



Deactivation

Of The

2nd. Combined Action Force HQ

CAF Deactivates, Mission Goes On

DANANG -- One of the Marine Corps' most unique commands has been scaled down to a single operational unit in Quang Nam Province.

With the deactivation of Headquarters, Combined Action Force (CAF) here September 23, only one of its subordinate elements will continue to carry on a program once active throughout the Republic of Vietnam's five northernmost provinces. CAF Headquarters was the last of four CAF elements deactivated as part of President Nixon's Increment IV Reduction of U.S. Forces in Vietnam. Three Combined Action Groups (CAGs), were disbanded over a three month period leaving only 2nd CAG operating with its headquarters at Hoi An.

Second CAG, commanded by Lt. Col. John J. Tolnay, will continue to perform the primary CAF mission of providing security to the Vietnamese in hamlets and villages. This is done by training Popular Force (PF) soldiers and assisting them in providing protection from Communist pressure, terror, and influence. CAG's mission also serves to aid local law enforcement, foster respect for local and national government and to promote general community welfare.

CAF, once known as the Combined Action Program, has continually performed its mission since August, 1965. At that time a rifle company from the Fourth Marine Regiment was redesignated as the 1st Combined Action Co. (CACO) at Phu Bai. The program grew to four CAGs, with a total of 114 CAPs operating within 19 CACOs before it began to scale down.

A CAP is formed by attaching a U.S. Marine rifle squad and a U.S. Navy corpsman to a PF platoon. The Marines and PFs eat together, sleep together and fight the VC together by employing three basic principles in their tactics.

The first is the principle of tactical mobility.

A CAP does not defend its hamlet from behind bunkers and barricades. The idea is not to put up a wall around a hamlet, but to lay a screen of ambushes on the hamlet's approaches. When done strategically, this CAP mobility provides not only offensive striking power, but also an element of protection afforded by elusiveness.

Their elusive mobility helps create an illusion that the CAP seems to be everywhere, but predictably nowhere. This unpredictability can ensure that the VC will never feel safe anywhere in a CAP area of operations. Surprise attacks against CAPs are also reduced through employment of this tactic.

Another principle is that of combining a minimum amount of personnel with a maximum amount of firepower.

While CAPs are small, they are backed by air strikes, artillery fire and reaction assistance from Marine infantrymen when it is required.

The third principle of CAP tactics is that of living among residents in villages and hamlets. Like the PF soldier, CAP Marines are considered "villagers." They are known by the villagers, and remain for as long as their assistance is needed.

This third principle clearly sets CAP Marines apart from regular units.

During the past five years, CAPs have successfully employed these basic principles and have conducted nearly two million Medical Aid Programs (MEDCAPs); dispatched more than 214,000 patrols, set up more than 145,000 ambushes, killed more than 5,300 VC, and from 1967 to 1970, captured more than 2,500 individual and crew-served weapons.

CAF units have also taken more than 1,500 confirmed VC prisoners and have received more than 450 Hoi Chanh's (VC rallying to the RVN government). No more than 2,100 U.S. Marines and Navy Corpsmen, nor more than 3,000 PF soldiers have ever participated in the CAF program at any one time.

Those who have served with CAF say its success can not be measured by statistics alone. Its value is best reflected in areas where CAPs once operated and where the PF's are now holding their own against VC influence.

Col. Ralph F. Estey, the last commanding officer of CAF, points with pride to the fact that not one hamlet or village once occupied by a CAP has permitted a VC take-over.

Return To:

- [Units & Histories](#)
- [CAP Web Site Home Page](#)