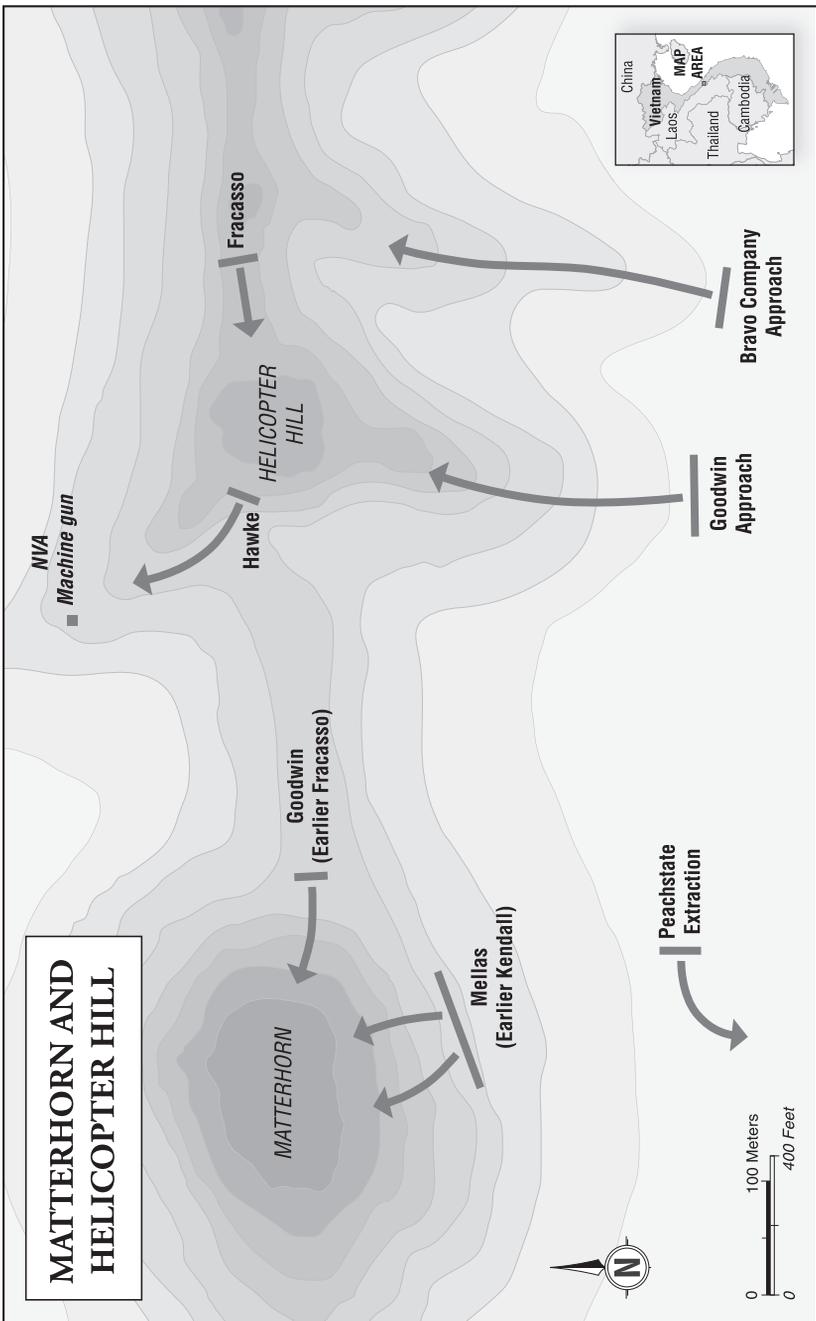


Matterhorn, Eiger, and Sky Cap are fictional places; the other locations are real.

MATTERHORN AND HELICOPTER HILL



GLOSSARY OF WEAPONS, TECHNICAL TERMS, SLANG, AND JARGON

actual Specific person commanding a unit, as opposed to just the unit in general. For example, if someone calling on the radio said, “This is Charlie One,” this would mean that it could be anyone on the radio, usually the radio operator, calling from First Platoon of Charlie Company. If the person said, “This is Charlie One Actual,” it would mean that the speaker was the actual commander of First Platoon. “Put your actual on” meant “I want to talk to your commanding officer.”

A. J. Squaredaway Marines used made-up names to personify conditions or standards. A.J. Squaredaway meant looking sharp. There were others. Joady was the guy screwing your girl back home and Joe Shit the ragpicker was the opposite of A. J. Squaredaway.

AK-47 Standard-issue automatic weapon used by the North Vietnamese Army and the Vietcong. It fired a 7.62-millimeter bullet at a lower velocity than the M-16. It was much less accurate than the M-16, but far easier to maintain under jungle conditions; and in close-in jungle fighting, accuracy at a distance was not a significant factor.

Arc Light missions “Arc Light” was an Air Force operation that used B-52s based on Guam. These B-52s were modified to carry thirty tons of conventional bombs, which were guided to the targets by ground-control radar. The missions were most often flown at night against enemy base camps, troop concentrations, and supply lines.

arty Artillery.

ARVN Army of the Republic of Vietnam, the South Vietnamese army—allies of the United States.

ASAP As soon as possible.

Avenues A gang of the 1960s in Los Angeles.

baseball team Radio brevity code for a squad (thirteen Marines).

Basic School, the Lowest-level Marine Corps officer school, where all Marine officers, including Marine pilots, are given the basic education needed to run a rifle platoon and company. It is located in Quantico, Virginia, and its name is abbreviated TBS.

basketball team Radio brevity code for a fire team (four Marines).

battalion A battalion, usually about 1,200 to 1,300 Marines and sixty naval medical personnel, had four rifle companies, and one larger headquarters and supply company (H & S) that held the 106-millimeter recoilless rifles, the 81-millimeter mortars, and the supply, maintenance, communications, mess, medical, and administrative personnel. Each battalion usually had a specific 105-millimeter artillery battery attached to it permanently from the regiment’s artillery battalion. A battalion was usually commanded by a lieutenant colonel, often called a “light colonel.” That rank is designated by a silver oak leaf. In the Marine Corps during the 1960s, command of a battalion was critical for advancement to high rank.

battery Artillery unit roughly equivalent in size to a rifle company. A battery in Vietnam had six 105-millimeter howitzers. One battery was normally assigned to one infantry battalion and whenever possible was situated on the highest ground in the area it was intended to support.

The battery often sent out forward observers to move with the infantry to help call in artillery missions. All Marine infantry officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) can call in artillery fire; however, lacking detailed knowledge of the immense amount of technical difficulties faced by artillerymen, they are usually more impatient than the forward observers.

bingo fuel Out of gas.

bird Any helicopter, but for the Marines it was usually a CH-46 helicopter.

blowing a dump Destroying an ammunition supply storage site (or ammo dump) by setting off explosive charges in the midst of the ammunition.

Brown, H. Rap A 1960s black radical and defense minister of the Black Panther Party.

Butterbar A second lieutenant, often new and inexperienced, so called because the rank was designated by a single gold bar.

CAG Acronym for combined action group. This was a small group composed of Marines and local militiamen called popular forces (in slang, ruff-puffs, from Republic of Vietnam Popular Forces) that was placed in a small specific area to protect villages from intimidation and terror. This idea achieved considerable success, and the Marines who fought in CAG units were brave and competent, having to operate on their own away from traditional unit structures. Unfortunately, following the iron law of manipulation—that if a system can be invented, a countersystem can be invented—Marine infantry commanders would often “volunteer” shirkers and troublemakers for duty with CAG to get them out of their own units.

C-4 Composition C-4 plastic explosive was used for virtually anything from cooking coffee to blowing up ammunition dumps and clearing landing zones. It came in white bars about one foot long, one inch thick, and three inches across, wrapped in olive drab cellophane. It could be safely dropped, cut, pulled into long cords, or stuffed into cracks. It

was detonated by blasting caps, which had to be carried in special small wooden boxes and were much more dangerous. When ignited in the open, C-4 burned with an extremely hot white flame but did not explode. Its primary use in this configuration, strictly against policy, was for heating C-ration cans. When detonated by a blasting cap, C-4 was a powerful explosive. A thin cord wrapped around a two-foot-diameter tree would cut the tree in two, although a preferred method was to put one charge slightly higher than another on opposite sides and cut the tree between the two offset blasts.

CH-46 Twin-rotor assault helicopter called the Sea Knight, used by the Marines for assaults, resupply, and medevacs. It had a crew of five: pilot, copilot, crew chief, and two aerial machine gunners. It had a long fuselage and a ramp at its tail where Marines got on and off. This ramp was pulled up to serve as the rear door when the CH-46 was airborne. Depending on the altitude, temperature, how many gunners were carried aboard, and how much risk the pilot was willing to take, a CH-46 would carry from eight to fifteen Marines as far as 150 miles. In emergencies more people were carried, but then the risks went much greater. Alternatively, the CH-46 could carry about two tons of “external load,” slung beneath it in a cargo net. Its maximum speed was approximately 160 miles per hour. The CH-46 Sea Knight was smaller and carried less load than the more familiar CH-47 Chinook used by the Army, although the two helicopters looked similar. Because of the requirement for folding rotors and efficient storage aboard ships, the Marine CH-46 was not capable of carrying the heavier loads that the Army CH-47 helicopter—with its permanent rotor blades and larger engines—could manage. The Marine Corps depended primarily on the CH-46 to deliver its units to combat. The CH-46 also doubled as the supply and medevac workhorse because the Marines were insufficiently supplied with the more mobile and versatile Huey.

CH-47 Twin-rotor turbine-driven helicopter called the Chinook and used by the Army. It was made by Boeing Vertol and from a distance looked like a very large CH-46. Its crew consisted of a pilot, a copilot, a crew chief, and one or two waist machine gunners. The Army chose

the CH-47 as more of a workhorse supply vehicle and depended on the smaller Hueys to deliver its infantry units into combat.

chi-comm Hand-thrown antipersonnel fragmentation grenade used by the NVA and Vietcong. It had a wooden throwing handle and a round cylindrical form; hence the nickname “potato masher.”

chopper Any helicopter.

chuck Among Marines in the bush in Vietnam, a non-derogatory term for a white Marine, used by both races, as in “He’s a chuck dude.” It was more along the lines of jive talk, like calling someone a cat. It most likely was derived from “Charles,” also slang for “the man.” It was usually opposed to “splib,” commonly used slang for a black Marine.

CID Acronym for criminal investigation division. The Marine Corps CID was responsible for investigating and uncovering criminal activity taking place within Marine units. Major concerns during the Vietnam War were drug dealing and fragging. Agents, in many cases civilians, often worked under cover posing as ordinary Marines. They had roughly the same standing among Marines as narcs or snitches did among civilians who used drugs. Most Marines saw drug use in rear areas as a victimless crime and the penalties—long prison terms and dishonorable discharges—as unfair. Drug use in the bush, where lives could be lost as a result of failure to perform, particularly on watch, was discouraged through what could politely be described as self-policing activities.

claymore Popular fan-shaped antipersonnel land mine that used composition C-4 as its explosive. It produced a directional, fan-shaped pattern of fragments and was usually placed aboveground in front of a fighting hole or alongside a trail for an ambush. When detonated, from a fighting hole using an electric detonator wire, the M18A1 Claymore delivered 700 spherical steel balls over a sixty-degree fan-shaped pattern that was more than six feet high and fifty yards wide by the time the fragments reached fifty yards out. It was named after a large Scottish sword by its inventor, Norman A. MacLeod. One side of the mine was inscribed with the bold embossed words, THIS SIDE TOWARD ENEMY.

CO commanding officer.

COC combat operations center. This was usually a tent with sandbag walls, or, if the unit had been in place long enough, a bunker made entirely of sandbags with a roof usually made from steel runway mat, also covered with sandbags. It contained all the maps, radios, and personnel that ran a battalion or regimental combat headquarters. It was the tactical nerve center of the battalion or regiment.

company During the Vietnam War a Marine rifle company consisted of 212 to 216 Marines and seven Navy hospital corpsmen. It was designed to be led by a captain (two silver bars), and at the beginning of the war the majority of companies were. By 1969, however, many were being led by a first lieutenant (one silver bar); and during intense periods of fighting, a second lieutenant (one gold bar) could end up running a company until a higher-ranking replacement arrived. The company consisted of three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon. The weapons platoon was designed to have a second or first lieutenant in charge and consisted of nine M-60 machine-gun crews and three 60-millimeter mortar crews. But in the jungle and mountain fighting during the Vietnam War, machine guns, which were originally in the weapons platoon, were attached directly to the rifle platoons, usually one per squad. This left only the 60-millimeter mortar squad as the entire weapons platoon, usually led by a corporal or sergeant who reported directly to the company commander. Companies usually operated with 160 to 180 Marines, because of attrition.

conex box Short for “container, express.” A conex box was a heavy corrugated-steel shipping container about eight feet long, six feet high, and six feet wide. One end was hinged and could be opened like a heavy door to facilitate loading.

Coors Radio brevity code for “killed in action.” These codes changed frequently.

cordon and search Operation in which an entire village or even an area (if enough troops were used) was surrounded: i.e., “cordoned off.”

Units were then sent in to search the houses and hiding places for NVA or Vietcong. If any were flushed out, they could not escape through the ring of surrounding troops.

CORDS Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support. A hybrid civilian and military organization under the Department of State that was formed to coordinate the U.S. civil and military pacification programs. Some of its personnel actively tried to make pacification work, exposing themselves to danger, but far too many were seen as rear-area fat-asses.

corpsmen Navy medical personnel assigned to Marine units, the equivalent of the Army medics. They provided the first medical care received by a wounded Marine and were highly respected. Many sacrificed their lives trying to save wounded Marines. At full strength, every Marine rifle company had two Navy corpsmen assigned to each of the three platoons, and one additional senior corpsman, usually an HM-1, their boss, assigned to the small company command post or CP. Because of shortages later in the Vietnam War, many platoons got by with a single corpsman, and companies got by with HM-2s instead of HM-1s.

CP A command post. Technically, the term refers to a spot on the ground where the company or platoon commander set up with his radio operators and staff. An equally common use of the term referred to the group of people, not the place, as in “the CP group.” In a typical Marine company in Vietnam, there was no “post”—that is, no physical structure such as a bunker (as seen in movies). Instead, there were just fighting holes like those on the lines or, when a unit was on the move or in action, simply any place from which a company or platoon commander would direct the unit.

C-ration Often called C-rats or by less neutral nicknames. The standard C-ration, used beginning in World War II and believed by most Marines in Vietnam to have been packed at the same time, came in three “styles” or “units,” contained in thin cardboard boxes. The B1 style had a single small can, the size of a tuna fish can, full of chopped ham and eggs, ham slices, beef, or turkey loaf; and a larger can of fruit, such as

applesauce, fruit cocktail, peaches, or pears. The B2 had larger cans of beans and wieners, spicy meatballs, beefsteak and potatoes, spaghetti and meatballs, and ham and lima beans (considered inedible except under extreme duress). This package also contained a small can of pound cake, pecan roll, or fruit cake, and cheese spread (caraway and pimento) and thick crackers. The B3 unit contained meat loaf, chicken and noodles, spiced meat, and boned chicken. All three styles also came with an accessory pack containing a white plastic spoon, instant coffee, sugar and nondairy creamer, two Chiclets, cigarettes in a four-smoke mini pack (Winston, Marlboro, Salem, Pall Mall, Camel, Chesterfield, Kent, and Lucky Strike), a small roll of toilet paper, moisture-resistant paper matches, and salt and pepper.

Crotch, the Slang for the Corps, the Marine Corps.

cumshaw A bribe. Pidgin English, from Chinese (Amoy) *gamsia*, an expression of thanks.

dee-dee To run away or exit quickly. From the Vietnamese *didi mao*, “go away.” One example would be “Let’s dee-dee,” meaning, “Let’s get out of here fast.” Another would be “The enemy dee-deed,” meaning that they left quickly.

division Large unit, approximately 13,000 to 14,000 Marines, usually commanded by a major general (two stars). It included an artillery regiment, three infantry regiments, and supporting units such as engineers, heavy artillery, intelligence, reconnaissance, and supply.

DMZ A demilitarized zone. In Vietnam the DMZ was a zone about five kilometers (just over three miles) wide on both sides of the seventeenth parallel, established by a treaty that attempted to disentangle the French forces from the Vietminh forces. It came to form the border between North and South Vietnam. The Ben Hai River ran through its center in its eastern half. The eastern end stopped at the China Sea. The western end stopped at the Laotian border.

dozens The dozens is an African-American oral contest in which two competitors, usually males, go head-to-head in usually good-natured,

ribald trash talk. Example: “Your momma’s so fat I had to take two buses to get on her good side.” They take turns insulting each other or their adversary’s mother or other family members until one of them has no comeback.

DShKM .51-caliber machine gun A Soviet machine gun similar to the American .50-caliber Browning machine gun, although its round had a somewhat longer case. The initials stand for Degtyraov and Shpagin, the two people most instrumental in the weapon’s development. The K is for *krupnokalibernyi*, large caliber, and the M is a development model designation. This weapon was used extensively by the North Vietnamese Army as an anti-aircraft device, primarily for shooting down helicopters.

elephant grass Huge stalks of bamboo-like grass. It grew higher than a man’s head in thick, nearly impenetrable stands that could cover an entire valley floor. Its sharp edges drew blood.

E-tool Entrenching tool. A small folding shovel about two feet long, carried by all combat Marines. Designed primarily to dig fighting holes, it was also used to dig latrines, bunkers, and firing pits and to clear brush for fields of fire. On rare occasions it was used as a weapon.

executive officer, XO The second in command of a Marine company. The XO handled the administrative details of the company and acted as general counsel to the commanding officer (CO) and platoon commanders. On combat operations, the CO and the XO were usually physically separated so that if the commanding officer was hit the executive officer would probably be able to take command.

FAC The forward air controller, an enlisted man from the air wing who was attached to a company-size unit to coordinate all air support from resupply to bombing and strafing. An officer pilot usually occupied the same position at battalion headquarters. The Marine Corps pioneered close air support tactics and procedures in World War II, and the close working relationship between Marine Air and Marine Ground is a specialty of the Marines.

FAC-man Nickname commonly given to the enlisted forward air controller.

fire team Smallest unit in a rifle company. A fire team was designated to be four riflemen, but under combat conditions, because of attrition, fire teams quite often consisted of only three riflemen.

Five In radio code, the company executive officer, the second in command; for example, Bravo Five.

flat-hatting Flying extremely close to the ground.

FLD The final line of departure, an imaginary line behind which the assaulting troops wait for the signal to move forward. Once this imaginary line is crossed, the unit is irrevocably committed.

football team Radio brevity code for a platoon (forty-three Marines).

foxtrot whiskey Fixed-wing aircraft (as opposed to helicopters). Marine Corps, and occasionally Navy or Air Force, fixed-wing jet aircraft delivered almost all the close air support.

fragging Murdering someone, usually an unpopular officer or sergeant, by throwing a fragmentation grenade into his living quarters or fighting hole. The Marine Corps had forty-three fragging incidents during the Vietnam War, although not all ended in fatalities.

frag order Fragmentary order. This term has nothing to do with fragging. It was an addendum to a larger original order. Frag orders were usually more prevalent than original orders and were done for the sake of efficiency (at least as far as issuing orders was concerned). For example, an original order might have told a unit to enter a certain valley, destroy what it found, and return. A frag order could amend that original order, telling the unit to continue the mission for another week, or to proceed to a certain place, with the same mission but without having to repeat everything over the radio.

G-2 Also, G2. Division intelligence. American military organizations designate staff functions and organizations with letters and numbers. G stands for a division-level staff, R for regimental level, and S for battalion level. Staff functions are designated by numbers: 1 for administrative, 2 for intelligence, 3 for operations, and 4 for supply. So, at the

division level, the intelligence staff would be G-2 and at the battalion level it would be S-2. The officer in charge of that staff function would be called “the S-2,” or “the Two.” Major Blakely, as head of operations at the battalion level, is called “the Three,” because he is in charge of battalion operations, S-3.

grid coordinates All military maps are divided into one-kilometer squares (that is, each side of a square is six-tenths of a mile). A baseline point is established and designated 000000. The first three digits refer to the distance east from the base in tenths of a kilometer, and the last three refer to the distance north. For example, grid coordinates 325889 would refer to a point 32.5 kilometers (about 20.3 miles) east and 88.9 kilometers (about 55.5 miles) north of 000000.

gunjy Slang for zealous and combative, or overly zealous and overly combative, depending on the context and the tone of voice. It is probably derived from “gung ho,” a Marine expression borrowed from Chinese meaning “work together.”

gunny A company gunnery sergeant. During the Vietnam War, with the companies operating at long distances from headquarters, the company gunny was usually the highest-ranked noncommissioned officer out in the bush. The company first sergeants, one rank higher, usually handled administrative functions in permanent headquarters at locations like Quang Tri. The company gunny, who reported directly to the company commander, handled most of the supply functions and had a strong tactical and personnel advisory role. Although the gunny was not directly in charge of the platoon sergeants, who reported to their platoon commanders, he had a very strong dotted-line relationship with the platoon sergeants. A gunny’s “request” was the equivalent of an order. A platoon sergeant could go around the gunny by working through his commanding officer, but this was exceedingly rare. In peacetime the company gunny would normally be an E-7 gunnery sergeant, but because of wartime shortages this position was often filled by E-6 staff sergeants.

H & S Stands for headquarters and supply.

heat tabs Blue 1, 3, 5-Trioxane (sometimes called trioxin) wafers about one inch in diameter that could be placed in the bottom of “field stoves” made by punching holes in C-ration tin cans. Because the heat tabs didn’t oxidize well in the field stoves, they gave off noxious fumes that stung the nose and eyes. Heat tabs also took too long to heat anything. In the bush, most Marines preferred to cook with C-4 plastic explosive, often digging apart claymore mines (this was very dangerous and strictly forbidden) to get something less noxious with which to heat their C-rations.

heli team The weight, or load, that a helicopter can carry varies with the altitude and temperature. The higher the altitude and temperature, the lower the possible load. Although tactically it would be most effective to load entire organizational units, most often tactical units had to be divided into units called heli teams in accordance with the weather and altitude. Upon arrival in the landing zone, the heli teams would immediately disband, and the Marines would re-form into standard tactical units such as fire teams, squads, and platoons.

HM2 Also HM-2: hospital corpsman second class. Sheller, the senior squid, has this rank.

HM3 Also HM-3: hospital corpsman third class Fredrickson, the platoon corpsman, has this rank.

hooch Any shelter, permanent or temporary. A hooch could be anything from a rough plywood building in a rear area to a couple of rubberized ponchos strung together over some communication wire out in the bush. Sometimes spelled “hootch.”

Huey The UH-1 single-rotor helicopter. There were several variations, such as UH-1B and UH-1G, ranging from a “slick” (which had little armament and firepower and was used for evacuating the wounded and inserting ground forces) to a “gun ship” (which was armed with rockets, machine guns, or 20-millimeter cannons and was used for close air support). Hueys had many uses, including close air support, medical evacuations, inserting and extracting reconnaissance teams, and transporting high-ranking officers. The Army used them as assault he-

licopters, and Army airborne and cavalry units had the use of many times more Hueys than similar-sized Marine units.

humping Aside from the obvious sexual connotation, humping meant hiking out into the bush with seventy or more pounds of gear on one's back, the normal weight carried by the Marine infantryman. "They humped me to death" was a common complaint about being forced to do more walking than one thought reasonable.

huss A favor granted by a superior or by the system in general. Example: "He caught a huss when he got out of the bush to pick up the paychecks."

IFR Stands for instrument flight rules. These "rules" were procedures and standards put into effect whenever visibility was so limited by bad weather or darkness that the pilot had to rely on flying with instruments. When IFR was not in effect, VFR—visual flight rules—would be used.

immersion foot Condition in which the foot becomes numb and then turns red or blue. As the condition worsens, the feet swell and open sores break out, leading to fungal infections and ulcers. If left untreated, immersion foot usually results in gangrene, which can require amputation. Immersion foot develops when the feet are constantly cold and damp and are enclosed in constricting footwear. It is also known as trench foot.

ITR Stands for infantry training regiment. Upon graduation from boot camp, Marines are assigned their military occupational specialty, or MOS. They then undergo training in their MOS at various bases. Those assigned an MOS of 03, infantry, went on to the Infantry Training Regiment at Camp Pendleton, California. "Oh-three" was far and away the most common Marine MOS.

John Wayne Small thumb-size can opener that folds the blade against itself and is usually worn with the Marine's identification tags (dog tags). Its official military designation is the P-38 can opener.

K-bar Knife with a seven-inch blade and a wrapped-leather handle. It looked like a large bowie knife and has been standard issue to all Marines since World War II. It could be a lethal and effective weapon,

but it was most often used for numerous more utilitarian jobs, such as cutting brush, opening cans, whittling short-timer's sticks, and cleaning fingernails. The name is of obscure origin, but the likely source is "Knife Accessory Browning Automatic Rifle."

KIA Stands for killed in action.

Kit Carson scout North Vietnamese and Vietcong soldiers who surrendered were offered the opportunity (and good pay) to become scouts for Marine units, using their knowledge of NVA tactics and the terrain to help direct the Marine units on operations. Often these men were disillusioned with communism and fought from idealistic motives, but sometimes they were simply cynical mercenaries fighting for whoever would pay them the most. They were generally regarded as traitors by the Marines, however unfair that image may have been.

lifer Someone who is making the military a career. "Lifer" was quite often a derogatory label, obviously connoting a prison sentence. It also implied that the lifer put career, military rules, and decorum above the welfare of the troops.

Loco Cocoa Loud and clear. Any other combination of L and C, such as Lime and Coke or Lickety Clit, that struck a radio operator's imagination could also mean loud and clear.

louie Slang for lieutenant.

LP A listening post, usually a team of two Marines placed outside the defenses at night with a radio. Their job was to listen (since they could not see) for enemy movement and warn their unit of an enemy attack. All Marines on LP hoped they could hear the enemy coming, give their warning, and make it back to safety or simply hide in the jungle until the fight was over. They were well aware, however, that the job was sacrificial. A company in the jungle would normally have three LPs out at the same time, one in front of each platoon.

LZ A landing zone for helicopters. Such zones ranged from uneven, often sloping, cleared patches of ground deep in the jungle or elephant

grass, whose diameter was only about twice the expected chopper's length, to larger, better-constructed zones on permanently occupied hilltops. LZ could also refer to something as sophisticated as a large, permanent, often blacktop area at a rear base that accommodated several choppers at the same time.

M-16 Standard-issue automatic rifle used during the Vietnam War. It fired a 5.56-millimeter spitzer boat-tail bullet at a very high velocity, the object being to wound rather than kill. (Wounds tax an army's medical and personnel systems more than kills do.) The M-16 is still in use today, but the bullet is slightly heavier (62 grains versus 55 grains) and is fired at a slightly slower velocity (3,100 feet per second versus 3,250 feet per second).

M-26 Standard-issue fragmentation grenade during the Vietnam War. It was also referred to as a "Mike twenty-six," or a "frag" (as opposed to a "smoke" or an "illum") It weighed 21 ounces, and looked like a fat egg with an olive drab smooth steel skin. It came with a "spoon" on the top—a spring-loaded arming device that was activated by removing a wire ring holding the spoon to the grenade's side. Once the ring was removed, the thrower had to keep the spoon in place by holding it against the grenade with his hand. Once the grenade was thrown, the spoon was released and started a chemical reaction that set the grenade off in four to five seconds. The grenade was filled with coiled perforated metal, which blew into pellet-like projectiles that could kill people within a radius of about fifty feet. The effective killing radius of the grenade, however, was actually only about ten feet. An average Marine could toss an M-26 thirty or forty yards. The explosive was composition B, a mixture of mostly TNT and cyclonite (or hexogen).

M-60 machine gun Standard-issue Marine machine gun in Vietnam. Its maximum range was 3,725 meters (2.3 miles), although its effective range was closer to 1,100 meters (about 0.7 mile or twelve football fields). It fired the standard NATO 7.62-millimeter round (.308 caliber) using linked belts with 100 rounds each. These belts were often carried crossed over the body, but in jungle warfare carrying them that way would expose

them to small sticks and leaves, which would stop the firing, so the belts had to be contained in metal cans that were very heavy and very awkward to carry. The M-60 was designed to be manned by three Marines: a gunner and two assistants to help carry the ammunition. In Vietnam, however, because of attrition, the teams were usually only two men. A good gunner could fire 100 rounds per minute at a sustained rate. Firing at the gun's maximum rate of 550 rounds per minute would soon generate too much heat and destroy the barrel. The M-60 had a folding bipod on the front of the barrel and weighed 18.75 pounds. Marines loved this weapon and generally admired the guys who carried and fired it.

M-79 Grenade launcher that looks very much like a short, fat shotgun. It can fire high-explosive grenades (HE round), heavy buckshot (shotgun round), or fléchettes, small arrowlike projectiles, in a wide arc, so it is a very good jungle weapon where targets are hard to locate quickly.

MAG Marine Air Group.

Marine amphibious force (MAF) Two or more Marine divisions plus necessary Marine air support. During the Vietnam War the MAF was led by a lieutenant general (three stars) and based in Da Nang. It reported operationally to MAC-V, Military Assistance Command Vietnam, headed by an Army general (four stars) located in Saigon. For administrative and logistical support it reported to the commanding general, Fleet Marine Force Pacific (three stars), located in Hawaii. MAC-V reported to U.S. Pacific Command, headed by a four-star admiral.

mast See **request mast**.

medevac Medical evacuation.

mess duty The menial chores of running a kitchen: peeling potatoes, washing dishes, etc. Usually, in peacetime, mess duty is considered something to avoid and is often assigned as a punishment for mild infractions. In Vietnam, however, if a Marine got mess duty, he got out of the bush and into a place of safety, so the punishment became *not* allowing the Marine to get mess duty.

MIA Stands for missing in action.

mike mike Millimeter.

Mike 26 The M-26 hand grenade.

montagnard From the French for mountain dweller. In this context, any person belonging to one of the many indigenous tribes that inhabited the western mountains and jungle of Vietnam.

motor-T Motor transportation. Support troops that operated and maintained trucks and other vehicles used primarily to move people and matériel on the ground. This vital function is often overlooked, much as football fans overlook linemen who seldom score, but without whose contribution no team can win.

mustang Officer who came up from the enlisted ranks.

Mutter's Ridge Strategically important east-west chain of high hills in northern Quang Tri province that paralleled the DMZ. The origin of the name is uncertain, but it has been attributed to several Marines named Mutter, most prominently Staff Sergeant Alan Mutter, USMC, who was killed there. The name has also been attributed to the radio call sign of Third Battalion Fourth Marines, which fought an early battle there. Mutter's Ridge paralleled Route 9 for most of its eastern half and was vital to the control of Route 9 and the valley of the Ben Hai River to the north, another access route to penetrate from Laos and North Vietnam into the Quang Tri plain. In the novel it extends much farther west than it does in reality.

Nagoolian Usually a name for the enemy, specifically the North Vietnamese Army, but often used to designate any Vietnamese unit or even a hypothetical individual. It is derived from Nguyen, the most common Vietnamese name.

NCO Noncommissioned officer.

NCOIC Noncommissioned officer in charge.

NIS Naval Investigative Service. This organization was like the detective force of the Navy, as opposed to the shore patrol, whose members

acted more like uniformed police. NIS also was involved in covert operations that attempted to find criminal activity such as drug dealing.

numby or numbnuts A stupid or incompetent person. Numby is pronounced “nummy.”

NVA North Vietnamese Army, the regular army of the People’s Republic of Vietnam, a well-equipped and well-trained regular fighting force, in contrast to the VC or Vietcong, which was a guerrilla force.

Oley Radio brevity code for wounded in action.

on line When not fighting, infantry units normally move in columns, one man behind the other. In the jungle, there is almost no other way to move and maintain any control. When men who are in a column have to engage an enemy in front of them, they would be able to use only the fire of the first two or three people, otherwise the others could get shot in the back. The solution is to “go on line.” This means that the column spreads out in a long line facing the enemy so that every rifle can be brought to bear on the enemy without the risk of shooting a friend in the back. This maneuver was easier to think about than to accomplish while under fire, particularly in a jungle, where visual contact could be lost within twenty feet.

OP Stands for outpost. An OP served the same purpose as a listening post (LP) but was used in daylight. It was less frightening than an LP because one could see as well as hear and smell and the company usually had small units patrolling out beyond the OPs; these units afforded the OPs extra protection and warning time.

op-con Verb formed from *operational control*. Often, Marines will simply switch units from one command to another if that serves a tactical situation. For example, if a company from one battalion found itself operating to support a company from a different battalion, the battalion commander of the first company would hand over operational control to the commander of the second battalion, thereby eliminating the useless and even possibly destructive delays and misunderstandings that could arise if the two battalion commanders had to coordinate with each

other. The first battalion's company would thus be "op-conned" to the second battalion.

OV-10 The OV-10 Bronco was a two-engine, twin-boom observation and close-air-support plane. With its twin booms and large connecting horizontal stabilizer it looked much like the old P-38 Lightning. It carried four M-60 machine guns and two 4-missile Zuni pods outboard on each wing, as well as smoke rockets. It could also be configured for small bombs.

patrol Mission assigned to a smaller unit. A patrol involved walking outside the sight and rifle range of the larger unit and would range anywhere from five to ten kilometers (about three to six miles) and last up to a full day, depending on the terrain. Patrols were used to locate the enemy and enemy supplies and to destroy them or fix them in place until reinforcements could arrive. Patrols also were used to screen the enemy from approaching the larger unit and give warning if an enemy approach was detected.

platoon Three squads form a platoon. During the Vietnam War a platoon was designated to be forty-three Marines, but in combat conditions the platoon was usually manned at levels in the low to mid-thirties. A platoon was supposed to have either a second lieutenant (one gold bar) or a first lieutenant (one silver bar) as its leader, a platoon sergeant (four stripes), a platoon guide (three stripes), and the platoon leader's radio operator. In Vietnam by the late 1960s, there was a shortage of staff NCOs, so three-stripe sergeants often became platoon sergeants. Platoon guides were often done away with, and a second radio operator was added (along with a second radio) to assist the platoon sergeant—who in mountain and jungle fighting often operated independently from the platoon commander. Both the platoon sergeant and the platoon commander led squad-sized patrols.

poag An overweight rear-area do-nothing. The term is derived from the time when the Marines were in China before World War II. They were issued candy (Baby Ruth, Tootsie Rolls, etc.) to supplement their rations. Sugar and other sweets were rare commodities in China, so the

troops found the candy useful for barter in towns. The Chinese word for prostitute sounded something like “pogey.” Thus, the candy became “pogey bait” and the expression eventually became Marine slang for junk food and candy bars in general.

point The first man in front of a column is said to be the point man or simply the point. The act of being the first in the column is called “walking point.” It is probably the most frightening and nerve-racking job, short of an actual assault, that an infantryman does—and some claim it’s worse than an actual assault.

poncho liner Thin blanket of camouflaged nylon (5 feet 8 inches by 6 feet 10 inches) quilted to a polyester fill. It was tied, by attached strings, underneath a Marine’s rubberized-canvas poncho to provide warmth. It was most often used as a blanket, the only source of warmth for most Marines in the field.

pos rep Position report.

PRC 25 Pronounced “prick twenty-five.” This was the AN/PRC 25 FM radio used by all Marine infantry units in Vietnam. It used early solid-state technology and weighed about twenty pounds, with its battery. It was carried like a backpack by the radio operator. It had 1.5 watts of power and could broadcast three to seven miles, depending on the terrain. Unfortunately, high hills blocked the signal, making it less effective in the mountains. Also, although the radio itself was waterproof, the handset was not. The handset looked like a black 1960s telephone handset attached by a long spiral cord. When the radio was turned to maximum volume, a person could hear easily with the handset a couple of feet from the ear. The handsets were often wrapped in plastic to protect them from the constant rain of monsoons. Radio operators were prime targets, easily spotted by the large FM antenna, which also identified the person closest to the radio as the unit leader.

R & R Stands for rest and recreation. Marines were given a five-day R & R once during their thirteen-month tour of duty in Vietnam. Because some places were more popular than others, the most desired places to go on R & R were allocated according to how much time a

Marine had spent in-country. Sydney was a first choice among white Marines. Bangkok was a favored choice among black Marines. Hawaii was a favorite of married Marines. Some Marines waited until their twelfth month in order to get enough seniority to go where they wanted.

radio alphabet code Because letters can often be mistaken when transmitted orally, the military adopted a standard code designating each letter: Alpha is “A,” Bravo is “B,” and so on through Zulu for “Z.” Because NVA intelligence units would intercept radio messages, Marines were leery of saying last names over the radio, so Jones would become “character Juliet,” Smith would become “character Sierra,” and so on.

radio brevity code An unsophisticated but continually changing shortcut code used for concealing information from the enemy in speaking over a radio. For example, beer brands could be used to designate different categories of casualties: e.g., “Coors” for killed in action, “Oley” for wounded in action. After a short time a new system would be established, such as cigarette brands: “Camels” would mean killed in action and “Luckies” would mean wounded in action. A few days later professional quarterbacks would be the general category, so Namath could mean killed in action; Hornung, wounded in action; and so on. Brevity code was applied to anything that was dangerous to transmit in the clear. For example, “cars” would be the brevity code to transmit locations. A specific car name would refer to a designated grid coordinate. The person radioing in a position would say, “From Cadillac up two point four and right three point one.” The listener would go to the designated “cars” grid coordinate for the day and calculate (in kilometers) from there to locate the transmitting party. Sending one’s location in the clear would invite artillery or rockets to that location.

radio unit designators To confuse enemy intelligence when transmitting the names of units, a battalion-size unit would have a radio name that it changed frequently. For example, here the First Battalion of the Fourteenth Marines is designated “Big John.” Bravo Company of the First Battalion would thus be designated “Big John Bravo.” The First Platoon of Bravo Company would be called “Big John Bravo One.” At the company level, for convenience, the battalion designator would be dropped.

The company would just be Bravo, and the First Platoon would be Bravo One. First Squad in the First Platoon would be Bravo One One, and so on.

Red Dog Radio brevity code for any squad-size patrol.

regiment Traditional core unit of the Marines, about 4,000 Marines. It consisted of three infantry battalions, one artillery battalion, and supporting staff and was usually commanded by a full colonel, often called a “bird colonel” because the rank is designated by a silver eagle. When someone is asked what unit a Marine served with, the answer will usually be in the form of the individual’s regiment, such as “Fourth Marines,” “Ninth Marines,” or “One-Nine,” meaning First Battalion Ninth Marines. Regiments can be shifted to various divisions or task forces, depending on need. Command of a Marine regiment is a very prestigious position.

regular The Marine Corps divides its officers into two categories: reserve and regular. A reserve officer has USMCR placed after his name and rank; a regular officer has only USMC placed after his name and rank. All enlisted personnel are regulars, unless they specifically join a reserve unit after active service. Reserve officers are expected to serve three or four years of active duty and then either join a reserve unit or quit the Marine Corps altogether. The bulk of junior officers are reserve officers, the exceptions being graduates of the Naval Academy and some graduates of Naval ROTC who have already chosen the Marine Corps as a career. If a reserve officer wants to make the Marine Corps a career, he “goes regular” and is then viewed very differently by the Marine Corps personnel system. He no longer has a set time commitment to the Corps, but is expected to serve at least twenty years until retirement, and in most cases longer. In exchange, good positions such as command of company-size or larger units and advancement in rank are easier to attain. Very few reserve officers ever attain a higher rank than first lieutenant or get assigned to career-enhancing positions.

request mast Every Marine has the right to request an interview with his commanding officer. The term “request mast” hasn’t changed since the days when Marines served on wooden sailing ships and the interview took place “before the mast.”

RHIP Rank has its privileges.

Route 9 A mostly dirt or gravel two-lane highway that connected the coastal plain around Quang Tri to Vandegrift Combat Base, Khe Sanh, and Laos. During the Vietnam War it was the only easy way to cross the mountains and supply Marines operating in them with land-based transportation. It also ran through the only easy way to get from Laos into the populated coastal lowlands, and was the most direct way for the NVA to reach Quang Tri, particularly with armor; hence, it was of immense strategic value.

RPD Ruchnoi Pulemet Degtyarev, one of the lightest and most effective machine guns ever produced, was the standard machine gun used by the NVA and the Vietcong. It used the same 7.62-millimeter bullet as the AK-47 and the SKS. Beneath the barrel, it had a 100-round drum that contained the belted ammunition. The drum protected the ammunition from getting fouled by jungle dirt and plants, further increasing the RPD's effectiveness. This weapon could fire about 150 rounds per minute for an effective range of around 800 meters (about half a mile). The bipod is permanently attached but can be folded alongside the barrel for ease in movement. The RPD weighed 19.4 pounds fully loaded.

RPG Stands for rocket-propelled grenade. This is a small rocket with an explosive head that can be fired by a single man. It is very effective and is still used in Iraq by the insurgents.

RTO Stands for radio operator, from "radio telephone operator," a defunct name no longer used by the time of the Vietnam War.

scuttlebutt Gossip, rumor. A scuttlebutt is a water fountain on a ship, a place where people congregate and exchange informal talk.

Semper Fi Short for *Semper Fidelis*, Latin for "always faithful," the Marine Corps motto. It means always faithful to the country's call, but for Marines it primarily means always faithful to each other.

senior squid The Navy hospital corpsman assigned to a company headquarters who is in charge of the corpsmen assigned to the platoons in the company. The table of organization rank called for a hospital corpsman

first class (HM1 or HM-1), a naval petty officer equivalent to a Marine staff sergeant (E6 or E-6). Each Marine company had one senior hospital corpsman at the company headquarters. Tactically he reported to the company commander, but administratively he reported to the battalion surgeon, a Navy doctor, usually a Navy lieutenant. In Vietnam, because of shortages, this post was often filled by a lower-ranking hospital corpsman second class (HM2 or HM-2), the equivalent of a Marine sergeant (E5 or E-5), and there was often only one corpsman to a platoon.

shit-kicker A paperback western novel.

shit sandwich A particularly tough firefight.

short-timer A standard tour of duty for a Marine in Vietnam was thirteen months. Around month eleven or twelve, most Marines began behaving differently. At this time, in contrast to the previous months, they could entertain the hope that they were going to get through alive and unscathed, but this hope destroyed the earlier psychological numbness and fatalistic thinking of the combat infantryman that had made fear easier to deal with. Short-timers' behavior took all sorts of forms, like wearing two flack jackets, refusing to come out of a fighting hole to urinate, or refusing to brush one's teeth (on the assumption that brushing made one's smile too bright). Some of these behaviors were consciously opera buffa, but others were a result of serious psychological disturbances.

short-timer's stick Wooden staff from three to five feet long and about two inches in diameter. It was marked in some way each day, elaborately or simply, depending on the skill and taste of the carver. A few contrarians would mark all the days at once and then lop off a mark for each day that passed, until the lucky ones carried just a stub. The sticks served as walking sticks, canes, tent poles, and even weapons in a pinch. Some of the short-timer's sticks were works of art.

sick bay This was where the battalion medical staff was available for nonemergency illnesses and injuries. The term also meant the activity of providing routine medical care, as in "Sick bay will be at 0830 hours every day."

Six Radio code for the commanding officer of a unit the size of a company or larger.

skipper Casual term of affection and respect used by Marines to designate a company commander, no matter what his rank. Sometimes it is used for the leader of larger formations, such as a battalion or Marine Air Group or squadron. In the Navy, it refers to the commanding officer of a ship or boat, no matter what his rank, and has much the same connotation.

Skoshi cab A small Japanese taxi. "Skoshi" means small or little in Japanese. Small Marines often were nicknamed Skosh, for example, Bass's radio operator.

SKS Standard-issue semiautomatic weapon used by the North Vietnamese Army and Vietcong. It fired the same 7.62-millimeter bullet as the AK-47, but it did not fire automatically: the trigger had to be pulled for each shot. Being longer than the AK-47, it was much more accurate.

snoopy Slang for a poncho liner, so called because one could hide under it in the jungle when "snooping around." The name also evoked, comfortingly, the cartoon beagle Snoopy.

snuff or snuffy A young Marine of low rank.

Slausens A gang of the 1960s in Los Angeles.

splib Among Marines in the bush during Vietnam, this was a non-derogatory term for a black Marine. It was used by both blacks and whites as a rather "hip" way of identifying an African-American, usually a male. A common example is "He's a splib dude" for a black Marine, in contrast to "He's a chuck dude" for a white Marine.

squad Unit designed to consist of thirteen Marines: three four-man fire teams and a squad leader. Usually, however, it operated with about ten or eleven Marines. A squad was designed to be led by a sergeant (three stripes), a noncommissioned officer with at least four years of experience or more; in Vietnam, though, most squads were led by corporals (two stripes) or even lance corporals (one stripe), most of whom were teenagers.

squid Slang for a Navy hospital corpsman. The Navy provides all the medical services for the Marine Corps. (The Army, by contrast, has its own medical services; the Army equivalent of a corpsman is called a medic.) Corpsmen wore Marine uniforms and trained for service with the Marine Corps in special schools run by the Navy at Marine Corps facilities called field medical services schools (“Field Med” for short). The table of organization called for two corpsmen for each platoon, but there was often only one.

stand to Most attacks come at dawn or dusk, when the light is favorable enough for the attacker but makes him hard for the defender to see. For this reason all Marines would be required to man (stand to) their fighting holes at these critical times.

super-grunts Reconnaissance Marines. Reconnaissance personnel were all volunteers who operated far from friendly units in very small groups. Only highly recommended and experienced Marine infantry personnel were selected from the rifle companies; hence the half-derogatory, half-admiring nickname “super-grunts.” Marines still in rifle companies had mixed feelings about reconnaissance teams. On the one hand, these teams were admired because they were brave, were frequently sent on dangerous missions, and had already proved themselves as ordinary grunts. On the other hand, they lived in relative comfort in the rear when they weren’t out in the bush, and if they got into trouble they sometimes had to be bailed out by a rescue operation, which usually involved a firefight. There were two levels of reconnaissance: division and force. Force reconnaissance personnel received more extensive training than division reconnaissance personnel; for example they were all highly trained scuba divers and parachutists. Force recon is generally considered to be the *crème de la crème* of the Marine Corps, equivalent to (although the Marines would say better than) the Navy’s SEALs.

TAOR Tactical area of responsibility. A geographic area assigned to any unit for which that unit has sole operating authority and responsibility.

TBS See Basic School.

Three The officer in charge of the staff tasked with planning operations. Major Blakely is in charge of First Battalion's operations staff, S-3, so he is called "the Three."

tubing When an armed mortar shell is dropped into the mortar tube, an explosion propels it from the tube toward its target. The sound of this explosion is very distinct and is called tubing. Usually, if one hears tubing, there are several seconds before the round hits, because the sound of tubing arrives much faster than the high-arcing mortar round itself.

twelve and twenty A Marine's tour in Vietnam was thirteen months, as opposed to the Army's standard tour of twelve months. The thirteenth month was added because initially Marines were transported to Vietnam and back by sea, and the two voyages took roughly a month. Even though the Marine Corps later adopted the Army's practice of moving personnel by air, the tour of duty remained unchanged. However, there was an unwritten policy that no Marine would spend his last ten days in Vietnam out on an operation. Marines would often get so nervous and spooked, worried that they would die just before they were to be sent home, that many stopped functioning. This unwritten policy of getting out of the bush on one's "twelve and twenty" was generally adhered to.

utes or utilities Camouflaged trousers and jackets used by Marines in the jungle. Also called jungle utilities, cammies, and jungle utes. Marines referred to their working non-dress uniforms as utilities; the Army referred to them as fatigues.

VC Vietcong, the guerrilla army based in South Vietnam and supplied by the North Vietnamese. The Vietcong were the "peasants in black pajamas" of folklore, but this force ranged in quality from "peasants" to well-equipped cadres virtually indistinguishable from a traditional regular army. Early in the war the Vietcong had nationalist as well as communist elements, having grown out of the Vietminh movement that opposed French colonial rule. The Vietcong were purposefully virtually eliminated as a fighting force by the North Vietnamese during the Tet Offensive of 1968. They were deliberately thrown into battle,

inadequately equipped or inadequately trained to withstand American firepower, while the regular NVA units, better equipped and better trained, were held back. This was done because the North Vietnamese government feared that the Vietcong would form an opposition to its eventual rule.

VCB Vandegrift Combat Base, located in a small valley in the eastern side of the Annamese Cordillera about midway across Vietnam. VCB was originally called LZ Stud the primary LZ from which the Marines and the 1st Air Cavalry division launched their relief of Khe Sanh. When the Marines withdrew from Khe Sanh, they turned LZ Stud into a forward staging area from which smaller units of company size could be inserted into the mountains. The Marines named it after the hero of Guadalcanal General Alexander Archer Vandegrift, recipient of a Medal of Honor and the eighteenth commandant of the Marine Corps.

VFR Stands for visual flight rules, operational standards and procedures that are in place when flying conditions are good enough that pilots need not rely on instruments.

wake-up It was extremely important, psychologically, to know exactly how many days a man had left until his tour of duty was over and he could leave Vietnam. However, there was an ambiguity. Do you call the day you board the plane for home your last day in Vietnam or your first day out of Vietnam? This was resolved by calling that day a “wake-up.” It didn’t count as in or as out, and this was the most accurate way of expressing how much time was left until the date of departure. (That date was called the RTD, “rotation of tour date,” by the Marines, and DEROS, “date eligible for return from overseas,” by the Army.) It is the day you wake up in Vietnam, but the day you go to sleep somewhere else.

WIA Stands for wounded in action.

XO Stands for executive officer.

NUMERICAL TERMS

.44 Magnum Staff NCOs (four stripes) and higher ranks could carry personal firearms of their choice, and a favorite was the Smith & Wesson Model 29 or Colt .44 revolvers designed to fire the powerful .44 magnum cartridge. (Another favorite was the slightly smaller .357 Magnum.) The original .44 Magnum revolver was developed jointly by Remington, which developed the .44 cartridge (actually a .429), and Smith & Wesson, which beefed up its standard .44 Special to accommodate the cartridge. The weapon was developed in the 1950s but did not become widely known to the general public until later, because it was carried by Clint Eastwood's famous character Dirty Harry Callahan.

.45 Standard-issue .45-caliber semiautomatic pistol. It was issued during the Vietnam War to officers, noncommissioned officers, corpsmen, and machine-gun and mortar crews. It was developed by John Browning in 1905 as a result of Marine action against the Moros in the Philippines, where it was found that a .38-caliber revolver, without a direct hit to either the heart or brain, could not stop a man who had bound his limbs and body with vines or ropes to stop bleeding and prevent shock. The .45 fires a very heavy bullet, at low velocity, and will knock a man down when it hits him in nearly any part of the body. The disadvantages of the .45 are that it has only a few shots before having to be reloaded and that it is notoriously inaccurate. The reputation for inaccuracy is somewhat unfair: because of their far shorter barrel lengths all pistols are less accurate than rifles, and accuracy up to fifty feet is quite good with a skilled shooter. Mastery of the weapon, however, is difficult. It has immense recoil that puts the next shot off target; and accuracy requires sighting time and a steady hand, both of which are often lacking in combat. In Vietnam, most junior officers, corpsmen, and even machine gunners carried both .45s and M-16s. Controversy still rages over the .45. In 1985 the U.S. military replaced it with the 9-millimeter Parabellum semiautomatic pistol, but the Marine Corps still retained the .45, though not as standard issue. Reports from Iraq

indicate that the 9-millimeter is too light, and demand for .45s, which, among their other virtues, can penetrate concrete blocks and still kill someone on the other side, has risen sharply in that theater.

46 See CH-46.

47 See CH-47.

60-millimeter mortar These mortars are referred to as “sixties” or “sixty mike mikes.” The weapon consisted of a 12.8-pound tube 2 feet 5 inches long and 60 millimeters in diameter; a 16.4-pound bipod; and a 12.8-pound base plate. It could fire a 3.1-pound high-explosive round in a high arc a distance of just under 2,000 yards at a rate of eighteen rounds per minute until the tube got too hot. The blast radius of the projectile was about thirty-five feet. All Marine companies in Vietnam carried three sixties, and the rounds, usually two per man, were carried by every Marine in the company.

81-millimeter mortar The M29 81-millimeter mortar was a smooth-bore, muzzle-loading weapon with a high angle of fire. The mortar platoon was located in the battalion H & S company and was most often used by the battalion commander to support ongoing operations when air or artillery was not available. The 81-millimeter could be carried by men on foot if it was broken down into a three-man load: a fifty-one-inch tube and sight, bipod, and base plate. In total, it weighed about ninety-three pounds. It could fire about twenty-four rounds in one minute, but because the barrel heated up, its sustained rate of fire was about two per minute. Its effective range was about two and a half miles. Each round weighed about fifteen pounds.

82-millimeter mortar The Russian-designed, slightly larger version of the very similar 81-millimeter mortar used by the Marines. It can be broken down and carried by a three-man crew. There was a rumor that this mortar was designed as it was because in a pinch it could use the slightly smaller U.S. rounds, but U.S. mortars could not use its slightly larger rounds. An 82-millimeter mortar round weighs about six and a half pounds and carries a terrific explosive wallop. It has an effective range of about two miles. It is very effective in hilly terrain, as it shoots

in a high arc. (Standard artillery, by contrast, usually cannot fire in high arcs but has far greater range and even heavier rounds.)

105 The M101 105-millimeter howitzer was the standard artillery piece used by the Marines in Vietnam. It had a maximum range of 11.27 kilometers (about seven miles). Its maximum sustained rate of fire was about three rounds per minute. (More than six rounds per minute would cause the barrel to burn up.) The figure 105 millimeters refers to the diameter of the barrel (and therefore of the projectile), about 4.1 inches.

120-millimeter mortar Soviet-designed, it fired a thirty-four-pound round up to three and a half miles. It took a crew of five or six to operate, and weighed about 375 pounds. It could be broken down and packed by the infantry, but it was often packed on a two-wheel carriage if the terrain permitted. It was greatly feared because its explosive power was much more destructive than that of the 82-millimeter mortar.

155 The M114 155-millimeter howitzer. The diameter of the barrel and projectile was about 6.1 inches. The 155 had a bigger range—14.6 kilometers (about nine miles)—than the 105. It also carried a much bigger punch; its projectiles weighed ninety-five pounds, nearly three times the weight of the 105-millimeter projectile. The 155 was already obsolete at the time of the Vietnam War, having been put into service in 1942, but its replacement was self-propelled and couldn't be used in the jungle or easily transported by helicopter, whereas the older but lighter version could. For every four batteries of 105-millimeter howitzers, there was one battery of the larger 155-millimeter howitzer.

175 The M107 self-propelled 175-millimeter gun. The diameter of the barrel was about 7.1 inches, and the high-explosive projectile weighed about 174 pounds. This gun could fire almost thirty-three kilometers (twenty miles). The Marines in western I Corps most often used Army 175s when there was no other available support, but did not use them for close support because at long ranges the 175 was not nearly accurate enough. For heavy close support the Marines relied on the eight-inch howitzer, which fired a 200-pound projectile nearly seventeen kilometers (ten miles), but with far greater accuracy. I once saw an

artillery FO, First Lieutenant Andrew O'Sullivan, put an eight-inch howitzer round through the slit of an NVA bunker from around seven miles' distance with only two adjustments. (Andy was only 300 yards from the bunker.)

782 gear Standard-issue Marine combat gear, mainly the pack, poncho, utility shovel, ammunition belt, and suspenders.

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