

Operation Buffalo

(Between the Hickories, July 1 - July 14, 1967)

June - Little Direct Contact

With up to three NVA divisions still threatening the six Marine infantry battalions and one BLT defending Khe Sanh, Con Thien and Gio Linh, things were a little better in June of '67 than in May. Even though the NVA's command, control and logistics structure had been dealt a significant blow by the first Hickory operations in May, it was evident by the second half of June that the enemy's presence and activity was regaining its former strength.

In the eastern portion of the DMZ, extensive patrols during June led to the discovery and destruction of roughly 2,500 NVA bunkers that had escaped the sweeps of the first Hickory operations. At the same time, the enemy increased the frequency of the artillery, mortar and rocket attacks on Gio Linh, Con Thien, Camp Carroll and Cua Viet. Nearly 1,650 artillery rounds fell on these positions compared to 1,013 in May - a 60% increase. This meant that despite continued air and artillery missions on the enemy's communications and logistics lines, the NVA was able to increase supply stocks sufficiently enough to expend 55 artillery rounds each day. However, mortar and rocket fire declined in June, do likely to extensive patrolling, both within and beyond the "Rocket Box" where "A" Co. of 1st Amtracs had established a permanent presence of a full platoon (rotating every few days).

As the month was coming to a close, the frequency of enemy contacts with Marine patrols increased, indicating the resumption of a concerted enemy buildup within and just below the DMZ.

A second major effort of friendly forces in this area during July was the construction of what was referred to as the DMZ firebreak buffer zone. Eventually viewed as "McNamara's folly," the plan (officially called "Illinois City" at first, then "Dye Marker") envisioned a series of 6 strong points, 12 watchtowers and 3 battalion base areas spanning the entire DMZ. (This is how Hill 31 eventually became know as A-1 and why Oceanview came into existence.)

July 1-14: Operation Buffalo

Compared to the heavy engagements during May and early June, the Khe Sanh area was relatively quiet during the last half of June and the first half of July. As a result, Operation Crockett was terminated. The situation was different in the eastern DMZ region.



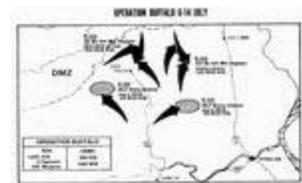
In addition to manning the "Rocket Box" and running numerous patrols throughout its extensive TAOR, during late June and early July, 1st Amtracs also provided support to the 1st ARVN Division in Operations Lam Son 70 and 95, as well as general support of Operation Cimarron, which started in late June. A number of Amtrac crews from our battalion also continued providing support at Gio Linh and Con Thien throughout the month. On July 6th, after several days of heavy contact in the Con Thien area, Operation Cimarron was renamed Operation Buffalo, with its starting date made retroactive to July 2nd, 1967.

At 10 am on the 2nd of July, Company B from 1/9 was on patrol about a mile and a half northeast of Con Thien and made contact with what they thought was a small, well-entrenched enemy unit. In what is now reminiscent of the enemy actions in Hickory II, B/1/9's contact soon evolved into a major attack by 5 NVA battalions employing mass artillery that was coordinated by ground attack forces. The enemy also employed mortars and flame throwers. The rest of 1/9 attempted to joined the fray, moving toward the battle by chopper and on the ground. Substantial supporting fire (arty, air, and naval) was brought to bear on the NVA ground forces. In an attempt to disrupt the reinforcement effort, the NVA unleashed over a thousand artillery and mortar rounds on Gio Linh and Con Thien, 700 of which fell on 1/9 alone. By mid-afternoon 3/9 had entered the battle, choppering in from Dong Ha, and attacked from the enemy's left flank. This did the trick. The NVA broke contact and retreated to the DMZ. Although the NVA suffered 55 KIA (conf.) and 88 (prob.), the Marines had suffered sizable losses, 84 KIA, 1 MIA and 190 WIA. Clearly, a very bad day for 1/9.

Given the surprising use of coordinated artillery support from within and above the DMZ by NVA ground units, the III MAF leadership decided to bring in reinforcements for the 9th Marines, landing both SLF Alpha (BLT 1/3) and SLF Bravo (BLT 2/3) by helicopter during July 3rd and July 4th.



On the morning of July 6th, a mortar-equipped NVA force unsuccessfully attacks 2/3, incurring losses of 35 KIA (conf.). Concurrently, A/1/9 has spotted about 200 NVA in a draw about 2 miles northeast of Con Thien. The quick-thinking Marines called in artillery to fix the enemy in place and subsequently killed 154 of them before the remaining few NVA escaped. This was accomplished without a single Marine casualty. They had clearly evened the score from the July 2nd engagement.



At midnight on the 6th, 3/9 surprised a 400-man NVA battalion moving along a trail in column about 3 miles northeast of Con Thien. In the heavy night fighting, the 3/9 Marines killed 155 NVA while suffering 3 KIA of their own. Additional contacts by the two SLFs on the 8th and 9th of July added another 84 NVA KIA to the Operation Buffalo's tally.

When Buffalo ended the morning of July 14th, the cumulative enemy losses had reached 1,290 NVA KIA (conf.) and 513 NVA KIA (prob.). Marine casualties totaled 159 KIA and 345 WIA. Over a third of the enemy losses were attributed to supporting fire.

The stage was set for Hickory II.

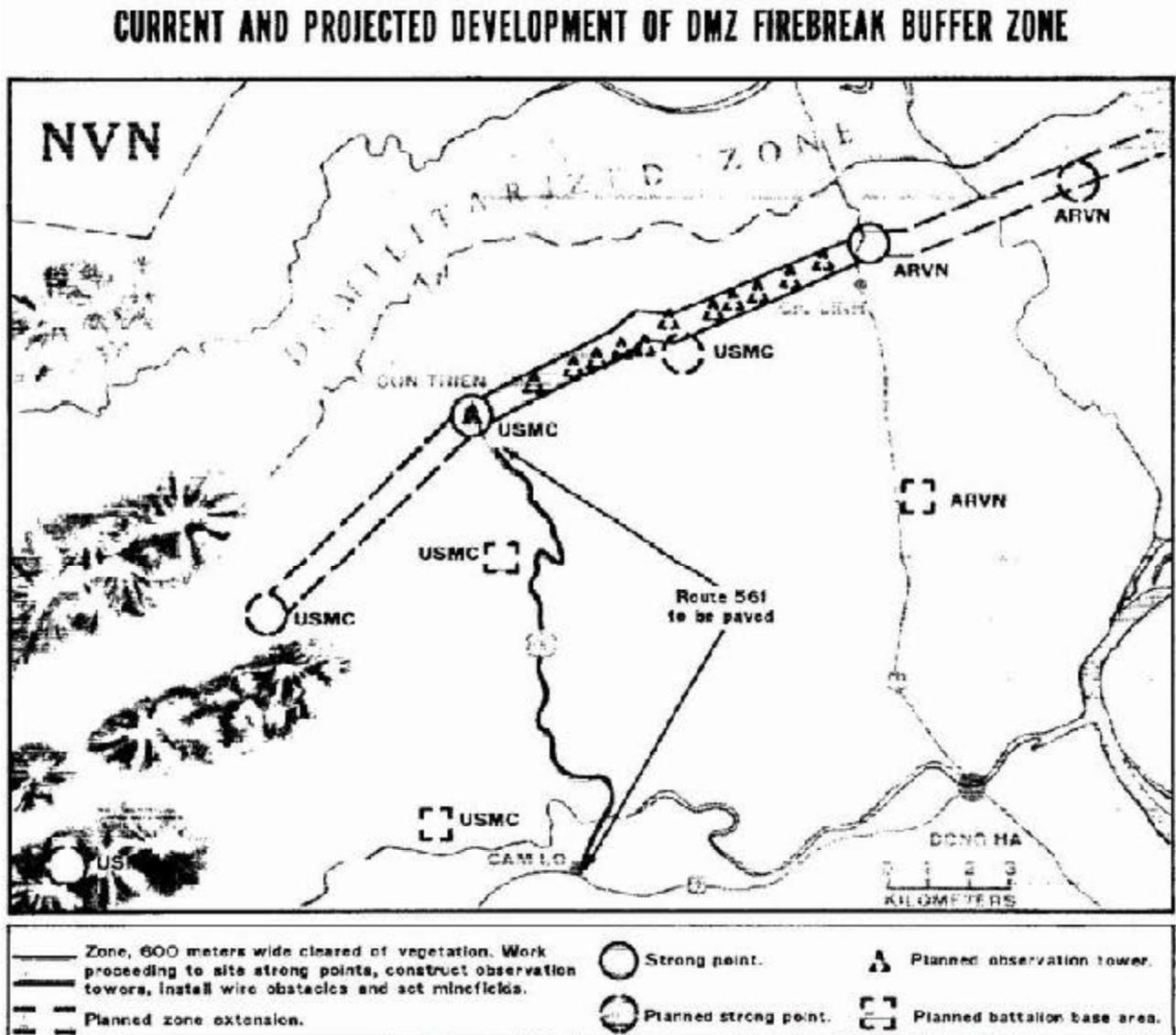
Next Installment:

The next installment will cover will cover Operation Hickory II, the first Regimental scale operation to employ the 1st Amtrac Battalion as an organic (but poorly-equipped) infantry unit.

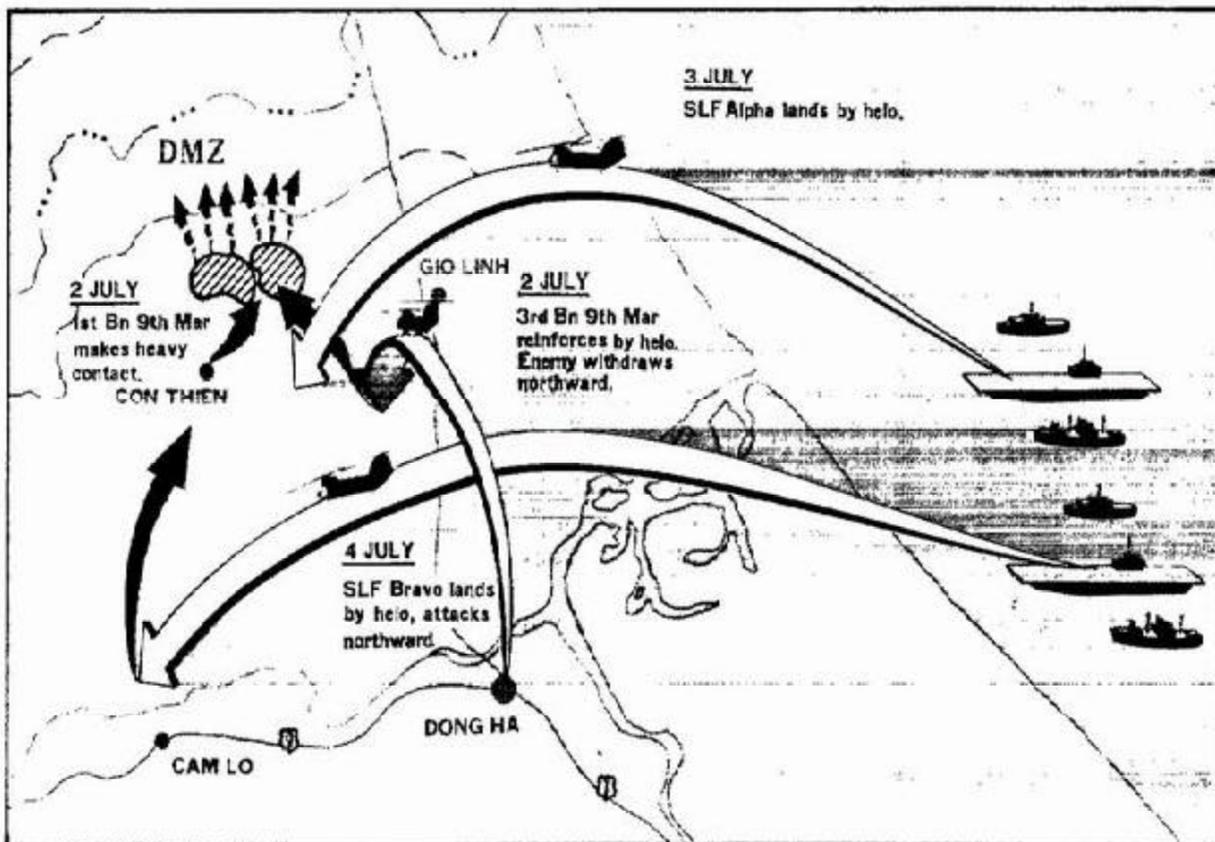
Note: At least one casualty from the Cua Viet facility was reported by 1st AmTracs from Buffalo. A US Navy HN by the name of C. A. Ballauf was KIA after receiving a shrapnel wound in the head while on Operation Buffalo. Several other battalion casualties were reported to have occurred in the Con Thien area during July.

Sources: (USMC Historical Division, Archives Section Vietnam CDs)
 1st Amtracs Command Chronology, June 1967 and July 1967 BVNCD-009,
 FMFPAC Operation of Marine Forces Vietnam, June 1967 and July 1967, VNCD-001,
 OpFiles - Operation Buffalo, VNCD-064
 3rd MarDiv Command Chronology July 1967- VNCD-029
 3rd MarDiv Unit Journal July 1967- VNCD-029
 3rd MarDiv OpPlan (6-hour SitReps) Buffalo 2-14 July 1967- VNCD-029

Summarized from source materials by Hugh Connelly.



OPERATION BUFFALO 2-5 JULY 1967



OPERATION BUFFALO 6-14 JULY

