A red-tinted photograph of a war-torn urban environment. In the foreground, a soldier in full combat gear is seen from the back, looking towards the right. In the background, another soldier is visible amidst the rubble of a destroyed building. The scene is filled with debris, including a piece of corrugated metal and a rifle. The overall atmosphere is somber and historical.

DEATH

— IN THE —

IMPERIAL CITY

U.S. MARINES IN THE BATTLE FOR HUE
31 JANUARY TO 2 MARCH 1968

MARINES IN THE VIETNAM WAR COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

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31 JANUARY TO 2 MARCH 1968

COLONEL RICHARD D. CAMP JR., USMC (RET)



MARINES IN THE VIETNAM WAR COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

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Within the context of the Vietnam War, the battle for Hue City stands as an example of urban warfare and how the U.S. military and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam were able to secure victory in the face of severe odds. This commemorative begins with an overview of the city and its geographical, political, and cultural importance to the region. According to Buddhist myth, the picturesque city of Hue, the provincial capital of Thua Thien Province and the former imperial capital of Vietnam, sprang to life as a lotus flower blossoming in a puddle of mud.* Hue is located on a bend of the Huong or Perfume River, a major waterway running from the western foothills to the sea. The river provides an excellent supply route from the South China Sea only seven kilometers northeast of the city. The mountain slopes of the Annamite Chain (or Gai Truong Son) begin an equal distance away and the Laotian border lies another 50 miles farther west. In between the mountains and the border are the A Shau Valley and the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the major North Vietnamese infiltration and supply route to the south. The narrow 25-mile long A Shau Valley, known as Base Area 114, served

*Some of the content in the following work was originally published in 1997 by Jack Shulimson, LtCol Leonard A. Blasiol (USMC), Charles R. Smith, and Capt David A. Dawson (USMC) in *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year, 1968*.

as an arm of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and provided an important sanctuary from which Communist forces could launch their attacks on the population centers along the coast. The Annamite Chain presented a formidable obstacle that prevented allied forces from penetrating into the interior of the country except by helicopter.

Hue was an important religious and intellectual center for the Vietnamese people. Its residents enjoyed a tradition of civic independence that dated back several hundred years. The Buddhist monks who dominated the religious and political life of the city viewed the struggle between North and South Vietnam with aloof disdain. They advocated local autonomy and traditional Vietnamese social values that led to a distrust of the central Saigon government and its American allies as well as Communism. In both the 1963 Buddhist uprising and the 1966 Struggle Movement, the monks from the Hue pagodas and the students and professors at Hue University provided the informal leadership that rallied the residents against successive Saigon regimes.**

Despite the war, Hue retained much of its prewar ambience. "I was taken with the beauty of the city," Marine Corps

**Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of Da Nang and other northern cities. They formed an organization called the Military-Civilian Struggle Committee (a.k.a. Struggle Movement) to support LtGen Nguyen Chanh Thi and express opposition to the Saigon government.

Captain James A. Gallagher recalled. “It was a magnificent place. It exuded culture. It had the French influence.” The city had escaped the worst ravages of war. Even though the enemy mortared it from time to time, and saboteurs from the *Hue City Sapper Unit* occasionally committed acts of terrorism, a large enemy force had never appeared at the gates. Nevertheless, considering the city’s cultural and intellectual importance to the Vietnamese people, it was only a matter of time before the Communists tried to make it their prize.

The city was divided into two sections. The Citadel, a six-square-kilometer fortress constructed in the first two decades of the nineteenth century and modeled after the Forbidden City in Beijing, China, stood on the north bank. Within its walls lay formal gardens and parks, private residences, market places, and pagodas. It was built in the shape of a diamond, with its four corners pointing to the cardinal directions of the compass. Stone walls that were 20 feet thick and from 25 to 30 feet high encircled the Citadel, as did a wide moat filled with water.

The Perfume River ran a parallel course a short distance from the southeastern wall, offering extra protection from that quarter. Ten gates pierced the massive city walls. Four of the portals, made of elaborately carved stone, were on the southeastern side, and the remaining walls had two gates apiece. A shallow canal cut through the heart of the Citadel, winding a crooked course from the middle of the southwestern wall to the middle of the northeastern wall. A pair of culverts blocked by barbed wire connected the interior city canal with those outside. The southeastern section of the city included the imperial palace, a walled and moat-ringed compound covering nearly a square kilometer.

South of the Perfume River lay the newer section of the city, a bustling residential and business community that contained numerous public buildings, including the prestigious Hue University, the province headquarters and its associated jail, the main hospital, and the treasury. “Many of the instructors from the university . . . and most of the Europeans lived on that side of the city,” Lieutenant Colonel Ernest C. Cheatham explained. “Consequently, the buildings were all European or American style.”

Southern Hue, half the size of the Citadel, also was known as the Triangle. Its irregular shape was bounded on the south by the Phu Cam Canal, on the east by a stream



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A188251

The gate to the inner wall of the imperial palace was photographed during a tour of the city as part of a cultural development program. Taken in February 1967, long before the battle, this image shows the elaborate entrance and part of the surrounding wall in the Citadel.

known as the Phat Lac, and on the northwest by the Perfume River. The Bach Ho Railroad Bridge and the Nguyen Hoang Bridge linked the modern city to the Citadel. The six-span Nguyen Hoang Bridge, near the eastern corner of the Citadel, was the main thoroughfare for vehicles and pedestrians using Highway 1. The An Cuu Bridge, a modest arch on Highway 1 that conveyed traffic across the Phu Cam Canal, was the only other bridge of military importance in southern Hue.

Allied Troop Disposition

American

The 3d Marine Division (3d MarDiv) was in the process of shifting north from Quang Nam and Thua Thien Provinces to Quang Tri Province. At the same time, the 1st Marine Division was redistributing its forces in the corridor between Phu Bai and Da Nang. This overall redeployment of Marine forces was about three-quarters complete when the North Vietnamese offensive began. Task Force X-Ray, under the command of Brigadier General Foster C. LaHue, did not assume responsibility for the Phu Bai area, including Hue City, until 15 January 1968. LaHue, who had been serving



Fleet Marine Force-Pacific (FMFPac) Headquarters

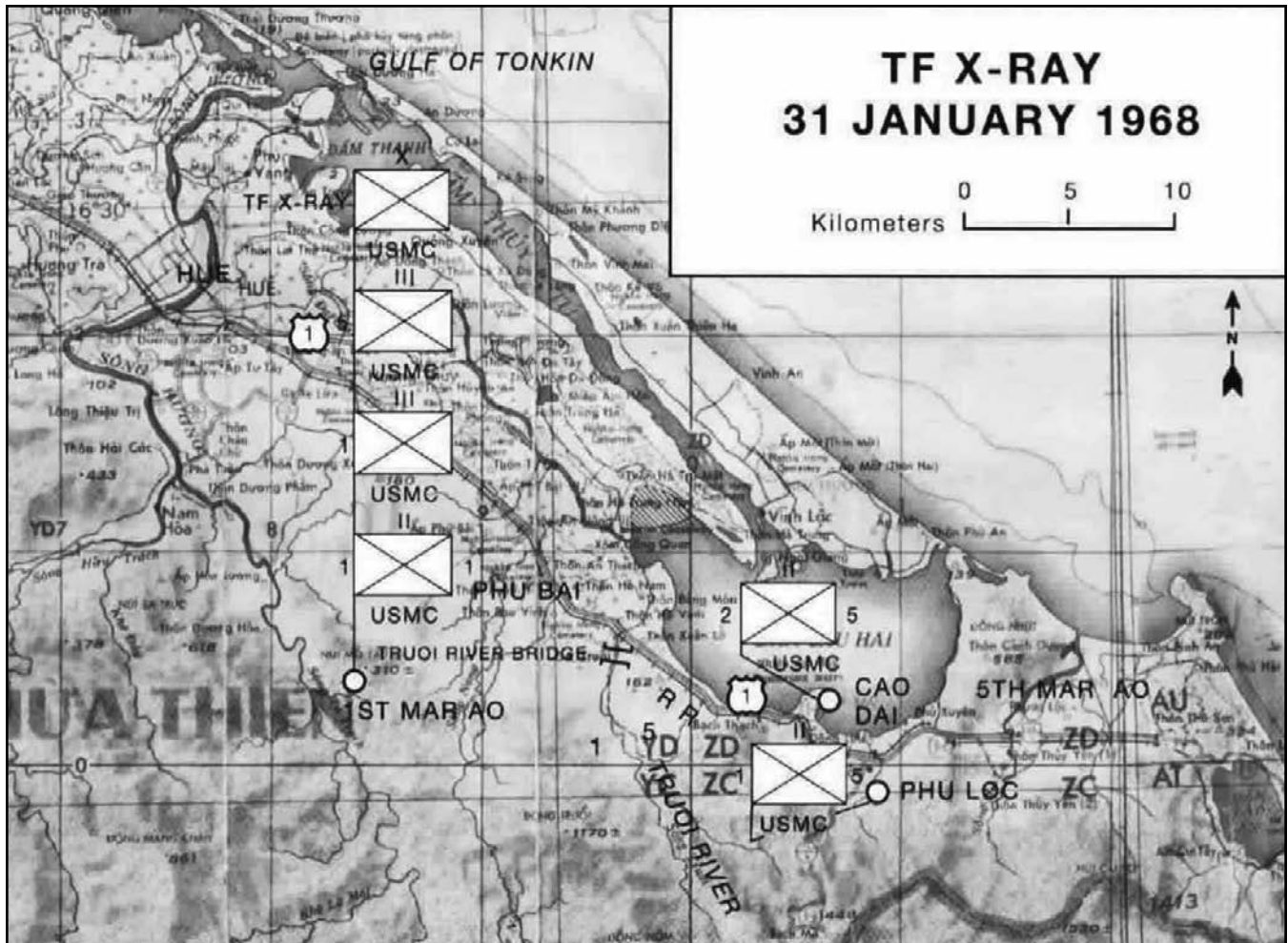
This map illustrates the situation at the conclusion of Operation Hue City.

as assistant division commander in Da Nang, barely had enough time to become acquainted with his new tactical area of responsibility (TAOR), let alone come up to speed on the fast-developing Tet situation.* Once activated, Task Force X-Ray moved its headquarters to Phu Bai, taking over the 3d MarDiv command post. The task force would eventually be responsible for all of Thua Thien Province, with LaHue

*Named for the Vietnamese New Year, the Tet offensive began in the early hours of 31 January 1968 with simultaneous attacks by approximately 85,000 North Vietnamese troops on military installations and South Vietnamese cities.

coordinating efforts with Brigadier General Ngo Quang Troung and his 1st ARVN Division.

General LaHue's Task Force X-Ray controlled two Marine regimental headquarters and three infantry battalions—the 5th Marines, under Colonel Robert D. Bohn, had the 1st and 2d Battalions; and the 1st Marines, under Colonel Stanley S. Hughes, had only the 1st Battalion in the Phu Bai sector. All the units were new to the area. Colonel Bohn arrived on the 13th, while Colonel Hughes did not reach Phu Bai until 28 January. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Marcus J. Gravel, made



Adapted by Marine Corps History Division

its move from Quang Tri about the same time.* His Companies C and D reached Phu Bai on 26 January, Company B and Headquarters Company came three days later, and Company A deployed on the 30th. Captain Gordon D. Batcheller, the Company A commander, remembered that while most of his troops were at Phu Bai on that date, two of his platoon commanders mistakenly stayed at Quang Tri and the third was still at a division leadership school.

The American presence in the city was minimal at approximately 200 U.S. servicemen, mostly noncombatants. They were assigned to the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service, Detachment 5, to the 135th Military Intelligence

Group Regional Team, as advisors to the Republic of Vietnam National Police, and to U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV). There were a number of U.S. government employees, construction workers, and missionaries scattered throughout Hue in hotels, rented houses, and churches. The Communists had identified who they were, where they worked, and the location of their billets long before Tet began.

Approximately 100 U.S. Army advisors and administrative personnel, as well as a few U.S. Marine Corps guards, were headquartered in the lightly defended USMACV compound a block and half south of the Perfume River on the east side of Highway 1, just across from the university. In *The Siege at Hue*, George W. Smith describes the compound as “rectangular in shape, about 300 yards wide and 200 yards deep. It was surrounded by a six-to-eight foot wall, except at

*Throughout this work, the longer, formal style of designating Marine Corps units will be used, such as Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. Note that “1st Marines” in Marine Corps parlance refers to the 1st Marine Regiment.

the main gate, which was blocked by a 10-foot-high chain-link fence. Adjacent to the main gate was a heavily sand-bagged security booth manned by at least two Marines who checked all traffic. . . . The entire perimeter was topped by barbed wire, trip flares, and a dozen or so [M18] Claymore mines placed atop the walls at critical spots.”

A rotating group of staff personnel from the compound was stationed at Brigadier General Ngo Quang Truong’s Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) headquarters day and night. Other advisors accompanied South Vietnamese units throughout the countryside. A small group of Army technicians manned a radar station a few hundred meters to the east of the USMACV compound. Dozens of Army technical specialists and military intelligence personnel were staying in the Huong Giang Hotel several blocks to the west. Finally, a small detachment of U.S. Navy personnel was stationed at a boat ramp just north of the advisory compound.

The 1st and 3d Brigades, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), and the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), operated out of a series of firebases and landing zones between Phu Bai and Quang Tri City. The nearest U.S. Army unit to Hue was the 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), which operated from Camp Evans, 27 kilometers northwest of the city on 26 January.

South Vietnamese

Despite Hue’s size and importance, the city had relatively few defenders within its limits. On the eve of Tet, the greater metropolitan area contained fewer than a thousand South Vietnamese troops on active duty. Most of the garrison was on leave to celebrate Tet, either at their homes in the city or elsewhere in neighboring districts. The headquarters of the ARVN 1st Infantry Division, commanded by Brigadier General Truong, made its home in the walled Mang Ca military compound, a small fortress that occupied the northeast corner of the Citadel. Apart from the headquarters staff and a handful of support units, the only combat units in the Citadel were the division’s 36-man Reconnaissance Platoon and its reaction force—the elite, all-volunteer, 240-man *Hac Bao* (Black Panther) Company.

General Truong had a sense of unease as the Tet holiday began on 29 January. Although his intelligence staff did not think the enemy had the capability or the intention of

Brigadier General Ngo Quang Truong

Ngo Quang Truong was born on 19 December 1929 to a well-to-do family in the Mekong River Delta region of Kien Hoa Province (now Ben Tre). Following the Vietnamese practice, his family name was Ngo and his first name was Truong; Americans routinely addressed the Vietnamese by their military title and first name, which was why he was so widely known as General Truong. After graduation from My Tho College, he went to military school in Thu Duc and was commissioned into the Vietnamese National Army in 1954. Ngo spent the next dozen years in an elite airborne brigade, and in 1966 became commander of the 1st ARVN Infantry Division in Hue.

“He did not look like my idea of a military genius: only five feet seven, in his midforties, very skinny, with hunched shoulders and a head that seemed too big for his body,” General Norman H. Schwarzkopf remembered. “His face was pinched and intense, not at all handsome, and there was always a cigarette hanging from his lips. Yet he was revered by his officers and troops—and feared by those North Vietnamese commanders who knew of his ability.”

In 1967, Ngo’s division attacked and destroyed the NVA and Viet Cong infrastructure in Thua Thien. After the battle, he was promoted to brigadier general. By 1968, Ngo was leading men into some of the bloodiest battles seen in Vietnam, particularly the battle for Hue City, which led to a special promotion to major general. Later in 1970, Ngo replaced Major General Nguyen Viet Thanh as commander of IV Corps.

launching a major attack against Hue, the general was painfully aware of the city’s vulnerabilities. His division was tough and battle tested but stretched uncomfortably thin throughout I Corps. Two battalions of the 3d Infantry Regiment were west of Hue, one on a routine sweep mission and the other undergoing training at the Van Thanh divisional training center, while the remaining two battalions were searching for the enemy near the coast southeast of Hue. The 1st Regiment was stationed at Quang Tri City, 50 kilometers to the

northwest, and the 2d Regiment was another 12 kilometers farther up Highway 1 near Dong Ha.

The Van Thanh divisional training center, with a two-gun detachment of 105mm howitzers, was located three kilometers southwest of the Citadel on the north bank of the Perfume River. The Tam Thai military camp, headquarters of the South Vietnamese 7th Cavalry and home to a troop of M41 Walker Bulldog light tanks, was located two kilometers south of the Perfume River and just west of Highway 1. An engineer battalion camp sat about two kilometers to its southwest. A military training facility for Montagnard hill tribesmen, the Le Loi transportation camp, and an ordnance depot, all of which were lightly guarded, was located inside the Triangle. Finally, a handful of Vietnamese Regional Force companies and Popular Force platoons were scattered throughout the villages and hamlets that surrounded the city.

On 30 January, General Truong canceled all leave and ordered his units on full alert. He directed his division's reaction force under the command of First Lieutenant Tran Ngoc Hue to send three platoons south of the river to act as security for the provincial headquarters, the power station, and the prison. Two other platoons were split up and dispatched to guard the gates to the Citadel. The deployment left Lieutenant Hue with one platoon and his headquarters section (about 50 men) to guard the division command post. Truong also sent Lieutenant Nguyen Thi Tan's 36-man Reconnaissance Company on a river and area surveillance mission approximately five kilometers southwest of the city, the most likely avenue of approach.

Elizabeth Jane Errington and B. J. C. McKercher stated in *The Vietnam War as History* that "the chief of the National Police called several of his close friends to a secret meeting. He told them that he had reliable information that the city was going to be attacked by a strong enemy force the next day. His advice to his friends was to gather up their families, get some water and provisions, and stay in hiding until the assault was over. . . . The police chief reportedly disappeared during the fighting in Hué."

At 2200 on 30 January, Regional Forces troops stationed in a village a less than a kilometer north of the An Hoa Bridge observed what appeared to be enemy figures moving in the dark. The territorial soldiers opened fire and radioed a warning to General Truong's headquarters. Just before

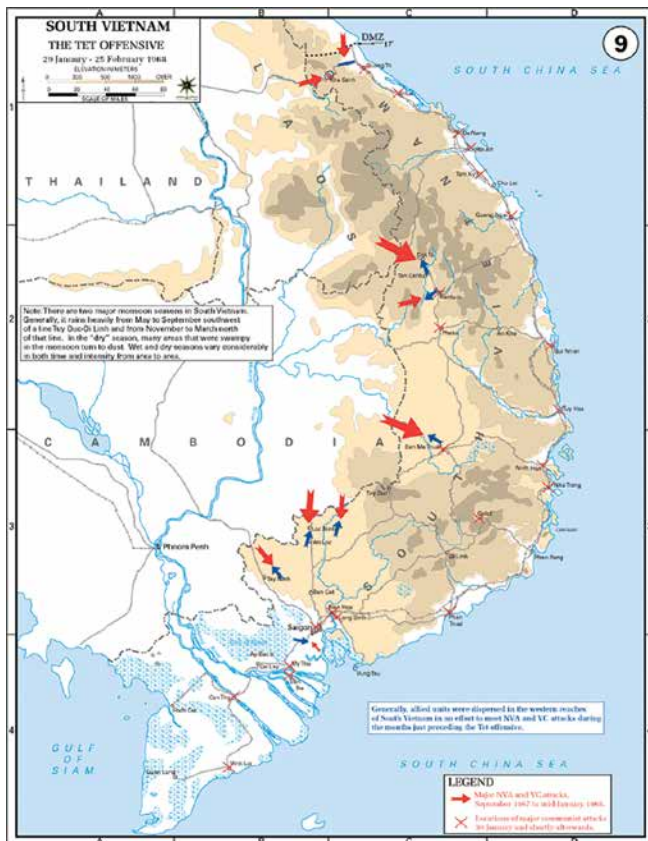
midnight, Lieutenant Tan's Reconnaissance Company spotted a long column of North Vietnamese emerging from the darkness and heading for the Citadel. Following Tan's report of the incident, Truong immediately dispatched a light observation aircraft from the Tay Loc airfield, but the pilot did not spot the enemy formation because of overcast skies and returned to base.

North Vietnamese

In early October, General Tran Van Quang (a.k.a. Bay Tien), commander of the *Tri-Thien-Hue Military Region (B4 Front)*, received a secret order directing him to mount a general offensive and uprising to liberate Hue during the Tet holiday. The order caught Quang by surprise because "in both character and scale, such an offensive was very different from the one which our Region Party Committee and Military Region Headquarters had been planning." Quang requested more time to prepare and recommended that the offensive should not begin until April or May. His request was denied. "Hanoi has made the decision and the orders are clear—we have no choice but to carry them out," Quang noted in a statement in 1986.

The North Vietnamese created a special logistical and administrative zone known as the Hue City Front to manage the upcoming battle. The new combat headquarters, staffed by high-ranking officials from the *Tri-Thien-Hue Military Region (B4 Front)*, local party members, and military officers from the units involved in the attack, had authority over the city and the three districts that surrounded it. According to Eric Hammel's *Fire in the Streets*, the *B4 Front* headquarters was located in the captured hamlet of Thon La Chu in a multistory American-built concrete bunker. The enemy also created a rear services group that would keep supplies moving into the battle area from the mountains, with much of the labor coming from civilians who would be pressed into duty once the offensive began.

Communist documents captured during and after the Tet offensive indicate that enemy troops received intensive training in urban street fighting before the offensive began for both individual and unit tasks, including offensive tactics, techniques, and procedures to assist in taking the city and defensive measures to hold the city once they seized it. While the assault troops trained for the battle, Viet Cong intelligence agents prepared lists of "cruel tyrants and reactionary



Map courtesy of the Department of History, United States Military Academy at West Point.

elements,” who were to be rounded up during the early hours of the attack. The list included primarily South Vietnamese officials, military officers, politicians, American civilians, and other foreigners. After capture, these individuals were to be evacuated to the jungle outside the city where they would be “punished” for their crimes against the Vietnamese people.

Although allied intelligence reported elements of two North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regiments (*4th* and *6th Regiments*), two sapper battalions, and an assortment of Viet Cong local forces in Thua Thien Province, there was little evidence of enemy activity in the Hue sector. U.S. order of battle records listed the *6th NVA Headquarters* with its *804th Battalion* in the jungle-canopied Base Area 114, about 20–25 kilometers west of Hue. One battalion, the *806th*, was supposed

to be in the Street Without Joy area in Phong Dien District, 35 kilometers northeast of Hue.* American intelligence officers believed the remaining battalion, the *802d*, to be about 20 kilometers south of the city or with the regimental headquarters in Base Area 114. According to the best allied information, the *4th NVA Regiment* was in the Phu Loc area near Route 1 between Phu Bai and Da Nang.

Unknown to the allies, both enemy regiments and support units were on the move toward Hue. Among the new arrivals was the *7th Battalion* of the *29th Regiment, 325C Division*, a unit that had come from laying siege to Khe Sanh. Also new to Thua Thien Province was the *5th Regiment*, a three-battalion unit that normally operated from Base Area 101 near Quang Tri City. Other reinforcements included an artillery battalion armed with 122mm rockets, two sapper battalions, two 82mm mortar companies, two 75mm recoilless rifle companies, two 12.7mm heavy machine gun companies, and a special unit equipped with 50 rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPG7, or B41) that had greater penetrating power than the older and more common RPG2 (B40) weapon. By the eve of Tet, the enemy had quietly assembled a strike force near Hue equivalent to at least 14 battalions.

The North Vietnamese spent much of December 1967 and January 1968 preparing the battlefield. Communist agents used patient and discrete observation, as well as human informants, to obtain up-to-date tactical intelligence about the military facilities in Hue. From those reports, they concluded that a quick capture of Hue was possible because the city was “nearly unprotected” and the soldiers defending it “had a weak morale and a poor combat capability.” Meanwhile, guerrillas made regular night excursions through the villages around Hue to make the local dogs bark, thus desensitizing the inhabitants to their canine alarms. Enemy scouts drew detailed maps of routes the attacking units were to take and spent many hours observing the routines of South Vietnamese soldiers. A Viet Cong sympathizer, Pham Thi Xuan Que, stated that “weapons were smuggled into us. We managed to print a number of leaflets and tracts for the National Liberation Front (NLF) calling on the population to remain calm and not carry out reprisals when its forces entered the city.”

*A longtime Communist bastion, the Street Without Joy is a 32-kilometer strip along the coast, stretching north and south.

North Vietnamese logisticians stockpiled supplies in mountain camps to the west and south of Hue, and the enemy established aid stations and hospitals staffed by both military and civilian personnel.

The Hue City Front organized a northern and southern wing to attack Hue from several directions simultaneously. The *6th NVA Regiment*, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Trong Dan, was assigned three primary objectives: Mang Ca headquarters compound, Tay Loc airfield, and the imperial palace. In addition, bunkers, sentry posts, the Hue Citadel gates, and the ARVN airborne unit at An Hoa were to be taken. The regiment consisted of the *1st*, *2d*, *6th*, and *12th Sapper Battalions* and four specialized companies (*C15*, *C16*, *C17*, and *C18*), reinforced by the *416th Battalion*, one 122mm DKB rocket launcher unit, and two special action units (40 men).

South of the Perfume River, the *4th NVA Regiment*, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Van, was to attack the modern city. Among its objective areas were the provincial capital building, the prison, and the USMACV advisors compound. The two regiments had nearly 200 specific targets in addition to the primary sites, including the radio station, police stations, government officials' residences, the recruiting office, and even the national imperial museum. The target list contained detailed intelligence that named suspected government sympathizers and their usual meeting places.

From 28 to 30 January, elements of the *12th Sapper Battalion* and the *Hue City Sapper Battalion* began to slip into the city disguised as simple peasants with the help of accomplices inside. With their uniforms and weapons hidden in baggage, boxes, and under their street clothes, the Viet Cong and NVA mingled with the Tet holiday crowds celebrating the Vietnamese Year of the Monkey. Many donned ARVN uniforms and then took up predesignated positions that night to await the attack signal.

Lieutenant Colonel John F. Barr, commander of the 1st Field Artillery Group, noted that

The unusual number of young men in civilian clothes; unusual in that most Vietnamese youths were either drafted by the ARVN or off in the hills with the Viet Cong. I mentioned this upon arrival at the ARVN artillery headquarters. I was assured by the artillery

commander that it was customary for local farmers to come into Hue to celebrate the Tet holiday. Since he was a thoroughly professional soldier with eight years combat experience in the province, I accepted his explanation—to my subsequent regret.

Another American, Army Major Robert B. Annenberg with the 149th Military Intelligence Group, also felt something was amiss. Most shops closed earlier than usual, and one establishment that never closed—the local bordello—was shuttered and dark. The streets were strangely deserted, and Annenberg saw almost no one celebrating Tet in the usual manner with firecrackers, balloons, and decorations. He found the silence in the city unnerving. The unusually somber mood prompted the major to wonder whether the local population knew something that he did not. A Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) official told U.S. Foreign Service officer James R. Bullington that an attack was imminent: “There seem to be indications that it just might come as early as tonight.”

The main body of the southern wing descended from their mountain staging area on the afternoon of 29 January and headed for a ferry crossing on the Ta Trach River, about 10 kilometers south of the city near the “Rock Crusher,” a Navy Seabee stone quarry. The lead elements arrived two hours ahead of schedule and well before the sun had set. A forward air controller (FAC) spotted them and called in artillery and airstrikes, forcing the entire southern wing to postpone the crossing until the next night.

On the evening of 30 January, the northern wing of the enemy attack force moved toward Hue from base camps in the western hills. A Viet Cong company armed with 82mm mortars and 57mm recoilless rifles veered north and took up a position near the PK-17 outpost. Its orders were to shell the South Vietnamese airborne and armored units stationed there once the offensive began. Two kilometers to the northwest, an engineer unit moved within sight of its target—the An Lo Bridge that spanned the Bo River. As it did, the *806th Battalion*, one company from the *800th Battalion*, and a handpicked sapper platoon of 40 men, all from the *6th Regiment*, quietly occupied a forward staging area in a graveyard two kilometers northwest of the Citadel. Around that time, the *802d Battalion* from the *6th Regiment*, the remainder of

the *800th Battalion*, the *12th Sapper Battalion*, and several heavy weapons companies marched down from the mountains to a spot on the Perfume River several kilometers west of Hue before turning toward the Citadel.

About 1900 that evening, the *6th Regiment* had assembled on a slope designated Hill 138. According to an NVA account, the troops ate a meal of “dumplings, Tet cakes, dried meat, and glutinous rice mixed with sugar.” A prisoner taken after the battle said his unit was given a propaganda speech on how they were about to inaugurate “the greatest battle in the history of the country.” Lieutenant Colonel Dan and his officers inspected the men’s gear and many of the soldiers changed into new khakis, and at 2200, the regiment resumed its march.

Just after midnight, Marine Captain James J. Coolican, advisor to the Hoc Boa Company, drove over the Nguyen Hoang Bridge on his way to spend the night at the USMACV compound. “I remember stopping the jeep just before the bridge and looking back at the city,” he said. “I could see the lights of the Citadel. It was like Christmas . . . a very pretty sight. I spent a moment or two admiring the lights before driving across the bridge.”

The Battle Begins

In the enemy command post to the west of the city, the NVA commander waited for word that the attack had begun. At approximately 0230 on 31 January, a forward observer reported: “I am awake, I am looking down at Hue . . . the lights of the city are still on, the sky is quiet, and nothing is happening.” Sometime later, the observer came back on the radio and announced that the assault was under way. At 0340, a signal flare lit up the night sky above Hue and a rocket barrage fell on the city from the mountains to the west. Lieutenant Hue was at home in bed when the first rocket landed. “I jumped up and quickly put on my clothes and web gear and went outside,” he recalled. “I remembered I had given my jeep to one of my platoon leaders across the river, so I jumped on a bicycle to head to my headquarters on the other side of the airfield.”

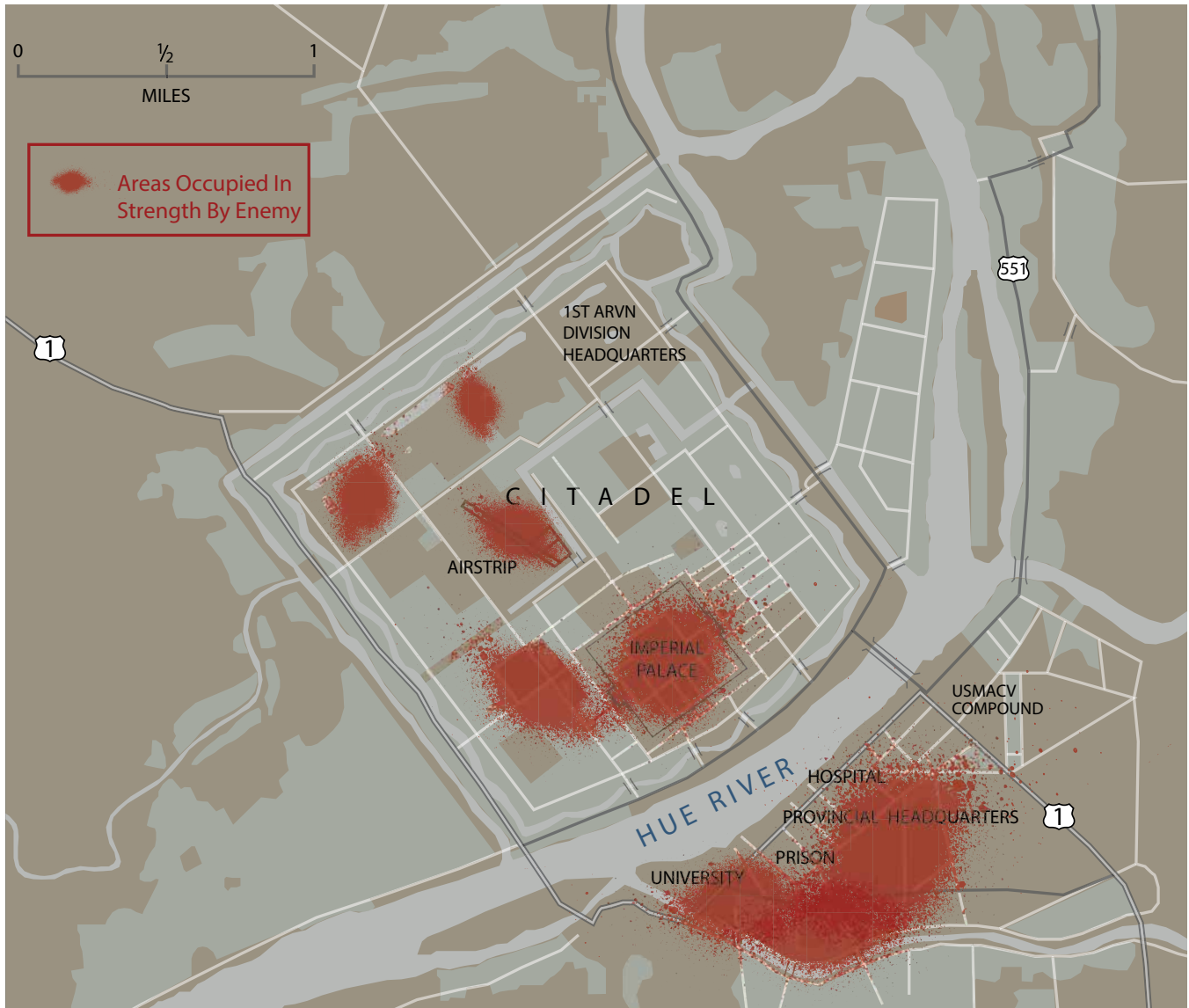
At the western gate of the Citadel, a four-man North Vietnamese sapper team, dressed in South Vietnamese Army uniforms, killed the guards and opened the gate. Using flashlights, they signaled the lead elements of Lieutenant Colonel

Dan’s *6th NVA Regiment*. In similar scenes throughout the Citadel, the NVA regulars poured into the old imperial capital. Lieutenant Hue reported that “There were VC [Viet Cong] running all around me. I’d watch them go down one street and I would head the other way. I knew where I was going. They didn’t.” Despite the crowd of enemy soldiers, Hue reached his unit.

Nguyen Thi Noa, a 20-year old Hue resident, recalled that About 4 a.m. my mother got up to pray, and I heard the sound of gunfire and the heavy thud of footsteps. I opened my door slowly and saw many, many [North Vietnamese] soldiers running by. They wore helmets covered with leaves. By dawn, the soldiers from the South had all run away. The VC [Viet Cong] came and questioned the landlord about my husband and another soldier, but the landlord protected us. He told them my husband and the other soldier had come in the morning to drink tea, then left. It was lucky for us the landlord said that. Otherwise, my husband would have been killed.

The *800th* and *802d Battalions* pushed through the western gate and drove north. On the Tay Loc airfield, the Black Panther Company, reinforced by the division’s 1st Ordnance Company, stopped the *800th Battalion*. Although the enemy battle account stated that the South Vietnamese “offered no strong resistance,” the NVA report acknowledged that “the heavy enemy [ARVN] fire enveloped the entire airfield. By dawn, our troops were still unable to advance.”

While the fight for the airfield seesawed back and forth, the *802d Battalion* struck the 1st Division headquarters at Mang Ca. Although the enemy battalion penetrated the division compound, an ad hoc 200-man defensive force of staff officers, clerks, and other headquarters personnel managed to stave off the enemy assaults. General Truong called back most of his Black Panther Company from the airfield to bolster the headquarters’ defenses. Lieutenant Hue led his men back to the division compound. “I could see some bodies outside the wall,” he said. “I also saw that the enemy had set up three machine guns overlooking the main gate to support an attack. I brought up some LAAWs [light antiarmor weapons] and we blew away the machine guns. Then we threw down a smokescreen and dashed into the compound.



Fleet Marine Force-Pacific (FMFPac) Headquarters

Positions occupied in strength by the NVA on 31 January. This map was produced after the conclusion of Operation Hue City.

We were very lucky. If I had arrived 1 hour later, there would have been no more headquarters.” In spite of the vigorous attack, General Truong remarked that “I never had to fire my weapon, but it was close.”

Captain Coolican recalled that “we picked up the LAAWs on our way back from an exercise near the DMZ [demilitarized zone] and when we got back to Hue we held several classes on how best to use them. There is no doubt in my mind that their effective use on that first day saved

General Truong’s headquarters.” Army Captain Ralph O. Bray Jr., who was in the headquarters at the time, recalled that “with all the B-40s and mortars we were taking I knew the enemy was close. When we had to stop them at our wall I knew they had the whole city.”

As daylight broke over the embattled city, more than 60 percent of the Citadel, including the imperial palace, was in the hands of the NVA. At 0800, North Vietnamese troops raised the 54-square-meter red and blue Viet Cong banner



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A801129

Aerial view of Hue City.

with its gold star over the massive Citadel flag tower. Marine Corps Captain Robert E. Laramy, an aerial observer, flew in an Army Cessna O-1 Bird Dog near the river when “We came up east of the city and came down the river at a very low altitude. It was first light over the Citadel, and our radio traffic was going berserk. Then we saw that thing, a Viet Cong flag, fluttering over the palace. It was an incredible sight only a few hundred feet away.” U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer Frederick E. Ferguson remembers “looking out

of my right side [of the helicopter] as we went past the Citadel. My gunner on that side . . . said, ‘Let’s fly past and get the flag on the way out’.”

A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer tried to fly into Hue. “Our aircraft approached the city at 10,000 feet, and I can only describe the site below as ‘surreal,’” he recalled. “Not one inhabitant, vehicle, bicycle, or other form of life could be seen in this city of 140,000 Vietnamese.” The officer described a scene from a science fiction movie where all the

people had been gassed or died from some lethal biological agent. Smoke billowed from destroyed Cessna L-19 aircraft at the Citadel's Tay Loc airfield. Tracer fire could be seen around the prison, the USMACV building, and the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) compound. "What really caught my attention, however, was a huge red Communist flag waving from the main Citadel flag pole. I asked the pilot to descend to 5,000 feet," the CIA officer said. "At 8,000 feet, watermelon sized anti-aircraft tracers came at us from atop a two story building near the An Cuu Bridge."

Across the river in southern Hue, much the same situation existed. U.S. advisors in the USMACV compound, a complex of several two- and three-story buildings astride Duy Tan Street (Route 1) at the foot of the Perfume River, awoke in the early morning hours to the sound of bursting mortar and rocket rounds. "There was no doubt in my mind that it was an incoming round," Captain Coolican said. "The first thing I did was hit the deck and turn my [tactical] radio on." The Americans in the compound grabbed any weapons at hand and manned their defenses against an assault by the *804th* and *K4B Battalions* of the *4th NVA Regiment*.

Specialist Fourth Class James M. Mueller related that "the trip wires, and flares on the barbed wire were ignited. Our entire corner of the compound was lighted up like it was daylight. . . . [T]he yelling, the screaming, and the chaos seemed to go on forever. We did not realize what was going on around us. We stayed in our bunker, followed the sergeant's orders to defend the corner and prayed that we would survive this hell."

Captain Coolican left the relative protection of the bunker to make the rounds: "I went over by the dispensary to see about any casualties. There was a lot of fire coming from the back of the compound and I went to investigate. A bunker took a direct hit, injuring five people, all helicopter pilots. I grabbed a stretcher and helped move the injured to the dispensary."

Coolican's radio operator, Army Specialist Fourth Class Frank Doezema Jr., was in a 20-foot wooden guard tower "spraying machine gun fire toward the area of the main gate." Specialist Mueller, who was nearby at the time, recalled that "as Doezema was firing at the NVA, an explosion blew off the lower part of his legs." Coolican ran to help, laying down a base of fire and climbing the tower. Though Doezema was

hit in both legs and bleeding heavily, he was given a shot of morphine and transported to the USMACV dispensary. Mueller later said, "A medevac chopper was called in to evacuate him . . . but the enemy snipers prevented the Huey from landing. I learned later that Doezema bled to death."

The *4th NVA Regiment* with the *804th NVA Battalion*, supported by local force companies and elements of the *Hue City Sapper Battalion*, launched its offensive against the city. The force divided into several attack groups and sought out key civil and military facilities. According to the North Vietnamese official account, their actions and preparations in Hue lacked the cohesion and timing of those in the Citadel. For example, the attacks on southern Hue were carried out by many forces employing varying tactics. One unit lost its way in the darkness and did not arrive in the city until 0600. Despite confusion that morning, the NVA had control of most of southern Hue except for the prison, the USMACV compound, and the Hue landing craft utility (LCU) ramp on the waterfront to the northeast of the compound.

When James Bullington flew into Hue late on the afternoon of 30 January, he stopped at the CORDS headquarters for news on enemy activity. While nothing solid had been reported, some low-level rumors indicated there might be problems during the Tet holidays. Since no one seemed especially concerned, Bullington decided to spend the night at the power plant in southern Hue. At approximately 0200, he was awakened by the sounds of incoming mortars; however, by dawn things had quieted down. Bullington recalled that "I walked over to the power plant and spoke to my French friend. 'What are you doing here?' he whispered with a shocked expression. 'I told you to stay inside. They're here, the North Vietnamese are right here, they're all around us.' And he pointed to the other end of the courtyard where for the first time I saw armed men with pith helmets." The NVA had set up a command post in the power plant, not more than 25–30 yards from Bullington's hiding place.

While the NVA and Viet Cong assault troops roamed the streets freely and consolidated their gains, political officers began a reign of terror by rounding up South Vietnamese and foreigners on the special lists. Viet Cong officers marched through the Citadel with loudspeakers, calling out names and telling them to report to a local school. Those who did not report were hunted down. The detainees were

Captain James Joseph Coolican

Navy Cross Citation

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Captain James Joseph Coolican, United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism in action in the city of Hue, Thua Thien Province, Republic of Vietnam on 31 January 1968. In the early morning hours, without warning, the enemy assaulted simultaneously all positions of the Hue [U.S.] Military Assistance Command, Vietnam Compound perimeter with 122-mm. and B-40 rockets, mortar and intense small-arms fire. Captain Coolican, with disregard for his own safety, dashed 150 meters through the hail of exploding enemy rounds to a guard post where he moved four wounded personnel to the dispensary. Within a short time, the enemy scored a direct hit on a 20-foot tower, mortally wounding the guard. Quickly, Captain Coolican ran to the tower under heavy enemy fire, recovered the wounded man and carried him down the ladder to an awaiting stretcher. After this, he returned to the tower guard post where he silenced the enemy with a fierce blanket of M-79 grenade fire. At daybreak, because



of the critical condition of two wounded men, an emergency air medical rescue was planned from a landing zone approximately 400 meters from the [US]MACV compound. Captain Coolican organized a small force and, after two futile attempts at evacuation of the wounded, he finally succeeded on the third trip and carried critically needed ammunition back to the compound. When a relief force coming to the aid of the compound was ambushed and sustained numerous casualties, Captain Coolican assembled his men and sped to the scene of intense fighting. Under unrelenting hostile fire, he skillfully directed the collection of the injured and evacuation to the Hue [US]MACV dispensary. Throughout the battle of Hue, he skillfully effected medical evacuations under enemy observation and fire. He succeeded in saving many lives with no loss to his own force. Captain Coolican's conspicuous gallantry, professionalism and extraordinary devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Specialist Fourth Class Frank Doezema Jr.

Distinguished Service Cross Citation

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918, takes pride in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross (Posthumously) to Specialist Fourth Class Frank Doezema, Jr., United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations involving conflict with an armed hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam, while serving with Advisor Team 3, United States Army Advisory Group, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. Specialist Four Doezema distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 31 January 1968 while defending his unit's compound in the city of Hue against a savage enemy attack. The insurgents unleashed an intense barrage of rocket, mortar and automatic weapons fire on the installation during the early morning hours, Specialist Doezema raced to his assigned defensive post, a twenty-foot wooden tower, and sprayed the assaulting enemy with deadly accurate



machine gun fire. Heedless of the hostile fusillade directed at his exposed position, he directed his comrades' fire from the vantage point. A rocket exploded on the tower roof, and Specialist Doezema was seriously wounded by flying shrapnel. He determinedly remained at his post and continued firing at insurgents who were advancing in defilade behind a cement wall on the far side of the street. While shouting words of encouragement to his fellow soldiers and directing their fire, Specialist Doezema was mortally wounded by the explosion of a second enemy rocket. His fearless and gallant actions in close combat accounted for at least eighteen enemy killed and were responsible for the successful defense of the compound. Specialist Four Doezema's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty, at the cost of his life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

never seen alive again. Their fate was not known until U.S. and South Vietnamese forces captured the Citadel and found nearly 3,000 bodies buried in mass graves.

In the Citadel, the embattled General Truong called in reinforcements. He ordered his 3d Brigade; the 3d Troop, 7th ARVN Cavalry; and the 1st ARVN Airborne Task Force to relieve the pressure on his Mang Ca headquarters. In response, an armored column rolled out from the PK-17 outpost onto Route 1 and headed for the city. A North Vietnamese blocking force stopped the ARVN relief force about 400 meters short of the Citadel wall. Unable to push past the enemy positions, the South Vietnamese paratroopers asked for assistance. The 2d ARVN Airborne Battalion reinforced the convoy, and the South Vietnamese finally pushed the enemy aside and entered the Citadel in the early morning of 31 January. The cost had been heavy, with the ARVN suffering 131 casualties, including 40 dead, and losing 4 of the 12 armored personnel carriers in the convoy. According to the South Vietnamese, the enemy also paid a steep price in men and equipment. The ARVN claimed to have killed 250 of the NVA, captured 5 prisoners, and recovered 71 individual and 15 crew-served weapons.

The 3d ARVN Regiment had an even more difficult time. On 31 January, two of its battalions—the 2d and 3d—advanced east from encampments southwest of the city along the northern bank of the Perfume River until North Vietnamese defensive fires forced them to fall back. Unable to enter the Citadel, the two battalions established night positions outside the southeast wall of the old city. The 1st and 4th Battalions, also operating to the southeast, were stopped and surrounded by the North Vietnamese. Captain Phan Ngoc Luong, commander of 1st Battalion, was able to break away with his unit and retreat to the coastal Ba Long outpost, though arriving with only three clips per man for their World War II-era M1 Garand rifles. The following day, the battalion embarked upon motorized junks and reached the Citadel without incident. The 4th Battalion, however, remained unable to break its encirclement for several days.

On 31 January, Lieutenant Colonel Phan Huu Chi, commander of ARVN 7th Armored Cavalry Squadron, attempted to break the enemy stranglehold south of the city. He led an armored column toward Hue, but like the other South Vietnamese units, found it impossible to break through.

The lead armored personnel carrier (APC) took a direct hit from an RPG. Captain Jack Chase, U.S. Army advisor to the ARVN 3d Troop, 7th Armored Cavalry, explained that “they let the APC get right on top of them, perhaps 15 or 20 feet away before firing. When we finally got to the APC there wasn’t enough left of the crew to put in a helmet.”

With the promise of U.S. Marine reinforcement, Lieutenant Colonel Chi’s column, with three tanks in the lead, tried once more. This time, they crossed the An Cuu Bridge into the city. Coming upon the central police headquarters in southern Hue, the tanks attempted to relieve the police defenders. An enemy B40 rocket made a direct hit on Chi’s tank, killing him instantly and forcing the South Vietnamese armor to pull back.

Reaction Force

In the early morning hours of 31 January, General LaHue received information that Hue had been invaded by the enemy, that the USMACV advisors compound and 1st ARVN Division headquarters had been compromised, and that he would go to their assistance. Task Force X-Ray also received reports of enemy attacks all along Route 1 between Hai Van Pass and Hue. All told, the enemy hit 18 targets: bridges, combined action units, and company defensive positions. “The enemy intelligence was practically non-existent,” LaHue complained. At 0630, LaHue dispatched his “Bald Eagle” Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, under the command of Captain Gordon D. Batcheller, to reinforce the ARVN at the Truoi River Bridge.* Batcheller recalled some years later that “we were roused out about 0400 on the 31st and launched south on trucks to rendezvous with and reinforce . . . [ARVN] forces about a map sheet and a half south of Phu Bai.”

According to Captain Batcheller, the truck convoy carrying his company was escorted by two Army trucks each armed with M55 quadruple mounted .50-caliber (Quad-50s) machine guns; one truck was at the head and the other at the rear of the column. Army Sergeant Robert H. Lauver was a squad leader of a Quad-50 multiple machine gun mount. “It was always exciting providing escort duty through Hue.

*As a nod to an iconic American symbol, a Bald Eagle Company referred to a quick reaction force or a tactical reserve.

[We] could relax, unbutton the flak jacket, and take off the steel pot,” he recalled.*

When the convoy reached its destination, there were no ARVN troops to meet them. On their way south on Route 1, the company passed several combined action units, whose troops indicated that the Viet Cong were moving toward Hue, though nothing had been hit and all bridges were up. Batcheller then received orders from Lieutenant Colonel Gravel to reverse direction and reinforce an Army unit north of Hue or go to the assistance of a Combined Action Platoon (CAP) just south of Phu Bai.

Regardless of Batcheller’s choice, this new mission was short-lived. Approximately 30 minutes later, at 0830, the company received another set of orders, presumably from Task Force X-Ray, “to proceed to the Hue Ramp area . . . to investigate reports that Hue City was under attack.” Until now, the fighting for Hue had been an entirely South Vietnamese affair. General LaHue actually had very little reliable intelligence on the situation other than that Truong’s headquarters and the USMACV compound had come under attack. Because of enemy mortar fire at the LCU ramp in southern Hue, the allies had stopped all river traffic to the city.

With this limited information, Company A continued north toward Hue. As the convoy proceeded along Route 1, it met up with four M48 Patton battle tanks from the 3d Tank Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Karl J. Fontenot, the battalion commander, recalled that Second Lieutenant James E. Georgaklis commanded the “four tanks that were due to load onto LCUs to go on up to Dong Ha. The vehicles included two command [M48A3 90mm] gun tanks and two [M67A2] flame tanks.” The tankers had discovered some burned-out hulks of the 7th ARVN Armored Cavalry Squadron and decided to return to Phu Bai when Company A approached from the rear. Captain Batcheller discussed the situation with the major in charge, who then joined with Company A as they moved toward the USMACV compound. Private First Class William Purcell said, “We climbed on board the tanks and commenced the attack into the city, not knowing what we were getting into.”

*Sgt Lauver would later be awarded a Silver Star for his actions with the Quad-50.

A short time later, Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. LaMontagne, the 3d Marine Division embarkation officer, accompanied by a Navy chief petty officer, sought out Batcheller and “made the valid observation that we were moving too slow.” Batcheller was not sure of LaMontagne’s status, as he “never tried to assume command,” but instead “offered excellent advice.” LaMontagne was, in fact, on his way to the LCU ramp to supervise the loading of 3d MarDiv (Rear) equipment and personnel, who were still redeploying from Phu Bai to Dong Ha.**

As Company A approached the southern suburbs of the city, they came under increased sniper fire from the dilapidated buildings and thatched huts that lined either side of the highway. In one village, the troops dismounted and cleared the houses on either side of the main street before proceeding. “Incoming enemy fire intensified, and we were asked to direct fire at a multi-story building to the right side of the road,” Sergeant Lauver said. “As we poured several hundred rounds into the building, there was a sudden break by several NVA soldiers across an open area to the rear of the structure. Open targets! The guns traversed to the right, cutting down the enemy until they took cover.”

The convoy then crossed the An Cuu Bridge, which spanned the Phu Cam Canal, into the city. Caught in a murderous crossfire from enemy automatic weapons and B40 rockets, the Marines once more clambered off the trucks and tanks. Sergeant Alfredo C. Gonzalez, a 21-year old Texan and acting 3d Platoon commander, took cover with his troops in a nearby building. When enemy machine-gun fire wounded one Marine in the legs, Gonzalez ran into the open road, slung the injured man over his shoulder, and returned to the relative safety of the building despite being hit by fragments of a B40 rocket. Responding to orders from Captain Batcheller, Gonzalez rallied his men, who were on the point, and the column was again on the move.***

This time the Marine convoy only advanced about 200 meters before heavy enemy fire forced them to stop. “When we went across a small canal, all hell broke loose,” Private

**LtCol LaMontagne would later be awarded the Silver Star for his actions on 31 January 1968.

***Sgt Gonzalez would be posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for this event and actions he took on 3–4 February.



Fleet Marine Force-Pacific (FMFPac) Headquarters

Hue City on 31 January 1968. This map was produced after the conclusion of Operation Hue City.

First Class Purcell recalled. The enemy came at them from both sides of the road with a machine gun bunker on the west side of the road. “It was like going through a gauntlet,” Purcell said. “The first tank received all the fire coming from the buildings and at ground level.” Small-arms fire sounded like gravel pelting a metal building. A recoilless rifle fired four rounds, two of which penetrated the M48A3 tank (H-51) and killed the tank commander. At that point,

Sergeant Gonzalez, on the east side of the road with some men from his platoon, crawled to a dike directly across from the machine gun bunker. With his Marines laying down a base of fire, Gonzalez jumped up and threw four grenades into the bunker, killing all the occupants.

Company A cautiously made its way northward in the built-up area. “We got our wounded out of the street and from that point on we just started fighting our way up the

Gunnery Sergeant James L. Canley

Navy Cross Citation

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Gunnery Sergeant James L. Canley, United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving as Company Gunnery Sergeant of Company A, First Battalion, First Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, during operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam from 31 January to 6 February 1968. On 31 January, when his company came under a heavy volume of enemy fire near the city of Hue, Gunnery Sergeant Canley rushed across the fire-swept terrain and carried several wounded Marines to safety. Later, with the company commander seriously wounded, Gunnery Sergeant Canley assumed command and immediately reorganized his scattered Marines, moving from one group to another to advise and encourage his men. Although sustaining shrapnel wounds during this period, he nonetheless established a base of fire which subsequently allowed the company to break through the enemy strongpoint. Retaining command of the company



for the following three days, Gunnery Sergeant Canley on 4 February led his men into an enemy-occupied building in Hue. Despite fierce enemy resistance, he succeeded in gaining a position immediately above the enemy strongpoint and dropped a large satchel charge into the position, personally accounting for numerous enemy killed, and forcing the others to vacate the building. On 6 February, when his unit sustained numerous casualties while attempting to capture a government building, Gunnery Sergeant Canley lent words of encouragement to his men and exhorted them to greater efforts as they drove the enemy from its fortified emplacement. Although wounded once again during this action, on two occasions he leaped a wall in full view of the enemy, picked up casualties, and carried them to covered positions. By his dynamic leadership, courage, and selfless dedication, Gunnery Sergeant Canley contributed greatly to the accomplishment of his company's mission and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service.

street, one building at a time," Private First Class Purcell explained. "There was fire coming from the buildings, and you had to imagine the scene. It was like going through Queens or Brooklyn, New York, with all two- and three-story buildings, paved streets, sidewalks, the whole developed side of things." When the convoy reached the An Cuu Bridge, the Marines saw wrecked and smoldering South Vietnamese tanks on the far side, victims from the armored task force that had tried to reach the Citadel earlier that morning.

Captain Batcheller maintained sporadic radio contact with Lieutenant Colonel Gravel at Phu Bai. For the most part, however, the only thing he heard on his artillery and air radio nets was Vietnamese. The convoy reached an elevated highway in the middle of a large cultivated area, and once again came under enemy fire. Navy Chaplain Richard M. Lyons recalled that "there was a narrow street with

two-story houses along the street . . . we were receiving heavy fire from them. We went up a street until we got to a wide boulevard that was being covered from inside the Citadel by the NVA." Several men were wounded. Batcheller went to the assistance of a fallen man and was wounded seriously in both legs and his arm. Lyons feared that "he would die, but they got a jeep and took him for medical attention and he survived." Gunnery Sergeant James L. Canley, a giant of a man at six feet, four inches tall and weighing more than 240 pounds, then took command of the company.

As Company A engaged the enemy on the outskirts of Hue, Colonel Stanley S. Hughes, the 1st Marines commander, requested permission from General LaHue to reinforce

*Lyons was the first Navy chaplain to move with a Marine unit into Hue after the battle began. He also was the only Navy chaplain to receive the Silver Star during the Vietnam War.

Captain Gordon D. Batcheller

Navy Cross Citation

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Captain Gordon D. Batcheller, United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving as Commanding Officer, Company A, First Battalion, First Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in the Republic of Vietnam on 31 January 1966. Elements of Company A were assigned the mission of reinforcing a unit of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam in the city of Hue. Joining a small armored column north of Phu Bai in Thua Thien Province, the unit proceeded along National Route One toward Hue. On the southern edge of the city the column was ambushed by a numerically superior enemy force using automatic weapons, mortars, recoilless rifles and B-40 rockets. Quickly organizing his outnumbered forces into a defensive perimeter and unmindful of the danger, Captain Batcheller boldly began directing his unit's return fire. Exhibiting sound tactical judgment and calm presence of mind under enemy fire, he formulated a plan of attack and courageously exposed himself to the intense enemy barrage as he began shifting his men to more advantageous positions from which they delivered accurate suppressive fire against the hostile emplacements. Although injured by fragments of an exploding enemy rocket round, he aggressively led his men in a fierce assault against the enemy blocking



positions, steadfastly advancing until he reached a besieged Popular Force compound. As the enemy increased the intensity of their attack, one of the Marine tanks was hit by hostile automatic weapons fire and B-40 rockets which wounded several of the crew members. Ignoring the danger from enemy rounds exploding all around him, Captain Batcheller unhesitatingly moved to the damaged vehicle to assist in removing the casualties. Simultaneously, he reorganized his force and succeeded in routing the enemy from its fortified positions. As the intensity of enemy fire to the front lessened, the column began receiving heavy automatic weapons fire from both flanks, seriously wounding Captain Batcheller in both legs. Exhibiting great courage and physical stamina, he supported himself with his elbows and resolutely continued to direct his men in repulsing the enemy until, weakened by the loss of blood from his serious injuries; his voice fell to a whisper. Even then, he bravely encouraged those near him as he lay receiving medical treatment. As a result of his determined efforts, National Route One was reopened, enabling the reaction force to reach the embattled city of Hue. By his exceptional heroism, outstanding tactical ability and steadfast devotion to duty at great personal risk, Captain Batcheller upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

the embattled company. The only available reinforcements were the command group of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, and Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, which had become the Phu Bai quick reaction force in place of Company A earlier that morning. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel, the 1st Battalion commander, remembered that no intelligence was available on the situation in Hue and that his own battalion was "strung out" in the Phu Bai sector with elements still at Quang Tri. Gravel had never met Captain Charles L. Meadows, the Company G commander, until "that first day."

For Gravel's part, the only planning he was able to accomplish was to give the order, "Get on the trucks, men." Captain Meadows recalled that his task was to "get into the trucks with your company, go up to the 1st ARVN Division headquarters and escort the CG [commanding general] back down to Phu Bai."* The mission should have taken no more than two to three hours.

*Capt Meadows would later receive the Silver Star for actions on 6 February.

Crossing the An Cuu Bridge, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel's relief column reached Company A in the early afternoon. With the linkup of the two forces, Gravel kept the tanks with him but sent the truck and the wounded, including Captain Batcheller, back to Phu Bai. The vehicles returned without escort, just the truck drivers and wounded, some of whom could still fire their weapons. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel determined that this was the only feasible way to evacuate the wounded because "we weren't going to get any helicopters in there." According to Gravel, this "was a terrible long shot . . . but it worked."

With the tanks in the lead, Company A, the battalion headquarters group, and Company G followed as Gravel's makeshift command made its way toward the USMACV compound. Captain Meadows recalled that there was no traffic on the road and no pedestrians or children on the sides of the road. "There weren't even chickens!" he claimed, which made him uneasy. In addition to a lack of good intelligence, the companies had to make do without maps of the city or solid communications, often just radio static.

The convoy reached the compound at approximately 1515 on 31 January, but the enemy attackers had pulled back from the immediate vicinity of the battered compound by this time. "Things were in bad shape," Specialist Mueller said. "The compound had taken many rounds from mortars and rockets." Lieutenant Colonel Gravel met with Army Colonel George O. Adkisson, the U.S. senior advisor to the 1st ARVN Division. According to Marine accounts, Adkisson told the Marine battalion commander that the "Citadel was in fine shape," but they needed assistance evacuating American nationals. "I quickly came to the realization that the North Vietnamese could easily have overwhelmed us," Adkisson said. "Since they had not, it seemed most likely that they were simply not interested in us or our compound. For this reason, I did not believe subsequently that the compound was in great peril."

Task Force X-Ray ordered Gravel to cross the river to relieve the pressure on General Truong's headquarters. In a personal letter to Captain Batcheller, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel expressed his anger about the order: "We proceeded to the [US]MACV compound then were gifted with the most stupid idiotic mission to cross the Perfume River Bridge and go to the aid of the CG 1st ARVN Division."

He reported his concerns to Task Force X-Ray, but he was ordered to "go anyway."

Leaving Company A behind to secure the USMACV compound, the battalion commander took Company G, reinforced by three tanks from the 3d Tank Battalion, the 40mm self-propelled antiaircraft guns (or Dusters), the Quad-50s, and a few South Vietnamese tanks from the ARVN 7th Armored Squadron, and attempted to cross the main bridge over the Perfume River. Gravel left the vehicles behind on the southern bank to provide direct fire support. "The Quads and Dusters were positioned at the base of the Nguyen Hoang Bridge and ordered to fire across the river in support of the Marines from Company G," Sergeant Lauer explained.

Lauer further recounted that

My Quad .50 was providing cover fire from across the river when a Marine officer came up to me and asked, "Sarge, my men are getting the hell shot out of them, can you help them out?" We pulled the Quad truck onto the bridge and drove toward the Citadel on the north end . . . there were dead and wounded Marines along both edges of the bridge deck. Men were using bodies of their dead buddies as cover so they could continue to put fire on the enemy. As soon as we reached the north end of the bridge, we opened up with our machine guns on the buildings that ran parallel to the river. The southeast corner of the wall of the Citadel was just to our left. Marines were yelling at us as we drove across to try to tell us where to direct our fire. . . . During this action I saw many Marines perform heroic actions . . . many were cut down trying to take out machine gun bunkers. I remember a Marine charging a bunker with grenades only to not make it . . . another Marine with an M-60 firing from the hip also did not make it.

Lance Corporal Willie J. Barnes spotted several North Vietnamese. He said, "You could actually see them maneuvering, then shooting, well organized. They were there to kick our a—s." Lance Corporal Lester A. Tully, later awarded the Silver Star for his action, ran forward, threw a grenade, and silenced a machine gun. Two platoons successfully made their way to the other side. They turned left and immediately

came under automatic weapons and recoilless rifle fire from the old fighting positions dug into the Citadel wall by the Japanese during World War II. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel recollected that, as it was late in the afternoon and the sun was in their eyes, “we were no match for what was going on. . . . I decided to withdraw.”

This was easier said than done. The enemy was well dug in and “firing from virtually every building in Hue City” north of the river. Gravel radioed back to Colonel Adkisson for vehicle support to recover the wounded. According to Gravel, the trucks never arrived. Becoming agitated by the situation, the battalion commander took his radioman and an interpreter “to find out where in the hell the vehicles were.” They came upon some U.S. naval personnel and a few American advisors in two Navy trucks and brought them back to the bridge. In the meantime, the Marines commandeered some abandoned Vietnamese civilian vehicles and used them as makeshift ambulances to carry out the wounded.

Among the casualties on the bridge was Major Walter D. Murphy, the 1st Battalion’s S-3 or operations officer, who later died of his wounds. “I went over to Murphy and told him to hang in there, that he’d be on his way to a hospital shortly,” Captain Coolican remembered. “He told me his back was hurting him but otherwise he seemed in control. He was comforting the other wounded Marines. When I came back to get him for the medevac, he had bled to death. . . . Murphy was the man who drove the effort that first day and he took chances he probably shouldn’t have.” Captain Charles Meadows’ company had 49 casualties the first day, almost all from crossing the bridge.

By 2000 that evening, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, had established defensive positions near the USMACV compound and a helicopter landing zone in a field just west of the Navy LCU ramp in southern Hue. On that first day of the battle, the two Marine companies in Hue had sustained casualties of 10 Marines killed and 56 wounded. During the night, the battalion called a helicopter into the landing zone to evacuate the worst of the wounded. According to Lieutenant Colonel Gravel, “It was darker than hell and foggy.” So much so that the pilot radioed, “Where are you? I can’t see.” A sergeant on the ground talked the aircraft down, knocked on the nose of the Boeing CH-46 Sea Knight, and replied, “Right out here, sir.” Gravel marveled that the sergeant



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A194522

Two civilians of the USMACV help Marines carry wounded to the safety of the compound used as a command post for Company H, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, during the bloody street fighting in Hue.

“had a knack about working with helicopter pilots. . . . [H]e brought it [the helicopter] right on top of us.”

The American command still had little realization of the situation in Hue. General LaHue later commented that “early intelligence did not reveal the quantity of enemy involved that we subsequently found were committed to Hue.” U.S. Army General William C. Westmoreland’s headquarters had, if possible, even less appreciation for the magnitude of the NVA attack on the city. Westmoreland cabled Army General Earle G. Wheeler, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, that the “enemy has approximately three companies in Hue Citadel and Marines have sent a battalion into the area to clear them out.”

Evade, Escape, Capture

By the morning of 1 February, the situation was becoming only too apparent to both the South Vietnamese and American troops in Hue. In Da Nang, Lieutenant General Hoang Xuan Lam, the I Corps commander, and Marine Corps General Robert E. Cushman Jr., commanding general of III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF), agreed that the 1st ARVN Division would assume responsibility for the Citadel

while Task Force X-Ray would clear the city south of the Perfume River. “We were assigned at this time a multiplicity of tasks,” General LaHue stated. “These included locating and rescuing isolated Americans of the intelligence community, going to the relief of specific ARVN units such as those in the engineer compound, ordnance depot, recapturing the ARVN arsenal, seizing the provincial prison before the prisoners could be released,” and the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) compound in the northwest corner of the city overlooking the royal tombs. A CIA report noted that, “as of 1330 hours [on] 1 February Saigon time, the 50 PRUs in their Hue compound had repulsed five attacks, were surrounded by approximately two VC [Viet Cong] companies, were short of ammunition, and had not had food for two days.”

The PRU commander withdrew his men from the compound to trenches near the southern perimeter. “I watched the PRUs retreat as enemy forces swarmed into the vacated building,” a CIA agent said. “I immediately contacted our supporting FAC who said he could provide naval gunfire support from an American cruiser, which I believe was the USS *Providence* [CLG 6]. The first round exploded directly in front of the building. A massive barrage of eight-inch shells quickly followed, reducing the structure to rubble instantly. The PRUs then counter-attacked and moved into the smoking ruin.” On 4 February, according to a CIA report, the PRUs withdrew to the Huong Hoa District headquarters.

Captain Raymond R. Lau, a rural development advisor, shared a house with three other Americans when the attack began. Lau recalled, “We were awakened at about 4:00 a.m. to the sound of gunfire and explosions in the distance. . . . According to the Nung guards outside, the guard camp across the canal at Nam Giao was coming under attack, and they were noticeably concerned. . . . [T]he sustained firefight indicated that it was something bigger than a probe.” Lau was joined by fellow Marines, Captain Robert W. Hubbard and Sergeant Howard G. Vaughn, and two civilians who worked for the American embassy. Sergeant Vaughn was severely wounded, along with one of the civilians, and died several days later. Captain Hubbard was killed on 4 February while leading the group to safety and was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross.



Defense Department (Marine Corps) 68-0015G

U.S. military police escort a captured Viet Cong combatant from the buildings next to the American embassy in Saigon. In the early morning attack on 31 January, 19 Viet Cong were killed in the embassy compound as they stormed the main building.

The 135th Military Intelligence Group regional team was staying in a rented villa in the city at the onset of the attack, and they found themselves under intense enemy fire. “It was like Custer’s last stand,” said Army Sergeant Donald J. Rander, assistant agent in charge of the Hue regional headquarters. “All the North Vietnamese in the world seemed to be outside the door.” The team held out all day and into the night before running out of ammunition. During the firefight, Army Corporal Barry L. Wolk was killed and four others captured, including Army Captain Theodore W. Gostas and Sergeants Rander, Robert E. Hayhurst, and Edward C. Dierling. The latter two were able to escape from their captors days later and returned to friendly forces.

The Americans at Armed Forces Radio and Television Service, Detachment 5, also were caught behind enemy lines. The nine-man detachment under First Lieutenant James V.

Captain Robert W. Hubbard

Navy Cross Citation

The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Navy Cross (Posthumously) to Captain Robert Walker Hubbard, United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving as an Advisor to the Revolutionary Development Cadre, Thua Thien Province, in the City of Hue, Republic of Vietnam, from 31 January to 4 February 1968. On 31 January, while carrying out his advisory duties within the city of Hue, the quarters in which Captain Hubbard was temporarily residing, together with two military and two civilian personnel, came under intense enemy ground attack. Quickly assuming command, he organized a defense against the repeated assaults from the enemy forces and covered the front door along with two of his companions. Every attempt by the enemy to overrun their strongpoint was thwarted, until finally, after two of his group were seriously wounded, withdrawal was necessary. Quickly assessing the situation, he braved the intense enemy fire while searching for a covered route through which his group could withdraw. Despite the ever increasing enemy fire, he elected to cover the withdrawal of his unit and inflicted numerous casualties



upon the enemy. During the ensuing days, the enemy maintained almost complete control of the city of Hue, and Captain Hubbard's group of men found it necessary to move from shelter to shelter to escape death or possible capture. Although acting in the capacity as a civilian advisor at the time of the Tet Offensive, Captain Hubbard's skill as a Marine infantry officer instantly surfaced during this crisis. He was constantly moving, administering to the wounded, foraging for food and water for his companions, searching for assistance from friendly forces, and returning deadly accurate fire on the enemy. On 4 February, with all food, water and ammunition depleted, he led the group, armed only with a single hand grenade, in an attempt to reach friendly forces south of the city. During this time he was hit and mortally wounded by small-arms fire. By his brilliant leadership, intrepid fighting spirit and exceptional fortitude, Captain Hubbard was largely responsible for the escape of his fellow Americans. His outstanding courage and valiant devotion to duty reflected the highest credit upon himself, the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

Di Bernardo was located a few blocks from the USMACV compound. "I remember being called over to the [US] MACV compound the day before the attack for a briefing on enemy activity," Di Bernardo recalled. "I was told to double my guards at my compound and to expect some kind of trouble. I told them that other than the two 'white mice (ARVN military policeman)' I didn't have any guards." When the rocket attack started, "the first thing I noticed was that the white mice were gone. I called the [US]MACV compound and spoke to the duty officer. He told me they were under attack and to hold where I was until they could get back to me. The phone went dead and I never heard from them again." The detachment held out for three days before Di Bernardo and four of his men were captured. Two others were killed, one executed, and one man escaped.

Chief Warrant Officer Three Solomon H. Godwin, a Marine counterintelligence officer, was assigned as an advisor

to the Vietnamese National Police, Special Branch. He had taken refuge at their headquarters in the city during the initial North Vietnamese assault. He and four national policemen held out until 5 February, when they were wounded by a heavy mortar barrage and taken prisoner.*

Operation Hue City

On 1 February, the fight for the city was officially designated Operation Hue City. General LaHue stated that there were "Essentially four phases of the Marine commitment: Phase I, initial commitment of reaction forces; Phase II, buildup of forces south of the Perfume River and clearing that portion of the city of enemy forces; Phase III, operations within the Citadel; and Phase IV, operations in the urban and rural

*CWO Godwin died in captivity on 25 July 1968 but was officially listed as missing/captured until he was declared dead on 14 May 1973. His remains have never been returned to the United States.



Defense Department (Marine Corps) 10-1-14-34-68

A Marine from 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, fires his M79 grenade launcher from a Hue University building at a North Vietnamese sniper.

areas south of the Phu Cam, north of the Song Van Dong and east of the city.”

Task Force X-Ray ordered Lieutenant Colonel Gravel’s “bobtailed” 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, in southern Hue to advance to the Thua Thien provincial headquarters building and prison, six blocks west of the USMACV compound.* Still unaware of the extent of the enemy forces in both the old and new cities, LaHue told a group of American reporters at Phu Bai that “very definitely, we control the south side of the city. . . . I don’t think they [Communist forces] have any resupply capability, and once they use up what they brought in, they’re finished.”

At 0700, Gravel launched a two-company assault supported by tanks toward the jail and provincial building. An M79 grenadier from Company G, 5th Marines, recalled that “we didn’t get a block away [from the USMACV compound] before we started getting sniper fire. We got a tank . . . got a block, turned right and received 57mm recoilless which put out our tank.” Sergeant Lauver recalled, “A corpsman yelled for help and I jumped off the truck and ran to the tank. He needed to get one of the wounded tankers to cover, so I grabbed and helped. The Marine was obviously seriously hurt, I never knew if he made it.” The attack was

*The term *bobtailed* refers to a battalion that has less than four rifle companies and may have less than its full complement of Headquarters and Service Company elements.

Enemy Situation

The Task Force X-Ray command chronology for February identified the following enemy formations in the Hue City area:

4th Regiment and subordinate *804th* and *K4B Battalions*;
6th Regiment and subordinate *800th*, *802d* and *806th Battalions*;
416th Battalion, *5th Regiment*;
7th and *8th Battalions*, *90th Regiment*;
7th Battalion, *9th Regiment*;
7th and *9th Battalions*, *29th Regiment*;
Hue City Sapper Battalion;
810th Battalion; and
K200 Transportation Battalion.

The *12th Sapper Battalion* is carried as a probable participant and the *4th* and *6th Battalions*, *24th Regiment*, are considered possible participants.

“stopped cold” and the battalion returned to the USMACV compound.

By this time, General LaHue realized the enemy strength in Hue was much greater than he had originally estimated. Shortly after noon, he called in Colonel Stanley Hughes of the 1st Marines and gave him tactical control of the forces in the southern city. In turn, Hughes promised Gravel reinforcements and provided him with the general mission to conduct “sweep and clear operations in assigned area of operation . . . to destroy enemy forces, protect U.S. Nationals and restore that portion of the city to U.S. control.”

North of the Perfume River, the 1st ARVN Division enjoyed some limited success. Although the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 3d ARVN Regiment remained outside the Citadel walls, unable to penetrate the NVA defenses, the 2d and 7th Airborne Battalions, supported by armored personnel carriers and the Black Panther Company, recaptured the Tay Loc airfield. At approximately 1500, the 1st Battalion, 3d ARVN Regiment, reached the 1st ARVN Division command post. Later that day, U.S. Marine helicopters from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 (HMM-165)

brought part of the 4th Battalion, 2d ARVN Regiment, from Dong Ha into the Citadel. One of the pilots, Captain Denis M. Dunagan, reported that the call for an emergency troop lift came in around 1400. Eight CH-46 Sea Knights made the flight in marginal weather with a 200–500-foot ceiling and a mile visibility, arriving in an improvised landing zone under enemy mortar fire. The deteriorating weather forced the squadron to cancel the remaining lifts with about half of the battalion in the Citadel.

Shortly after 1500, Marine CH-46s brought Captain Michael P. Downs's Company F, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, into a landing zone south of the LCU ramp, with minimum difficulty, though the helicopters took machine-gun fire from the Citadel walls across the river. Downs reported to Lieutenant Colonel Gravel, who told him to relieve a USMACV communications facility that was surrounded by a Viet Cong force. Nothing Downs had been told at Phu Bai prepared him for the situation he encountered. The company spent most of the afternoon trying to reach the isolated U.S. Army signal troops but "never made it." According to Down's personal records, his company suffered 3 dead and 13 wounded.

Downs pulled back to Gravel's command post at the USMACV compound, where he received orders to take his company, a couple of tanks, and "make a night attack to the Thua Thien Provincial Prison, which was some six blocks away." He questioned the order because "[it was] not reflective of what the situation was in the city at the time" and drafted a message to Task Force X-Ray to rescind the order. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel agreed and forwarded the message. "I finally convinced them [Task Force X-Ray] that we didn't have the power and that the prisoners had been released on 30 January," Gravel noted. In fact, a South Vietnamese report indicated that, after being freed by the NVA, most of the approximately 2,000 prisoners were used as labor while 500 others were given weapons and joined enemy combat units as replacements.

At Da Nang, General Cushman continued to discuss the situation with General Lam. The two commanders decided against the employment of fixed-wing aircraft or artillery in Hue. As Cushman later related, "I wasn't about to open up on the old palace and all the historical buildings in there. I told Lam he was going to have to do it." While the South Vietnamese would remain responsible for the Citadel and



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A371336

Refugees pass by a supporting tank as it moves up the street during Operation Hue City.

the Marines for the southern city, Cushman made plans to cut the enemy lines of communication to the west.

With the concurrence of General Westmoreland, the III MAF commander made arrangements to bring the newly arrived 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) into the Hue battle. In late January, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) with two of its brigades had relieved the 1st Marines at Camp Evans, about 19 kilometers north of Hue. On 1 February, General Cushman alerted the cavalry commander, Army Major General John J. Tolson III, to be ready to deploy his 3d Brigade from Camp Evans into a sector west of Hue. "We woke up one bright day and got word that Hue was occupied, with the exception of the 1st ARVN Division compound," Tolson recalled.

Reinforcement

Tolson's plan called for the insertion of two battalions of the 3d Brigade northwest of Hue "to attack to the south, southeast from Camp Evans, to destroy the enemy between Evans and Hue." By midafternoon on 2 February, 400 men from 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Richard S. Sweet, landed 16 kilometers northwest of Hue, followed by the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, and the 3d Brigade headquarters. Sweet briefed his plan to the division



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190509

A machine gun team from Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, uses a table to stabilize their weapon as they clean out snipers.

staff. “Not a single man there said they couldn’t support us,” he said. “No one raised any objections.” The two battalions attacked southeast toward Hue in an attempt to shut down the enemy supply line. The first day, 2d Battalion suffered approximately 30 wounded and was still some distance from the city.

The weather conditions in Thua Thien took a turn for the worse. A chill gripped the area, dense fog blanketed the landscape, and the cloud ceiling dropped to 300 feet. The sudden winter snap was but a preview of things to come. For the rest of the month, temperatures hovered in the low 50s and rarely exceeded the mid-60s. Virtually every day brought rain and fog, making flight operations difficult if not impossible. The bad weather not only restricted the availability of air strikes but also hampered efforts to supply units in the field.

Even when breaks in the weather permitted air operations, allied pilots found flying anywhere near Hue extremely dangerous. The enemy had placed dozens of antiaircraft machine guns on the upper floors of houses, and then had torn out small sections of roofing to permit the weapons to fire unimpeded. Because the barrels remained entirely inside the houses, pilots had difficulty seeing the muzzle blasts and, thus, locating the guns. “The weather was miserable at this time with ceilings being at most 150 to 200 feet,” Tolson said. “Nevertheless, helicopters kept flying and placed the troops close to the assault positions even if they could not make an actual air assault.”

The U.S. Army’s Company C, 227th Aviation Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, lost seven helicopters on 31 January. The company commander’s Bell UH-1 Iroquois was shot



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190400

Supported by tanks, Marines clear buildings during street fighting near Hue University.

down in a rice paddy by 12.7mm anti-aircraft fire as it passed over the city. It crashed in the midst of a large NVA force, and within seconds, it was struck by an RPG and small-arms fire that wounded the crew and passengers. The wounded reached the safety of an ARVN compound and were eventually evacuated. Army Warrant Officer John W. Hazelwood, Lift Platoon, C Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, reported that “there was anti-aircraft fire everywhere.”

In southern Hue on 2 February, the Marines made some minor headway and brought in further reinforcements. The 1st Battalion finally relieved the USMACV radio facility that morning, and after a three-hour firefight, reached the Hue University campus only after a tank was hit. “We were ordered back to our [US]MACV positions,” claimed Captain Downs. Sometime during the night, the NVA dropped the railroad bridge across the Perfume River west of the city, but they left the bridge across the Phu Cam Canal untouched.

Captain G. Ronald Christmas, commanding officer of Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, was in the field when he received orders to lead a beefed up 12-truck convoy that included 2 Army trucks equipped with quad .50-caliber machine guns and two M50 Ontos self-propelled 106mm tank destroyers to relieve the USMACV compound. “As I planned for the trip to Hue, I tried to recall the tactical principles involved in providing convoy security,” Christmas said. “I did remember one thing from the TBS, the importance of immediate action drills. I required the company to rehearse them before departing for the city.”*

At approximately 1100, Company H crossed the An Cuu Bridge. “Route 1 seemed clear,” Christmas recalled. “One, two, three roadblocks were passed with no enemy action. It all seemed too easy. Hue was in sight and seemed to be deserted.

*TBS, or The Basic School, is the initial training school for Marine Corps officers following commissioning.

Catherine Leroy



Twenty-three year old Catherine Leroy was a French-born photojournalist who, with correspondent Francois Mazure, journeyed to Hue to cover the battle and found herself in an area controlled by the North Vietnamese. Taken prisoner, the pair was fortunate to meet a friendly NVA officer who

ordered them freed and allowed them to take photographs. The resulting pictures and Leroy's story were published in the 16 February 1968 *LIFE* magazine. Leroy was famous for being the first accredited journalist to make a combat parachute jump. She had earned her parachutist's license as a teenager, with more than 80 jumps under her belt. She was described by a U.S. Marine as "intense about her work and without hesitation would go off on patrol with any unit that was going through the wire." During one such patrol with a Marine Corps unit, she was wounded and hospitalized for several weeks. Remaining relatively unknown for most of her career, Leroy's work was later documented by filmmaker Jacques Menasche in 2015, though she won multiple awards for images captured in Vietnam and Lebanon. Leroy passed away in Santa Monica, California, in 2006.

As the convoy rolled toward the compound, there were no signs of life. Then, Wham!" The second truck in line had been hit by an RPG, which was followed by intense small-arms fire, though most of it was from Company H. Unfortunately, a young lieutenant from another outfit had hopped in the cab of the second truck and was killed by the blast. The NVA fled the scene without causing any casualties in the company.

In the ensuing confusion, the convoy exchanged fire with a Marine unit already in the city. As one Marine in the convoy remembered, "Our guys happened to be out on the right side of the road and of course nobody knew that. First thing you know everybody began shooting at our own men . . . out of pure fright and frenzy." Within a few minutes, the guns were silent. Neither of the Marine units took any serious casualties, and the Marine fire had suppressed the enemy



Marine Corps Art Collection

Bushwhackers, Hue, by John T. Dyer. A Marine tank, destroyed in the heavy street fighting of the 1968 Tet offensive in Hue awaits disposition beside the Perfume River. "Bushwhackers" had been painted on the tank's barrel by its former crew.

weapons. One rocket, however, disabled a truck that the Marines later towed to safety. Two French journalists, Catherine Leroy and Francois Mazure, who claimed they had wandered behind North Vietnamese lines and had been captured and released, took asylum with the convoy.

About midday, Company H joined Lieutenant Colonel Gravel where the 1st Battalion had established a toehold near the USMACV compound. "The compound reminded me of an old fort surrounded by Indians," Christmas said. The NVA, however, continued to block any advance to the south. An enemy 75mm recoilless rifle knocked out one of the supporting tanks. By the end of the day, the Marines had sustained 2 dead and 34 wounded and claimed to have killed nearly 140 of the enemy. As one Company G Marine remarked, the unit spent the day "hitting and seeing what was there." The battalion consolidated its night defensive positions and waited to renew its attack the following day.

At Phu Bai, Colonel Hughes prepared to bring his headquarters group into Hue. On the afternoon of 2 February, Colonel Robert D. Bohn, the 5th Marines commander, called in his 2d Battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ernest C. Cheatham Jr., three of whose companies were already in Hue. According to Cheatham, a big man who had played professional football, Bohn told him to "saddle up



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190816

Hue City bridge over the Perfume River, which was blown up by North Vietnamese sappers.

what you need. . . . [the 1st Marines] headquarters is going to Hue tomorrow. There's problems up there. . . . We're going to put you in . . . [to] take charge of your three companies and let me know what's going on." The next morning, 2d Battalion went in blind.

On 3 February, both the command groups of the 1st Marines and 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, arrived in Hue in another "Rough Rider" armed convoy.* The weather had taken another turn for the worse, with temperatures of 50

*Originally coined as a nickname for the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment during the Spanish-American War, here the term *Rough Rider* denotes an elite force dedicated to convoy security.

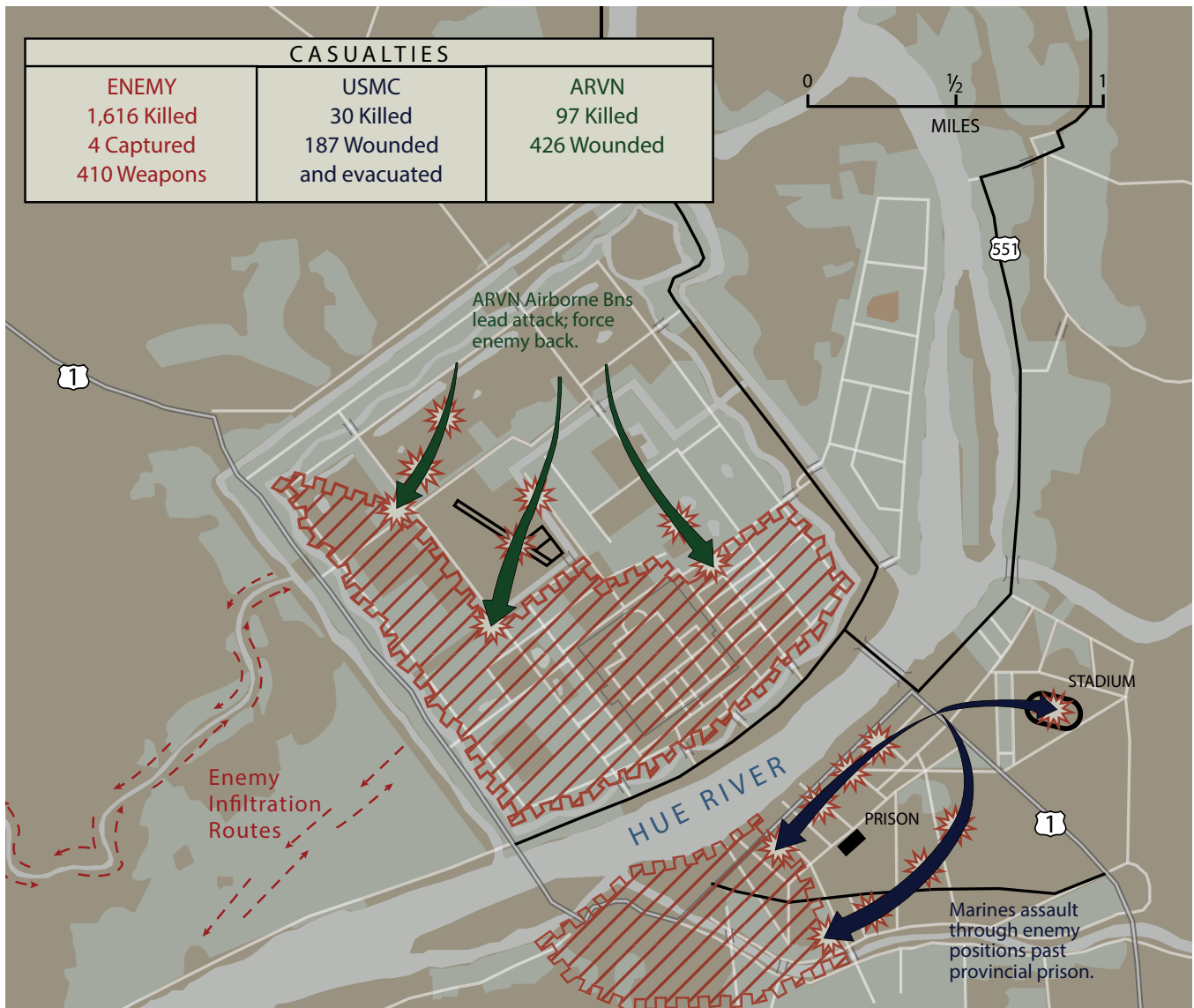


Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190767

A Marine Ontos crew member enjoys a break in the fighting at Hue.

degrees and constant precipitation in the form of fog, a fine mist, or rain. Although the Marine trucks came under enemy sniper and mortar fire, they safely reached the USMACV compound in the city. Colonel Hughes established his new command post and held a hurried conference at about 1330 with his two battalion commanders. While Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham then took control of his three companies already in the city, Gravel retained command of Company A. The regimental commander gave the latter the task to keep the main supply route open, while Cheatham was to continue the attack south from the university toward the provincial headquarters.

At this point, Hughes, a pre-World War II enlisted Marine, who had been awarded the Navy Cross for action on Cape Gloucester in the Pacific campaign, turned to Cheatham. According to the 2d Battalion commander, Hughes told him: "I want you to move up to the Hue University building, and your flank is the Perfume River and you're going to have an exposed left flank. . . . [A]ttack through the city and clean the NVA out." Cheatham waited for further clarification of his orders, but the regimental commander gruffly stated that "if you're looking for any more, you aren't going to



Fleet Marine Force-Pacific (FMFPac) Headquarters

Hue City during 1–6 February 1968. This map was produced after the conclusion of Operation Hue City.

get it. Move out!” He then softly added, “You do it any way you want to and you get any heat from above, I’ll take care of that.”

Beginning the Advance, 3–4 February

Establishing his command post at the university, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham ordered a two-company, tank-supported attack against a complex of buildings—public health, provincial treasury, and the post office—just across the street from

his position. While Company G remained in reserve, Company H was assigned to capture the public health building and Company F took the post office and treasury facilities. Like Lieutenant Colonel Gravel before him, Cheatham discovered there was no quick solution given that walls of both the treasury building and the post office were four or five feet thick, preventing rifle fire from penetrating the concrete. Cheatham said, “They were very strong buildings that took an awful lot of direct fire.” The battalion tried to take the post

office and treasury buildings five or six different times: “That means mustering everybody’s courage and energy up. You’d assault and back you’d come, drag your wounded and then muster it up again and try it again.”

Although Company H reached the public health building by evening, it had to fall back to the university. As Captain Christmas later explained, the Marines did not have enough men given that the frontage for a company was about one block, and with two companies forward, “our left flank was constantly exposed. The enemy would put an automatic weapon on the street that was outside our lines and fire.” The battalion stayed in its night defensive positions and waited for daylight.

While Cheatham’s battalion tried to take the treasury and post office, Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, maneuvered southeast of the USMACV compound and captured an abandoned South Vietnamese police station against nominal resistance. The Marines found 30 carbines, 2 M1919 Browning Automatic Rifles, 10 M1 Garand rifles, 20 60mm mortar rounds, and 40 cases of small-arms ammunition. At 1900, the battalion reported that the nearby International Control Commission (ICC) team was safe and that “no USMC personnel entered ICC building,” thus not providing any grounds that U.S. troops violated the terms of the 1954 Geneva Accords.*

By late evening on 3 February, all supporting arms restrictions were removed south of the river. However, poor weather prevented effective air support; in fact, air support was most affected by weather. Morning and evening fog, intermittent rain, and almost constant overcast skies curtailed the employment of fighter and reconnaissance aircraft. As a result, many of the radar-controlled airstrikes were flown at night to the west of the city proper.

The morning of 4 February, Colonel Hughes discussed the situation with his two battalion commanders. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel was not surprised to learn that the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, had not moved from their position from the day before. Believing “that there was some second-guessing down at headquarters on the inability of his

battalion [1st Battalion, 1st Marines] to attack,” Gravel now felt somewhat vindicated. Colonel Hughes decided to place the 1st Battalion on Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham’s exposed flank and continue the push against enemy defensive positions.

As the 1st Battalion cleared its objective area, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel had only Company A, now under First Lieutenant Ray L. Smith, who had relieved the wounded Captain Batcheller. Lieutenant Smith recalled that, from when he arrived in Hue on 2 February until then, the battalion had basically held its own near the USMACV compound. On the morning of 4 February, its first objective was the St. Joan of Arc School and Church, only 100 meters away. According to Smith, the building “was square with an open compound in the middle and we found by about 0700 that it was heavily occupied.” Smith’s Marines found themselves engaged in building-to-building and room-to-room fighting against a determined enemy. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel remembered that, in the convent building, “in these little cloisters that the ladies live in . . . we went wall-to-wall.” One Marine would place a C-4 plastic explosive against the wall, stand back for the explosion, and then a fireteam would rush through the gaping hole.

In the school building, Sergeant Alfredo C. Gonzalez’s 3d Platoon secured one wing but came under enemy rocket fire from across the courtyard. The Marine sergeant dashed to the window and fired about 10 LAAWs to silence the enemy. A B40 RPG shattered the glass pane and struck Gonzalez in the stomach, killing him instantly. Lieutenant Smith credited Gonzalez with taking out two enemy rocket positions before he was killed.

After securing the school, Company A maneuvered to the sanctuary, which sat in a grove of trees and houses. As the troops advanced upon the building, the NVA threw down grenades, killing or wounding several Marines. According to Gravel, “They [enemy soldiers] were up in the eaves, the wooden overhead; and they were in there and we couldn’t get them out.” Reluctantly, Gravel gave the order to fire on the church. Marine mortars and M40 106mm recoilless rifles pounded the building. In the ruins, the battalion found one Belgian and one French priest, both unhurt, but according to Gravel, they were “absolutely livid” that the Marines had attacked the sanctuary. Believing he had little choice in the

*The International Control Commission (the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam) was created by the Geneva Accords to ensure the provisions of the treaty. It consisted of Polish, Indian, and Canadian members. Although, by this time, ICC was unable to enforce anything, it still retained facilities and personnel in both North and South Vietnam.

Sergeant Alfredo C. Gonzalez



Alfredo Cantu Gonzalez was born on 23 May 1946 in Edinburg, Texas. He was an all-district football player at Edinburg High School in spite of weighing only 135 pounds. He joined the Marine Corps Reserve after graduating from high school in June 1965. He then joined the Regular Marine Corps on 6 July 1965. Gonzalez served one tour in Vietnam as a rifleman and squad leader with Company L, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, 3d Marine Division. On 1 January 1966, he was promoted to private first class, in October to lance corporal, and in December to corporal. Upon his return to the United States in January 1967, he served as a rifleman with the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, 2d Marine Division, at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. On 1 July 1967, Gonzalez was promoted to sergeant, and later that month, he was transferred to Vietnam for his second tour of duty as a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division. He was serving as a platoon leader during the Battle of Hue City when he was cited to receive the Medal of Honor. His other awards and citations include the Purple Heart, the

Presidential Unit Citation, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with star, the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with palm, the Military Merit Award, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign.

Medal of Honor Citation

The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Sergeant Alfredo "Freddy" Gonzalez, United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty on 1 January and 4 February 1968, while serving as platoon commander, Third Platoon, Company A, First Battalion, First Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in action against the enemy near Thua Thien, Republic of Vietnam. On 31 January 1968, during the initial phase of Operation HUE CITY, Sergeant Gonzalez's unit was formed as a reaction force and deployed to Hue to relieve the pressure on the beleaguered city. While moving by truck convoy along Route No. 1, near the village of Lang Van Lrong, the Marines received a heavy volume of enemy fire. Sergeant Gonzalez aggressively maneuvered the Marines in his platoon, and directed their fire until the area was cleared of snipers. Immediately after crossing a river south of Hue, the column was again hit by intense enemy fire. One of the Marines on top of a tank was wounded and fell to the ground in an exposed position. With complete disregard for his safety, Sergeant Gonzalez ran through the fire-swept area to the assistance of his injured comrade. He lifted him up and though receiving fragmentation wounds during the

rescue, he carried the wounded Marine to a covered position for treatment. Due to the increased volume and accuracy of enemy fire from a fortified machinegun bunker on the side of the road, the company was temporarily halted. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Sergeant Gonzalez exposed himself to the enemy fire and moved his platoon along the east side of a bordering rice paddy to a dike directly



across from the bunker. Though fully aware of the danger involved, he moved to the fire-swept road and destroyed the hostile position with hand grenades. Although seriously wounded again on 3 February, he steadfastly refused medical treatment and continued to supervise his men and lead the attack. On 4 February, the enemy had again pinned the company down, inflicting heavy

casualties with automatic weapons and rocket fire. Sergeant Gonzalez, utilizing a number of light antitank assault weapons, fearlessly moved from position to position firing numerous rounds at the heavily fortified enemy emplacements. He successfully knocked out a rocket position and suppressed much of the enemy fire before falling mortally wounded. The heroism, courage, and dynamic leadership displayed by Sergeant Gonzalez reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps, and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190472

Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, leaves a church after successfully capturing it from North Vietnamese control during one of the bloody battles in Hue.

matter, Gravel thought the dark-robed clerics were fortunate to escape with their lives as his troops had been ordered to shoot at anyone in a black uniform.

At 0700 on 4 February, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham's companies renewed their attempts to take the public building across from the university. "The axis of advance would be generally along Lei Loy Street which ran west and parallel to the Perfume River," Christmas said. The enemy situation was unknown, however, based on what he had seen for the past few days. Christmas knew there were strong North Vietnamese forces in the city. Company H was assigned to seize the public health building and then support Company F's attack on the treasury, while Company G was in reserve.

The 1st Platoon attacked on schedule and quickly seized its objective, but 3d Platoon took casualties as it attempted to cross the street. Christmas explained, "Each time the platoon popped smoke grenades to conceal its movement, the

enemy opened up with an automatic weapon, firing accurate grazing fire from somewhere on the flank. Apparently, the NVA had read our manual. They knew that we concealed our movement with smoke grenades." The company worked out a solution using an M40 106mm mule-mounted recoilless rifle.* The Marines would use smoke grenades to ascertain the enemy machine gun position or positions and then move the M40 partially into the street, and then "crank off" a .50-caliber spotting round followed by the 106mm round. The backblast of the M40 raised a cloud of dirt and the recoilless rifle shell forced the enemy troops to keep their heads down. Taking advantage of the opportunity and dust

*The Willys-Overland M274 mule was officially known as the Army mule or mechanical mule. It was developed as an infantry ammunition, light cargo, personnel, and weapons carrier. The mule was adopted for service in 1957 and was used by the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, and to a limited degree by the Navy, Seabees, and Air Force.



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190343

Marines of Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, move a 106mm recoilless rifle during heavy fighting in Hue.



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A371125

Marines of Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, cover a blown wall in Hue City.

cover, the Marine infantry advanced. Christmas explained that “once we got across that street . . . that first lead element could direct its fire back toward that automatic weapon [or weapons].”

According to one of the noncommissioned officers (NCOs), the recoilless rifles teamed up with both the M29A1 81mm mortar crews and the infantry. The M40s would blast holes through buildings so the units could get in without using the entrance. Marine recoilless rifle gunners flushed out the NVA and then forward observers for the mortar crews called in the 81mm rounds. Sergeant Terry Cochrane, the platoon sergeant of the 2d Battalion’s 106mm platoon, remembered that the gunner even fired one recoilless rifle from inside one of the university buildings. Unable to position their weapon to knock out a machine gun that blocked the battalion’s advance, Cochrane and his gunners took their 460-pound recoilless rifle “inside . . . and we fired it with a lanyard where we knocked out our objective—we kind of knocked out the building that the 106[mm] was in too, but it didn’t hurt the gun, once we dug it out.”

Nevertheless, the North Vietnamese remained inside the treasury building. With its thick walls and large steel

door, the structure was impervious to Company F’s repeated efforts to force its way into the building, despite the use of recoilless rifles and tanks. The NVA covered all the avenues of approach with fire. According to one account, Major Ralph J. Salvati, the 2d Battalion’s executive officer, suggested employing CS gas (or tear gas) against the enemy.* Salvati told Cheatham he had seen a stack of E8 35mm tactical CS launchers in the USMACV compound and proposed that he get them. Lightweight and compact, one launcher could fire 64 CS canisters in four volleys of 16 each. Salvati joined Captain Downs in an abandoned school near the treasury with the launchers.

Putting on their gas masks, Salvati and two enlisted Marines ran into an adjoining courtyard and set up a launcher.** After a misfire, the major hooked up a battery to the trigger mechanism. This time, the E8 launcher hurled the gas canisters into the treasury compound and within minutes produced a huge

*CS gas (2-chlorobenzylidene malonitrile) is widely used as an incapacitating spray that causes excessive tear production, eyelid spasms, increased nasal secretion, tightness in the chest, sneezing, coughing, retching, and burning sensations in the throat and nose.

**Maj Salvati was awarded the Silver Star for his actions on 4 February 1968.



Defense Department (Marine Corps) 1D-17-37-68

Marines of Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, were equipped to meet any type of resistance as they combed the streets and alleys of Hue in February 1968.

chemical haze. With the gas permeating the building, and under the protective fire of 81mm mortars and 3.5-inch rockets, the Marines of Company F pushed forward wearing their gas masks. According to Captain Downs, once the Marines got inside the building, “the NVA wanted no part of us and they exited the building as quickly as they could.”

Until 4 February, the An Cuu bridge over the Phu Cam Canal still stood and permitted the Marines to reinforce the troops in Hue. On the morning of the fourth, Company B, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, arrived with a Rough Rider armed convoy and joined Lieutenant Colonel Gravel’s command. That night, however, North Vietnamese sappers blew the bridge, effectively closing the land route into the city, which left the Marine command two alternatives to resupply the Hue forces: river traffic and helicopters. With the continuing mist and overcast skies, every helicopter mission was a hit-and-miss venture. More than once, heavy enemy 12.7mm antiaircraft fire forced Marine pilots to jettison their loads of ammunition slung under their low-flying helicopters. The



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A371126

Marines of Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, lower a wounded comrade from a rooftop on the Hue University campus.

river route also presented problems. Taking advantage of the narrow ship channel up the Perfume River from the sea, the enemy subjected allied craft to both mortar bombardment and automatic weapons fire.

Fortunately, Task Force X-Ray had built up the combat stocks of the 1st Marines in Hue. On 4 February, Marine trucks from Company B, 1st Motor Transport Battalion, brought in enough rations to sustain both infantry battalions in Hue for two days. The following day, a Navy LCU from Da Nang braved the NVA crossfire from both banks of the Perfume River and docked at the LCU ramp in the city. The 1st Marines now had enough rations to last through 16

Lance Corporal Roger O. Warren

Navy Cross Citation

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lance Corporal Roger O. Warren, United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving as a Machine Gunner with Company F, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in action against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 3 February 1968, during Operation HUE CITY, Corporal Warren's platoon was taken under intense enemy automatic weapons and rocket fire as they attempted to assault the city's Treasury Building. As the unit entered a large courtyard, one Marine was seriously wounded by a sudden burst of hostile fire and was unable to move from his exposed position. Corporal Warren, who had been wounded earlier, ignored his own painful injuries and courageously ran into the open courtyard under intense enemy fire and placed his body between the casualty and the hostile fire. Disregarding his own personal safety, he commenced firing his machine gun from the hip at suspected enemy positions until he depleted his supply of ammunition. Quickly reloading his weapon, he once again placed fire on the enemy allowing the casualty to be evacuated. On 5 February, as he was delivering a heavy volume of



suppressive fire on the enemy from the second story window of a building, he was suddenly hurled through the wall into the adjoining room by two enemy rocket rounds. Wounded in both legs and temporarily stunned by the force of the explosion, he was carried downstairs and placed with six other casualties awaiting treatment. Realizing the heavy enemy fire was preventing expeditious evacuation of the casualties, he exposed himself to the intense enemy fire and brought accurate M-16 fire to bear on the enemy. Assured that the more severe casualties had been evacuated, he allowed himself to be evacuated and helped carry a wounded comrade to the aid station. Despite his several wounds, he refused medical evacuation and elected to return to his unit due to the shortage of qualified machine gunners. Upon returning to his unit Corporal Warren directed intense fire on the enemy positions. He gallantly continued to perform his duties until the seriousness of his wounds caused him to be evacuated on 10 February 1968. By his intrepid fighting spirit, exceptional fortitude, bold initiative and devotion to his fellow Marines, Corporal Warren reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

February. With the arrival of a second LCU on the fifth, and another landing craft three days later, the regiment experienced no shortage of ammunition despite its expenditure at 10 times the normal combat rate in Vietnam.

“We had to rely on the LCUs and LCMs [landing craft, mechanized] for resupply. They made support of our forces possible,” General LaHue stated. “[We] loaded them in Da Nang, brought them up to Hue and down the Perfume River. Each river convoy was escorted by patrol boats as they battled through ambushes and harassing fires . . . and they took losses. Many of them were hit while transiting the river. One LCU blew while carrying ammunition and two LCM

bladder refueler boats were hit, caught fire, and sank or were stranded.”

Navy Lieutenant Commander Thomas J. Cutler wrote in *Brown Water, Black Berets* (2012) that

When the Tet offensive began on 31 January, the PBRs [patrol boats, river] got into the thick of things. A call from personnel at the supply off-loading ramp in Hue said an attack was under way. Eight PBRs charged up

*The LCM is a riverboat and mechanized landing craft used by the U.S. Navy and Army during the Vietnam War. They were typically called *Mike boats*, which refers to the military phonetic spelling for LCM, or Lima Charlie Mike.

North Vietnamese Army Defensive Tactics

There are five basic types of battle positions: primary, alternate, supplementary, subsequent, and strongpoint. The NVA's defensive system was organized around strongpoints. The term *strongpoint* refers to a defensive position, such as a natural or reinforcing obstacle, that is heavily fortified and armed with automatic weapons, around which other positions are grouped for its protection. Strongpoints are positioned based on key or decisive terrain, particularly if it will isolate a defending force retaining a position critical to the defense. "I found that he [the NVA] defended on every other street," Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham explained. "When we would take him off one street, we would usually push through the next row of houses fairly quickly and then hit another defensive position." In this urban battlefield, the strongpoints were typically centrally located in a three-story building surrounded by a courtyard with a stone wall. The NVA often built small bunkers for automatic weapons on the first floor and placed snipers in the upper stories, as well as in other buildings along the route of advance. Spider holes, manned by a soldier equipped with both an AK47 and a B40 RPG, were positioned in the courtyard.

The NVA would use interlocking bands of fire, leaving allied troops no way to get around them. "We had to pick a point and attempt to break that one strongpoint," Cheatham continued. "And if we could break that one strongpoint, then possibly we could get into that and it would sort of break up his defensive position. And then we'd work from there." Each building became a fortress with interlocking fires from another structure, which restricted allied movement and the ability to retrieve casualties. Another Marine described the battle "like fighting a hive of bees. Fire was coming from street level, from windows on the second floor, and from the roof of every building. We had to crawl everywhere and then call in the tanks so we could retrieve our wounded."

the river in response and met heavy rocket, mortar, and small-arms fire when they arrived. They made repeated firing runs on the enemy positions on the north bank of the river opposite the ramp until they suppressed the hostile fire. They held the VC [Viet Cong] at bay until that evening, when Marines were able to move in and secure the area. The PBRs continued security patrols around Hue for the next several days.

Block by Block, 5–8 February

As the Marines experienced within the halls of the St. Joan of Arc School and Church, moving sporadically room by room, U.S. and allied forces could only advance in spurts given the nature of urban warfare in Hue. Casualties in this terrain initially were brought to the battalion aid station at Hue University by stretcher. Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham explained that "as we advanced further [*sic*] away from our initial aid station we commandeered civilian vehicles, turned them into ambulances, and drove them to [the] aid station. I had my doctors a few meters or maybe one block right behind the front line treating people. We never let the aid station get further [*sic*] than 2000 to 3000 meters from us." Navy Hospital Corpsman First Class Russell M. Angman recalled, "The battalion aid station moved wherever the action was, setting up as fast as possible. It was very difficult at times for the companies to get their wounded out of the field because of enemy fire. Consequently, many times all the casualties would arrive at once in whatever means of transportation that could be utilized."

The Marines quickly adapted to the street fighting, so different from the rice paddies and tropical jungles of the Vietnamese countryside in their previous sectors. As Captain Christmas later observed, "Street fighting is the dirtiest type of fighting I know. The adrenaline of the moment is the only thing that kept us going." Although one Marine fire-team leader agreed with Christmas that "it's tougher in the streets," he also remarked that "it beats fighting in the mud. . . . You don't get tired as quickly when you are running and you can see more of the damage you're doing to the enemy because they don't drag off their dead."

An immediate problem caused by the change of locale from the countryside to the urban setting was in orientation. Gravel and Cheatham both complained about the



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190420

HM3 Edward F. Darewski, a corpsman with Company K, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, aids a wounded Marine during a firefight along the Cua Viet River.

inadequacy of their maps. Originally, their only references were the standard 1:50,000-scale tactical maps that showed little of the city detail. Captain Meadows observed, “You have to raid the local Texaco station to get your street map. That’s really what you need.” Downs thought differently. “[Captain] Meadows may well have taken a map off the gas station wall but the ones we used were 1:12,500 AMS [Army Map Service] maps. They were the most valuable. Initially, I think there were only three in the battalion with only the company commanders having one.” Both battalions eventually obtained sufficient maps, which numbered the government and municipal buildings and prominent features of the city. Cheatham and Gravel and their commander used the numbers to coordinate their activity.

Prior to that time, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham and his commanders used colors to designate their positions. Captain Christmas later related the resulting confusion. He would radio Captain Downs and yell, “Hey, I’m in a pink building.” Downs would reply, “Hey, that’s fine. I’m over here in a green building.” Captain Meadows would then chime in with “Good! I’m in a brown building.” At this point, Cheatham would ask, “Where the hell are the green, brown, and pink buildings?”

By this time, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham had a firm idea about the extent of the task that his battalion faced. The 2d Battalion had an area of operations about 11 blocks wide and 8–9 blocks deep. He later declared, “It wasn’t that big [but] it looked plenty big at the time.” Cheatham recalled

that he “attempted to . . . attack with two companies up and keep that third company of mine back, protecting our left flank.” Due to the fighting conditions, Cheatham usually had to commit his reserve: “The area was just too large for one infantry battalion, minus a company, to attack.”

With little room to outflank the enemy, the battalion had to take each building and each block “one at a time.” Cheatham and his Marines had to pick a point and attempt to break that one strongpoint. Over time, Cheatham and his officers noted that the enemy “defended on every other street. . . . When we would take him off one street, we would usually push through the next row of houses fairly quickly and then hit another defensive position.” He compared the tactics to a football game, where “we hope to kill them inside or flush them out the back for the men watching the exits. Then, taking the next building, two men rush the front. It sounds simple but timing has to be just as good as a football play.”

The close-quarter combat and the low-lying cloud cover prevented both Marine infantry battalions from depending upon air or artillery. Fixed-wing close air support was out of the question. Both units used artillery only occasionally and then usually later in the operation or for interdiction missions on suspected enemy approach and escape routes. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel explained that “artillery in an area like that is not terribly effective because you can’t observe it well enough. You lose the rounds in the buildings, in the streets . . . and you have a difficult time with perspective.”

Supported by the four tanks from the provisional platoon of the 3d Tank Battalion, which arrived with the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, on 31 January and a platoon of Ontos from the Anti-Tank Company, 1st Tank Battalion, the Marine infantry advanced methodically against stubborn enemy resistance. Cheatham had reservations about employing the tanks in his sector due to the confining nature of the battlespace: “The moment a tank stuck its nose around the corner of a building, it looked like the Fourth of July.” The enemy opened up with all the weapons in its arsenal from B40 antitank RPGs to machine guns. One tank sustained more than 120 hits and another went through five or six crews. Cheatham said that when the “tankers come out of those tanks . . . they looked like they were punch drunk.”

The Marine infantry commanders were much more enthusiastic about the Ontos with its six 106mm recoilless



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A371122

Gas mask clad Marines of 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, move out in search of NVA during Operation Hue City.

rifles. Despite its “thin skin,” Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham described the vehicle “as big a help as any item of gear that we had that was not organic to the battalion.” An even stronger backer of the Ontos, Colonel Hughes later commented, “If any single supporting arm is to be considered more effective than all others, it must be the 106mm recoilless rifle, especially the M50 Ontos.” Hughes believed that the mobility of the Ontos made up for the lack of heavy armor protection. Further, its plating provided the crew with sufficient protection against enemy small-arms fire and grenades. From ranges of 300–500 meters, the 106mm recoilless rifle rounds routinely opened “4 square meter holes or completely knock[ed] out an exterior wall.” Even at distances of 1,000 meters, they proved effective. Because the Ontos was vulnerable to enemy RPGs and B40 rounds, Cheatham employed the vehicle in hull defilade, even if the fortification came in the form of a brick wall.*

Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham reserved his greatest praise for his battalion’s organic supporting weapons, including 106mm recoilless rifles, 3.5-inch rockets, and mortars.

*The term *defilade* refers to a military tactic that describes exposure to enemy fire. If a unit is in defilade, they are using the natural environment or artificial obstacles for concealment or cover. When referring to an armored vehicle, it indicates a hull-down or turret-down position.



Marine Corps Art Collection

Flushing out Snipers, Hue, by Ned Conlon. A Marine fires a 3.5-inch rocket launcher at sniper positions in Hue City during the 1968 Tet offensive.

He preferred the 3.5-inch rockets that could penetrate 11 inches of steel, and “that thing would pop these walls.” The colonel specifically remembered one firefight that lasted for nearly two hours between Marine and enemy gunners shooting 3.5-inch and B40 RPGs at one another at a range of 50 meters. Fortunately, Cheatham’s unit had more ammunition than the enemy combatants.

Captain Downs recollected the similar use of 81mm mortars at extremely close quarters. He regularly brought Company F’s mortar fire within 35 meters of his men: “We were on one side of the street and the 81[mm]s were fired on the other side of the street.” Lance Corporal Roger L. Straight said, “We’ve got some good gunners. They double-check everything because we have to. We’re firing about 25 meters

[from] our friendlies . . . [so] we’ve got to be on target.” Cheatham compared their application of 81mm mortars to a sledge hammer: “If you put enough 81[mm] rounds on top of a building, pretty soon the roof falls in.” Downs had orders from Cheatham to destroy a building if they even suspected it housed the enemy. For Downs, this was when “we really became serious about retaking the city.”

On the morning of 5 February, both Marine battalions resumed the attack southwest toward the city hospital and the provincial headquarters. On the right flank, Company H advanced along Le Loi Street, parallel to the riverfront. The two companies of 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, secured the left flank. Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham tried to keep a two-block front, which he later explained was “simple

enough. But when you realize that there's no one on your left . . . you've got to expand this out." Expansion of the operation, however, required troops, "resources that we were very, very short of." Lieutenant Smith later wrote that 5 February was "an extremely rough day" with the battalion sustaining 19 casualties and advancing "only 75 yards." Gravel remembered, "The going was slow. We would go maybe a block. We fought for two days over one building."

Although both battalions encountered moderate-to-heavy enemy resistance on the fifth, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, made somewhat faster progress. At 1630 that afternoon, Company G secured the main hospital building after a 90-minute firefight supported by an M48 Patton main battle tank, 106mm recoilless rifles, and 3.5-inch rockets. The Marines removed civilian patients from the line of fire, killed 4 NVA soldiers, and took 30 wounded prisoners. By the end of the day, the three companies accounted for more than 70 NVA dead and 40 captured enemy weapons.

The morning of 6 February, Cheatham's battalion continued clearing the hospital complex with all three companies on line. Company H on the right and Company G in the center met with relatively minor resistance and quickly consolidated their positions. Company F on the battalion's left flank, however, took heavy fire from its front and pulled back to call in 81mm mortars, and for one of the few times, 105mm howitzer support from Marine artillery forward gun sites. About 40 high-explosive shells fell on the enemy positions. By late afternoon, the NVA broke contact under fire, and the company secured the last of the hospital complex. Downs's company sustained 4 dead and 11 wounded but killed more than 20 of the enemy.

Company G then launched its attack against the provincial prison. While 1st Platoon provided protective fire from the second story of the main hospital building, mortar men and M40 106mm gunners blasted a hole in the prison walls. One corporal reported that the company fired E8 CS canisters into the gaping hole, hoping to force the enemy troops out, but "they threw it back at us."

Believing the NVA also were equipped with gas masks, the Marine infantry cautiously searched the rooms and cells of the prison, beginning with the top floor and working their way down. Second Lieutenant Michael A. McNeil, Company G's 1st Platoon commander, described taking the unit's

first prisoner, an NVA sniper, equipped with both an SKS Simonov and M1 Garand rifle and eight grenades. The prisoner tried to jump Sergeant G. B. Zachary, but McNeil wrestled the enemy soldier to the floor with a half nelson and then bound his hands behind his back.* Even then, the North Vietnamese continued to struggle and had to be carried, "fighting all the way." McNeil's platoon took eight more prisoners, who "threw down their weapons, raised their hands and came walking out." Company G killed 36 NVA at a cost of one man wounded as they took the prison.

On the 2d Battalions' right flank, Company H encountered strong resistance after it left the hospital and pushed forward toward the nearby provincial headquarters. "I knew that the building complex was defended as a strong point," Christmas said. "The attack would be completely canalized because of the nature of the buildings, streets, and alleys. My lead element would have to cross an open street and then 40–50 meters of open courtyard." Like its sister companies, Company H employed mortars, E8 CS gas, and M40 106mm recoilless rifles to soften up the objective. Private First Class George Sepio, a driver for one of the flat-bed mules in the M40 platoon, recalled that "[the] NVA threw everything they had at us. We took incoming mortars and rockets and automatic weapons fire. We had to push the mule out, fire, and pull it back in under heavy sniper fire while we were firing. We opened up the way for the 'grunts' [infantry] to take the building."

Two Marine tanks came up to support the attack. One took four direct hits from B40 RPGs that struck and penetrated the turret, wounding three crewmen. The tank burned all day as the 90mm rounds cooked off. The company expended more than 100 81mm mortar shells, 60 recoilless rifle rounds, and four E8 CS launchers in support of the assault on the headquarters. "The battle raged for almost five hours and the company still did not have a foothold. [Finally,] the enemy's fire slackened. I could see dead NVA soldiers in the courtyard and decided to order the 1st Platoon to attack under cover of tear gas and smoke," Christmas explained. "The men smashed into the building . . . [where] one Marine was shot and killed on the stairway, and two

*A half nelson is a wrestling hold in which one arm is thrust under the corresponding arm of an opponent and the hand placed on the back of the opponent's neck.

Lieutenant Colonel Ernest C. Cheatham Jr.

Navy Cross Citation

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Colonel [then Lieutenant Colonel] Ernest C. Cheatham, Jr., United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving as Commanding Officer of the Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in the Republic of Vietnam from 3 February to 3 March 1968. During Operation Hue City, Colonel Cheatham led his battalion in extremely heavy house-to-house fighting against a numerically superior North Vietnamese Army force.

Advancing through the city on 4 February to assault the well-fortified Treasury Building/Post Office complex, his unit came under intense fire from concealed enemy positions. The enemy resistance halted the Marines' advance during two days of bitter fighting. Nevertheless, Colonel Cheatham remained steadfast in his determination to secure the enemy stronghold. Skillfully deploying a 106-mm. recoilless rifle squad into advantageous firing positions, he personally pinpointed the targets with M-16 tracer rounds and directed



accurate fire on the enemy, which significantly reduced the pressure on his assaulting force. Completely disregarding his own safety, he joined the assaulting unit and aggressively led his men in routing the North Vietnamese from their entrenched positions. While proceeding through the city on 6 February, he organized his battalion for an assault on the enemy-held Provincial Headquarters Building. Ignoring the hostile fire all around him, he directed his men to covered positions while he fearlessly advanced to an exposed position from which he could locate the sources of enemy fire. Calling

an Ontos forward, he directed effective suppressive fire on the enemy and then courageously led his unit as it continued the assault. Colonel Cheatham's dynamic and heroic leadership and his unflagging example inspired all who observed him and contributed greatly to the defeat of the enemy and to their subsequent withdrawal from the city. His dauntless courage and unflinching devotion to duty upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

others were wounded but the assault continued . . . room by room." By midafternoon, the exhausted Marines finally took the provincial headquarters. They had killed 27 enemy soldiers, taken 3 prisoners, and captured an assortment of enemy small arms and ammunition. The company sustained 1 dead and 14 wounded in the fight.

The provincial headquarters had served as a motivating symbol for both the NVA and the Marines in the modern city. A frayed Viet Cong flag flew over the building. Immediately after the capture, Gunnery Sergeant Frank A. Thomas "vaulted through a hole in the wall" and ran to the flagpole clutching an American flag. As a CBS television crew filmed the event, Thomas raised the Stars and Stripes. "We never knew exactly where the flag came from," Thomas said, "but when we said we wanted an American flag to raise, one of our Marines produced one a very few minutes later." For this

one time, the company ignored the USMACV directive that forbid the display of the U.S. flag without the South Vietnamese national banner beside it.

The activity around the flagpole caught the attention of the NVA. "Look out, there are snipers dug in along the wall," a man yelled. The enemy had dug a number of foxholes along a cement wall in the courtyard in front of the building. Within seconds, the NVA were taken under fire, six enemy combatants lay dead or dying, and a live North Vietnamese soldier was pulled out of a hole and taken prisoner.

The capture of the provincial headquarters was more than symbolic. The building apparently had served as the command post for the *4th NVA Regiment*. Once the headquarters fell, much of the enemy organized resistance in southern Hue collapsed. Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham remarked, "Once we overcame a NVA strongpoint, they never enveloped or



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A372950

A tank attached to Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, secures the canal bridge sector through heavy NVA contact during Operation Hue City.

never came back around behind us.” Lieutenant Smith wrote that, from 6 February forward, “[Company] A began to roll, and although we took more casualties, we never had a day to match” the earlier fighting. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel felt the NVA had lost its stomach for the fight and the main force evaporated, leaving only local forces as it crumbled.

On the morning of 7 February, both Marine battalions renewed their offensive. Cheatham’s battalion on the right flank made rapid progress. He put two companies on the line and placed the other company in reserve. The battalion’s after action report stated, “It became quite obvious the enemy had retreated leaving bodies and weapons behind.” The 1st Battalion on the left flank also moved forward but at a slower pace after meeting pockets of heavy resistance. The NVA knocked out an Ontos with a B40 RPG, killing the driver and wounding the vehicle’s commander. After a brief fire-fight, a platoon from Company B retrieved the damaged vehicle, evacuated the wounded Marine, and recovered the body of the dead man.

By 10 February, the battalions reached their objectives and found that the North Vietnamese were abandoning food, weapons, and ammunition in their rushed exodus. “When any enemy begins to leave his weapons and personal gear behind,” First Lieutenant William Moore, 2d Battalion’s S-2 stated, “he is on the run. . . . I think we have him just where we want him now.” The Marines now controlled the southern sector of the city, but the NVA still controlled the Citadel, leaving the city cut neatly in two. During clearing operations, the battalions killed more than 1,000 enemy combatants, captured 6 prisoners, and detained 89 suspects. Marine casualties included 38 dead and approximately 320 wounded. Company H had been hit particularly hard. “Shortly after noon on 13 February,” Christmas remembered, “the company overran an enemy base camp situated west of the railroad yard. As I was checking the progress of the lead platoon, an intense mortar barrage seriously wounded me and the other officers of the company” and most of the staff NCOs. One Marine from Company G said, “We would start getting new guys and it just seemed that every time we got new guys we would lose them just as fast as we got them.” Another remarked, “The stink—you had to load up so many wounded, the blood would dry on your hands. In two or three days, you would smell like death itself.”

Foreign Service Officer Bullington had managed to hide from the NVA with two Catholic priests in their two-story house. He recalled, “When the artillery started coming in we would all go downstairs, and huddle under the staircase. Thankfully so, because we took a direct hit from what was probably a 105mm shell and suddenly the house was one-story. After nine days . . . Captain Ron Christmas and his Marines liberated me. They wrapped me in a blanket and carried me out as if I was a wounded Marine, so the neighbors would not see that the priests had been harboring an American.”

With the Marine lines secure, the South Vietnamese authorities, assisted by U.S. military and civilian advisors, brought some semblance of order to southern Hue. They established a refugee center at the university for the civilians unexpectedly caught in the middle of a war. The National Police took harsh measures against both civilians and ARVN troops participating in the wholesale looting that occurred behind the Marine advance. By 13 February,

Captain George R. Christmas

Navy Cross Citation

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Captain George R. Christmas, United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving as the Commanding Officer of Company H, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On the afternoon of 5 February 1968 during Operation HUE CITY, Company H was attacking a complex of buildings known to be an enemy strong point consisting of mutually supporting bunkers, fighting holes, and trench lines. During the ensuing fire fight, two platoons seized the corner building of a city block, but intense hostile small-arms, automatic weapons, and B-40 rocket fire temporarily halted the advance. Realizing the seriousness of the situation and the urgent need to sustain the momentum of the attack, Captain Christmas, undaunted by the heavy volume of enemy fire, completely disregarded his own safety as he moved across thirty-five meters of open area to join the lead element and assess the situation. Returning



across the fire-swept area, he rejoined the remaining platoon, issued an attack order, and then ran seventy meters across open terrain, ignoring automatic weapons fire, hand grenades, and satchel charges striking around him to reach a tank he had requested. Braving enemy fire and two B-40 rockets that hit the tank, he fearlessly stood atop the vehicle to direct accurate fire against the hostile positions until the intensity of enemy fire diminished. Immediately realizing the tactical advantage, he jumped from the tank, and directed his company in an aggressive assault on the hostile positions, personally leading his men in room-to-room fighting until the building complex was secured. In a large measure due to his bold initiative and courageous actions, he provided the impetus which inspired his men to aggressive action and enabled them to successfully accomplish the mission. By his dynamic leadership, unfaltering determination and selfless devotion to duty in the face of extreme personal danger, Captain Christmas upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Marine engineers had built a pontoon bridge alongside the destroyed An Cuu span, and truck convoys brought in much-needed supplies and food for both the troops and the civilian population. Although the battle for southern Hue was largely over, the fight for the Citadel had just begun.

Stalemate in the Old City

While the Marines cleared Hue, the South Vietnamese offensive in the Citadel faltered. In the first days of the campaign, 1st Battalion, 3d ARVN Regiment, had cleared much of the northwest corner of the old city, while the 1st ARVN Airborne Task Force, just south of the 1st Battalion, attacked from the Tay Loc airfield toward the western wall. To the east, 4th Battalion, 2d ARVN Regiment, advanced south from the Mang Ca compound toward the former imperial palace grounds, enclosed within its own walls and moats.

The battalion made excellent progress until enemy resistance stiffened about halfway toward its objective. The North Vietnamese had transformed hundreds of buildings, many of them constructed of stone and masonry thick enough to withstand small-arms fire, into a series of defensive lines and interconnected strongpoints. By 4 February, 1st ARVN Division reported that nearly 700 NVA troops had been killed in the Citadel.

At this point, General Truong made some adjustments in his lines. On 5 February, he moved the 1st ARVN Airborne Task Force's three battalions into the northeast sector, relieving the 4th Battalion. Assuming responsibility for the airfield, 4th Battalion pushed forward all the way to the southwest wall on the following day. At the same time, 1st Battalion, 3d ARVN Regiment, recaptured the An Hoa gate in the northwestern corner of the Citadel. South of



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A371127

PFC James M. Jones with Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, helps a refugee child through the window of a house.

the Citadel, just north of the Perfume River, the remaining three battalions of the 3d ARVN Regiment futilely butted up against the southeastern wall of the old city in an effort to roll up the enemy defenses from that direction.

On the night of 6–7 February, several hundred North Vietnamese reinforcements scaled the southwestern wall with grappling hooks and forced 2d Battalion, 4th ARVN Regiment, to fall back to the Tay Loc airfield with heavy losses. That afternoon, the cloud cover lifted enough for South Vietnamese Air Force fixed-wing aircraft to drop 25 500-pound bombs on the NVA-occupied southwestern wall of the Citadel. Despite several accurate strikes, however, Communist reinforcements continued to flow into the city.

According to the U.S. Army Center of Military History, the Communists tried to use their air power to support the attack. On 7 February, the North Vietnamese sent four Soviet-made Ilyushin IL-14 “Crate” twin-engine cargo planes racing toward Hue from an airfield near Hanoi. The aircrews had not been informed, however, that weather over Thua Thien Province was terrible. Two of the aircraft carrying explosives, antitank ammunition, and field telephone cables managed to find an opening in the cloud layer about 10 kilometers north of Hue. They dropped their cargoes in a large lagoon for local forces to retrieve. One of the aircraft returned safely; but the

other, flying through dense fog, crashed into a mountain, losing all on board. Meanwhile, the other two IL-14s, which had been modified to drop bombs, had orders to strike General Truong’s headquarters. Neither flight crew could find the city in the fog and returned to North Vietnam without dropping their payload. They tried again five days later, but once again, bad weather prevented them from locating the Mang Ca compound. The two aircraft radioed that they were scrubbing the mission, then headed out to sea to jettison their bombs. A short time later, their transmissions went dead and they were never heard from again.

With the NVA pouring reinforcements into the old city, General Truong once more redeployed his forces. He ordered the three battalions of the 3d ARVN Regiment south of the Citadel to give up their hopeless efforts at the southeastern walls and move into the city. On the afternoon of 7 February, 3d ARVN Regimental headquarters and three battalions embarked on South Vietnamese motorized junks, landing the troops at a wharf north of Hue. The 3d ARVN Regiment then entered the Citadel through the northern gate and took up new positions at the 1st Division’s Mang Ca compound. By that evening, four airborne battalions, the Black Panther Company, two armored cavalry squadrons, the 3d ARVN Regiment with all four battalions, the 4th Battalion, 2d ARVN Regiment, and a company from the 1st ARVN Regiment were inside the Citadel.

Despite the ARVN troop buildup in the old city, General Truong’s forces made little further headway. For the next few days, the ARVN ran up against dug-in NVA, who refused to budge. The North Vietnamese still controlled about 60 percent of the Citadel. NVA replacements continued to infiltrate into the old city after dark.

To the west, the U.S. Army’s 1st Cavalry Division was having the same luck as the ARVN forces in the Citadel against the North Vietnamese. General Tolson’s mission was to seal off the city from the west and north with their right flank on the Perfume River. The Army general observed, however, that the weather and low ceiling of 150–200 feet, combined with the enemy antiaircraft weapons, “made it impractical and illogical to contemplate an air assault by any unit of the Division, in the close proximity of Hue.”

As the vanguard of Army Colonel Hubert S. Campbell’s 3d Brigade, Lieutenant Colonel Sweet’s 2d Battalion,

12th Cavalry, started out on foot early on 3 February in a cold drizzle from its landing zone. The battalion advanced southeastward along a path paralleling Route 1. At approximately 1000, the Americans saw a North Vietnamese battalion setting up defenses in the village of Que Chu, roughly 500 meters to their front. A tree-lined and thickly vegetated hamlet, Que Chu extended 200 meters north and south and was about 75 meters wide. The North Vietnamese were armed with machine guns, AK47 Kalashnikov assault rifles, and recoilless rifles, occupying positions originally prepared by ARVN troops. The battalion attacked, supported by the division's Aerial Rocket Artillery (ARA) Squadron.* After several hours of fighting, the battalion cracked the NVA defenses and established a night defensive perimeter in northern Que Chu. Nine U.S. soldiers died in the attack and 48 were wounded.

At this point, Lieutenant Colonel Sweet did not know the size or identity of the enemy force. Que Chu harbored the headquarters of the *Hue City Front*, as well as the *416th Battalion* of the *5th NVA Regiment* and all three battalions of the *29th Regiment, 325C Division*, the latter having just arrived after a forced march from Khe Sanh. Sweet surmised that he had stumbled onto a major staging area for reinforcements and supplies going into Hue, and he knew the enemy would make great sacrifices to preserve it.

Under cover of darkness, the enemy moved up reinforcements in regimental strength, and at daybreak on 4 February, it launched a counterattack supported by a heavy mortar barrage. The 2d Battalion was surrounded and outnumbered, but they beat off several assaults with the support of the ARA Squadron and artillery. The brief morning firefight cost the 2d Battalion another 11 killed and 51 wounded. Sweet felt abandoned and remembered a briefing of the division staff prior to jumping off. "Earlier they all said, every one of them, that they would be able support us," he said angrily. "If there was going to be a problem, any problem, why didn't some a—e say something?"

In assessing the situation that night, III MAF "believed that the 2/12 Cav [2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment] is blocking a possible exfiltration route for the [NVA] forces involved in the battle for Hue." At this time, Lieutenant

*The ARA was an armed helicopter unit and it served as an artillery component of the Army's airmobile divisions. The ARA aviation concept was no longer used by the Army by the mid-1970s.

Colonel Sweet was more concerned about the enemy overrunning his positions than blocking any exfiltration route. He held a hasty conference with his staff and company commanders. After considering the options, Sweet decided to break free of the encirclement that evening. Resolving to take action that the enemy least expected, Sweet moved his battalion deeper into enemy-held territory to a small hill called Nha Khan that rose from the plain several kilometers southwest of Que Chau. That afternoon, the battalion evacuated its wounded, but the helicopters did not have enough room to take the bodies of the 11 dead. They were buried in the sand so they could be retrieved later.

As darkness fell, the battalion quietly formed two columns, using tape and pieces of clothing to secure items that might make noise as they marched. Shortly after 2000, the men slipped northwest toward a 75-meter gap in the enemy lines. The North Vietnamese sentries did not see the Americans as they slid past. The battalion reformed to single file after reaching a graveyard set between two villages and sent scouts out ahead for the march south. A few minutes later, the scouts froze when they heard the unmistakable sound of a machine-gun bolt being drawn. The unseen NVA manning the weapon were merely cleaning it, however, and failed to notice the crouching Americans only a few meters away. The scouts quietly backtracked and led the battalion in a wide arc around the machine-gun nest without provoking further incident.

Slogging its way through wet paddy lands, the battalion arrived at Nha Khanh by 0700 on 5 February. The exhausted soldiers established a new perimeter on a piece of high ground that dominated the approaches to Hue six kilometers to the east. One of the men later said, "We had gotten less than six hours sleep in the past 48 hours. We didn't have any water and the river water was too muddy to drink."

While the 2d Battalion dug in on Nha Khan, the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry, advanced into the Que Chau sector on the afternoon of the fifth. Patrolling the area west of the hamlet, Army Lieutenant Colonel James B. Vaught's men encountered only token resistance. In the meantime, Lieutenant Colonel Sweet believed his men had stopped all enemy daylight movement by "calling in artillery on the plains in front of them." General Tolson considered moving the 2d Battalion back to Camp Evans but, "at this point . . . I was



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A371335

Machine gun team with machine gunner PFC Dominick J. Carango give advancing troops of Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, fire support during street fighting in Hue.

faced with a couple of situations that strained my resources. . . . [W]hen Hue was occupied, my main land supply line was out.” Concerned about protecting Camp Evans and his helicopters and supporting the 1st Brigade at Quang Tri City, Tolson “was told to attack towards Hue [and] I already had at least three missions that I felt had to be carried out.”

General Tolson dismissed the idea of bringing the 2d Battalion out of the fight for Hue. On 7 February, just northwest of Que Chau, Lieutenant Colonel Vaught’s battalion encountered a strong NVA force that had reoccupied the village. Unable to push the North Vietnamese out, he called in ARA gunships and artillery. The next morning, the Army troopers renewed the attack, but they were forced back in the

face of NVA automatic weapons fire, RPGs, and mortars. In frustration, the American battalion dug in for the night.

At this point, the 3d Brigade commander ordered Sweet’s battalion to deploy off its hill and come in behind the enemy, squeezing the NVA between the two American units. On the morning of 9 February, 2d Battalion troops departed their positions only to bump into a North Vietnamese battalion in the hamlet of Bon Tri, approximately 3,000 meters south of Que Chau. Like Vaught’s unit, Sweet’s battalion saw little success against strong enemy defenses.

For the next few days, the 1st Cavalry units west of Hue, like the ARVN in the Citadel, faced a stalemate. They were able to hold their own but could not push the NVA out.

Lieutenant Colonel Richard S. Sweet

Distinguished Service Cross Citation

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918 (amended by act of July 25, 1963), takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Lieutenant Colonel (Infantry) Richard Searcy Sweet, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations involving conflict with an armed hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam, while serving as Commanding Officer of the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. Lieutenant Colonel Sweet distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions during the period 3 to 5 February 1968 as a battalion commander defending the city of Hue. Colonel Sweet was on the ground with his front line troops when the enemy launched an attack on the city. Positioning himself far forward, he disregarded the intense North Vietnamese mortar and sniper fire and expertly directed his forces in an advance toward Hue. His brilliant leadership enabled all four of his companies to successfully cross a wide open rice paddy into the city while under a constant enemy fusillade. He then led his battalion through the first line of enemy resistance, and by nightfall had succeeded in establishing a tight defensive perimeter. Under a steady hail of mortar and heavy automatic



weapons fire from three sides, the battalion fiercely fought to retain its position. Early in the morning of 4 February the perimeter came under an extremely heavy bombardment and shortly thereafter began receiving ground attacks by large numbers of North Vietnamese soldiers. The battalion was soon encircled by a North Vietnamese regiment, and heavy enemy fire rained on the defenders from all directions. Colonel Sweet skillfully directed the perimeter defense, personally encouraging his troops' fight. Following their commander's example, the officers and men of the battalion fought savagely to repulse the enemy. After dark, Colonel Sweet devised a plan to deceive the surrounding North Vietnamese forces and move through their positions to a new location deeper in their lines of communication. The entire battalion slipped through the enemy's encirclement without suffering one casualty. Again Colonel Sweet's example provided the inspiration for his troops and by daybreak they had successfully occupied commanding terrain deep inside the enemy's area of operations. Lieutenant Colonel Sweet's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

During this period, the NVA command maintained its own support area outside the western wall of the Citadel, capitalizing on the failure of friendly forces to isolate Hue. *Washington Post* correspondent Peter Braestrup wrote, "sealing off an eight-mile perimeter [west of Hue] would have demanded far more troops . . . than were available."

With the clearing of southern Hue by 1st Marines, General Cushman prepared to bring more forces into the fight for the entire city. After Army General Creighton W. Abrams Jr. arrived and formally established the USMACV Forward headquarters at Phu Bai on 12 February, Cushman met with him the following day. They both agreed that the "successful conclusion to Operation Hue City was the number one

priority in ICTZ [I Corps Tactical Zone]." The III MAF commander relayed this concern to General Tolson, who still wanted to return 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry, to Camp Evans. Cushman told the cavalry commander to keep 2d Battalion in the fight. He felt the battle was about to reach a climax and ordered Tolson to keep his forces in position to prevent the enemy from escaping to the southwest.

In the interim, General Westmoreland and the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) had sent reinforcements to I Corps.* The 1st Battalion, 327th Airborne Reg-

*The JGS was the equivalent of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff except the JGS had direct operational control over South Vietnamese forces, while the Joint Chiefs only worked closely with U.S. commanders.

iment, from the 101st Airborne Division had arrived at Phu Bai and came under the operational control of Task Force X-Ray, while another battalion from the division was coming by sea. The South Vietnamese flew the first elements of the Vietnamese Marine Task Force A to Phu Bai from Saigon to relieve the battered Airborne Task Force in the Citadel. At Phu Bai on 9 February, General LaHue ordered 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, to move into Hue.

Entering the Walled City

At 0700 on 10 February, Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, departed the battalion's Phu Loc operating area south of Phu Bai for the latter base. The company reached Phu Bai at about 1100 and came under the direct operational control of the 5th Marines, who ordered it into Hue City to reinforce the 1st Marines. That afternoon, the company crossed the broken span of the An Cuu Bridge and entered southern Hue. At the same time, 1st Battalion's Company B arrived at Phu Bai as did the lead elements of the Army's 1st Battalion, 327th Airborne Regiment. The Army battalion made ready to relieve the remaining companies of the Marine battalion in the Phu Loc sector. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, in turn, would enter the old Citadel to reinforce the ARVN.

Simultaneously, the Marine command attempted to improve the coordination of artillery, naval gunfire, and other supporting arms for the Citadel fighting. Earlier on 8 February, the 1st Field Artillery Group (1st FAG) at Phu Bai, the artillery command for Task Force X-Ray, deployed four 155mm howitzers of Battery W, 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, to firing positions at Gia Le, approximately 3,000 meters west of Phu Bai, to improve supporting fires for forces in Hue. Two days later, 1st FAG sent two 4.2-inch mortars from 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, to the stadium in southeast Hue to provide E8 CS gas and heavy mortar support for forces in the Citadel. Similarly, a 105mm howitzer battery from 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, entered the city across the newly established pontoon bridge over the Phu Cam Canal. From its position in southern Hue, the battery could support the Marines to the north and to the west.

On 10 February, 1st FAG commander Lieutenant Colonel John F. Barr ordered two officers on his staff to the Citadel as forward observers. One of the men, First Lieutenant



Defense Department (Marine Corps) 1D-17-37-68

Marines of Company H, 5th Marines, display a captured Viet Cong flag that they replaced with the Stars and Stripes following a bitter fight for the Thua Thien Province headquarters during Operation Hue City.

Alexander W. Wells Jr., remembered receiving word that the colonel wanted to talk to him. Barr informed Wells that he had volunteered the young lieutenant “for a 24-hour mopping-up mission” to General Truong in the Citadel to coordinate supporting fires. Wells, whose tour in Vietnam was about over, indicated he would rather stay where he was, but Barr gave him little choice in the matter.

Shortly after 1630 on 10 February, Wells and his radio operator flew by helicopter to the Tay Loc airfield, where they were to provide support to 2d Battalion, 4th ARVN, and the Black Panther Company, which had just retaken the field. As the aircraft approached Tay Loc, the enemy attacked with sniper fire. The two Marines leaped out of the hovering craft and ran into a Quonset hut near the airfield tower, which was “full of Australians [advisors] playing cards and drinking scotch.” Wells was then told that General Truong wanted to see him at the division headquarters compound, approximately 1.5 kilometers to the east.

Upon reaching the division headquarters, General Truong briefed Wells on his new assignment as an observer with the remnants of an ARVN airborne battalion pinned down in a forward area. Wells “was shocked to learn that the 5th Marines had not arrived yet and that he and his radioman would be the only Americans in actual combat with the ARVN.” The Vietnamese general indicated on a large wall map the location of his designated outpost surrounded by enemy troops. Truong explained the Vietnamese unit required “his ‘big guns’ immediately to break the siege.” According to Wells, “Truong emphasized . . . that the Emperor’s Palace of Perfect Peace and the Royal City itself were in a strict no-fire zone, but H&I [harassing and interdiction] fires could be designated on the outer wall surrounding the Palace grounds.”

After the briefing, two ARVN soldiers, whom Wells remembered as rangers, escorted him and his radioman through dark streets and alleyways to the ruins of a Buddhist pagoda approximately 500 meters west of the Dong Ba Tower. It took Wells roughly three hours to negotiate the kilometer distance from the Mang Ca compound to the pagoda. Inside and around the courtyard of the temple, only a short distance from the imperial palace were approximately 100 Vietnamese troops. According to Wells, they were surrounded by North Vietnamese forces. Given the ominous

circumstances, Wells nicknamed his refuge the “Alamo.” For the next two weeks, he called in Marine support artillery and naval gunfire from ships off the coast, adjusting his target selection by reference to his map and by sound.

At division headquarters, General Truong revised plans for the battle of the Citadel. With the arrival of the South Vietnamese Marine Task Force A at Phu Bai, he proposed they replace the battered Vietnamese airborne battalions in the eastern sector. The airborne units would then return to Phu Bai and be flown back to Saigon. Through the chain of command, he asked Task Force X-Ray to provide a U.S. Marine battalion, which would then relieve the Vietnamese Marines and attack to the south. After the U.S. Marines arrived, the Vietnamese Marines would push to the west and then turn south, advancing along the western wall. The four 3d ARVN Regiment battalions would continue clearing operations in the northwest sector. Eventually, the allied forces would surround and isolate the NVA forces holed up on the former imperial palace grounds, which separated the Vietnamese and American Marine sectors.

As was often the case, events overtook the plans. Although Vietnamese Marine Task Force A and its 1st Battalion arrived at Phu Bai from Saigon on 9 February and came under the operational control of the 1st ARVN Division, the Vietnamese remained at Phu Bai. In a meeting with the Vietnamese Marine commander, Major Hoang Thong, at Task Force X-Ray headquarters, General LaHue suggested that Thong deploy immediately to the Citadel. However, Thong declined until the rest of his command joined him. He explained that he “was acting under written instructions promulgated by the Vietnamese Joint General Staff which prohibited piecemeal [commitment] . . . of his force.”

The support elements of the Vietnamese Marine task force reached Phu Bai on the night of 10 February. The next morning, U.S. helicopters lifted the task force headquarters and its 1st Battalion into the Citadel. The weather turned nasty in the afternoon, however, and only the headquarters and one company made it into the city before clouds and rain grounded the helicopters. General LaHue proposed that the remainder of the battalion be trucked to southern Hue and then board LCMs for the trip downriver to a landing site north of the Citadel. They would then move on foot into the city. Major Thong refused, saying that “he did not feel that



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190401

A Marine scans the streets for enemy snipers with an M48 Patton tank ready for heavy firepower in the Hue University area.

either route was sufficiently secured." Two days would pass before the skies cleared sufficiently for the airlift to resume.

The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, entered the old city. Shortly after 1045 on 11 February, Marine CH-45 Sea Knight helicopters lifted three platoons of Company B into the Mang Ca compound. The Sea Knight carrying 3d Platoon was hit and the pilot wounded, forcing the aircraft to abort and return to Phu Bai with the troops still on board. Later that day, Company A, with five tanks attached, reached the 1st ARVN Division headquarters after an uneventful crossing of the Perfume River in a Navy landing craft.

Also on 11 February, Major Robert H. Thompson, the commanding officer of 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, and his command group accompanied the remaining companies from the Phu Loc sector to Phu Bai. Only 10 days prior, Colonel Bohn had chosen Thompson, who had served with him before as a battalion operations officer, to take over the battalion after its previous commanding officer was wounded. Before assuming command of the battalion, Thompson, a lieutenant colonel selectee, had been the III MAF embarkation officer. The NVA had prepared a rather undignified assumption of command ceremony for the new battalion

commander. Thompson recalled that “the moment I stepped off the helicopter [at Phu Loc] we received mortar incoming. My first 15 minutes with 1/5 [1st Battalion, 5th Marines] was spent at the bottom of a muddy fighting hole with my baggage and several Marines piled on top of me.”

When Major Thompson arrived at Phu Bai, he reported to General LaHue, who briefed him that the 1st Marines had largely cleared southern Hue, although 1st ARVN Division was having a difficult time in the Citadel. LaHue stated that Thompson’s battalion would be given a zone of action in the Citadel to assist the ARVN in cleaning out the remaining NVA forces from the city. LaHue expressed some concern about Thompson’s rank or rather lack of it. He feared that, since Thompson was only a major, Truong might take advantage of his inexperience. LaHue even suggested “making me a brevet colonel,” Thompson recalled. “I didn’t believe that would be necessary because I didn’t usually wear rank insignia in combat.” Thompson had the impression that “no one seemed to know what the actual situation was in the Citadel. I can remember General LaHue commenting that it shouldn’t take more than a few days to clean up the Citadel affair.”

Thompson reported to Colonel Hughes at his USMACV command post, where he was ordered to “move up the Perfume River in LCUs, land, and enter the Citadel from the north.” He was then to advise General Truong of the intention to launch a three-company attack southward within a zone of action that extended from the inner palace wall on the west to the Citadel wall on the east. Thompson spent the night in some damaged Hue University buildings. Sometime during the night, “an Army major appeared wearing full battle dress, including a .45-caliber pistol.” He introduced himself as Father Aloysius P. McGonigal, a Catholic chaplain assigned to the USMACV advisory group. He volunteered to accompany Thompson to the Citadel, which he gladly accepted.

The following afternoon, Companies C and D joined Thompson and his small advance party at the LCU ramp in the new city. Company D was placed under operational control of 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. After delays caused by enemy mortar and sniper fire on river traffic, the battalion’s headquarters group, the 3d Platoon, Company B, and Company C embarked on board an LCU. In spite of encountering

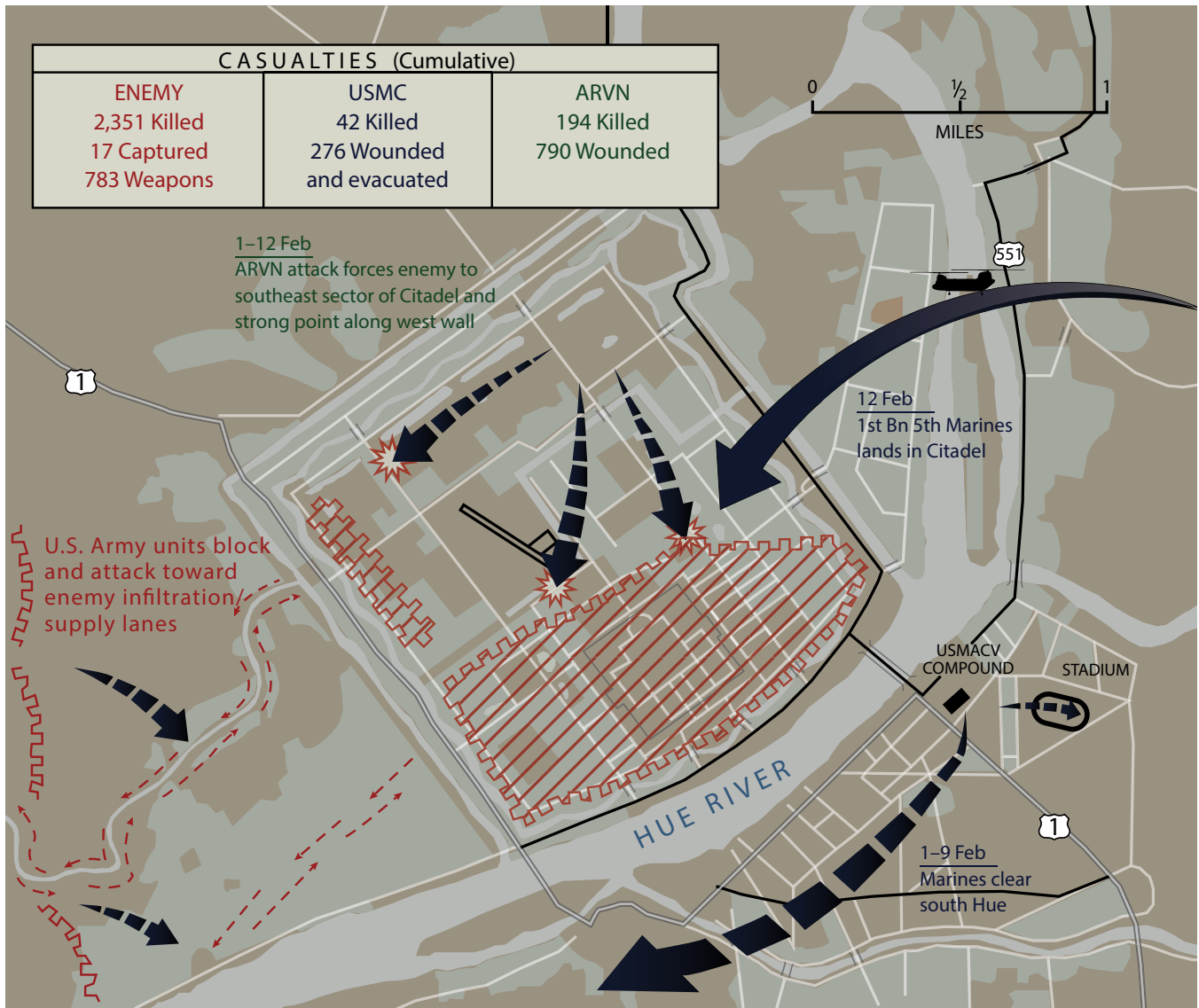
an occasional RPG round or enemy sniper fire from both banks of the Perfume River, they landed north of the city without incident.

As Thompson’s men were about to march to the Citadel, villagers warned the major that the NVA had set up an ambush along the route. The civilians guided them to another road and they were not fired on. After arriving at the ARVN division command post, Thompson met with General Truong and his staff. “Truong was very eager to accommodate our plan of attack or anything we wanted to do,” Thompson recalled. Truong’s staff indicated that an ARVN airborne battalion was holding a position near the attack point and that they would hold that position until U.S. troops passed through that morning. Thompson then prepared to execute his plan. Several years later, he indicated that he had proposed to move a column of companies from the division compound at first light to make contact with the airborne battalion, which would serve as the line of departure (LOD). The battalion would then advance “with two companies abreast” and one company in reserve.

The actual situation differed from the assumptions being made by the leadership. Apparently, when the Vietnamese Marine company came into the Citadel the previous day, the Vietnamese airborne units departed for Phu Bai and Saigon. Unaware of the interrupted Vietnamese Marine airlift, Thompson radioed Hughes late on the night of 12 February that he could not locate the two Vietnamese Marine battalions but, “unless directed otherwise, intend to commence attack at 13 [February] 0800.” Thompson also did not know that the Vietnamese airborne had since departed the Citadel.

Fight for the Tower

As planned, on the morning of 13 February, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, moved out of the Mang Ca compound with Company A on the left, Company C on the right, and Company B in reserve. “[Within] fifteen minutes . . . all Hell broke loose,” Thompson recalled. “There was no Airborne units in the area and Company A was up to their armpits in NVA.” Squad- and platoon-size enemy elements were dug in bunkers and built-up areas and along the Citadel walls. Company A took 35 casualties, including company commander Captain John J. Bowe Jr., from automatic weapons, grenades, B40 RPGs, mortars, and small arms. General Truong reported later that,



Fleet Marine Force-Pacific (FMFPac) Headquarters

Hue City on 12 February 1968. This map was produced after the conclusion of Operation Hue City.

“if there was any confusion, it was a communications problem. I was in daily contact with the Airborne Task Force commander. . . . I passed on all the information I had to the Marines.” Thompson countered after the incident that, “if I had known the Vietnamese airborne was gone, I would have planned differently.”

At that point, Thompson ordered Captain Fernandez Jennings Jr.’s Company B to relieve Company A and resume

the attack with First Lieutenant Scott A. Nelson’s Company C. With two attached tanks, Company C advanced approximately 300 meters before being stopped by heavy enemy fire from an archway tower at the Dong Ba Gate along the Citadel’s eastern wall. The NVA had dug in at the base of the wall and tunneled underneath the structure. The thick masonry protected them from supporting arms and also provided a covered approach for reinforcements.



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190477

Marines of Company B, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, render aid to trapped Marines while under heavy fire from an enemy machine gun during the Battle of Hue.

The battalion was stopped 75 meters short of its original proposed LOD. “Fighting in the Citadel was unlike anything I had ever experienced,” Thompson recalled. “We were in such close quarters with the enemy, often just meters away. We had no room to fire and maneuver. In essence, the fighting was an exercise of reducing fortified positions.” Colonel Hughes radioed Thompson to hold his position and “reorganize and prepare plans for continuing [the] attack indicating [the] type [of] support deemed necessary and desirable.” Thompson requested air and artillery support and the return of Company D.

On the morning of 14 February, the battalion resumed its attack using 5- and 8-inch naval gunfire and 155mm and 8-inch howitzers to pave the way. For the first time in several days, the cloud cover lifted for a brief period, allowing Marine McDonnell Douglas F-4B Phantom IIs and Vought F-8

Crusaders to fly support missions. “There was extremely heavy air activity everywhere,” First Lieutenant Andrew C. Delaurier, a Crusader pilot from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 235 (VMF-235) observed. Delaurier’s wingman “proceeded with one run with *zunis* and *snakes* and I followed up with *napalm*.” They had to make two runs to acquire the target. Although antiaircraft fire hit Delaurier’s Crusader, causing it to leak fuel, he made his way safely back to Da Nang.

Despite the heavy bombardment, the tower still stood and the attack stalled. Thompson felt the naval guns were accurate but were of little value because their flat trajectory caused either a hit outside the Citadel wall or over the wall past any targets inside. He praised the accuracy of the

*The term *zunis* refers to 5-inch Zuni air-to-surface unguided rockets, and *snakes* refers to 250- and 500-pound bombs configured with a tail called snake eyes.

artillery, but with the battalion on the “gun target line . . . it [was] virtually impossible for us to lean into our fires.” In this situation, with the artillery firing at close range and parallel to the direction of the attack, the shell dispersion could cause friendly casualties. The NVA also moved forward when Thompson’s men fell back to use supporting arms, “so when the fires were lifted, we had to fight to retake more ground.”

As a result, the attack stalled. Company C, on the right, advanced roughly 100 yards, destroyed an NVA rocket position, and captured an enemy soldier who walked into their lines. Company B did not make any progress against the tower, and after several futile attempts to take the tower, Thompson was forced to withdraw both companies and establish a night defensive position.

Captain Myron C. Harrington’s Company D joined the battalion at approximately 1800, after a frustrating day trying to cross the Perfume River by landing craft and finally by a Navy patrol craft, fast (PCF) or Swift boat. Harrington described the situation:

I could feel a knot developing in my stomach. Not so much from fear—through a helluva lot of fear was there—but because we were new to this type of situation. We were accustomed to jungles and open rice fields, and now we would be fighting in a city. . . . [O]ne of the beautiful things about the Marine is that they adapt quickly, but we were going to take a number of casualties learning some basic lessons in this experience. I think my most vivid memory as I went in was in talking with one of the other company commanders who had already been participating there in the action for a couple of days. In a very matter-of-fact way, without a great deal of embellishment on his part, he just frightened the hell out of me in telling me how bad it was. And I thought in my mind right then and there that, you know, hey, here I am with a fresh company and I knew without having to be told that what my mission was going to be the next day was to try and take the fortified tower position along the east wall. And sure enough, that evening when I went in to be briefed, Major Thompson, he just said,

*A *gun target line* refers to an imaginary straight line from the guns to the target.



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190302

Marines of Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, participate in a search-and-clear mission on the south side of the Perfume River after a heavy fight at the old imperial capital of Hue.

“Delta Company, tomorrow you’re going to take that east wall.” And I said, “Aye, aye, sir,” and went at it.

“My first impression was of desolation, utter devastation,” Harrington recalled further. “There were burnt-out tanks and trucks, and upturned automobiles still smoldering. Bodies lay everywhere, most of them civilians. The smoke and stench blended, like some kind of horror movie—except that it lacked weird music. You felt that something could happen at any minute, that they would jump out and start shooting from every side. Right away, I realized that we weren’t going to a little picnic.”

The next morning, under heavy supporting arms, Company D launched its attack. Harrington explained,

We tried our best to avoid malicious damage, if you would. We just didn’t shoot at walls just to blow them down. But when we had to shoot at a house, we shot at a house. When we had to destroy a house, we destroyed

Captain Myron C. Harrington Jr.

Navy Cross Citation

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Captain Myron C. Harrington, Jr., United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving as Commanding Officer for Company D, First Battalion, Fifth Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On the afternoon of 23 February 1968, Company D was attacking a well entrenched North Vietnamese Army force that was occupying a fortified section of the wall surrounding the Hue Citadel. As the Marines maneuvered forward, they began receiving a heavy volume of small arms, automatic weapons, mortar and antitank rocket fire. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, Captain Harrington skillfully deployed his 3.5 rocket teams into advantageous firing positions. Continuously moving from one position to another, he pinpointed enemy emplacements and skillfully directed the fire of his



men. After silencing four hostile positions, he requested supporting arms fire and skillfully adjusted 60-mm. mortar fire to within twenty-five meters of the forward elements of his company, while simultaneously adjusting artillery fire. Disregarding his own safety, Captain Harrington then fearlessly maneuvered to the point of heaviest contact and, rallying his men, boldly led a determined assault against the enemy soldiers. Shouting words of encouragement to his men, he skillfully maneuvered his unit forward and directed the Marines' fire upon the hostile emplacements. Largely due to his resolute determination and intrepid fighting spirit, his men overran the hostile positions and routed the North Vietnamese soldiers, accounting for twenty-five enemy soldiers confirmed killed. By his courage, superb leadership and unfaltering devotion to duty in the face of extreme personal danger, Captain Harrington upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

it. But we didn't go in there with the express purpose that this is a wonderful opportunity to show how great our weapons are and how much destructive power they possess. As a result of their being so entrenched, it required for us to bring maximum firepower at our disposal to eliminate them.

On 15 February, artillery and naval gunfire struck at enemy positions. Under the pounding, the tower gave way. A break in the cloud cover allowed two Marine Douglas A-4 Skyhawk jets to drop 250- and 500-pound bombs on the target. Backed both by tanks and Ontos, Harrington's Marines crept toward the wall and up the tower. They cleared the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong from their spider holes one by one with hand grenades and rifle fire. The NVA, nevertheless, defended their positions tenaciously, forcing Thompson to commit Company B. After six hours of hard fighting, including hand-to-hand

combat, Harrington's 1st Platoon established a foothold at the base of the tower. According to one account, Private First Class John E. Holiday made a "one-man charge" against an enemy machine gun bunker on the wall, firing his "machine gun from the hip 'John Wayne' style." The rest of the company followed and captured the tower.

The tower's capture cost the battalion 6 men killed in action and more than 50 wounded, while claiming 20 enemy dead. That night, Harrington left one squad in the tower and established his command post in a damaged house below the wall. The NVA launched a surprise night attack and retook the tower. Harrington led a counterattack and recaptured it:

I had to admire the courage and discipline of the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong [*sic*], but no more than I did my own men. We were both in a face-to-face, eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation. Sometimes they were only twenty or thirty yards from us, and once we killed



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190492

Marines en route to Hue aboard a Navy LCM 8 Mike boat prepare to return sniper fire from shore. The boat was loaded with 105mm ammunition.

a sniper only ten yards away. After a while, survival was the name of the game as you sat there in the semidarkness, with the firing going on constantly. . . . And the horrible smell. You tasted it as you ate your rations, as if you were eating death. It permeated your clothes, which you couldn't wash because water was very scarce. You couldn't bathe or shave either. My strategy was to keep as many of my Marines alive as possible, and yet accomplish the mission. You went through the full range of emotions, seeing your buddies being hit, but you couldn't feel sorry for them because you had others to think about. . . . It was dreary, and still we weren't depressed. We were doing our job—successfully.

On the morning of 16 February, the battalion pushed southeast along the Citadel wall. It seemed as if the men were under fire from three directions at once: North

Vietnamese snipers brought flanking fire on them from the taller building on Gia Hoi Island to the east and from walls of the imperial palace to the west. The battalion used artillery, naval gunfire, and an occasional air strike to suppress the enemy on the outer walls, but could do nothing about the snipers in the palace because the royal residence was a no-fire zone. The battalion gained the Americans approximately 150 yards, but at that point, Thompson called a halt to reorganize and resupply. In the day's fighting, the battalion counted 63 NVA bodies but suffered 7 killed and 47 wounded.

For the next few days, 1st Battalion met the same close-quarter resistance. Unlike the enemy in southern Hue, the battalion discovered that the NVA units in the Citadel employed better urban fighting tactics, had improved already formidable defenses, dug trenches, built roadblocks, and conducted counterattacks to regain redoubts, which were critical for their defensive scheme. Thompson described the older



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190582

Marines of 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, advance with a tank inside the Citadel at Hue.

city as “row after row of single-story, thick-walled masonry houses jammed close together and occasionally separated by alleyways or narrow streets.” As a result, the Marines were faced with hundreds of naturally camouflaged, mutually supporting, fortified positions. Moreover, both their flanks were exposed to the enemy; to the east, or left flank, four- or five-story houses stood outside the moat, which allowed the NVA to dominate the Citadel wall with observation and fire; and to the west, or right flank, the imperial palace provided the NVA safe haven from which to deliver small-arms, rocket, and mortar fire. Eventually, Thompson received permission to fire mortars, and on a “few occasions to have the ARVN fire artillery for us inside . . . the palace walls.” In his mind, “[t]he enemy had everything going for him.”

Thompson countered the enemy fixed defenses with heavy artillery, naval gunfire, liberal use of tear gas, and when weather permitted, fixed-wing support. He recalled, however,

“there was slow, misty cold rain falling constantly. I don’t recall seeing the sun during that period and the cloud cover broke enough to allow close air support on about three brief occasions.” He depended largely on his own unit’s firepower, especially mortars and automatic weapons, and the tanks and Ontos that reinforced the battalion. Thompson compared his tankers to the “knights of old sallying forth daily from their castles to do battle with the forces of evil.” One rifleman stated that, “if it had not been for the tanks, we could not have pushed through that section of the city. They [the NVA] seemed to have bunkers everywhere.”

The M48 Pattons and Ontos worked together under the command of the attached tank platoon commander. The infantry provided a screen while the Ontos or battle tanks furnished direct fire support. After a joint reconnaissance, the armored vehicles would move forward at full speed as the infantry laid down a heavy volume of fire. Upon reaching a

position where hits could be placed on the target, the vehicle commander halted and fired two or three rounds and then reversed direction to return quickly to friendly front lines.

At first, the M48 tank's 90mm guns were relatively ineffective against the concrete and stone houses; shells occasionally ricocheted back on the Marines. The tank crews then used concrete-piercing fused shells that "resulted in excellent penetration and walls were breached with two to four rounds." Casualties were high among armored vehicle crews, but the tanks received relatively little damage from RPG rounds.

The two 4.2-inch mortars from 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, supported the battalion's advance with high-explosive and E8 CS rounds. Private First Class Edward M. Landry later recalled, on 18 February, "firing a CS mission across the river again today. The air is [so] full of gas . . . we are almost used to it unless it is very heavy. We then use our masks." In the Citadel, the 4.2-inch CS shells proved more effective than the E8 launchers. The rounds penetrated the tile roofs of the building and "concentrated the full power of the round in the building rather than relying on the infiltration of the CS gas from outside." Enemy prisoners testified to the demoralizing effect of the gas on their units, although some NVA officers and senior NCOs carried gas masks with them into battle.

After heavy fighting on 17 February, Thompson called a temporary halt to the advance. NVA mortars sank an LCU attempting to resupply the battalion in the Citadel. Faced with shortages of food and ammunition, especially 106mm rounds for the Ontos and 90mm rounds for the M48 tanks, he made the decision to rest the battalion until the supplies arrived. The attack was at a standstill. "The resistance is getting stiffer," Thompson reported. "It's most difficult because of such close contact. We get an occasional gunship but no other air support. Charlie's dug way down into the buildings and they're too strong for our light mortars."

Taking the Citadel

While the U.S. Marine battalion fought for the Dong Ba Tower and inched its way forward, the Vietnamese Marine

**Charlie* represents a shortened reference to the Viet Cong, or Victor Charlie in military phonetic spelling.



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A371220

A Marine from 2d Platoon, Company H, aims an M60 machine gun out the window of a house during the Battle of Hue.

task force also entered the battle. After several delays, on 13 February, U.S. Navy landing craft ferried the command group and the remaining companies of the 1st Vietnamese Marine Corps (1st VNMC) Battalion and the entire 5th VNMC Battalion from the LCU ramp across the Perfume River to the northern landing site. At his Mang Ca headquarters, General Truong assigned the southwest sector of the Citadel, west of the imperial palace, to the Vietnamese Marine Task Force A. According to Truong's concept of operations, the task force would pass through friendly forces south of the headquarters the following morning and then attack first to the west and then turn with the 1st Battalion on the eastern flank and the 5th Battalion on the western flank.

For control purposes, General Truong divided the Citadel into six zones or areas of operations: Zone A covered the

Mang Ca compound; Zone B included the area immediately south of headquarters and under friendly control; Zone C had been given to the 3d ARVN Regiment and focused on the northeast sector; Zone D belonged to the U.S. 1st Battalion, 5th Marines; Zone E covered the imperial palace and grounds still occupied by enemy forces; and Zone F included the Vietnamese Marine sector.

As planned, at 0900 on 14 February, the Vietnamese Marines left their line of departure, but both battalions immediately ran into strong enemy forces. From 0930 to 1200, 5th Battalion engaged in intense house-to-house fighting until it reached its first objective. In its sector, 1st Battalion failed in its mission to secure a small school stubbornly defended by the NVA. Third Lieutenant Nhut led his men into a pagoda to launch an attack on the school. After an air strike on the enemy position, the lieutenant suddenly dashed forward toward an abandoned house that sat halfway between the school and the pagoda. Enemy fire cut him down. "I never told anyone to charge ahead," his company commander said. "I told everyone to wait." During a lull in the fighting, a small group of Vietnamese Marines recovered Nhut's body and his equipment. His helmet bore the inscription, "Live bedside you, darling, die beside buddies." On the fourteenth, 1st Battalion lost 9 dead and 24 wounded. After repulsing early morning probes on its positions, the battalion counterattacked and finally captured the schoolhouse on the afternoon of the fifteenth. During two days of fighting, the two Marine battalions had advanced less than 400 meters.

The 3d ARVN Regiment in the northwest sector of the Citadel also met with setbacks. On 14 February, the NVA broke out of their salient west of the Tay Loc airfield and cut off the 1st Battalion of the regiment in the western corner of the Citadel. Two days would pass before the ARVN could break the encirclement.

Similarly, the NVA was dealing with challenges of their own. On the night of 16 February, ARVN troops at the Alamo with Lieutenant Wells intercepted a radio transmission ordering "an attack of battalion-size reinforcements into the Citadel through the 'west gate' and over the moat bridge." Wells immediately called for support from the 155mm howitzers at Gia Le and all available Navy gunships on station to fire at on-call targets around the gate and the bridge. A 5-inch mount from one of the Navy destroyers responded

Senior North Vietnamese Instructions

According to a recent Vietnamese history, the Communist Central Military Commission (CMC) issued instructions that the Citadel must be held until 18 February. On the twentieth, the local Tri-Thien Regional Party Committee suggested to the CMC that it permit the withdrawal from Hue. The CMC then instructed the Communist military regional headquarters to: "Strive to hold, you will be supplied, including by air." The Vietnamese account then goes on to state, "From the night of the 20th through the 23d of February IL-14 aircraft of our Air Force flew parachute resupply to our forces in Hue. Although the effectiveness was low, the resupply by our air force stimulated the fighting morale of our troops and people on the battlefield."

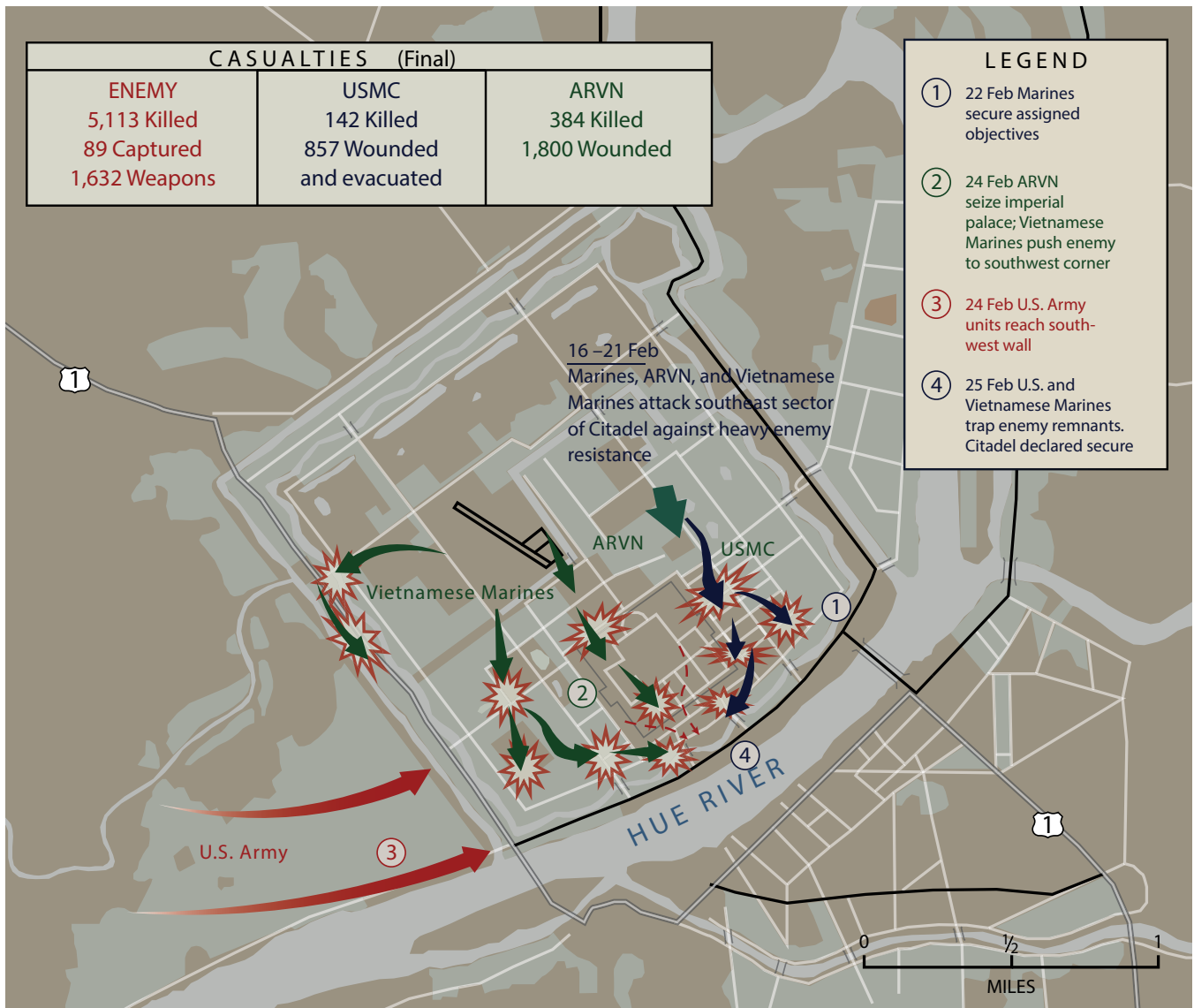
within 3 minutes and continued firing for approximately 10 minutes. Wells reported "screaming on the radio" after a direct hit on the moat bridge killed a high-ranking NVA officer and blew several enemy troops into the water.

At midnight, the technical detachment of 1st ARVN Division intercepted a radio communication from enemy headquarters inside the Citadel. Its contents revealed that the enemy commander had been killed during an attack-by-fire, that enemy losses were heavy, and that the new commander recommended a withdrawal from the Citadel.* His request was denied and he was ordered to continue fighting.

Estimating the Situation and Mounting the Offensive

The U.S. command feared a buildup of NVA forces in the Hue sector. Earlier on 16 February, General Abrams flew over 1st Cavalry Division's objective west of the city. He believed the North Vietnamese had at least three battalions still in the city and that "they are resupplied nightly from a base camp 18 kilometers west of the city, generally through the west gate. They have plenty of 60mm mortar and B-40 rocket ammo." Allied intelligence now identified

*The term *attack-by-fire* refers to a tactical mission where a commander uses direct fire, supported by indirect fire, to engage the enemy without closing with them to destroy, suppress, fix, or deceive.



Fleet Marine Force-Pacific (FMFPac) Headquarters

Hue City on 16–25 February 1968. This map was produced after the conclusion of Operation Hue City.

a new enemy battalion west of the city and a new regimental headquarters two kilometers north of the city with at least one battalion. Abrams radioed General Cushman to expect a renewed attack in Hue and “to reinforce the 3d Bde [Brigade] of the 1st Air Cav Div [Air Cavalry Division] to bring additional forces to bear north and west of Hue. We should make every effort to move against the enemy now, straining our logistics base to the maximum to include air supply if required.”

That same afternoon, General Abrams hosted a meeting with Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky and Lieutenant General Hoang Xuan Lam, the I Corps Commander, and Generals Cushman and LaHue. The USMACV Forward staff and Task Force X-Ray briefed the dignitaries on the Hue situation. Vice President Ky reported that his intelligence sources concurred with the American assessment of an enemy buildup west of the city. He also believed the North Vietnamese were willing to sacrifice “thousands of men to win

a slight political gain.” Ky declared that the advance of U.S. forces should not be deterred by the enemy’s use of pagodas, churches, and other religious buildings. The vice president would “accept responsibility” for any destruction caused by American efforts.

On 17 February, General Westmoreland met with Generals Cushman and Abrams. He concurred with them that the enemy was about to launch a major operation with Hue as its target. The three commanders also agreed on the need for further reinforcements and ordered in 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, with two battalions and 3d Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry Division, with two battalions as reinforcements. The two Marine battalions would continue mopping up in the modern city and expand operations to the east and south of Hue. The 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne, would block avenues of retreat to the south and southwest, while 3d Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry, pressed the NVA from the northwest.

In the Citadel, General Truong prepared for the final thrust against entrenched and determined enemy forces. He assigned the Vietnamese Marine Task Force A, now reinforced by a third battalion, to clear the southwestern wall. With the Vietnamese Marines on the western flank, Truong placed the 3d ARVN Regiment in the center with orders to attack south toward the imperial palace. His Reconnaissance Company approached on the right flank of Thompson’s battalion, which renewed its assault in the southeastern sector.

From the eighteenth through the twentieth, the U.S. Marine battalion and the South Vietnamese units in the Citadel met dogged resistance. The NVA in the Citadel were now fighting a rearguard action, and they contested nearly every piece of ground.* In spite of mounting casualties, the North Vietnamese continued to throw replacements into the fight. During the early morning hours of 19 February, two enemy battalions attacked the South Vietnamese Marines in the southwestern sector of the Citadel. Although supported by artillery, the Vietnamese Marines beat back the enemy assault, which several high-ranking NVA officers and political leaders used as a diversion to escape from the city.

After regrouping on 19 February, Thompson’s battalion resumed its offensive in the southeastern sector. He placed



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A371416

Marines of Company L, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, use walls and buildings as cover during their advance against the enemy.

three companies on line—B, C, and D, with A in reserve—but the battalion only made nominal gains against the NVA, who were holed up in the rubble. A two-story administrative building (the largest in the Citadel) remained particularly concerning for Thompson. From it, the enemy had excellent observation and fields of fire. Thompson believed that, if the building were taken, the rest would be easy—but by the twentieth, his battalion had run out of steam and a new approach was needed.

Generals Abrams and Cushman also were concerned about progress in the Citadel and the mounting number of American casualties. News correspondents with the Marines in the old city filed dispatches and film about the intensity of the fighting that were being read or viewed by American audiences the next day. One dramatic picture showed a Marine tank with a makeshift litter carrying wounded to the battalion aid station. On 19 February, reporter Lee A. Lescaze wrote a front-page article titled, “Shortage of Men, Air Support Slows Marine Drive in Hue,” that appeared in the *Washington Post*. According to Lescaze’s account, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, had advanced four blocks but were still two blocks from the southern wall of the Citadel. Marine officers

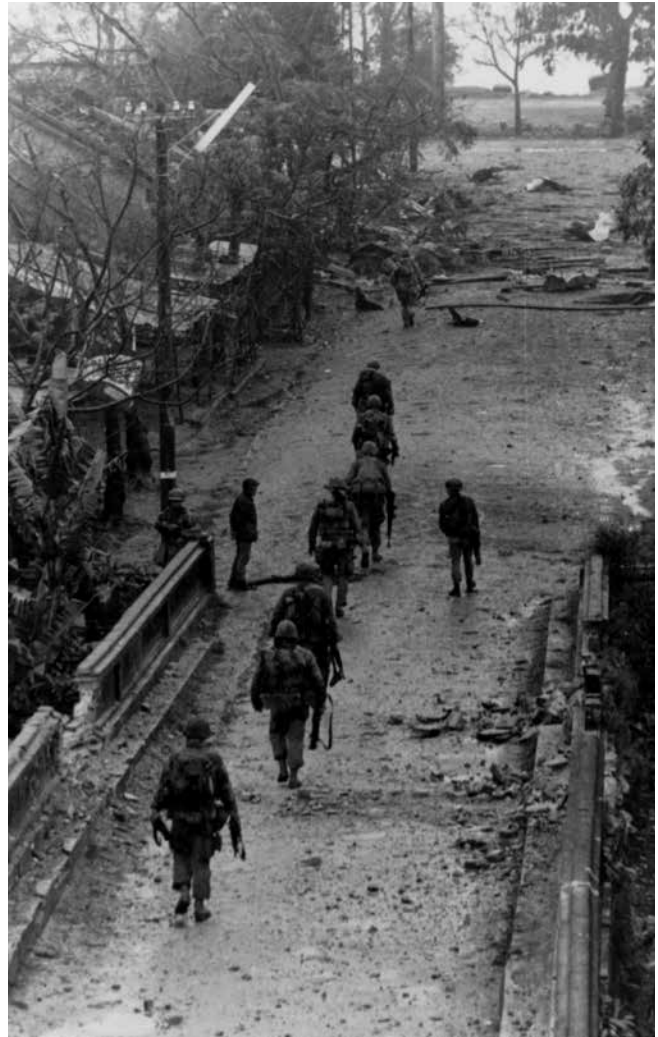
*The term *rearguard action* refers to a defensive or delaying tactic created by a rear guard covering the retreat or evacuation of an army.

were quoted as asking, “When are they going to get help?” Lescaze described the lead companies “trying to keep on line as they maneuver through buildings and rubble of Hue.” He wrote that, in some instances, corporals were acting platoon leaders taking the place of wounded or dead company officers. One officer remarked that “we don’t have enough men, enough air support, or enough artillery to do this thing quickly.”

Although not disputing the accuracy of Lescaze’s article, a division message stated that, of the 10 platoons in the Citadel battalion, 3 were commanded by lieutenants, 1 by a gunnery sergeant, 2 by staff sergeants, 2 by sergeants, and 2 by corporals. It further stated that inclement weather permitted fixed-wing support only on three days, 14–16 February. Because of the need for accuracy, the division revealed that it used only 8-inch howitzer and naval gunfire in support of the battalion, admitting that “1/5 [1st Battalion, 5th Marines] casualties have been high. During [the] past week, priority of personnel replacement has been given to the 5th Marines.”

On 20 February, General Abrams radioed General Cushman that he recognized the efforts to end the siege in Hue, but also that the weather had considerable impact on operations. Nevertheless, Abrams considered “the measure so far taken to be inadequate and not in consonance with the urgency of the problem or the resources you command.” In the Army general’s mind, it was essential that all available means of firepower and support be used to eliminate enemy forces in Hue. Abrams directed Cushman to focus priority on artillery fires to the ARVN and Marine units in the city. He declared that General Truong should coordinate “all outside support tendered, and we should be responsive to his requests. In accomplishing all the above, I direct that the resources owned by the U.S. be unstintingly committed to the support of the Vietnamese forces of all types, cutting out all the red tape and administrative procedures that in any way hinder the conduct of the battle. . . . This is one battle and anything anyone has that is useful should be committed to its early and final conclusion.”

At the same time he radioed Cushman, Abrams also sent a message to 1st Cavalry Division’s General Tolson: “You have a priority task to clear the northwest, west and southern approaches to Hue within the next 48 hours, using all



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190561

Marines of Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, move out on patrol in Hue.

resources at your disposal.” He then directed Tolson to make contact with Truong and assess the situation within the city, reporting personally to headquarters with a proposed plan of action. Abrams promised Tolson that he would issue the “necessary orders” to General Cushman “to insure [*sic*] that all available resources are placed at your disposal to accomplish this mission.”

Despite the obvious anxiety in Abrams messages, the battle for Hue was in its last stages. The enemy’s stubborn resistance inside the Citadel hit a desperate point on 21 February, when three 1st Cavalry battalions—1st Cavalry’s 3d Brigade; 2d Battalion, 501st Infantry; and 1st Battalion, 7th



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A374463

From a classroom at Hue University, a Marine fires his M16 at a sniper during Operation Hue City.

Infantry—drove a concerted attack against the Que Chau area, five kilometers northwest of Hue and the location of *29th Regiment, 325C Division* headquarters. U.S. forces occupied this area, and thus severed all enemy communications and resupply activities between the Citadel and the outside.

In the Citadel, Major Thompson determined the battalion needed another option to get the assault moving again. “To continue the attack as before would be sheer folly,” he said, and decided that a night attack might succeed. He briefed the company commanders, who “were not very enthusiastic. . . . [T]hey were willing to try, but I could see that their hearts

were not in it.” He gave the mission to Company A, now under the command of First Lieutenant Patrick D. Polk. In the brief time he commanded the company, Polk had revived its morale. So much so that Thompson believed “Pat Polk and Company A were ready to go.” According to the major’s plan, a platoon from the company would seize three key facilities, including the two-story administrative building, flanking the NVA positions during the night. At first light, the rest of the battalion would launch the general attack.

The 2d Platoon, led by Staff Sergeant James Munro, was divided into approximately three 10-man teams. At 0300

Major Robert H. Thompson

Navy Cross Citation

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lieutenant Colonel [then Major] Robert H. Thompson, United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving as the Commanding Officer, First Battalion, Fifth Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in the Republic of Vietnam, from 12 February to 3 March 1968, while participating in the Operation HUE CITY, Lieutenant Colonel Thompson aggressively led his battalion in intense fighting against well entrenched North Vietnamese forces within the Citadel. On 13 February, he deployed elements of his unit across the Perfume River to reduce enemy resistance in the southeast corner of the walled city. Almost immediately, small-arms, automatic weapons, and rocket fire from a large North Vietnamese force slowed his advance. Ignoring the intense enemy fire, he moved to an exposed vantage point where he rapidly assessed the situation and unhesitatingly moved across the fire-swept front of his battalion, directing the efforts of the company



commanders and shouting words of encouragement to individual Marines, inspiring them to resume the momentum of the attack. Ordered to commence an attack northwest of the city on 28 February, Colonel Thompson fearlessly moved his command group with the attacking companies repeatedly moving to the areas of heaviest contact in order to personally assist his unit commanders and influence the course of the engagement. When an attacked company engaged a well entrenched North Vietnamese force on 1 March, Colonel Thompson accompanied a reinforcing unit dispatched to establish a blocking position to prevent the enemy's escape. Located with the lead elements, he personally coordinated supporting arms fire with the movement of the advancing Marines as they overwhelmed the enemy and accomplished the mission. By his intrepid fighting spirit, inspiring leadership, and selfless devotion to duty at great personal risk, Colonel Thompson upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

on 21 February, the platoon moved out, and within a short time, captured all three buildings with a minimum of resistance. Thompson later speculated that the North Vietnamese had withdrawn during the night to sleep elsewhere. By daybreak, the enemy troops moved back in, providing “a turkey shoot” for Company A. According to one Marine, “Hell, the first thing in the morning, we saw six NVA . . . just standing on the wall. We dusted them all off.” The major thought “this threw the NVA into utter confusion and . . . gave our other companies the spirit they needed to continue the attack with zest.” Despite initial success, NVA resistance hardened. By the end of the day, the battalion had killed 16 North Vietnamese, taken 1 prisoner, and captured five individual weapons at a cost of 3 dead and 14 wounded Marines. The battalion was still approximately 100 yards short of the southeastern wall.

At 0930 the next morning, the battalion pushed forward. Except for some scattered snipers and an occasional mortar round, the enemy seemingly had melted away. Upon reaching the southeastern wall, Lance Corporal James M. Avella removed a small American flag from his pack and fastened it to a telegraph pole. The battalion's after action report documented the event: an element of Company A “hoisted our National Ensign.”

Upon securing the wall, Thompson ordered a new company under his command—Company L, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines—to capture the southern gate and the immediate area between the Citadel and the bridge across the river. The company performed “a classic combined arms effort that could not have been executed better on a blackboard.” Ironically, the sun was out for the first time in two weeks, and Marine fixed-wing aircraft dropped napalm within 800

meters of advancing troops. An M48 Patton battle tank provided suppressive fire on the enemy's positions on the palace wall, though one of the tanks took a direct hit. Sergeant Edward Scott said,

I don't know what they threw at us. The round penetrated 10 inches of steel. It hit the turret and entered on the loader's side. He got killed along with the tank commander. I was wounded also. Pieces of shrapnel were flying inside and destroyed all the radios and started a flash fire. There was so much smoke you couldn't see anything. The driver was untouched. . . . [He] got us out of there and drove to an aid station.

By 1800, the battalion had attained all of its objectives. To the west, however, the North Vietnamese continued to fight for every inch of the old city still in their hands. On 22 February, the enemy fired 122mm rockets followed by ground attacks against the Vietnamese Marines. Although forced back, the NVA maintained pressure on the Marine task force. By 23 February, they were in "moderate to heavy contact" and no advances were made. Venting his anger at what he considered the slow progress of the Vietnamese Marines, General Abrams threatened to dissolve the unit. He complained that, in the last three days, they "have moved forward less than half a city block," in spite of being the "strongest force in the Citadel either Vietnamese, U.S., or enemy."

At 0500 on 24 February, soldiers from 2d Battalion, 3d ARVN, pulled down the NLF banner flying over the Citadel, ripped it into tatters, and hoisted the South Vietnamese national colors. For the first time in 25 days, the yellow flag with three red stripes fluttered triumphantly in the early morning air. By 1025, the 3d ARVN Regiment had secured the southern wall. General Truong then ordered the Black Panther Company and 2d Battalion, 3d ARVN, to assault the imperial palace they recaptured by late afternoon. In the interim, the Vietnamese Marines had taken the western wall. By nightfall, only the southwest corner of the Citadel remained in enemy control. Under cover of darkness at 0300 on 25 February, the 4th Vietnamese Marine Battalion launched a surprise attack and eliminated this last pocket of North Vietnamese fighters in the Citadel. Outside the eastern walls, a two-battalion ARVN Ranger task force cleared the Gia Hoi sector, a small enclave located between the



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A373668

A Marine grenadier fires an M79 round into a sniper's position in Hue as 1st MarDiv advances toward the Citadel.

Citadel and the Perfume River that had been under NVA control since 31 January. Other than mopping-up operations, the fight for the Citadel had ended.

For 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, except for isolated skirmishes, its last significant action in the Citadel occurred on 22 February with the seizure of the southeast wall and its approaches. Thompson had hoped to participate in taking the imperial palace, but he later observed, "For political reasons, I was not allowed to do it. To save face, the Vietnamese were to retake the 'Forbidden City'." On the twenty-sixth, the ARVN relieved the Marine battalion, which departed the Citadel to join 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, in a two-battalion sweep east and north of the city.

Operation Hue City Ends

For the Marines, the operation lasted about another week. While 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, mopped up in southern Hue, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, conducted numerous company- and platoon-size combat patrols south of the Phu Cam Canal. The battalion relieved the 101st ARVN Engineering Company that had been surrounded by NVA just southwest of the new city. On 24 February, the battalion began a three-company sweep south of Hue in conjunction with the two battalions of 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. Under cover of darkness at 0300, the battalion advanced south of the Phu Cam Canal along Route 1 and then swung west. The 2d Battalion easily took its first objective at 0500, a piece of high ground 1,000 meters south of the canal and west of the highway. Roughly an hour later, Company F secured its second objective, Hill 103, another 1,000 meters south, without meeting any resistance. On Hill 103, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham established an outpost manned by an artillery forward observer team, a forward air controller, and an infantry squad from Company F for security. He then prepared to advance through a Vietnamese cemetery toward his main objective—an ARVN engineer battalion compound 1,500 meters to the west. The engineers had held out against repeated Viet Cong and NVA assaults since the beginning of February.

The battalion attacked at 0700, and by 0830, Company G reached the base and tied in with the ARVN engineers. On the morning of 26 February, the battalion continued the attack to clear a ridgeline west of the compound. The high ground was stubbornly defended, and by 1330, the enemy forced Company H to pull back and call in an air strike. The company pushed forward, but at 1630, it was unable to make any further headway. Two flights of A-4 Skyhawks came in low and dropped their ordnance, knocking out two enemy mortars and two machine guns and killing approximately 20 North Vietnamese. One bomb fell short, exploding near the company lines and killing four and wounding two. With darkness approaching, Cheatham recalled the company and waited for morning to renew the assault.

On 27 February, Marine air and artillery bombarded the enemy defenses. After the last fires had lifted, all three companies rushed forward, reaching the crest of the hill without



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190553

Marines of 2d Platoon, Company F, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, relax after securing a battle-scarred building during the Battle of Hue.

opposition and discovering that the enemy had escaped during the night. Fourteen enemy bodies were found strewn around the hilltop. The battalion completed its sweep south of the new city the next day and prepared for a joint operation with 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, to the east and north of Hue.

Leaving the southern sector to 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne, on 29 February, the two Marine battalions entered their new area of operations to cut off any NVA forces trying to make their way from Hue to the coast. Although encountering few enemy personnel, the two battalions uncovered



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A801236

ARVN soldiers of Company 212 raise the South Vietnamese national flag over the Citadel.

“fresh trench work along the route of advance, 3,000 meters long with 600 fighting holes.” Captain Downs remembered a trench complex covering eight kilometers with overhead cover every 15 meters. He remarked that it “had to be a way to get significant reinforcements into the city.” The search for North Vietnamese forces, however, proved fruitless. Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham observed, “We couldn’t close it [the loop around the enemy]. To be honest, we didn’t have enough people to close it.” On 2 March 1968, Operation Hue City was terminated.

Epilogue

The battle for Hue City cost all sides dearly. Marine units sustained casualties of 142 dead and close to 1,100 wounded. American advisors with the 1st ARVN Division in Hue reported 333 South Vietnamese Army troops killed, 1,773 wounded, and 30 missing in action. According to the U.S. Marine advisors with the Vietnamese Marine Task Force A in Hue, the Vietnamese Marines suffered 88 killed, 350 wounded, and 1 missing in action. The Army’s 1st Cavalry

Division (Airmobile) reported 68 killed and 453 wounded during the battle, while 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne, listed 6 dead and 56 wounded. Allied unit casualties exceeded 600 dead and nearly 3,800 wounded and missing. The enemy did not escape unscathed. Allied estimates of NVA and Viet Cong dead ranged from 2,500 to 5,000 troops. According to the South Vietnamese, captured Communist documents showed 1,042 killed and an undisclosed number of wounded.

The size and number of units the allies engaged in the one-month battle could only be speculated. The allied command, however, knew the enemy was in Hue in force. South Vietnamese and U.S. intelligence officers initially identified at least three North Vietnamese regimental headquarters controlling subordinate units during the early fighting: *4th*, *5th*, and *6th NVA Regiments*. Later, American and South Vietnamese units confirmed battalions from at least three more NVA regiments: the *29th* from *325C Division* and the *90th* and *803d* from *324B Division*. Allied intelligence also estimated that 15–18 enemy battalions took part in the battle in one form or another, not including Viet Cong local

force units. An estimated 8,000–11,000 enemy troops participated in the fighting in the city itself or the approaches to the former imperial capital.

Until the battle for Hue, the allied order of battle estimates listed the battalions from the *29th* and the *90th Regiments* as part of the besieging force at Khe Sanh, approximately 72 kilometers to the northwest. The *803d Regiment* was supposed to be in the eastern DMZ, 72 kilometers to the north. A prisoner from the *803d Regiment* captured on 23 February by Vietnamese Marines told his captors that, on the night of 21–22 February, his unit made a forced march from Gio Linh District to the Citadel. Although wounded, he spoke of the high morale and fairly low casualties in his unit. On 23 February, his unit received orders to withdraw, but he did not know why. In the hasty departure, the prisoner lost his way and ran into the South Vietnamese troops.

The allies remained unsure about North Vietnamese command and control. U.S. after action reports referred to a division-size force but never identified a specific enemy division headquarters. Given the disparity of so many regiments from different divisions, allied intelligence officers believed that a forward headquarters of the *B4 Front* under a North Vietnamese general officer directed the NVA Hue offensive.

Given the resources the North Vietnamese put into the battle and the tenacity with which they fought, the Hue campaign clearly represented a major component of the entire Tet offensive. According to an enemy account, the North Vietnamese military command had taken into consideration that the United States and South Vietnamese had concentrated their forces in the north, expecting an attack along Route 9. It viewed Hue as a weak link in the allied defenses in the northern two provinces. A North Vietnamese author wrote, “The enemy knew nothing of our strategy; by the time our forces approached the city of Hue, the enemy still had not taken any specific defensive measures.”

Once in the city, the NVA were there to stay. The Communists established their own civil government and their cadres rounded up known government officials, sympathizers, and foreigners, including American civilians and military personnel, in sections of the city they controlled. After the recapture of Hue, South Vietnamese authorities exhumed approximately 3,000 bodies that had been thrown into hastily dug graves. In all probability, these were the victims of

the Communist roundups. Although the North Vietnamese admitted to tracking down and punishing “hoodlum ring-leaders,” they claimed most of the reported civilian deaths were the result of happenstance, exaggerations by the South Vietnamese, or caused by the allies. Lance Corporal Ronald D. Defore observed that, “when we first came to the city, on most of the streets you’d find dead civilians that seemed to have [been] killed by the NVA. They seemed to have just slaughtered a lot of the families . . . you’d see whole families—which would be mother, father, and children—that were just killed, and they raped quite a few of the younger women. . . . A mother said the NVA raped and killed her two daughters, 15 and 13.” Hue was a devastated city. Some estimates showed that more than 80 percent of the structures in the city sustained damage or were destroyed. Of a population of approximately 140,000, more than 116,000 people were homeless and 5,800 were either dead or missing.

From the allied perspective, the struggle for Hue was a near thing, especially in the first few days. Only the failure of the North Vietnamese to overrun the Mang Ca and USMACV compounds permitted the allies to retain a toehold in both the Citadel and the new city. By holding these two positions, the Americans and South Vietnamese could bring in reinforcements to mount a counteroffensive. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel observed that the enemy had oriented his defenses to fend off forces coming into the city: “When we got in and were able to stay in there in strength . . . we fought him from the inside out.” Even then, if the enemy had blown the An Cuu Bridge across Route 1 on the first day, the Marines would not have been able to bring their initial battalions and supplies into the city.

Fortuitously for both the Americans and the South Vietnamese, the 1st Cavalry Division had arrived in northern I Corps before Tet and was in position to eventually commit a four-battalion brigade to the battle. Overcoming strong enemy opposition, including elements of three separate regiments, 3d Brigade reached the walls of the Citadel on 25 February, closing off enemy avenues of approach to the city from the west. By this time, the American and South Vietnamese forces had overwhelming superiority—the North Vietnamese units, fighting a rearguard action, abandoned the struggle to hold on to the city. General Truong told General Tolson that, if “I could ever get the Cav [1st Cavalry] to the



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A371124

A grenadier of the 3d Platoon, Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, carries a Vietnamese woman, a patient in Hue's hospital, to safety during the battle.

walls of Hue, the enemy would 'bug out'." Unfortunately, it took 22 days for the 3d Brigade to fight its way there. Major Talman C. Budd II, the U.S. Marine advisor to the Vietnamese Marine Task Force A, later wrote that, if the 1st Cavalry had been reinforced or replaced "to enable sealing off the west wall sooner . . . [it] would have shortened the struggle to reach the south wall."

While the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese harassed ship traffic along the Perfume River and other water routes into the Hue, they made no serious attempt to bar passage. Even with the An Cuu Bridge closed for more than a week, the Marines had stockpiled and brought in enough supplies by LCU to support operations in both the Citadel and southern Hue. By 14 February, the road network into the new city was once more open with a pontoon bridge in place over the canal. On two occasions, the NVA sank an LCU and temporarily shut down boat traffic on the Perfume River,

which forced Major Thompson's battalion to halt its advance due to a shortage of 106mm and 90mm rounds. If the enemy had made a stronger effort to cut both water and land lines of communications, the outcome of the battle for Hue would have been less predictable.

The Marine contingent eventually built up their logistics facilities in Hue, despite marginal flying conditions that curtailed resupply missions and the haphazard attempts of the enemy to cut the lines of communications. Marine helicopters eventually lifted more than 500 tons of supplies into Hue, while Navy LCUs brought in another 400 tons. After Route 1 opened on 12 February, trucks from Company B, 7th Motor Transportation Battalion, carried the bulk of the supplies into the city. More than 100 truck convoys made the round-trip journey from Phu Bai to Hue.

The 1st Marines established its logistics support area (LSA) in Hue next to the LCU ramp. Because the LSA was exposed

to enemy mortar fire and snipers, the Marines moved it to a South Vietnamese government complex next to the USMACV compound. Stockpiling supplies created a premium for space, which forced 1st Marines to relocate the LSA to the Tu Do (Freedom) Stadium several blocks to the east of the USMACV buildings. On 22 February, 1st Marines turned over the LSA to Force Logistics Support Group-Alpha (FLSG-A). General LaHue credited logistics support with enabling the infantry battalions to clear the city.

The low flight ceilings limited helicopter flights, significantly impacting medical support and evacuation. The need of forward medical facilities could not have been more clear to 1st Marines. Colonel Hughes established the regimental aid station at the USMACV compound and staffed it with eight doctors, providing “definitive” emergency care and control and coordination of all medical evacuation and serving as a battalion aid station for 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. The other two battalions had their own aid stations.

The Marines used trucks, mechanical mules, and any available transportation to evacuate the wounded back to treatment facilities. According to a 1st Marines report, bringing a wounded man from the battle site to an aid station could take approximately two to three minutes and another two to three minutes to transfer from the aid station to the helicopter landing zone. Eventually, the regimental surgeon established two categories of wounded for helicopter evacuation: Class I or emergency medevac, weather permitting; and Class II or immediate evacuation. Army helicopters assisted with Class I, while Marine helicopters had sole responsibility for Class II, “which they accomplished under severe weather conditions, and with great risk to the helicopter crews, often times flying with a 100-foot ceiling and zero visibility.”

On the south bank of the Perfume River, only two casualties died after arriving at the forward aid station. The two men from 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, died minutes after their arrival, one of gunshot wounds to the head and the other of neck wounds that severed both carotid arteries. Across the river, where 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, was dependent on air or water evacuation, six men died while waiting for helicopter evacuation suspended during severely inclement weather. The battalion surgeon declared that four of the Marines “would have died regardless of evacuation because of the nature of their wounds, and of the remaining two, it



Marine Corps Art Collection

Tanks in Hue by Wendell A. Parks. CWO Parks illustrated his Hue City experience on a wooden fuse box, and then burnt the image into the wood with a burning kit sent to him from home.

is equivocal whether they could have been saved if evacuated quickly.” In the Hue City battle, as with all operations in Vietnam and despite issues with helicopter evacuation, if a Marine reached an aid station alive, he had a 99 percent chance of surviving.

The allies faced another significant problem—population control. After the widespread destruction of the city, an estimated 116,000 homeless had to be fed and temporarily housed. Most of the population fled the city to take refuge with relatives and friends in the surrounding villages. After the initial confusion, U.S. and South Vietnamese agencies set up refugee centers. About a week after the NVA struck, U.S. Army Major Jack E. Walker, a subsector advisor, recalled that his superior considered him the “CORDS ‘refugee man.’” Walker surveyed the situation and discovered that 5,000 refugees had taken shelter in a Catholic church, another 17,000 were at Hue University, and another 40,000 displaced people were in the Citadel sector. Walker initially tasked himself with three activities: restoring city services, including water and power; eliminating health hazards, including burying the dead; and securing food for the refugees. With the assistance of the local Catholic church and American resources and personnel, Walker and his soldiers attacked these problems. By the end of February, a full-time refugee administrator was in place and local government functioned once more, albeit slowly.

In the first two weeks after the battle for Hue, the city still lacked any semblance of public order. The authors of the



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A372930

People move everything they can carry in an attempt to reenter their former residence or relocate their families after the destruction of their previous dwellings during the battle.

South Vietnamese official history of Tet wrote: “Thievery and looting were widespread. War victims stole from their fellow sufferers. All deserted houses were emptied of valuables. Robbed victims sought to steal from others.” Lieutenant Colonel Gravel complained about the “ARVN looting behind us.”

From an American perspective, reports of U.S. Marines involved in the looting were even more concerning. The Associated Press supposedly had a photograph of an American soldier or Marine carrying a large painting under his arm. A Swiss newspaperman reported to the USMACV that he saw “numerous breaches of discipline which would not be tolerated in the Swiss Army.” In his complaint, he claimed that a Marine tried to sell him a Longines watch and that

he saw other Marines looting photographic equipment from a partially destroyed store. The Swiss reporter encountered another group of Marines near the royal palace who were manning a strongpoint and “drinking whiskey, cognac, and beer, and cooking chickens.” He also witnessed several Marines shooting at dogs, cats, and chickens for their own amusement. A CORDS official told U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth F. Bunker that Marines vandalized offices in the Hue power plant, alleging they took “whiskey, piasters [*sic*], and dollars.”*

*The term *piastre* refers to a monetary unit of the pound (a hundredth of a pound) used in many Middle Eastern countries, such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria.



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190581

Viet Cong captives taken during Operation Hue City.

On 26 February, General Westmoreland ordered Generals Abrams and Cushman to give this potentially explosive issue their full attention. In turn, General Cushman asked Brigadier General LaHue and Major General Donn J. Robertson from 1st Marine Division to report all measures taken by their commands to avoid such incidents. Cushman said, "Looting obviously cannot be tolerated, and we must insure [sic] that every step is taken to prevent it. Officers and NCOs must be held responsible for looting by their subordinates." General Abrams assigned the USMACV (Forward) staff judge advocate to begin a formal investigation. General Robertson sent a 1st MarDiv attorney, Captain Bernard A. Allen, to assist with the probe in Hue.

On 2 March 1968, General Abrams reported the results of the investigation. He first addressed the Associated Press photograph. According to bureau heads in Vietnam, no such picture existed. They did remember a photograph taken before Tet of a 1st Cavalry soldier carrying a religious painting of the Virgin Mary in a sector south of Da Nang. After interviewing all commanders, newsmen, and CORDS personnel, the investigators concluded that "probably some small articles were looted by the Marines . . . however, these reported incidents were in extreme contrast to the extensive and systematic looting by ARVN troops and civilians." Captain Allen learned that ARVN troops used trucks to carry away the loot, regardless of the fact that no formal complaints



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A372924

GySgt Frank A. Thomas from Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, finds humor in a toy car during the height of battle for Operation Hue City.

from South Vietnamese citizens had been made against the Marines. General Abrams observed that “at this time, [the] investigation has failed to produce sufficient evidence upon which to base prosecution for any instance of looting by U.S. personnel.”

Abrams commended the Marine commanders in Hue. He observed that Colonel Hughes took “positive measure[s] to deter looting.” On 4 February, Hughes told all officers and NCOs that looting would not be tolerated. He directed battalion and company commanders to carry out periodic



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A190503

This Hue marketplace was destroyed in the Viet Cong attack.

inspections of personnel. Many valuables were turned into the regimental command post and returned to the rightful owners. Hughes did authorize, however, commandeering and cannibalizing vehicles when necessary to transport casualties. He also ordered the Marines to shoot dogs, cats, and pigs “eating bodies, both of U.S. and [Vietnamese] . . . which could not be immediately retrieved because of the tactical situation.” Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham stated that his men used blankets and broke windows “to avoid fragmentation from incoming rounds.” General Abrams concluded that Marine commanders had taken reasonable measures to prevent needless destruction.

During the close-quarter street fighting, such as in Hue, commanders did not have absolute control of the activities of their men. One Marine lance corporal reported, “Anything that was of any value we took . . . to keep for souvenirs and stuff.” He mentioned the random destruction to the university’s microscopes and other laboratory equipment that had been caused by Marines. The lance corporal seemed particularly amused when they seized vehicles, such as motor scooters, trucks, and even jeeps. He laughed as he described how “a grunt . . . would just jump on it and start riding it around the streets . . . that was pretty funny—right in the middle of



Defense Department (Marine Corps) A800450

Sgt P. L. Thompson sits on the golden throne of the former Vietnamese emperors at the heart of the palace, which was used as the NVA headquarters during the fighting for Hue City.

this war riding up and down the streets in motor scooters and even a 1964 black Mercedes goes flying down the street filled up with a bunch of Marines in it.” A Navy corpsman with the Marines recorded in his diary: “Looting is widespread. The ARVN’s wait until the Marines secure an area and then move in to loot. The Marines do well for themselves also.”

Even though some accounts seemed valid, Marine commanders in Hue believed that their men acted with restraint in spite of the temptations. Five years later, Lieutenant Colonel

Gravel recalled, “We took things for our own use; I wouldn’t kid you about that. I saw some things and I saw that they were returned.” Gravel and his Marines used bedding, food, and alcohol they found, but he insists there was no looting for anyone’s personal advantage. Some tried, but word soon spread of the consequences. In a similar vein, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham and his company commanders made much the same case. Despite some admitted pilfering of small items, such as watches and money, the company commanders denied there was a problem. Captain Meadows said, “Your troops don’t have

time to pick up big things to carry them around. They have other, more pressing things [to do].”

The speed and degree of the enemy offensive in Hue caught the South Vietnamese and American commands off guard. In underestimating the strength of the enemy in Hue, the allies sent too few troops to drive the attackers out. Although the South Vietnamese and U.S. commands in I Corps eventually deployed additional units piecemeal into the Citadel and the southern part of Hue and inserted the 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, to the west, command and control and coordination remained an issue until the final weeks of the operation. In a sense, Task Force X-Ray, the 1st ARVN Division, and the 3d Brigade fought their own battles in isolation of the others. With the exception of General Cushman and General Abrams, the Hue campaign never benefitted from an overall American or single commander. Both Cushman and Abrams often were distracted by the responsibility of their ranks and other skirmishes, such as Khe Sanh, to focus much of their attention, except periodically, on the Hue situation. From his headquarters at the Mang Ca compound, General Truong controlled the South Vietnamese effort in the Citadel. However, the lack

of an overall commander meant no general battle plan existed and an increase in competition for supporting fires, air, and logistical support.

With the end of his stay at Phu Bai fast approaching, General Abrams provided General Westmoreland his assessment of the enemy situation in the north. Abrams was less concerned about Khe Sanh but worried about the NVA using the A Shau Valley and Route 547 leading from the valley to “turn our flank.” He also expressed some anxiety about the recent move of the *803d NVA Regiment* into Hue. Abrams claimed the “continuing movement of [NVA] replacements to coastal plains supports my belief that Hue is the objective he [the enemy] would most like to have.” He acknowledged, however, that the NVA might settle for a less important objective if possible. Both sides were fighting for time, which meant overcoming manpower and logistical deficiencies. In the end, however, Abrams believed time was on their side. Generals Cushman and Westmoreland concurred with Abrams’s assessment. The recapture of Hue would represent the calm before the North Vietnamese launched another wave of attacks.

Sources

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

APC	armored personnel carrier
ARA	Aerial Rocket Artillery Squadron
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CAP	Combined Action Platoon or Program
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
DMZ	demilitarized zone
FAC(A)	forward air controller (airborne)
FAG	Field Artillery Group
FLSG	Force Logistics Support Group
FMFPac	Fleet Marine Force, Pacific
HMM	Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron
ICC	International Control Commission
ICTZ	I Corps Tactical Zone
JGS	South Vietnamese Joint General Staff
KIA	killed in action
LAAW	light antiarmor weapons
LAW	light antitank weapons
LCM	landing craft, mechanical (Mike boat)

LCU.....	landing craft, utility
LOD.....	line of departure
LSA.....	logistics support area
MAF.....	Marine Amphibious Force
MAW.....	Marine Aircraft Wing
NCO.....	noncommissioned officer
NLF.....	National Liberation Front
NVA.....	North Vietnamese Army
PBR.....	patrol boat, river
PCF.....	patrol craft, fast (Swift boat)
PRU.....	Provincial Reconnaissance Unit
RVN.....	Republic of Vietnam
SOG.....	Special Operations Group or Studies and Observations Group
SOP.....	senior officer present
TAOR.....	tactical area of responsibility
USMACV.....	U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
VMA.....	Marine Attack Squadron
VMF.....	Marine Fighting Squadron
VNMC.....	Vietnamese Marine Corps

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Richard D. Camp Jr.

Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)



Photo courtesy of the author

Dick Camp entered the Marine Corps through the Officer Candidates School after attending the State University of New York and graduating with a degree in elementary education. Commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1962, he served in a variety of command and staff assignments during a 26-year career, including 13 months as a rifle company commander with Lima Company, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines, and aide de camp to Major General Raymond G. Davis. Camp retired in 1988 with the rank of colonel and became a business manager for two school districts in Ohio. Retired again in 2005, he became the acting director of Marine Corps History Division. In 2006, Camp became the vice president for museum operations at the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation. He retired in 2012 to write full time.

He is the author of 15 books, including *Assault from the Sky: U.S. Marine Corps Helicopter Operations in Vietnam* (2013); two novels on Vietnam titled *Echo Among Warriors: A Novel of Marines in the Vietnam War* (2011) and *The Killing Ground: A Novel of Marines in the Vietnam War* (2013); and more than 100 articles in various military history magazines; and coauthor of *Lima-6: A Marine Company Commander in Vietnam* (1989). In addition, Camp has been a guest lecturer at numerous seminars and professional meetings.



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