

A black and white photograph of two Marine soldiers in a combat environment. The soldier in the foreground is kneeling and aiming a machine gun towards the right. He is wearing a helmet and has a large backpack and a magazine belt. The soldier behind him is also in a similar position. They are positioned next to a large, weathered wooden post. The background shows a damaged stone wall and some debris on the ground.

# The Battle of Hue City: 31 January-25 February 1968

Keystone Battle Series  
Marine Corps History Division

# Lecture Overview

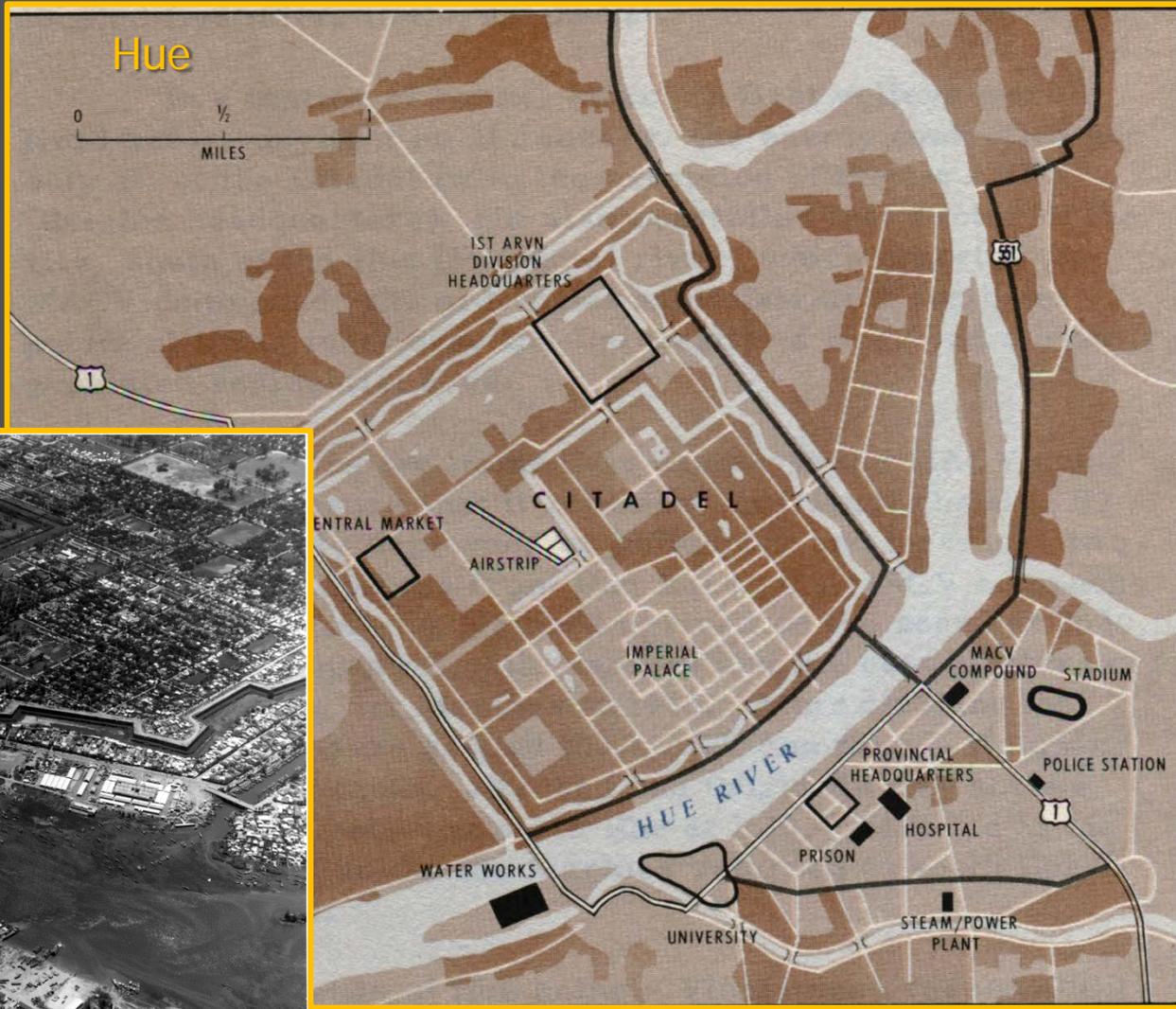
- I. Hue
- II. Friendly Unit Disposition
- III. The Tet Offensive
- IV. Hue - 31 January
- V. The Battle for southern Hue
  - A. 31 Jan-1 Feb
  - B. 2 Feb
  - C. 3-4 Feb
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  - D. 18-20 Feb
  - E. 21-23 Feb
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24 Feb-2 Mar
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Right: "Flushing out Snipers, Hue" by Ned Conlon. A Marine fires a 3.5" rocket launcher at sniper positions in Hue City during the 1968 Tet Offensive.



# I. Hue

- Cultural and religious center of Vietnam
- Divided into two districts
  - Citadel (Old City) – north of Perfume (Huong) River
    - Built in 19th Century
    - Designed after Forbidden City in Peking
  - modern city – south of Perfume (Huong) River



**Above Center:** Aerial view of Hue City

**Left:** The gate to the inner wall of the Imperial Palace of Hue, photographed during a tour of the city as part of a cultural development program. This picture taken in February 1967, long before the battle, shows the elaborate entrance and part of the surrounding wall to the Imperial Palace grounds in the Citadel. This wall is separate from the walls of the Citadel itself



# III. Tet Offensive (Launched 30 January 1968)

- NVA targeted major U.S. Installations, major population centers, and nearly every provincial city.
- 15-18 NVA Bns took part in battle for Hue City
- Enemy strength in Hue greatly underestimated by American commanders



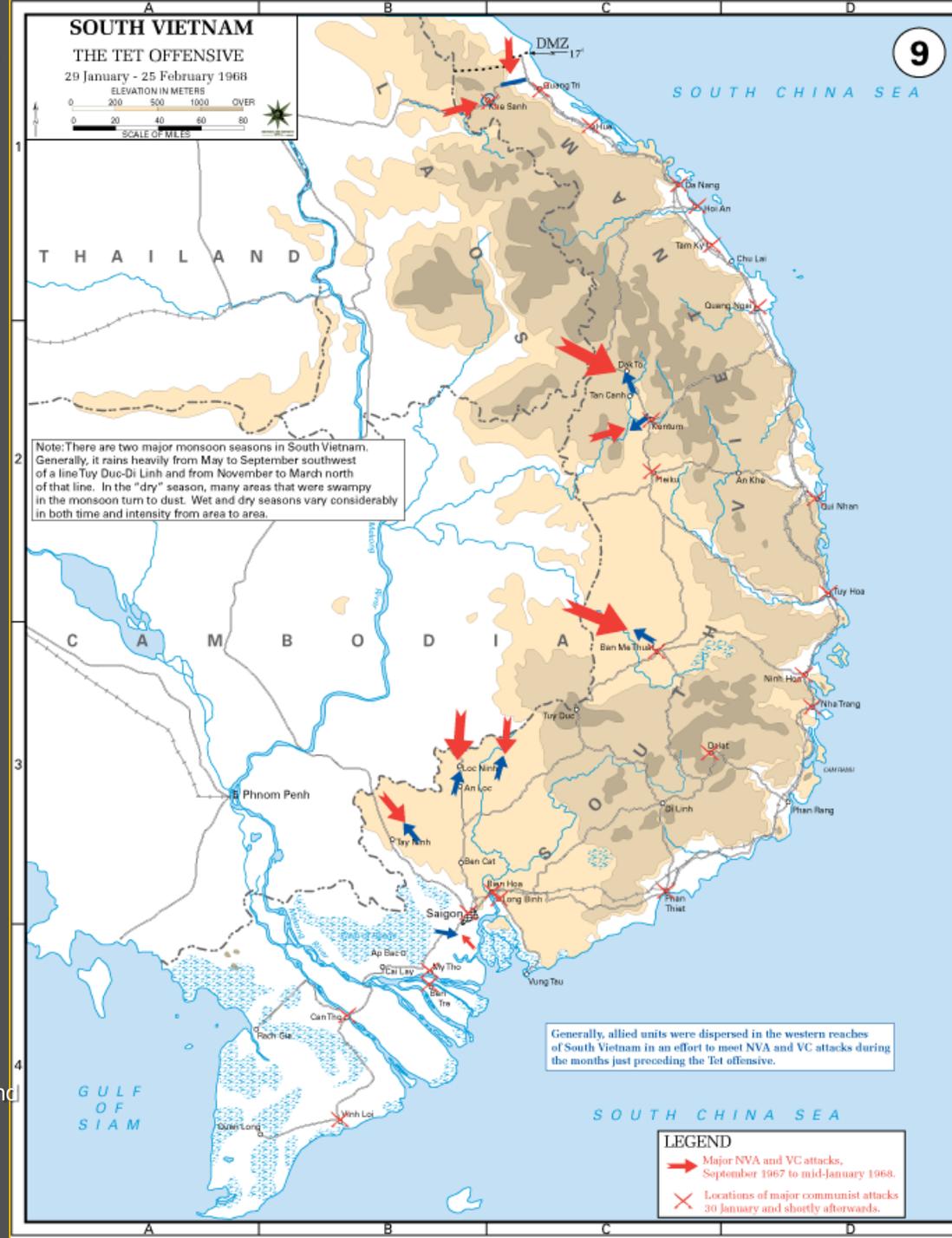
**Above Left:** U.S. Military Police escort a captured Viet Cong from the buildings next to the American Embassy in Saigon. In the early morning attack, January 31, 19 of this Viet Cong's comrades were killed in the Embassy compound while they were attempting to storm the main building.



**Top Center:** NVA Flag

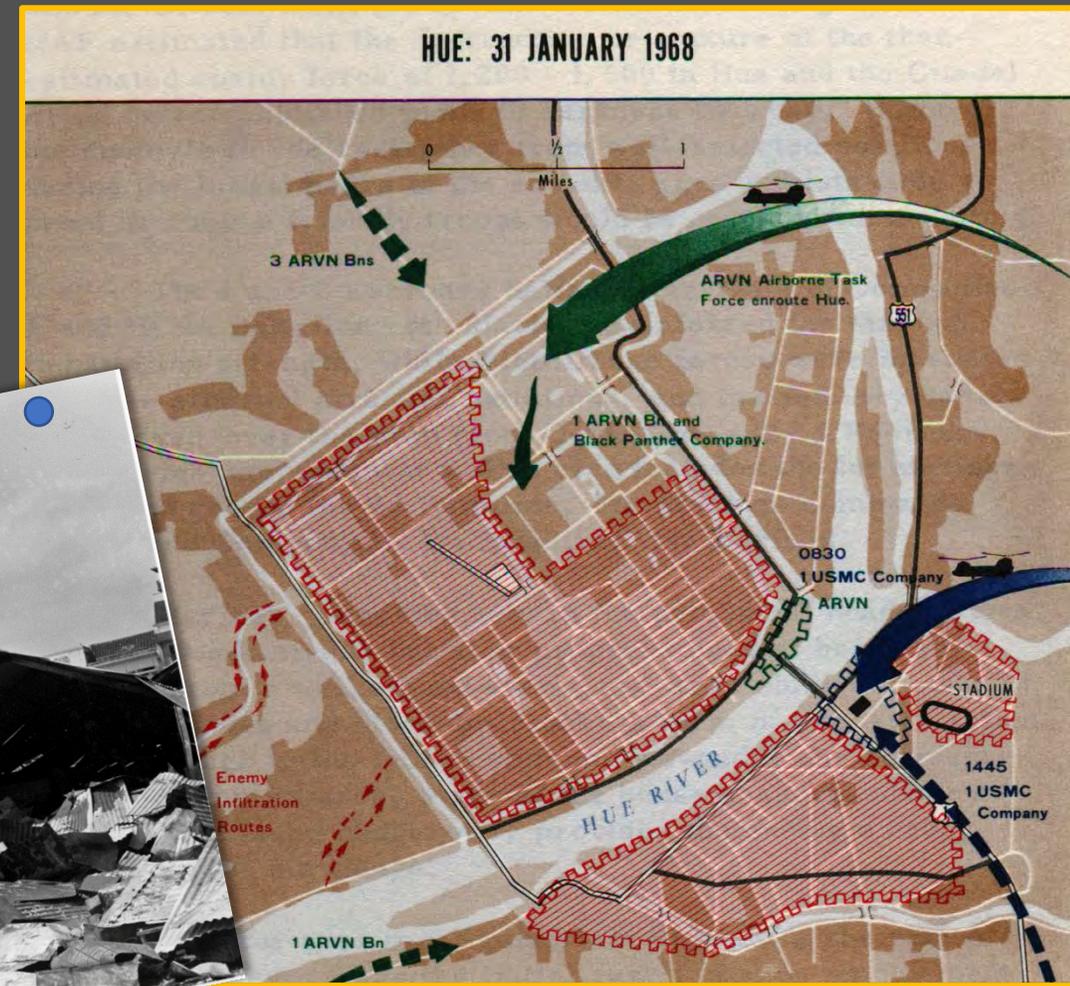
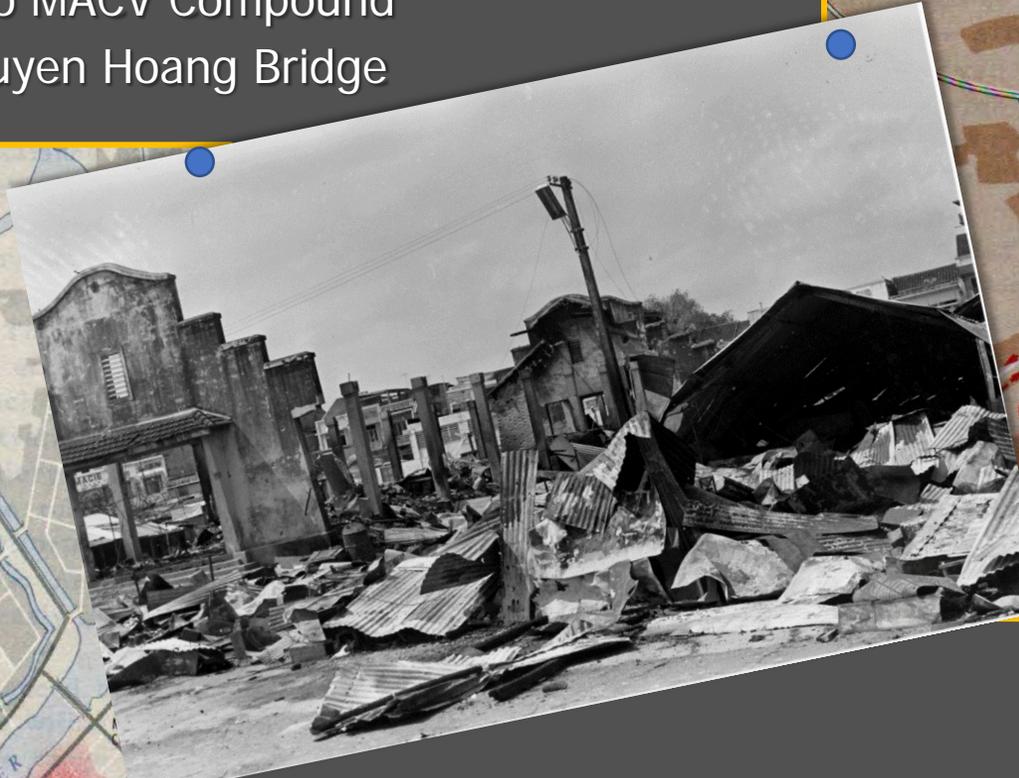
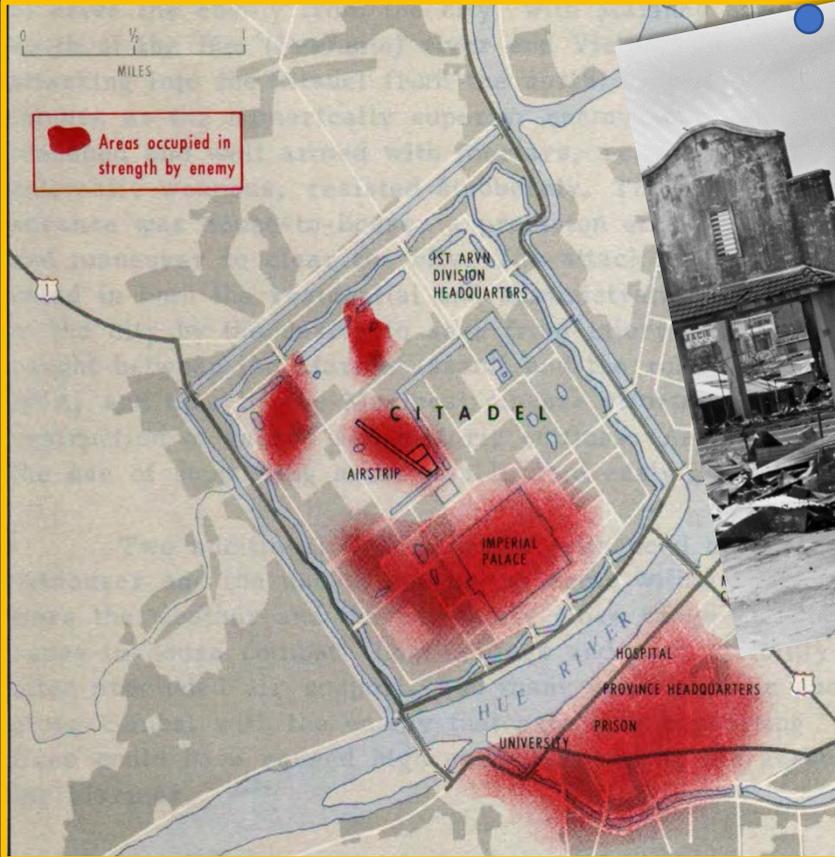


**Bottom Center:** Vietcong Flag



## IV. Hue - 31 January

- Only General Truong's HQ at *Mang Ca* (Citadel) and MACV Compound (southern city) not overrun
- 3000 South Vietnamese citizens and foreigners executed
- Company A, 1st Bn, 1st Marines and Company G, 2d Bn, 5th Marines fight their way to MACV Compound
- Costly assault across Nguyen Hoang Bridge



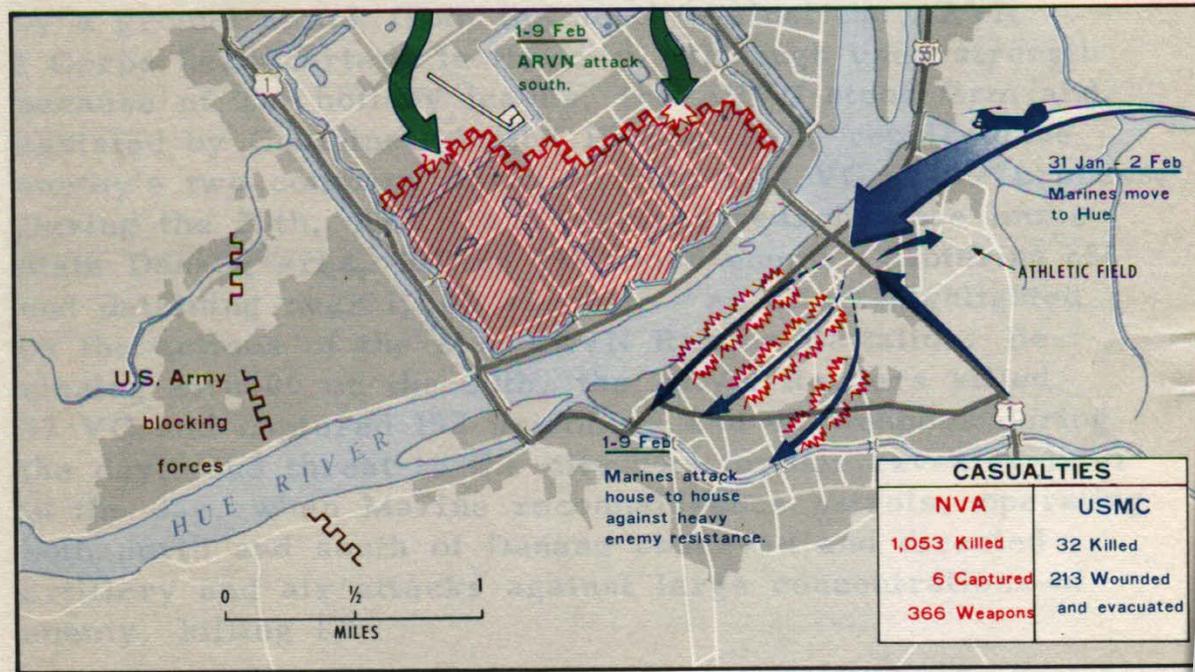
**Left:** Positions occupied in strength by the enemy on 31 January.

**Center:** This Hue market-place was totally destroyed in the Viet Cong attack.

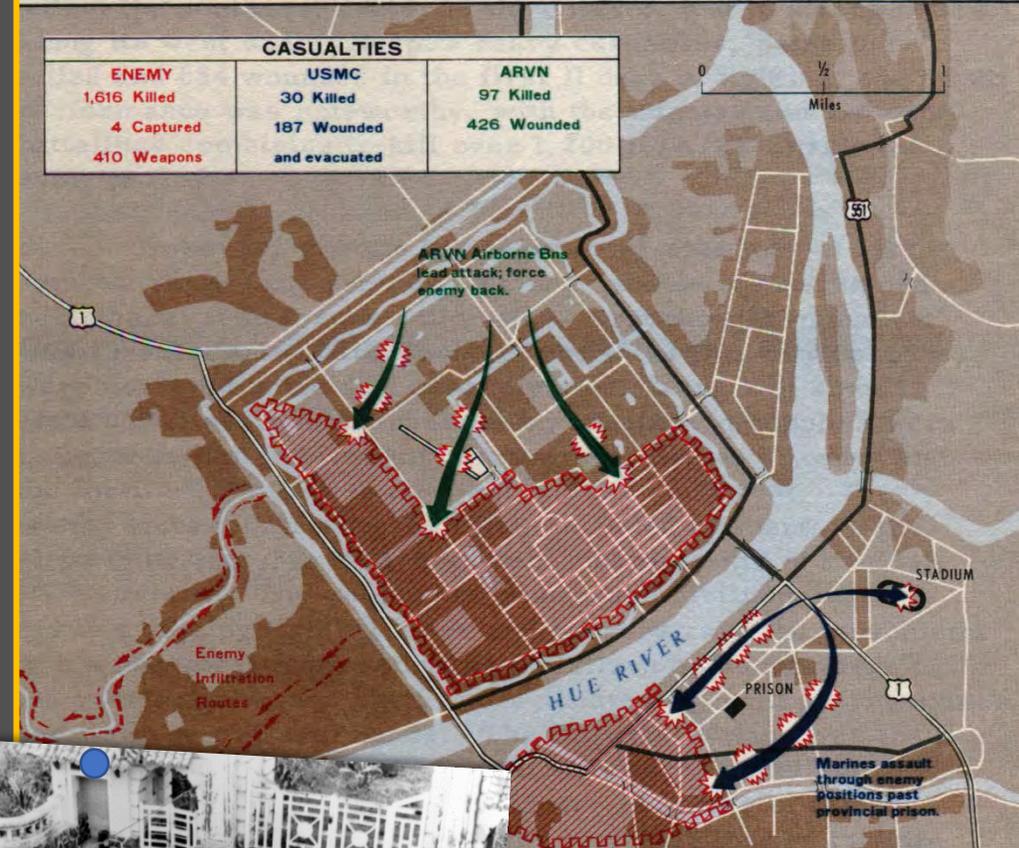
## V. The Battle for southern Hue: 31 Jan- 1 Feb

- Operation Hue City begins
- 1/1 launches two-company attack towards provincial building and prison
- *Tay Loc* Airfield recaptured by 1st ARVN Division

### BATTLE OF SOUTH HUE: 31 JAN - 9 FEB 1968



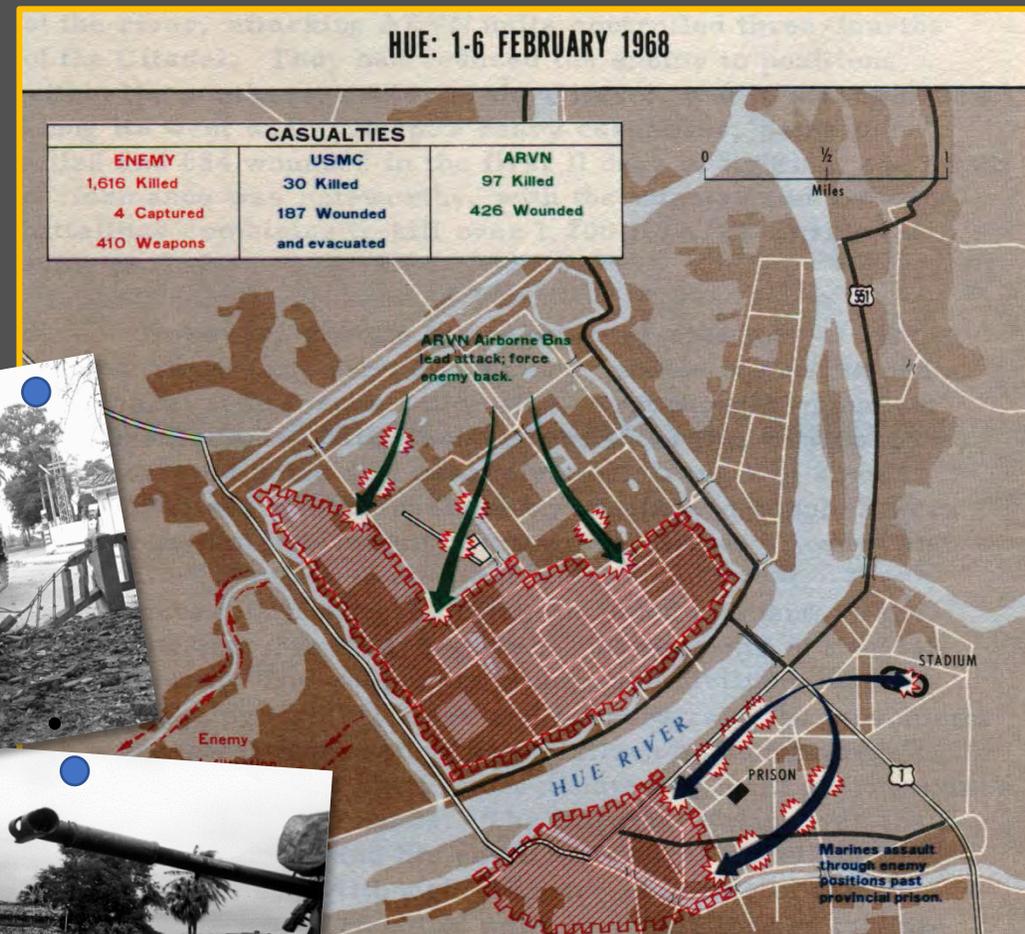
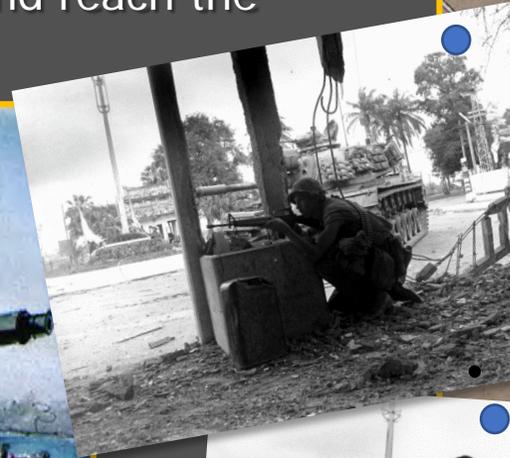
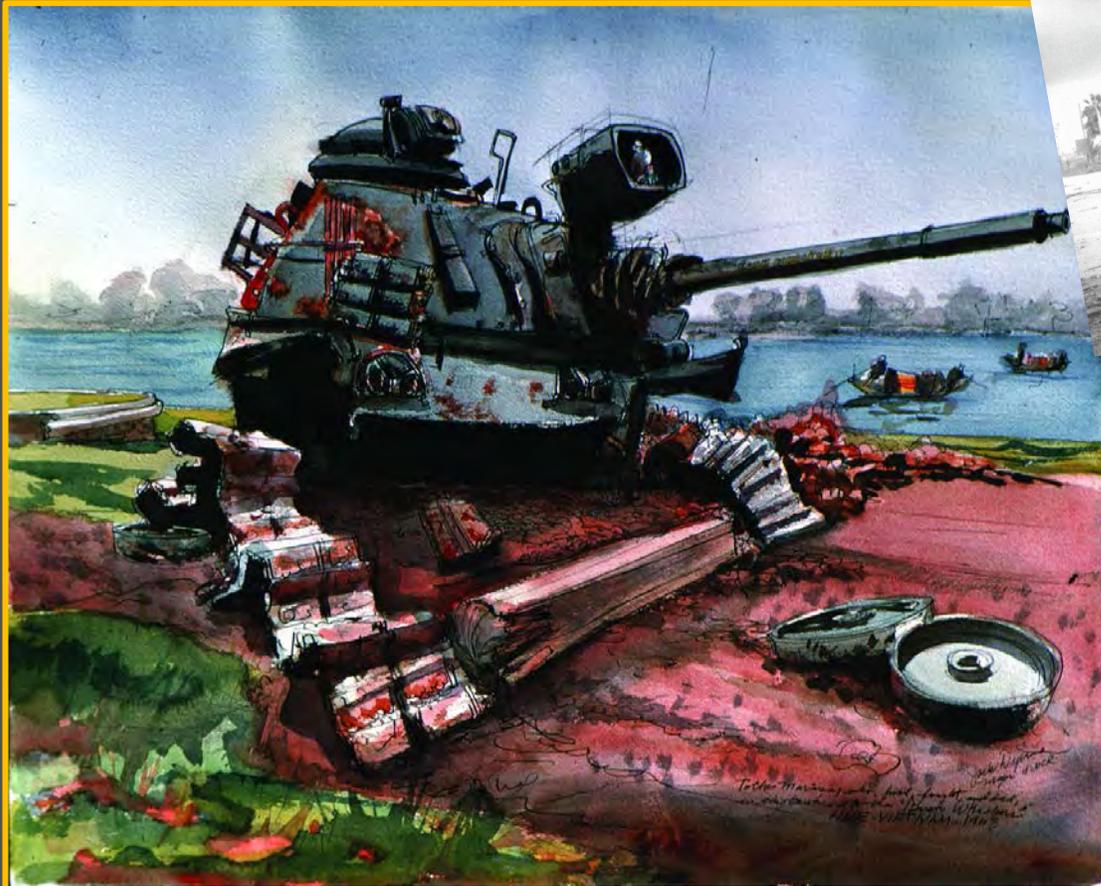
### HUE: 1-6 FEBRUARY 1968



**Right:** Refugees pass by a supporting tank as it moves up the street during Operation Hue City. The civilian population of Hue was caught in the middle of the battle.

## V. The Battle for southern Hue: 2 Feb

- 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division attacks southeast towards Hue to cut off enemy supply lines and escape routes but attack is badly mauled
- Marines in southern city get reinforced and reach the Hue University Campus



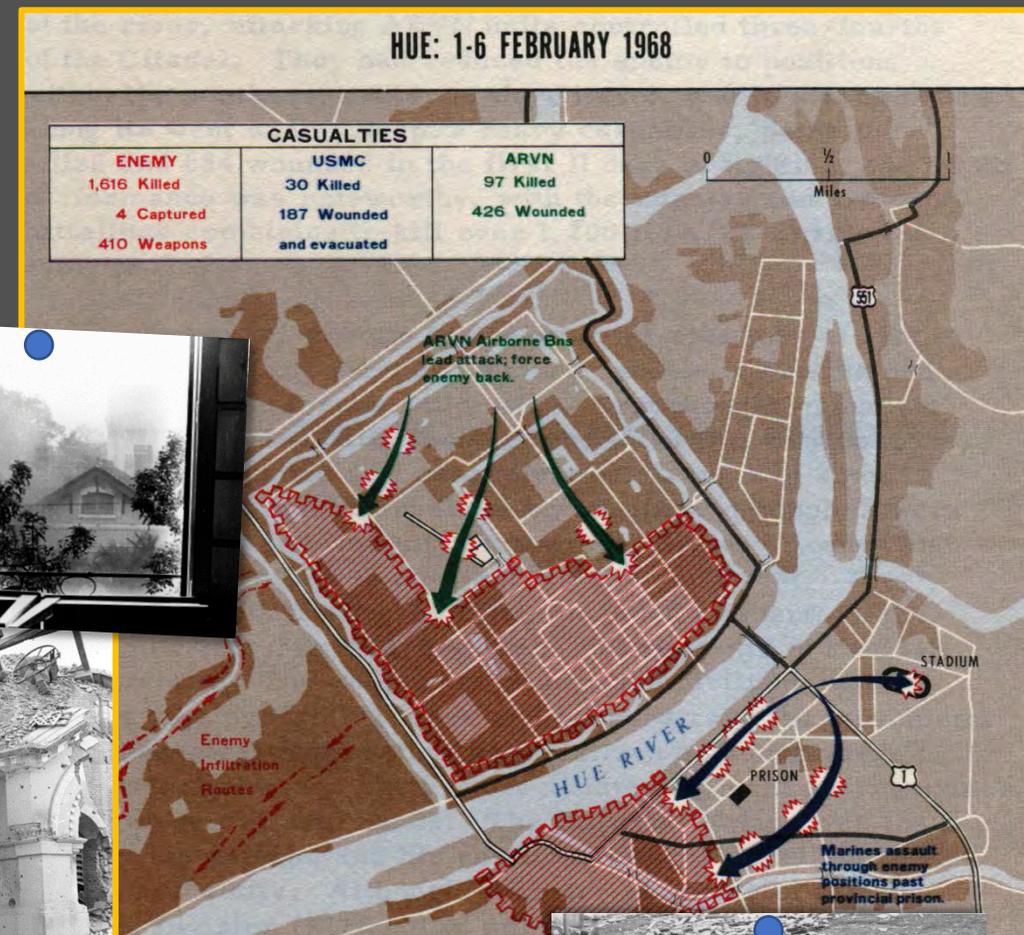
**Top Center:** A Marine scans Hue streets for enemy snipers with a M-48 ready for heavy firepower in the University area.

**Bottom Center:** Supported by tanks, Marines move to clear buildings in street fighting near Hue University.

**Left:** "Bushwhackers, Hue" by John T. Dyer. A Marine tank, destroyed in the heavy street fighting of the 1968 Tet Offensive in Hue, South Vietnam, awaits disposition beside the Perfume River. The name BUSHWHACKERS had been painted on the tank's barrel by its former crew.

## V. The Battle for southern Hue: 3-4 Feb

- Marines consolidate command of battalions 1/1 and 2/5 under Colonel Hughes and continue to advance into the southern city
- After 5 or 6 assaults on the post office and treasury building Marines forced to fall back to university
- Evening of 3 Feb – all supporting arms restrictions removed but weather prevents air support



**Above:** Hue bridge over the Perfume river, which was blown up by North Vietnamese Sappers on the night of 3 Feb.

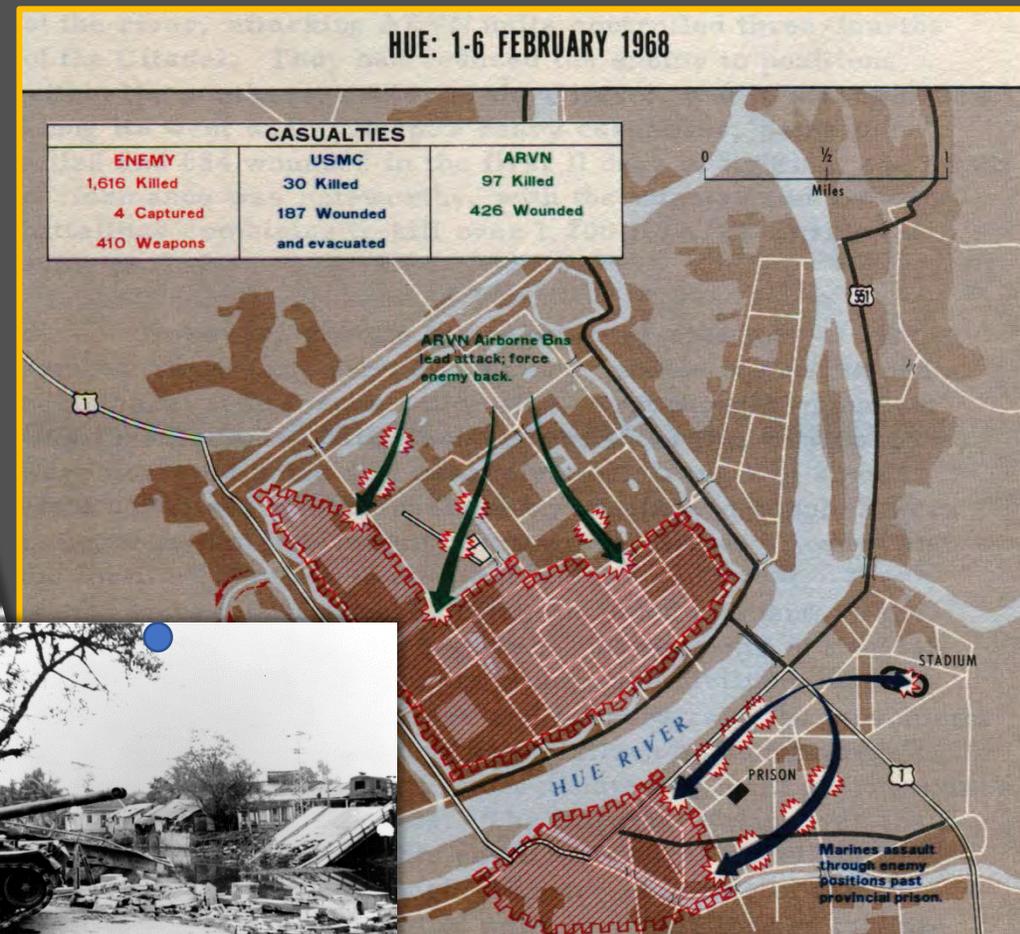
**Lower Center:** Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines leave a church after successfully capturing it from North Vietnamese control

**Above Center:** A Marine from 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, fires his M-79 grenade launcher from a window in Hue University at a North Vietnamese sniper in a nearby building

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

# V. The Battle for southern Hue: 5-8 Feb – Block by Block

- NVA use strongpoints and defend every other street
- 2d Bn's AO eleven block wide and eight to nine blocks deep
- Supported by M-48 tanks and M-50 Ontos (armored vehicle equipped with six recoilless rifles) Marines capture provincial HQs after five-hour battle



**Left:** Marines of Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, display a captured Viet Cong flag which they replaced with the Stars and Stripes following a bitter fight for the Thua Thien province headquarters during Operation Hue City.

**Center Left:** Gas mask clad Marines of 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, move out in search of NVA during operations in Hue City.

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

**Center Right:** A tank attached to Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, keeps the canal bridge sector secure during heavy NVA contact while on operation in Hue City

## V. The Battle for southern Hue: 6-10 Feb

- Marines renew their offensive enemy resistance largely evaporates
- 10 Feb - Marines control southern sector of the city
- Cost of clearing modern city
  - Marines – 38 dead and 320 wounded
  - NVA – 1000 dead and untold number wounded



**Above Left:** A 106mm recoilless rifle crew from 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, set up their weapon for firing during Operation Hue City.



**Center:** Marines of Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, lower a wounded comrade from a rooftop of the University of Hue

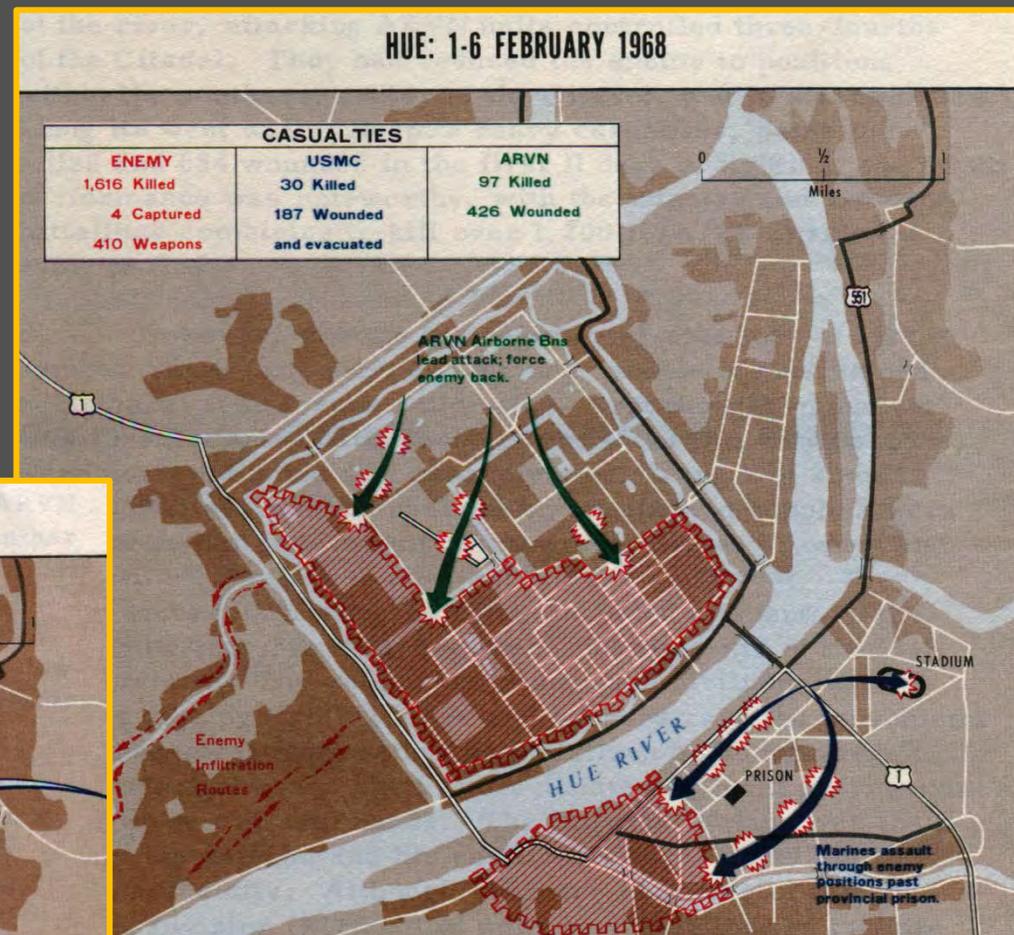
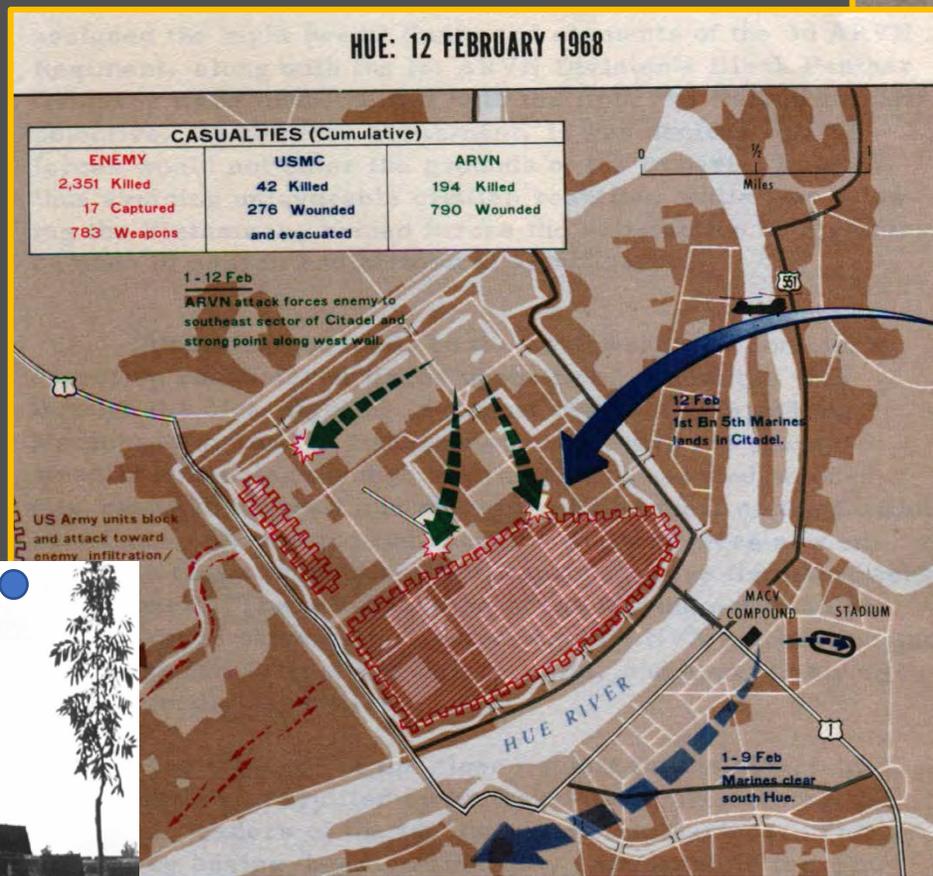


**Above:** Marines of Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, cover a blown wall during fighting in Hue City.



## VI. The Battle for the Citadel: 3-12 Feb

- 5-7 Feb Stalemate - NVA using hundreds of fortified structures with interconnected defensive lines
- 3-12 Feb – After heavy fighting 1st Cavalry units face stalemate outside Citadel
- Marines improve coordination of support fires for the fight in the Citadel



**Far Left Top:** People move everything that they can carry in an attempt to re-enter their former residence or relocate their families in a new home after destruction of their previous dwellings during the battle

**Far Left Bottom:** The southern gate to the Citadel, with its flagpole, is where the North Vietnamese raised the Viet Cong banner

## VI. The Battle for the Citadel: 11-14 Feb

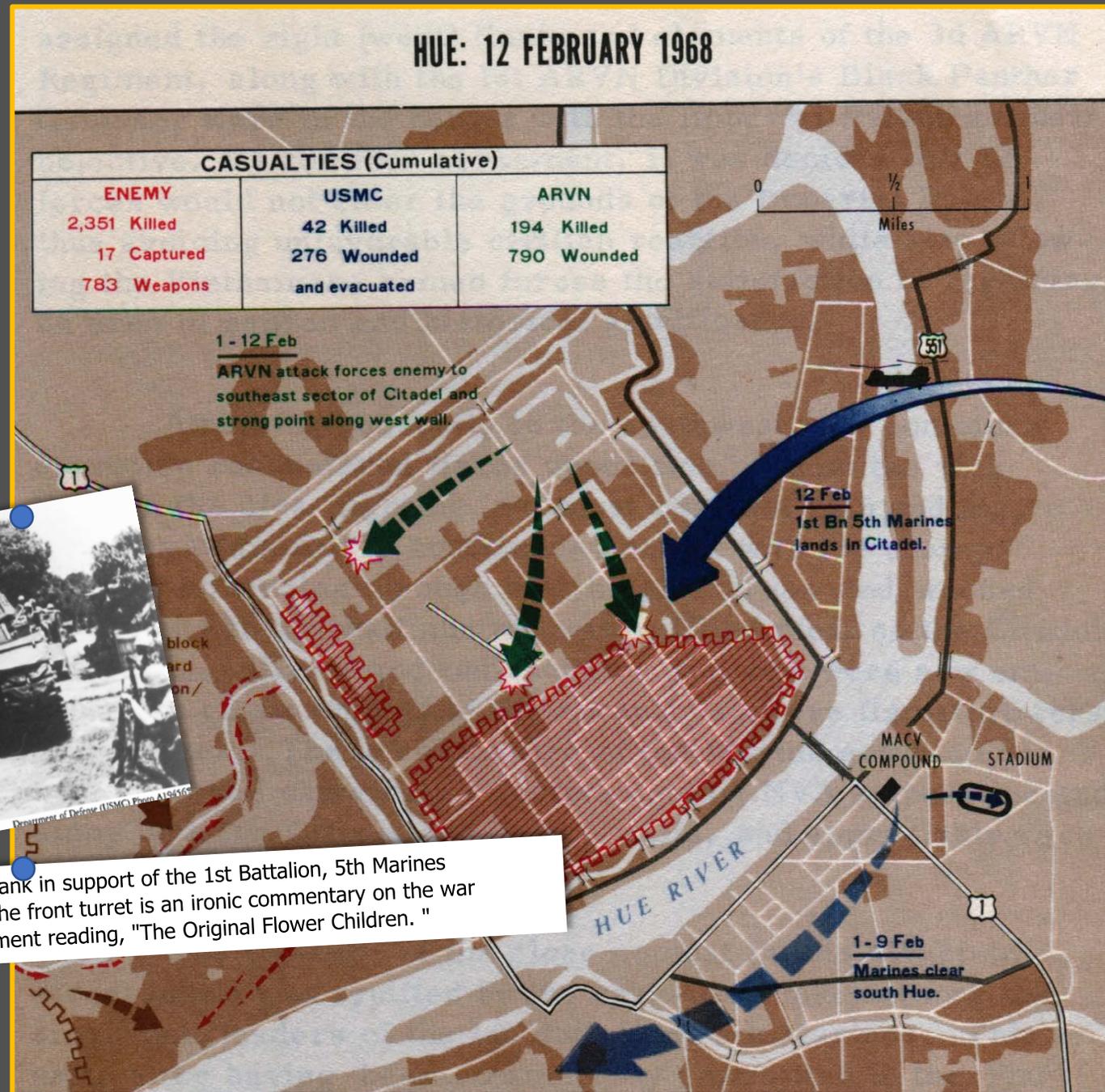
- 11 Feb – Companies A, B, and C, 1/5 arrive at *Mang Ca* Compound
- 13 Feb – 1/5 Marines attack and are immediately met with fierce resistance
- 14 Feb – renewed attacks stall



**Above Left:** Marines enroute to Hue aboard a navy Mike 8 Boat prepare to return sniper fire from shore. The boat was loaded with 105mm ammunition.



**Above:** A Marine M48 tank in support of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines enters the Citadel. On the front turret is an ironic commentary on the war and the anti-war movement reading, "The Original Flower Children."

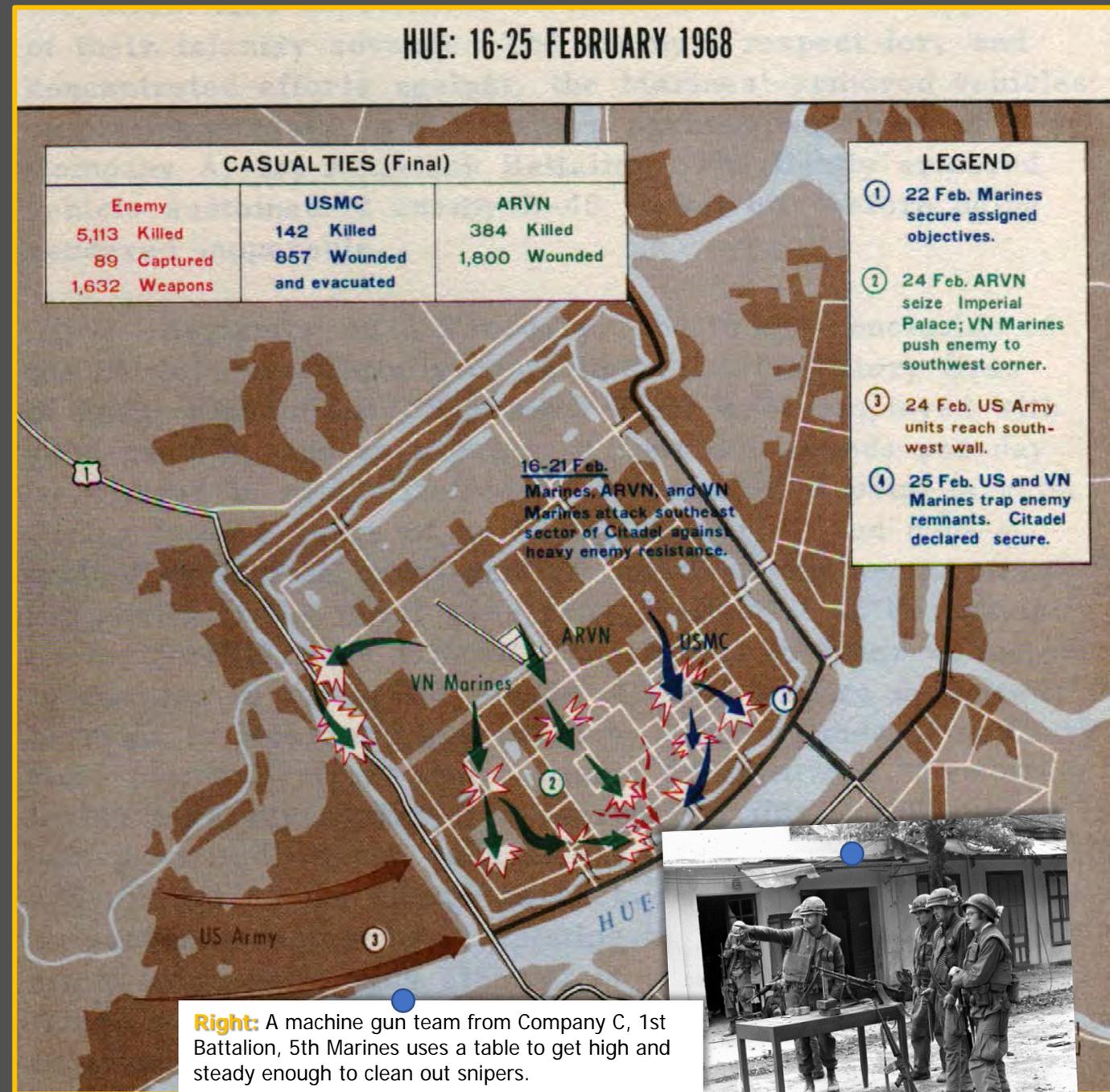


## VI. The Battle for the Citadel: 15-17 Feb

- 15 Feb – 1/5 captures a tower on the east wall of the Citadel
- 16 Feb – 1/5 continues to push into Citadel against NVA better adapted to city fighting than in southern Hue
- 17 Feb – After heavy fighting a temporary halt to the advance is called



**Above:** Machine gun team with machinegunner PFC Dominick J. Carango (Phelps, N. Y.) give advancing troops of Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines fire support during street fighting in Hue City

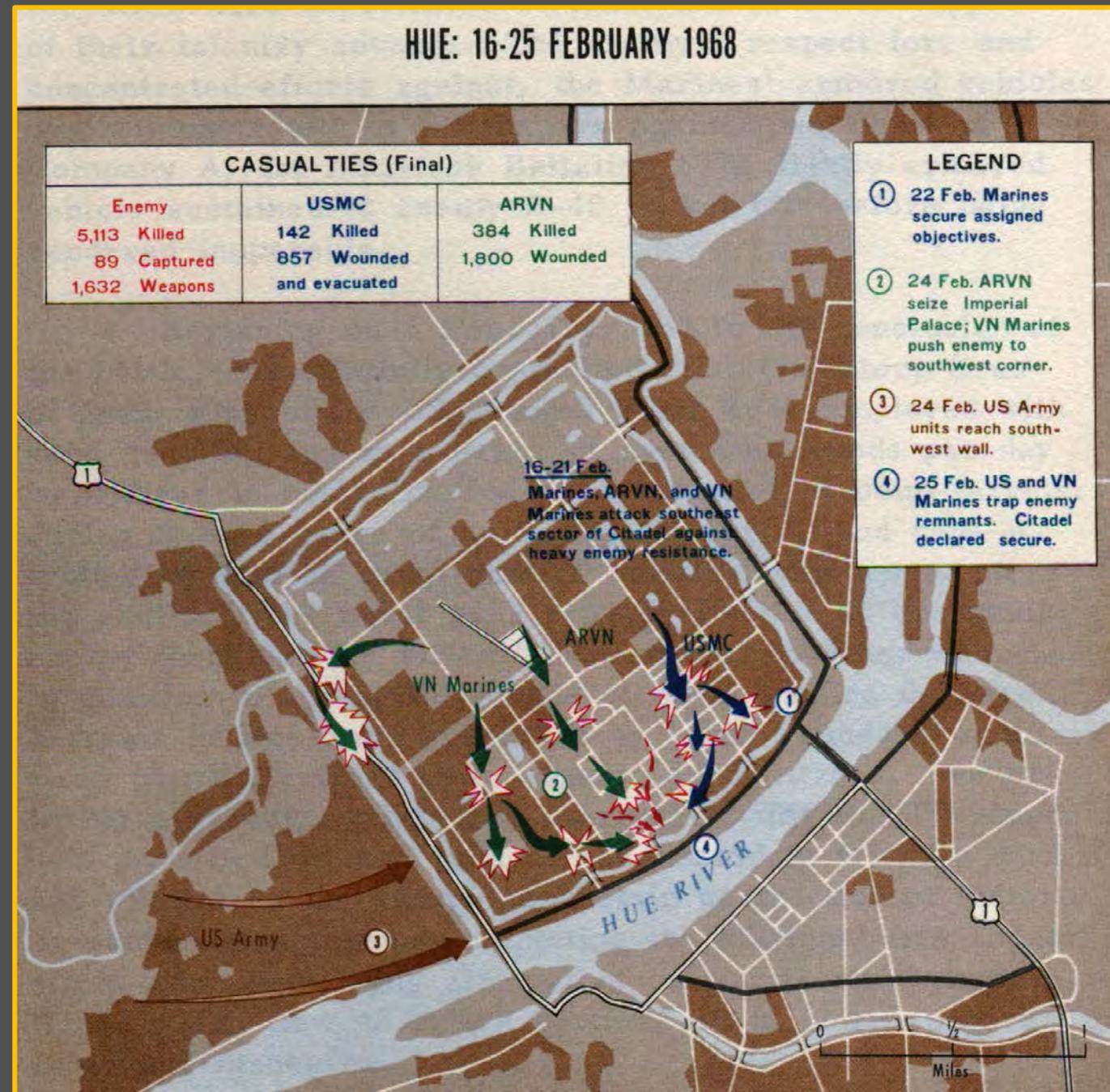


**Right:** A machine gun team from Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines uses a table to get high and steady enough to clean out snipers.



## VI. The Battle for the Citadel: 15-17 Feb Continued

- 16 Feb – The NVA still had 3 Bns in Citadel and were being resupplied
- 13-17 Feb – South Vietnamese Marine battalions and 3d ARVN Regiment make slow progress
- 17 Feb – NVA expected to launch major operation in Hue. Reinforcements ordered in to seal off the city
  - 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (northwest)
  - 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne (south and southwest)
  - 2 Bns of Marines (east and south)

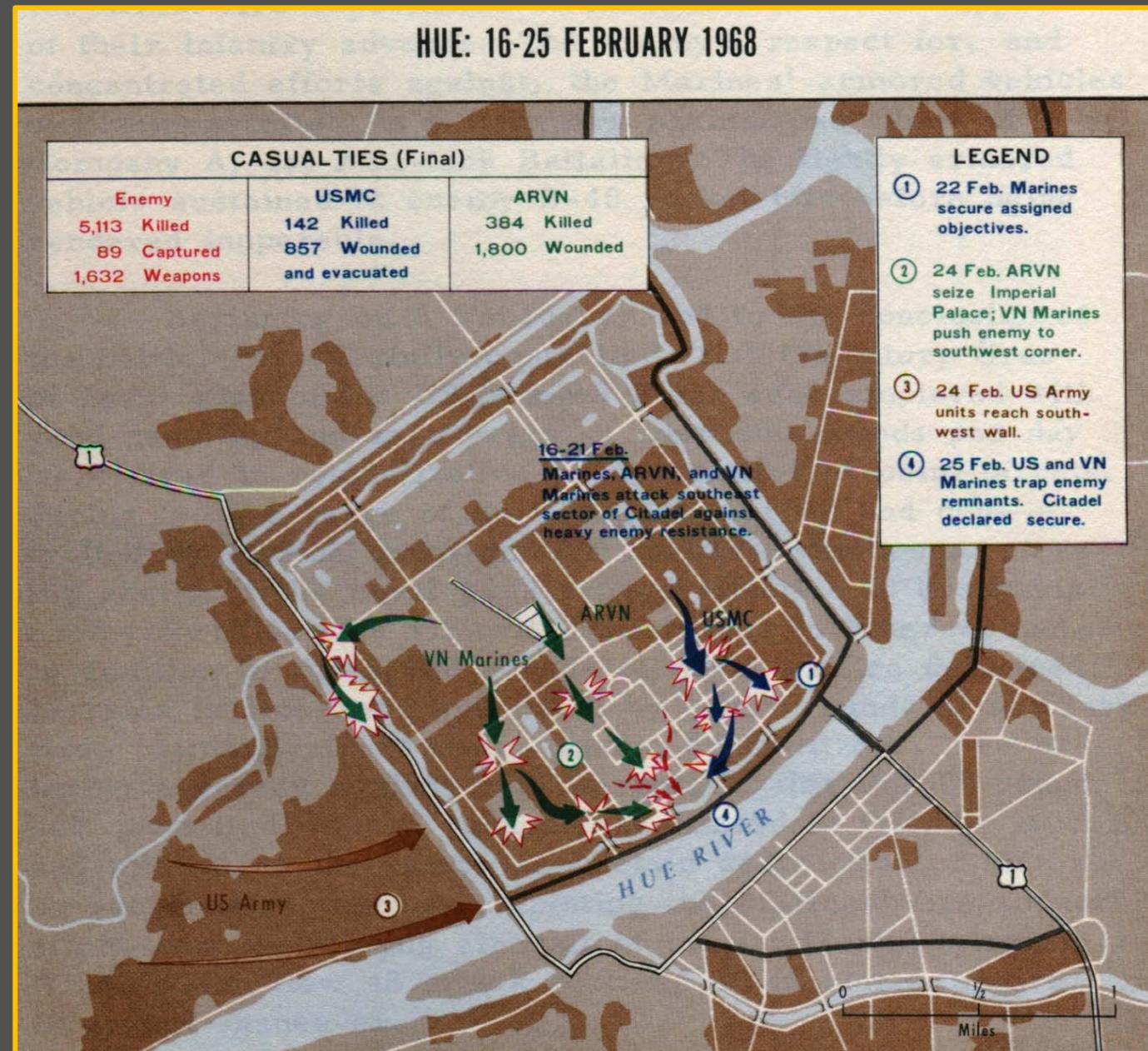


## VI. The Battle for the Citadel: 18-20 Feb

- 1/5 and South Vietnamese units met dogged resistance
- NVA in Citadel fighting rear guard action



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



## VI. The Battle for the Citadel: 21-23 Feb

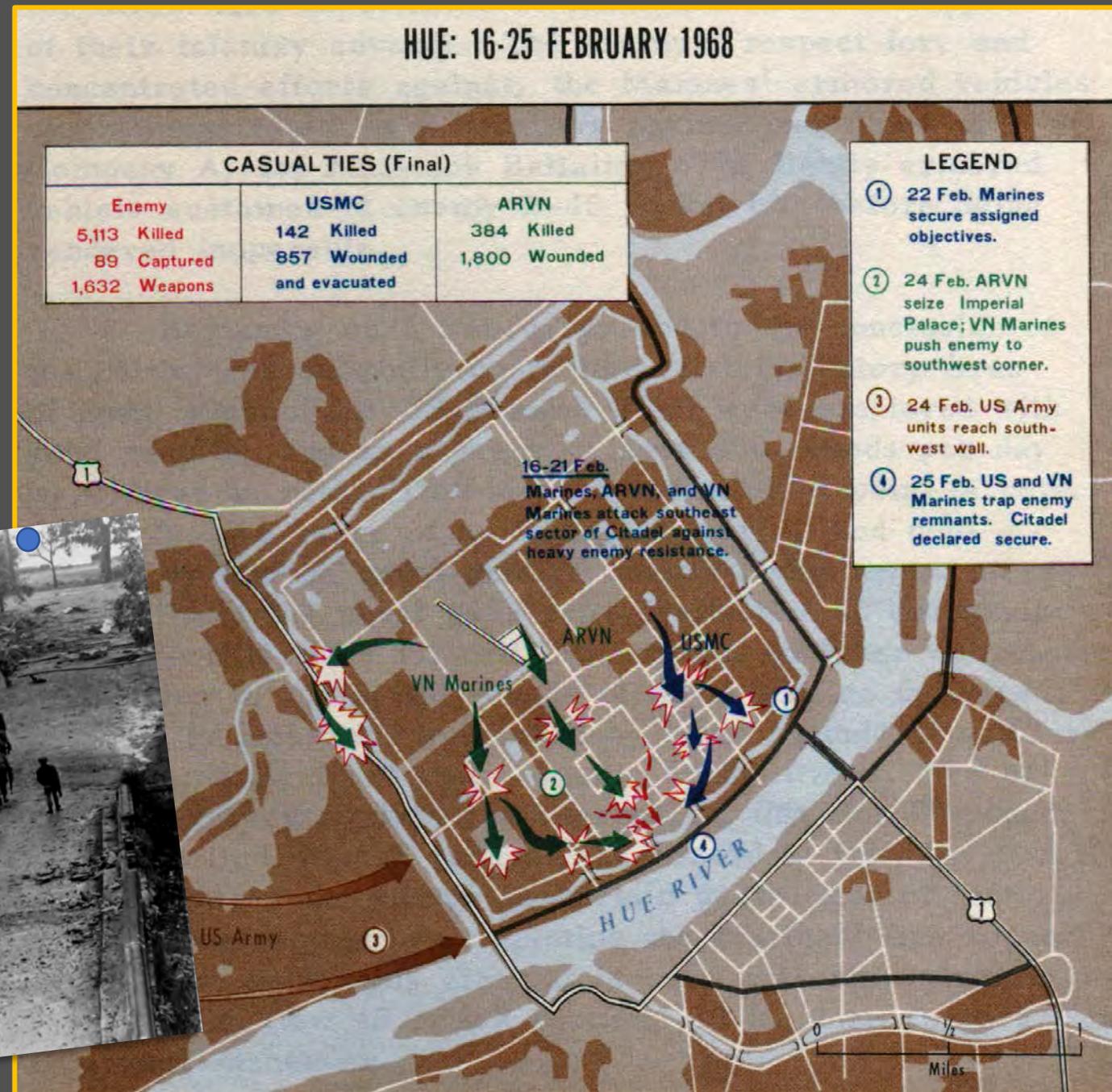
- 21 Feb – 3 Bns of 1st Cavalry Division sever enemy communications and resupply lines
- 0300 22 Feb – Co A, 1/5 launches successful night attack paving the way for
- 0930 23 Feb – 1/5 pushes forward and enemy resistance melted. Marines capture the southern wall of the Citadel



**Above:** Gate to the old walled city of Hue on the south side, secured by Marines of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines.



**Right:** Marines of Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, move out on patrol



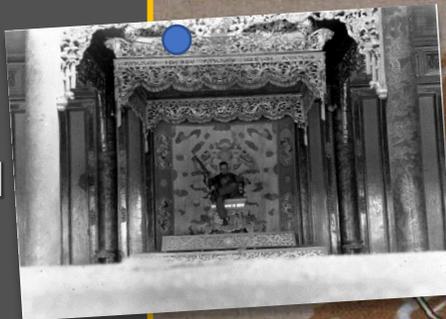
## VI. The Battle for the Citadel: Final Stages (24-25 Feb)

- 0500 24 Feb – South Vietnamese national colors raised
- Afternoon 24 Feb – Imperial Palace captured
- 0300 25 Feb – Vietnamese Marine Bn launches successful surprise attack and only mopping up remains

**Top Left:** Sgt. P. L. Thompson sits on the throne in the Palace of the old city of Hue. The Golden Throne of the former Vietnamese Emperors is at the heart of the palace that the North Vietnamese used as headquarters during the fighting for the city of Hue.

**Middle Left:** Sergeant Minh Le Doe of Company 212, South Vietnamese Army, waves his hand and smiles as the South Vietnamese flag is about to rise over The Citadel, after 25 days of street fighting with the North Vietnamese Army for the City of Hue.

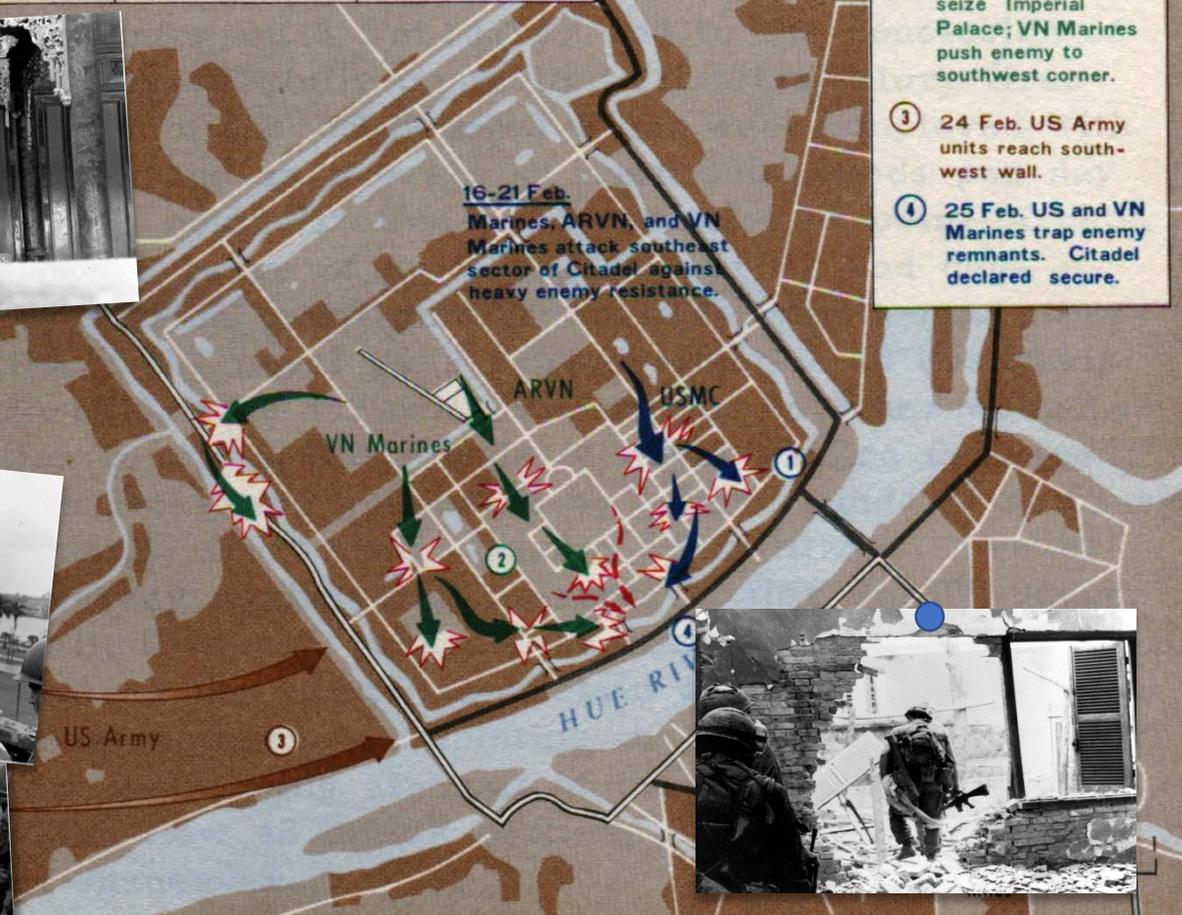
**Bottom Left:** South Vietnamese soldiers of Company 212, raise the South Vietnamese national flag over the citadel after 25 days of hard street fighting in Hue City, South Vietnam



HUE: 16-25 FEBRUARY 1968

| CASUALTIES (Final) |                           |               |
|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| Enemy              | USMC                      | ARVN          |
| 5,113 Killed       | 142 Killed                | 384 Killed    |
| 89 Captured        | 857 Wounded and evacuated | 1,800 Wounded |
| 1,632 Weapons      |                           |               |

| LEGEND |  |
|--------|--|
| ①      | 22 Feb. Marines secure assigned objectives.                                    |
| ②      | 24 Feb. ARVN seize Imperial Palace; VN Marines push enemy to southwest corner. |
| ③      | 24 Feb. US Army units reach southwest wall.                                    |
| ④      | 25 Feb. US and VN Marines trap enemy remnants. Citadel declared secure.        |



**Above Right:** Marines 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.

# VII. Closing out Operation Hue City: 24 Feb – 2 Mar

- 26 Feb - 1/5 relieved and joined 2/5 to sweep east and north of the city
- 24-27 Feb – 2/5 and 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne, involved in largescale fight with NVA. The NVA eventually withdraw in the face of American air/artillery support
- 2 Mar – Operation Hue City terminated



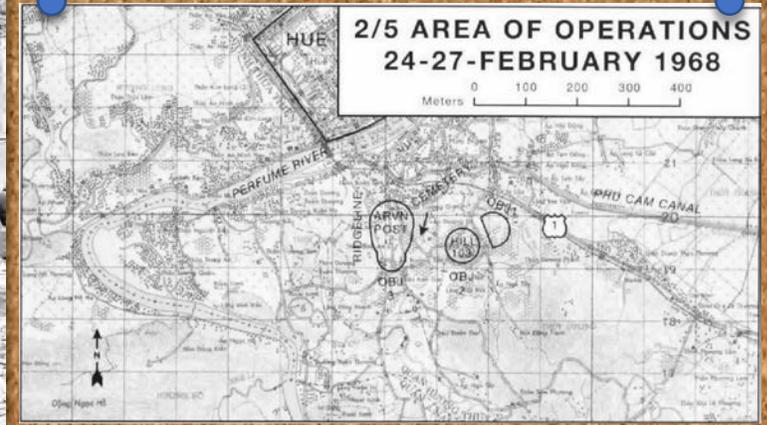
**Above Left:** Viet Cong captives from the battle for Hue city.



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



**Top Left:** Gunnery Sergeant F. A. Thomas, Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, finds humor in a toy car during the height of battle during Operation Hue City.



**Right:** A Marine grenadier fires an M-79 round into a sniper's position in Hue as 1st Marine Division Leathernecks advance toward the Citadel.

## VIII. Summary

- Major component of the entire Tet Offensive
- Characterized by intense urban warfare
- Cost both sides dearly
- NVA ejected and defeated

**Below:** Flags of the victors: The United States, The United States Marine Corps, and the Republic of South Vietnam

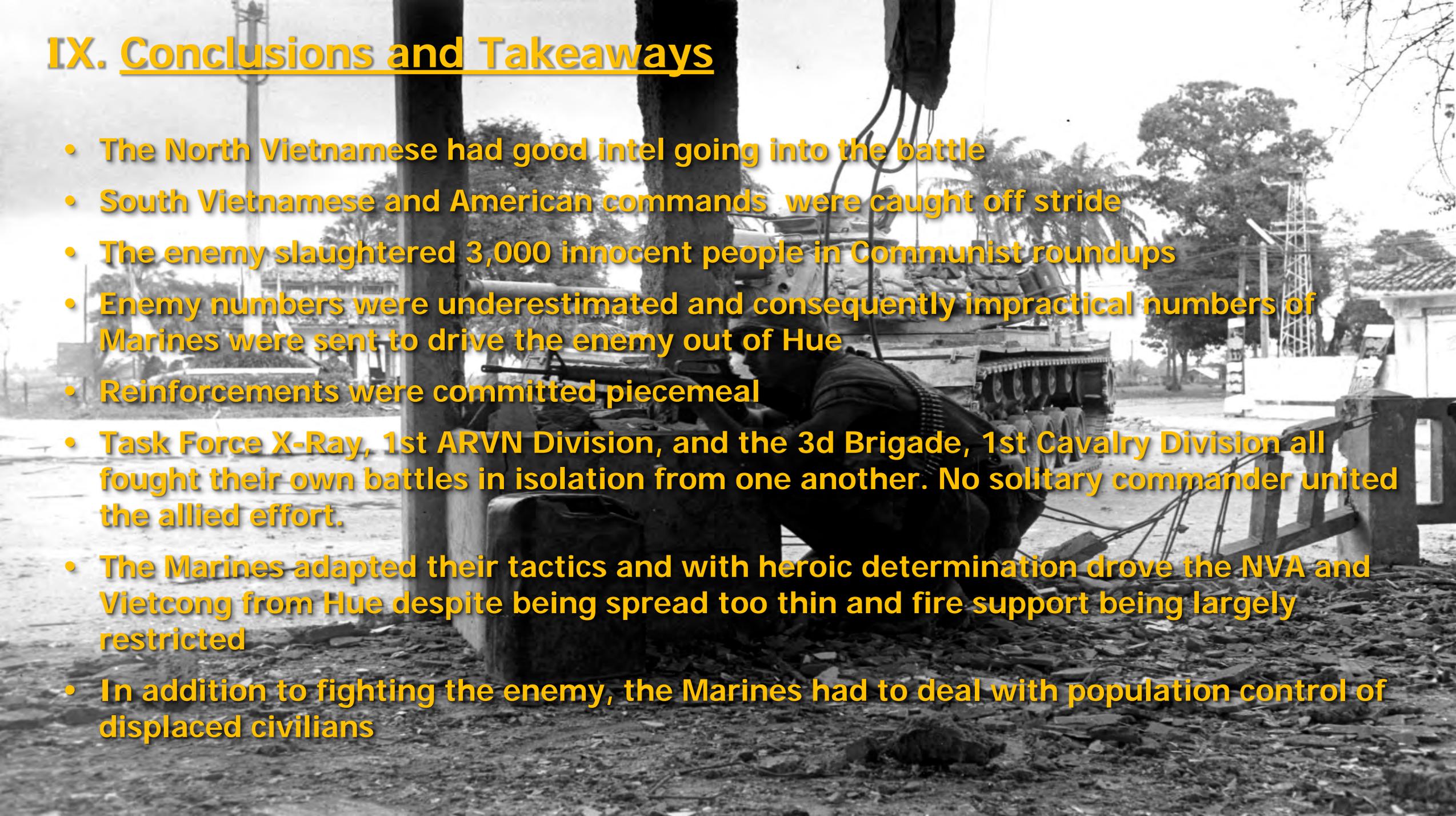


### Battle of Hue Casualties

|                       | <u>KIA</u>         | <u>WIA</u>     | <u>MIA</u> |
|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------|
| <b>Marine</b>         | <b>142</b>         | <b>1,100</b>   |            |
| South Vietnamese Army | 333                | 1,773          | 30         |
| Vietnamese Marines    | 88                 | 350            | 1          |
| 1st Cavalry Division  | 68                 | 453            |            |
| 1st, 101st Airborne   | 6                  | 56             |            |
| Allied Total          | 600                | 3,800          | 31         |
| <b>NVA</b>            | <b>2,500-5,000</b> | <b>Unknown</b> |            |

## IX. Conclusions and Takeaways

- The North Vietnamese had good intel going into the battle
- South Vietnamese and American commands were caught off stride
- The enemy slaughtered 3,000 innocent people in Communist roundups
- Enemy numbers were underestimated and consequently impractical numbers of Marines were sent to drive the enemy out of Hue
- Reinforcements were committed piecemeal
- Task Force X-Ray, 1st ARVN Division, and the 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division all fought their own battles in isolation from one another. No solitary commander united the allied effort.
- The Marines adapted their tactics and with heroic determination drove the NVA and Vietcong from Hue despite being spread too thin and fire support being largely restricted
- In addition to fighting the enemy, the Marines had to deal with population control of displaced civilians



## IX. Suggested Reading

- Bowden, Mark. *HUE 1968: A Turning Point of the American War in Vietnam*. [S.I.]: GROVE PRESS ATLANTIC MO, 2017.
- Camp, Richard D. and Jack Shulimson. *Death in the Citadel: U.S. Marines in the Battle for Hue City, 31 January to 2 March 1968*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Marine Corps History Division, 2017.
- Shulimson, Jack, Leonard A. Blasiol, Charles R. Smith, and David A. Dawson. *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year, 1968*. Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1997.

# UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS



Notes were created from Richard Camp's (Col. Ret). *Death in the Citadel: U.S. Marines in the Battle for Hue City, 31 January to 2 March 1968* (2017)

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