Vietnam War Collection, 1954-2004

Archives Branch

Marine Corps History Division

Quantico, VA

2013
Introduction

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Collection Summary

Title: Vietnam War Collection
Collection Number: COLL/3808
Physical Characteristics: 36 standard legal size document boxes; 18 oversized folders; 18.0 linear feet
Span Dates: 1954-2004
Languages: English
Creator: Marine Corps Historical Branch

Administrative Information

Restrictions: Collection is open to all researchers

Preferred citation: Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information:

Collection Name, Folder Heading, Collection Number, Name and location of Institution.

Example: Vietnam War Collection, [Folder heading], COLL/3808, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA

Provenance: The Vietnam War Collection was transferred from the Historical Branch, Washington, DC, to the Archives and Special Collections Branch at Quantico in 1999.
Biographical Sketch

The Marine Corps’ involvement in the Vietnam conflict began with the arrival of advisors to the South Vietnamese Marine Corps in the late 1950s. This involvement increased in scope with the deployment of helicopter squadrons and support personnel in 1962, culminating in the arrival of thousands of combat troops beginning in 1965.

Between 1965 and 1971, the conflict in Vietnam dominated the attention and resources of the Marine Corps, overshadowing virtually all other foreign and domestic activities. During this period the bulk of all Marine Corps personnel and equipment were committed to Southeast Asia. Fighting alongside their South Vietnamese allies, the Marines participated in some of the bloodiest battles of the war. Their efforts ensured that names such as Khe Sanh, Con Thien, Hue, and Diep Huc will be forever remembered in annals of American military history.

Despite their sacrifices, the Marines did not achieve a decisive victory. A phased withdrawal from the country began in 1969, as changing policy objectives and growing political and cultural constraints brought about the gradual decline of US military efforts in Vietnam. In 1975 the Marine Corps would be ordered to assist in the evacuation of US personnel and South Vietnamese refugees as the Republic of Vietnam toppled to the North Vietnamese.

The Vietnam Collection is a small but highly varied collection of records that documents the Marine Corps’ involvement in the Vietnam conflict. The collection contains documents that illustrate the efforts of the Marine Corps in the Republic of Vietnam, ranging from civic action and rural development projects to the application of armor, artillery, and air power in conducting full-scale jungle warfare.

The Marine Corps became involved in a highly complex and massive project to win the “hearts and minds” of South Vietnamese citizens in the country’s many rural villages and hamlets. To accomplish this civic action programs were initiated. These included rural development projects, medical and dental visits, and “personal response” projects to improve relationships between US military personnel and Vietnamese citizens. The Marine Corps also launched an innovative effort to provide security to villagers at the grassroots level. The Combined Action Program (CAP) was designed to assign specially-trained Marine units to villages and hamlets to operate with local militia forces to protect the citizenry against Viet Cong influence. The Vietnam Collection includes numerous reports and studies concerning the “hearts and minds” aspect, including civic action operations and projects; the alignment of the cultural concepts and traditions of American and Vietnamese societies; and the structure and organization of the CAPs. The collection also includes a complete set of the meeting minutes of the I Corps Joint Coordination Council for the August 1965-March 1968.

In contrast to this subtle (albeit complex) attempt to influence the populace of rural Vietnam, the Marines were also involved in conventional jungle war along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and the mountains of the I Corps Tactical Zone. Beginning in 1966, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) mounted repeated incursions of large combat units across the DMZ and Laotian border into the I Corps provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien. Units of the 3d Marine Division and
South Vietnamese forces confronted each of these offensives in a series of hard-fought campaigns across the mountains and plains of the northern I Corps region.

An operation that typified this “large-unit” war was Operation Prairie II, a vast search and sweep operation conducted by the 3d Marine Division in Quang Tri province between 1 February 1967 and 18 March 1967. The operation involved numerous air mobile landings, ambushes, firebase assaults, indirect fire attacks, and other engagements typical of the “large-unit” war. The collection includes a copy of the 3d Marine Division after action report for Operation Prairie II, which includes reports submitted by subordinate regiments, battalions, and supporting units.

In addition to the large-unit DMZ war in the two northernmost provinces of the I Corps Tactical Zone, the Marines were also involved in similar campaigns in the three southern I Corps provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai. While less intense than the fighting in the north, combat in the southern provinces proved to be no less dangerous, as North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces periodically attempted to move from their bases in the western mountains and in Laos to infiltrate and control the populated coastal regions. With US Army forces deployed into Quang Tin and Quang Ngai during 1967-1968, the 1st Marine Division concentrated its efforts in the lowlands of Quang Nam. The Vietnam collection includes a copy of a historical study documenting the battle of Northern Arizona in May 1969, which includes the 5th Marines’ defeat of an NVA infiltration force in the An Hoa Basin in Quang Nam. The study of this operation documents and illustrates the type of warfare that took place in the southern I Corps provinces.

Beginning in late 1969 the Marine Corps forces were gradually withdrawn from Vietnam. By the middle of 1971 all Marine Corps personnel had been withdrawn, with the exception of a few advisors, fire support coordinators, technicians, and other specialists. The Marines also maintained a presence in the region with amphibious forces-in-readiness and aviation units in the western Pacific. These forces were called to action when the North Vietnamese launched a massive ground offensive in South Vietnam beginning on 30 March 1972. For the next twelve months Marine forces were heavily involved in efforts to assist the beleaguered South Vietnamese Armed Forces in slowing (and eventually halting) the NVA onslaught—as Marine advisors assisted the South Vietnamese Marines, Marine aviation units took part in Operation Linebacker, a massive air campaign to interdict NVA logistics and resupply efforts. These activities are documented in the historical study, “Operations of US Marine Forces, Southeast Asia, 1 July 1971 thru 31 March 1973,” a Fleet Marine Force Pacific study.

The Vietnam collection also includes some records not directly related to the Marine Corps in Vietnam that nevertheless provide further insight into the nature of the Vietnam conflict, as well as document the roles played by other services in Vietnam. These records include translations of captured enemy documents an operation order for US Navy riverine forces in the Mekong Delta, and an after action report on the Tet Offensive in the Hau Nghia Province in the III Corps Tactical Zone. In conclusion, the Vietnam Collection also serves as a starting point for those who want to understand the nature of the Marines’ war in Vietnam, providing a sampling of Marine Corps Vietnam-related records to use and research.
Scope and Content

This artificial collection consists of official publications, analyses, historical summaries, after action reports, operation orders, maps, overlays, photographs, diagrams, blueprints, doctrinal publications, correspondence, interviews, and various secondary sources related to Marine Corps activities in Vietnam between 1954 and 2004.

The collection is arranged chronologically. Addenda have been placed at the end of the collection where applicable and as required. The size of the collection is approximately 18 linear feet.

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