



24 Hours In The Life Of The Marines At CAP 2-4-3, 1969

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At daybreak, the night's mosquitoes would disappear and the daytime flies would show up. We would pack up our gear, come in from that night's ambush site, and head toward the CAP 2-4-3 village named Thanh Taxy.

Being a mobile unit, we had to determine where to set up the new day site. A day-site is the place where we would store all of our gear for the next 12-hour period. It was usually somewhere in the village. Each day-site would be different so the VC would not know where we would be. We would then set up the machine gun and radio positions for the day. After that, half of the Marines would stand watch while the other half cleaned their weapons. Then the first half would clean their weapons while the others stood watch.

After being on watch for half of the prior night at the ambush site, some of us would try to get some sleep or get some breakfast that most often consisted of C-rations.

During the day time, if you were not on watch or radio detail, you could catch up on some sleep, write a letter, play cards, read a book, play with some of the village kids, help the village adults with something or build something, get a haircut from one of the kids in the village, take a bath in the river, or just chill out. One thing you always had to do was to keep your eyes on your gear. For some reason, things always grew legs and disappeared.

Then it would be time to send out our day patrol. That would be either before or after lunch, which were usually C-rations again. About half of the Marines, with someone carrying the second radio, and some Vietnamese PF's (Popular Forces) would set out on a patrol outside of the village, somewhere in our TAOR (tactical area of responsibility). We would walk out of the village on the paved road and head out on a rice paddy dike towards some jungle tree line, always looking for VC bunkers, booby traps, unexploded mortar or artillery rounds or anything that was suspicious. If we located anything, we would radio the situation back to CAP 2-4 company headquarters. If we found any VC bunkers, booby traps, or unexploded mortar or artillery rounds, we would blow it up in place. After a couple of hours, we would come back to the CAP 2-4-3 village for some chow or more sleep. Each day patrol would head in a different direction from the patrols before, so as not to create a pattern that the VC could catch onto. That could be deadly.

In late afternoon, two of the Marines would take our pull cart and head two clicks (2000 meters) west towards CAP 2-4 company headquarters. There, they would pick up supplies like C-rations, ammunition, mail from home and sodas and/or cold milk, if there was any. Then they would bring back and distribute.

Then it would be time for dinner, usually C-rations again. After dinner, we would determine where the two ambush sites would be for that night, who was going to be in each ambush site, and then wait for dark. After it was dark, the two ambush patrols, lead by the point Marine, would quietly head out towards their pre-determined ambush site for that night. Once the site had been reached, the point Marine would go into the site and check for anything that could be considered dangerous. If nothing was found, the squad leader would bring the Marines and the PF's into the site and set up the machine gun and radio positions. Then it was just a matter of being quiet, and staying alert during your watch. Sometimes we would catch some VC in our ambush, sometimes they would catch us in their ambush, or sometimes nothing would happen. Either way, heading back to the village the following morning would complete 24 hours in the life of the Marines at CAP 2-4-3 in 1969.

EXTRA INFORMATION ABOUT LIFE AT CAP 2-4-3

Once in a while our Navy Corpsman would set up a MEDCAP (Medical Aid Program) in the village. He would dispense out medicine and give out shots to villagers who were sick.

If it happened to be raining while you were on watch in the ambush site, you had to take your helmet off because the rain hitting your helmet was so loud, the VC could sneak up on you and you would not hear them. That was not a good thing. We often had a cloth hat that we would put on our head, which made it easier for you to hear but there was no protection for your head. Oh well, you win some and lose some.

During the monsoon season, part of each day was spent trying to dry your clothes, which was very hard because of the constant drizzle. After a while, you just gave up.

Sometimes, during the night's ambush site, a couple of Marines and PF's would leave their ambush site for an hour or so, on a Search and Destroy Mission, sometimes called KT's (Killer Teams). Those missions were extremely dangerous because you were all alone, crawling through rice paddies and jungle. You could trip a booby trap, meet up with a snake, or come across some VC and find yourself out numbered.

Depending on how many Marines were in our platoon, usually from 8-12, it would be your turn to go to CAP 2-4 company headquarters for one night. You would go to headquarters with the Marines who would go in to get supplies using the pull cart. There you could get some good chow (definitely not C-rations), take a shower and see a movie. Mainly you could get some sleep with out the danger of being killed in your foxhole in your ambush site unless you were unlucky enough for CAP 2-4 company headquarters to be shelled that night by VC rockets or mortars. Then all bets were off.

Each day, day after day, would consist of daytime watches, radio detail, day patrols, nighttime ambush sites and sometimes, killer teams. Sleep was something you got whenever you could. All of this was done with knowledge in the back of your mind that someone was trying to kill you. Becoming complacent about your daily routine was something you had to fight to prevent because when you are 18, 19 or 20 years old, you think you are bullet proof. The real reality of your situation becomes evident once again when you are looking at a wounded or dead United States Marine right in front of you. The real reality in Vietnam was, bullet proof you were not.