service Battery relinquished responsibility for operation of the 23rd Field Artillery Group Rear.¹⁴⁵

On 28 October, a platoon of 175mm Guns (SP) from Battery B, 6/27th Arty displaced by convoy from Phuoc Binh (Camp Martin) for an artillery raid. The mission of the platoon was to engage hard targets in the vicinity of the Du Gia Map Airstrip. The platoon expended 103 rounds of 175mm and returned to Camp Martin before nightfall of the same day.¹⁴⁶

During the months of November, December, and January, the battalion participated in several operations. On 28 November, a platoon of 175mm Guns of Battery A, 6/27th Arty displaced by convoy from Quan Loi for an artillery raid. The mission of the platoon was to engage hard targets in the "Flat Iron" area. The platoon expended 63 rounds of 175mm and returned before nightfall the same day.¹⁴⁷

On 23 December, a platoon of 8" Howitzers of Battery C, 6/27th Arty displaced by convoy from Phuoc Vinh to Thunder III. The Battery Headquarters remained at Phuoc Vinh.¹⁴⁸

On 27 December, a platoon of 8" Howitzers of Battery A, 6/27th Arty displaced by convoy from Quan Loi to Landing Zone (LZ) "Marge". The Battery Headquarters remained at Quan Loi.

¹⁴⁵Ltr. HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVGE-YC, SUBJ: ORLL, 1 Nov 69, p.4.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p.4.

¹⁴⁷Ltr. HQ, 6th Bn, 27th Arty, AVFB-FA-BC, SUBJ: ORLL, 14 Feb 70, p.3.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p.4.

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On 12 January 1970, a platoon of 175mm Guns of Battery C, 6/27th Arty displaced by convoy from Phuoc Vinh to LZ "Jake". Also, a platoon of 8" Howitzers of Battery C, 6/27th Arty displaced by convoy from Thunder III to LZ "Jake". Battery C's administrative headquarters remained at Phuoc Vinh. 149

On 13 January, a platoon of 175mm Guns of Battery B, 6/27th Arty displaced by convoy from Phuoc Binh (Camp Martin) for an artillery raid. The mission of the 175mm platoon was to engage hard targets in the vicinity of the Bu Gia Map Airstrip. The platoon expended 143 rounds and returned to Camp Martin before nightfall the same day. On 18 January, a platoon of 8" Howitzers of Battery B, 6/27th Arty displaced by convoy from Phuoc Binh (Camp Martin) to LZ "Lee". 150

On 27 January, Lieutenant Colonel Dan H. Ralls assumed command of the battalion succeeding Lieutenant Colonel Leonard F.B. Reed Jr. Immediately, Colonel Ralls was faced with the myriad of duties and responsibilities involved in leading a heavy artillery battalion.

149 Ibid., p.4.
 150 Ibid., p.4.

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During 1970, the battalion continued to support both US and ARVN units in Military Region III. During the months of May and June, the battalion participated in highly successful operations in Cambodia, conducted by US and ARVN units which drove the enemy from numerous sanctuaries.

On 15 July 1970, LTC George G. Mays assumed command of the battalion. The battalion had just returned from operations in Cambodia and LTC Mays immediately launched an intensive maintenance program. The battalion successfully passed the Annual General Inspection in August.

Following cross-border operations in Cambodia, the battalion occupied positions in northern Binh Long and Phuoc Long Provinces. Fire bases such as Bu Dop, Wade, Haymaker, Alpha, Beverly II and Song Be became synonymous with the 6th of the 27th. The battalion supported cross-border operations conducted by ARVN maneuver units from the 5th, 18th and 25th ARVN divisions, the 3rd Armored Brigade and the 3rd, 5th and 6th ARVN Ranger Groups. In addition to providing tactical support and constructing semi-permanent firebases, the batteries conducted numerous artillery raids attacking VC units both in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

During 1970, the draw down of US units accelerated. The number of non-divisional artillery battalions in Military Region III was progressively reduced through redeployment. At peak strength, II Field Force Artillery Headquarters had consisted of the 23d and 54th Artillery Group and a total of four heavy battalion consisting of three 40 MM duster batteries and a quad .50 machine gun battery. By years end, the number of battalions had been reduced from thirteen to seven.

In July of 1971, B Battery turned in its equipment and the battery's guidon was redeployed to Fort Lewis, Washington for inactivation. Battery C was located at FSB Wade near the town of Loc Ninh in support of the ARVN 5th Infantry Division which was conducting cross-border operations near the Cambodian village of Snoul. A number of hard fought engagements between NVA divisions and ARVN units occurred during that period. To maximize the use of the small number of US Artillery batteries remaining in Military Region III, Battery A was split into two firing platoons. One platoon supported the 2d Squadron, 11th ACR in Binh Duong and Tay Ninh Provinces while the other platoon was deployed approximately sixty (60) miles to the East near the city of Xuan Loc at FSB Olesen in support of the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Air Cavalry Division. Thus, with only two firing batteries remaining in Vietnam, the battalion was supporting ARVN forces and the only US maneuver units located in Military Region III.

On the 22nd of July, a change of command once again took place and LTC Neil A. Menzies assumed command of the battalion. During the months of August, September and October 1971, the battalion continued its mission of providing general support reinforcing fires for the 5th ARVN Division in Binh Long Province, the 2d Squadron of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and the 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. As in the past, timely and accurate artillery fires were delivered without incident. During August, the battalion successfully completed the Annual General Inspection conducted by Saigon Support Command. The following month the battalion successfully underwent an inspection conducted by the Office of the Inspector, General, Headquarters MACV.

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On 18 October 1971, the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery commenced redeployment operations and all equipment was turned in through supply channels. The majority of the personnel subsequently departed for CONUS for separation from the Army and reassignment while approximately one third of the officers and men were reassigned to units in Vietnam. Redeployment operations were completed on 20 November 1971 and the colors were sent to Fort Lewis, Washington for inactivation, thus closing another proud and brilliant chapter in the history of the 6th of the 27th Field Artillery Battalion.
