

The reports. then,
too, the author spent
much



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The topic of this book was the very first battle in the Viet Nam conflict, as fought by the American marines against the North Vietnamese. The actual thesis was that the Viet Cong's underestimation of the United States military forces' ability to rapidly and effectively deploy and fight, pretty much lost the North Vietnamese the battle, despite the fact that their intelligence was detailed and available early.

The evidence that supported the book's thesis was borne out by many eye-witness accounts, on both sides of the conflict. The overall quality of this work was superior as it appeared very thorough and well-researched. It also was an interesting read.

The value of this work could be considered to be of both historical and military benefit, in terms of actual recorded events and military tactics and strategy. Battle planners and historians may also enjoy and benefit from reading this book. Even, for those who lost family members in this battle, it could prove to be a worthwhile read. Further, most exemplary was the author's research, including evaluation and review of command logs, along with perusal and analysis of the various interrogation and after-action reports. Then, too, the author spent much time on the actual battlefield, and also conducted interviews with various families and combatants on either side, from members of the Marine unit to the VC 1st Regiment. Lastly, his personal conversations with the participants at all levels, on both sides. Finally, his own Marine combat experience as an infantry company commander at that time speaks for itself. The quality of these sources were adequate and in some cases, superior.

Everything appeared to corroborate the author's writing. This account is based upon actual primary and some secondary research but also personal experience, of course, as mentioned earlier. Thus, the author's argument that the Viet Cong's previous intelligence did not account for the rapid capability for the US marines to spearhead a most devastating and useful attack against them was quite creditable.

Lehrack's writing style and ability was such that the book was written clearly, and easy to read and follow, with plenty of action included, and sufficient background knowledge as gleaned from himself and his sources. As compared to our class activities, this student has observed that this reading was easier to get through than some others, and appeared to have adequate primary sources, as well as being sufficiently documented. A significant part of the appeal of this noteworthy book is due in part to its methodical "you are there" focus. The author places his audience right there in the geographical locale, at the particular time period, within the first two chapters. He therefore makes his point that the US slid right into this war, in increments, without much forethought, perhaps basing much action on current Cold War fears.

The highlights in the book's account consist of the following events. A teenage North Vietnamese deserter informed the United States Marine commander that right near the village of Van Tuong, also located near another new US base, was in danger. For, encamped nearby was the 1st Viet Cong Regiment. Soon, intercepted radio chatter confirmed this fact.

Since this situation was a direct threat to the base and, also presented the chance to decimate this slippery VC organization. So Lt Gen Walt determined to take the battle right to the enemy. His subordinate leader was named and it was the notable Colonel Oscar F. Peatross. The battalions to be employed were those at Chu Lai, the 3d Bn, Third Marine Regiment, and the 2d Bn, 4th Marines.

For reinforcements, Walt also requisitioned the amphibious 3d Bn, 7th Marines to join them, from the Philippines. A combined helicopter and amphibious assault was then employed. Secrecy and speed were and proved vital for success. So, in just three days, Starlite commenced. The Viet Cong then hurried to catch up and deployed anti-personnel mines, but these had no measurable effect. The battalions were able to land, leaving one unit in reserve.

Tanks and UH-1 Huey gunships assisted in securing the hill off the beach, the first objective. Then, an enemy battalion had to be quickly routed, and additional assaults were launched. Corporal Robert O'Malley, one of the primary heroes in the conflict, led his squad across a crucial trench and secured it, while fighting against scores of enemy. Although O'Malley suffered numerous wounds, refused to stop and leave the battle.

He managed to retrieve a number of his wounded troops. Then, the remainder of India Company secured the village of An Cuong 2, which had been aiding and abetting the enemy. At about the same time, in the Hotel, 2/4, 1stLt Jenkins' Marines managed to overcome an attack coming from the village of Nam Yen 3.

LCpl Ernie Wallace cleverly and bravely discriminated the camouflaged enemy out from the local terrain, and dispatched at least 25 of them with his M60. Another menacing machine gun nest was taken out by Cpl Dick Tonucci and one of his riflemen, PFC Ron Centers. They then proceeded to take out a second one, and also an enemy bunker. Then, a rifleman, LCpl J. C. Paul, provided covering fire for the wounded out in the open. He himself had been shot but had refused the medevac chopper.

Unfortunately, he was hit with mortar rounds and small-arms fire, and eventually passed away, defending his men. There was significant collateral damage on another assault on Nam Yen 3, although the enemy themselves suffered significant casualties. Further Marine casualties took place as a supply convoy was ambushed. This happened again with yet another convoy. Choppers came to the rescue, but also came under heavy fire. Some friendly air fire support proved to provide some valuable support. With 200 or so wounded, the Marines suffered 54 mortal casualties.

Nevertheless, all their forces- ground, air, ship, and artillery- managed to cause almost 700 dead Vietcong, the better part of several battalions. Both aviation and ground personnel had managed to dig in adequately, although much damage was suffered. Certainly, there were many heroes and military honors that day, for this first momentous battle.

Thus, these Marines ended the Starlite Operation successfully and proved that they could fight guerrilla style, on yet another type of terrain, that of the jungle-heavy and swamp-laden vista of Viet Nam. And so began that lengthy and controversial conflict.

Bibliography

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