

# MOVE TO CHU LAI, APRIL 1967

Donald Simpson

On 6 April, we were alerted for movement from Tay Ninh to Chu Lai located in Quang Tin Province, I Corps. I Corps was the northern most Corps Tactical Zone and was under the operational control of the Third Marine Amphibious Force. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division was located in the northern two provinces and the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division was located in the southern three provinces. A provisional Army Division was being formed to replace the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Quang Ngai and Quang Tin Provinces so that division could move north. The heavy infiltration of NVA units into I Corps over the previous few months had placed the Marines' mission in jeopardy.

The Provisional Division was designated Task Force Oregon. The designated division commander was Major General Bill Rossen, then the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) Chief of Staff. He was a native of Eugene, Oregon and a 1940 graduate of the University of Oregon, hence the TF Oregon designation.

This was to be a combat move by C-130 aircraft. We were instructed to move with basic load and organic combat equipment. Each soldier was to organize his individual gear and limited civilian attire into an "A" bag that would accompany the soldier on the move north and a "B" bag that would be stored at Tay Ninh for subsequent shipment north. All other property that the soldiers had accumulated was to be boxed up and shipped to the home of record in the States. Our area in the Tay Ninh Base Camp was to be turned over to elements of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The 4/23d Infantry, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division moved into the 3/21 area.

The "B"bags were loaded into conex containers and the boxes with personal gear was stored in the Mess Hall. 1Lt "Lev" Leverett, the Company XO, remained at Tay Ninh to supervise the turn over of our portion of the base camp, the shipment of the person gear to CONUS, and the subsequent movement of the B bags and residual company equipment to Chu Lai. As I recall "Lev" was about three days behind the main body in arriving at Chu Lai.

A Company was the first rifle company in the brigade to depart Tay Ninh on Sunday, 9 April. We moved on a C-130 with a portion of the company on a second aircraft. The battalion commander and key members of his staff were on the same airplane with my command element and me. The Battalion S-3 and a small advance party departed early that morning and met us when we arrived in Chu Lai.

As I recall, we arrived in Chu Lai around 1400 hours. The S-3, Major Will Roosma, met us. 3/21 Infantry was to replace the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Marines in an Area of Operations (AO) south/south west of the Chu Lai Air Base. A Company was to replace E Company, 2/7<sup>th</sup> on a combat base known as Tien Dao Hill or Hill 10 located just west of Highway One and about 800 meters north of the Tra Bong River.

The Company was to go into a perimeter in the vicinity of the air base for the night. I turned the company over to my senior platoon leader, Lt Chudoba, and accompanied the Bn CO to the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Marine HQ to coordinate our take over of the AO known as Ponderosa. We met briefly with the Marine Bn CO. He was busy packing his gear for the move north and had very little to say to us. I was escorted down to E Company to look at the position and coordinate with the outgoing Marine Company CO. The first thing I noticed was that we would not be able to man all the positions that the Marines had. A Marine rifle company has approximately 210 men. Ours had 152 at full strength. Also, I noticed that the bunkers on the positions were in bad shape and would need to be reconstructed. Basically, we had to redefine the perimeter and rebuild all the positions. There was, however, an excellent barbed wire barrier system around the position. That made me feel less naked going into this area.

Our initial briefings were rather scary. The Marines had been losing approximately a platoon a day in casualties. I felt we were going to be faced with some very tough combat. Sadly, I learned many years later that a good friend and classmate from growing up in Ashland, Oregon, CPT Brooke Shadburne, USMC, had been killed just five days prior, 5 April, just south of Chu Lai near Duc Pho.

It was after dark when I finally got back to the company. We were setup in a rock quarry near the base camp and for the life of me if I had to find that place today I could not do it. By the time I got back to that area months later the Bde HQ had been built up in that general area so that it was indistinguishable. I grabbed a C-ration, checked the defenses and curled up in my poncho liner and tried to get some sleep on the very hard, rocky ground.

The next morning we were trucked to Tien Dao Hill and executed the transfer of the position with E2/7<sup>th</sup> Marines. We immediately went to work repositioning the platoons, the crew served weapons and rebuilding the position. Located in our area were two young Marines who were part of the Combined Action Platoon or CAP program. These young marines lived in a local hamlet with the Vietnamese and assisted them in developing defenses. They were sharp young men and I picked their brains for intelligence information.