

POST OF THE CORPS

Story and photos by

SSgt Tom Bartlett

NOT only is it one of the smallest camps, it has a name, officially, thereby becoming the newest Post of the Corps and home for the 3d Force Recon Bn. All other Marine camps in Vietnam are merely designated by the unit there.

MajGen Lewis Walt, Commanding General, III MAF, officially dedicated Camp Reasoner on August 29, 1965, during ceremonies which included music by the Third Marine Division Band, an invocation by Chaplain Robert "Q" Jones, Capt, USN, Navy Chaplain Corps, and remarks by LtCol Don Blanchard, Commanding Officer, 3d Recon Bn.

Camp Reasoner is dedicated to the memory of 1stLt Frank S. Reasoner, who was killed while leading a Recon patrol deep into Viet Cong territory



(ABOVE) MajGen Lewis Walt, CG, III MAF, unveiled a sign, officially dedicating the Corps' newest post. (RIGHT) This is Camp Reasoner, as viewed from "OP Hotel."



CAMP REASONER

**The Corps' newest post is named after 1stLt Frank Reasoner,
3d Recon Bn., who gave his life to save a wounded Marine.**

when the patrol became heavily engaged with an estimated Viet Cong company.

Cpl Bryant C. Collins, a 20-year-old squad leader, recalls the patrol. He was leading the point on July 12 when sniper fire raked the unit. The Marines hit the deck and fanned out.

"We moved through a rice paddy and three or four houses. We searched the houses as we moved down the road, and then," Cpl Collins continued, "it began to pour.

"Lt Reasoner spotted a Viet Cong with a rifle, and called to us in the point. About that same time, we spotted the VC and opened fire. The lieutenant took his men across the road, and a Viet Cong machine gun opened up, pinning down the patrol.

"While we were pinned down in front

by the machine gun, a sniper opened up on our right flank. Our radioman was hit.

"The lieutenant looked around, told a couple of guys to move into better positions, and then went after the wounded radio operator. The machine-gun opened up again, and the lieutenant fell, dead, about five feet from the wounded man who was then shot for the second time."

"He was one of the greatest men I've ever known," 2dLt William T. Henderson recalled. "He didn't have to go with us on that patrol, but he wanted to be with his troops. He often went with a patrol because he wanted to be near his men.

"We all thought that it was just going to be a routine patrol," Lt Henderson continued, "but it turned out to

be quite a fight. Lieutenant Reasoner personally killed two Viet Cong before he was hit. Altogether, we killed 18 Viet Cong and took one prisoner besides destroying the machine gun."

After Lt Reasoner was killed, Cpl Collins crawled between the lieutenant and the radio operator. He told the radioman to crawl to cover, and was reaching for the radio when the machine gun rattled once more, cutting the radio in half. Collins directed fire toward the machine gun.

The M-79 man was wounded. Another Marine picked up the grenade launcher and knocked out the machine gun.

By this time, Collins' patrol was cut off from the main column. "We could hear a fire fight coming from the village and knew that the main column had been hit. I picked up the

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radioman and two others took the lieutenant. By now it was dark." Collins recalled.

The radioman was wounded for the third time.

Collins led the patrol toward the landing zone, and the village came alive with VC fire. The Marines sprayed the VC dwellings, moving as best they could to the heli-zone. The first helicopter took the lieutenant's body and three wounded men. (The platoon sergeant was wounded as the patrol arrived at the LZ.)

"Fire seemed to come from everywhere," Collins said, "and it seemed like an awful long time before the other chopper came in to pick the rest of us up. I realize that it was just a matter of minutes, but the way the VCs were shooting, it seemed like a couple of days down there.

"1stLt Reasoner did an awful lot for the battalion," Collins said. "One time a patrol was moving and a sniper opened up, but no one could spot where the VC was shooting from. The lieutenant stood right up out in the open and yelled something about Ho Chi Minh. The sniper opened up on the lieutenant, and we opened up on the sniper.

"The lieutenant laughed hard, thinking that it was funny." The sniper was too dead to enjoy the joke.

Prior to receiving his commission, 1stLt Reasoner served as an enlisted Marine, attaining the rank of sergeant. He received an appointment to the U. S. Military Academy at West Point, and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps upon graduation.

At the time of his death, he was serving as Commanding Officer, "A" Co.

"When we first moved into Vietnam," recalled SSgt Reginald B. Knight, battalion administrative chief, "it was nothing to see captains and majors striking tents. I've never worked in a better battalion," he continued, "nor have I worked so hard, either."

"When we first landed," added GySgt Joseph Lemieux, battalion intelligence chief, "our exec. Maj J. H. Oliver, helped carry ammo to shore from 'Mike' boats. Everybody, regardless of rank, shouldered the load.

"Right after the last Chu Lai battle, every man in this battalion volunteered to give blood for the wounded Marines. We had about 150 men accepted," he boasted.

LtCol Don H. Blanchard boasts of his battalion in a number of ways.

"This battalion has the highest church attendance record in the division," he beamed, "and the command-

ing general, himself, has complimented the men on the low percentage of incident reports written out by MPs.

"We use the buddy system in the field and on liberty," the colonel continued. "If a man is getting hot under the collar, his buddy sees to it that the situation remains under control."

LtCol Blanchard enlisted in the Marine Corps just five days after the attack on Pearl Harbor and reached the rank of sergeant before being commissioned in June 1944.

During World War II, he was with the 1st Tank Bn., First Marine Division, on Guadalcanal, and was the exec aboard the USS *Chicago*, participating in bombardments against Japan. His ship was in Tokyo Bay on V-J Day.

In Korea, he served as Commanding Officer, "A" Co., 1st Bn., Fifth Marines. He received the Silver Star for action in Korea and the Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V".

What is there about Recon that makes it the unit it is? Why have 49 men in the battalion extended for an additional six months' service in Vietnam?

More than 60 Purple Hearts have been awarded to members of the battalion so far; one man has been wounded three times.

The battalion has chalked up more than 600 patrols since its arrival in Vietnam, including nearly 150 by H&S Co.

The battalion insignia is a skull and crossbones superimposed over the Triad insignia of the Third Marine Division. Written in Latin on the patch are the words, "Silently, Swiftly, Deadly."

Recon in Vietnam is recognized as a top outfit. Recently, a call went out for volunteers to join the battalion. There were six empty spots. Fifty-two men from one regiment volunteered for the six slots.

The working day for the men at Camp Reasoner begins at 5:30 a.m., and ends when the work has been completed, generally around midnight.

Each morning, there's a briefing, with all section heads reporting to the colonel.

During a recent briefing, WO W. A. Fitts, battalion adjutant, informed the battalion commander that he was making a list of men eligible for rest and relaxation in Hong Kong.

Capt Bryant Moore, Communications and Motor Transport Officer, stated that "a new trunk line is in, and we'll have better phone operations."

Lt Francis Wilkin, USN, gave the medical report: "One man in the field hospital with malaria and three deadlined due to light duty."

2dLt Lawrence Ball, Supply Officer: "Requisitioned a muffler, tail pipe and differential."



LCpl Ronald Malfara, H&S Co., manned the main gate as a patrol left by convoy for "Red Beach" and a long night's walk to recon a fishing village.

Capt Bobby G. Hunter, "A" Co. Commanding Officer, gave a rundown on his unit, including position of observation posts and results of recent patrols.

Capt Pat Collins, Commanding Officer, "D" Co., was asked to tell the group about his patrol the night before. The entire group broke up as Capt Collins recalled the following:

"It was just before dark, and the sun was getting ready to sack out for the night. As I looked up into the sun, I spotted five people standing on the skyline; they were all carrying weapons. I figured, naturally, that it was part of my patrol, and I was thinking 'What the hell are they doing standing there like that, in plain view?'"

"I was going to yell at them to get off the skyline, but then I figured that I'd give my own ambush position away by yelling, so I didn't say a word."

"It wasn't until they moved away that I realized that I'd damned near ordered five Viet Cong off the skyline!"

Capt Collins' patrol returned with three prisoners, one dead VC, a confiscated rifle, grenade, some ammo and VC papers.

Later that day, a group from the Recon unit was preparing to take off on a helicopter-reconnaissance mission over an area which was to be patrolled.

1stLt Joseph Laterra, of the 3d Platoon, and 2dLt William Henderson recalled another patrol that they'd made together.

"Things are really improving," Lt Laterra stated. "Whenever we got into a bind before and we'd call for artillery,

we'd have to wait from 20 to 40 minutes for it to finally arrive."

"Hear, hear," Lt Henderson agreed. "Remember the last time your patrol got pinned down outside that village and the VCs opened up with automatic weapons? You didn't have to wait long then, did you?"

"No, I called for artillery, and before I'd called 'Roger,' the stuff began to fall."

"You were so happy," smiled Lt Henderson, "that you began jumping up and down like a little kid. You really lost your cool on that one."

Patrol communications have certainly been improved. One of Recon's observation posts is so elevated that they can receive and relay practically all calls, assuring contact at all times.

Recon boasts pre-set signals, including a SitRep, or Situation Report, given every half hour by the unit on patrol.

When there is no danger, the message is given orally; if there is danger, the operator uses just the key on the hand set, and taps out a prearranged signal.

"SALUTE" is another comm breakdown which saves time. The patrol calls in, utilizing S-size, A-activity, L-location, U-uniform, T-time, E-equipment. Without a break from the operator receiving, the patrol can give a brief, concise, accurate report in from 15 to 20 seconds.

When a patrol makes contact, the operator calls in "CONTACT," which means: C-command, O-occurrence, N-needs, T-time, A-action taken, C-

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Sgt Varnell Parker and LCpl Robert Muhltner put final touches to a shack at the camp.

Rifle inspections are frequent, but sometimes informal. They're always on the alert for rust.



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casualties, T-types of logistical support; again, a concise report given in seconds, and the needs of the patrol, if any, are known.

The Recon battalion has four soldiers from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, as well as Lt Vinh Cong, Liaison Officer for the Marines. He has served for the past six months with Recon, and thinks very highly of the unit.

"I have been in the Vietnamese Army for three years, and have only one more to serve. I learned my English at the Saigon University."

He also speaks French and Vietnamese.

Before joining the Army, Lt Cong taught at Technical High School in Hue for five years. He is married to a former primary school teacher.

"Before, I had bad ideas about the Americans. Now, I find that they are friendly to my people. I think they are a good thing."

There are many people around Camp Reasoner who think that Americans are "a good thing." "Bacsi Mau" is one of the finer things that happened to the villagers.

"Bacsi" is doctor in Vietnamese, and "Mau" is Vietnamese for "Moe."

"Bacsi Mau" is HN Mike Armstrong, a corpsman with the Marine unit.

He gave first aid to some of the village children, and they, thinking he was a doctor, began calling him "Bacsi." He tried to get them to call him by his nickname, but "Moe" seemed impossible for them to say, and it came out as "Mau."

"Doc" Armstrong fits in well with the Recon outfit. He's a graduate of the Mountain Warfare Training Center in Bridgeport, Calif., and he's been schooled in rubber boats and long distance swimming. He's a graduate of SCUBA School.

He's a qualified radio operator, and is capable of operating the PRC-10 and PRC-47. When on patrol, he stands his turn on watch.

"The corpsmen here are invaluable people," said 1stLt Doug MacCaskill. "They save lives, operate radios and assist with the 'People to People' program."

1stSgt Harry Rogers is the senior enlisted man of "Delta" Co. A veteran of the Iwo Jima campaign, he was once asked if he wanted to go on a river sweep.

Rubber boats carry a group downriver while patrols sweep both sides of the river banks. As the patrol discovers holes or caves along the river,

they use demolitions or grenades to blow them up.

1stSgt Rogers went along in a rubber boat. They spotted a likely hole and a Marine snooped in. A Viet Cong threw out a grenade which blew up half the boat, but didn't hurt anyone. 1stSgt Rogers let loose with a burst from his rifle, killing one VC, then threw in two grenades, killing another VC.

Since that time, 1stSgt Rogers has made all the river sweeps that he can get in on.

"He's a great guy to watch," said one of "Delta's" enlisted Marines. "The 'Top's' gotten two more VCs since that first patrol. One thing that I get a charge out of is that he never takes that cigar out of his mouth. Even when he's swimming or treading water, the cigar stays clamped between his jaws. I don't know if he smokes it or not. I've never seen any smoke coming from the cigar."

"But it is always in his mouth. I wonder if it is really a permanent part of his face?"

SgtMaj Ott C. Farris is the battalion

sergeant major. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in April 1940, and during the fighting at Bougainville, earned his first Silver Star. He also fought at Vella La Vella. At Iwo Jima, with the Fifth Division, he earned a Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

During his first of two tours in Korea, while making the Inchon Landing, he earned his second Silver Star.

Not all the members of Recon are old salts or grizzled veterans of other wars. Like Cpl Collins, who assumed command of 1stLt Reasoner's platoon, the younger men are learning the ways of guerrilla warfare.

The price they pay—these younger men—varies; but the lesson learned is invaluable.

Volunteering to go out on a patrol nearly proved quite costly to LCpl Arthur W. Wolf, of H&S Co. Before hitting the sack for the night, he put five 20 dollar bills in his boot.

Before he remembered the money he'd stashed in his boot, he found himself waist deep in mud on a patrol near a small village. By the time he re-



SSgt Robert L. Clark lost 50 pounds in three months, dropping from 201 to 151. HN Don Ryan checked the scales.

turned to Camp Reasoner, the money was in shreds.

He folded the currency into an envelope, enclosed an explanation, and mailed it to the Treasury Department. Two weeks later, he received a check for \$100.

"I guess," he explained later, "I'd better find a better place to keep my money."

Cpl Burley Boykin, a squad leader with "Alpha" Co., learned a costly lesson on patrol. A member of the point on a patrol, he and another Recon Marine set off a home-made Viet Cong booby trap which sent slivers of tin into their legs and abdomens.

Lt Francis Wilkin, USN, doctor of the Recon unit, estimated that he removed over 80 pieces of tin from Cpl Boykin's legs.

"The booby trap was made out of either a beer can or a used C-ration can," the doctor stated.

"If it had been the real thing, I'd be dead," Cpl Boykin smiled. "Instead, I'll be out on patrol again in a couple of more weeks. I'm anxious to get back

out in the field. This sitting around is making me lazy."

Marines of Recon, regardless of their rank, their youth, or experience, have all been tried. Every man, including cooks, typists, and drivers, the first sergeant, the sergeant major and the battalion commander, have been on patrol.

For some, like the colonel, sergeant major, and the first sergeant, the experi-

ence of two other wars is an example for the younger men to follow.

Camp Reasoner is not a large camp. The accomplishments and the pride of the camp only make the area seem large.

On the sign next to the gate of Camp Reasoner are the words:

1stLt Reasoner sacrificed his life to save one of his wounded Marines. 'Greater Love Hath No Man'." **END**

Pfc Paul Dietrich and Cpl Thomas Ballenger keep their gear in shape.



LCpls David Rethlake and L. W. Fears scrutinize "Happy Valley."

