

# Bases & OPs in Vietnam

*Books I & II, American Heroes: Grunts, Pilots & "Docs"*

By Michael Dan Kellum

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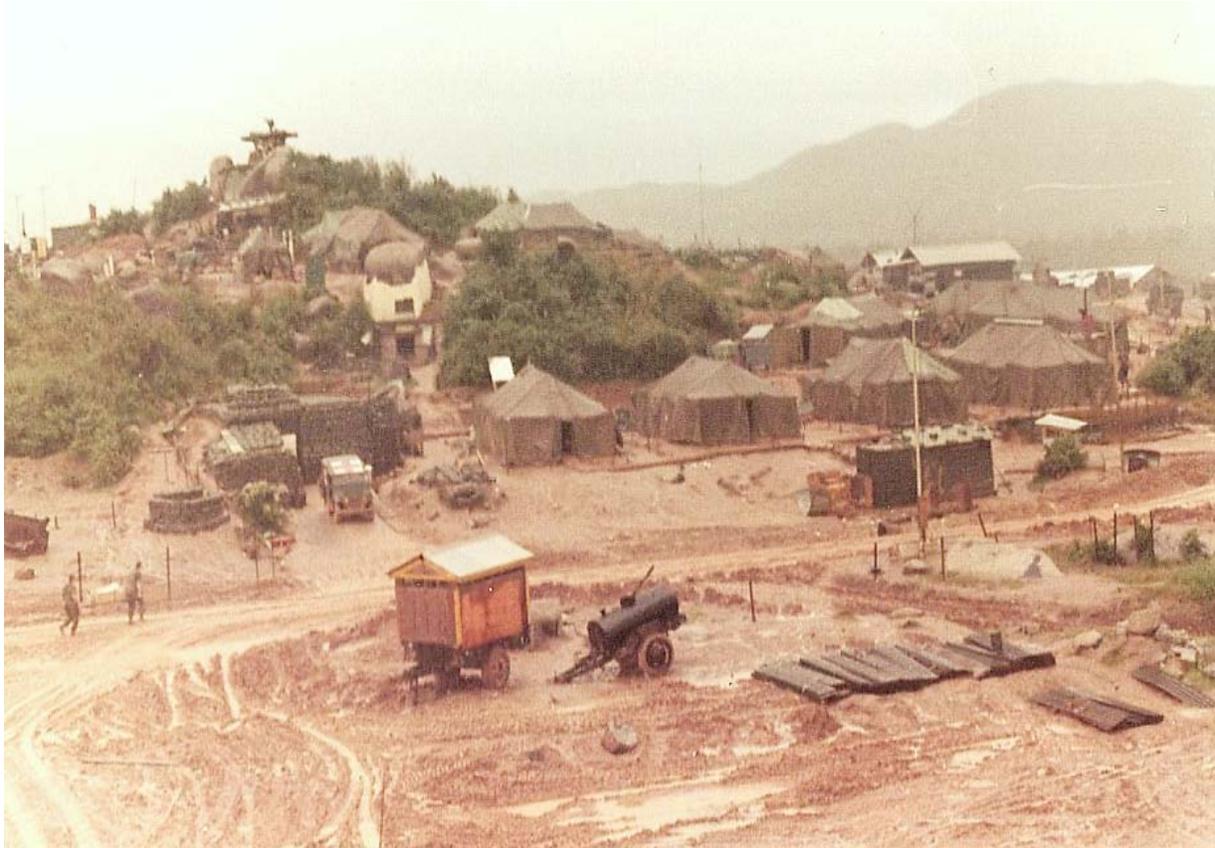
**HMM-263 Sea Knights approach An Hoa Combat Base south of Da Nang in June 1970 sometime before the base was closed, according to MSgt. Barney Espinoza. On III MAF tactical maps the area north and west of An Hoa was red-marked with past enemy activity and was designated Dodge City and Arizona Territory battlegrounds. (Photo by SSgt. Barney Espinoza Jr., MSgt., USMC Ret., HMM-263 S-3 SNCOIC/part-time Sea Knight gunner)**



**This is one of the Five Elements in the Marble Mountain cluster of granite mountains south of Da Nang. Espinoza thinks this is Marble Mountain but I lean towards it being Chinstrap just to the west of Marble Mountain. Regardless, it's a steep drop off and narrow ridgeline for an OP to be situated. (Photo by SSgt. Barney Espinoza Jr., MSgt., USMC Ret., HMM-263 S-3 SNCOIC/part-time Sea Knight gunner)**



**Unidentified mountain top position with "USMC" either etched on the ground or set in dark-colored rocks as of May 1970. (Photo by SSgt. Barney Espinoza Jr., MSgt., USMC Ret, HMM-263 S-3 SNCOIC/part-time Sea Knight gunner)**



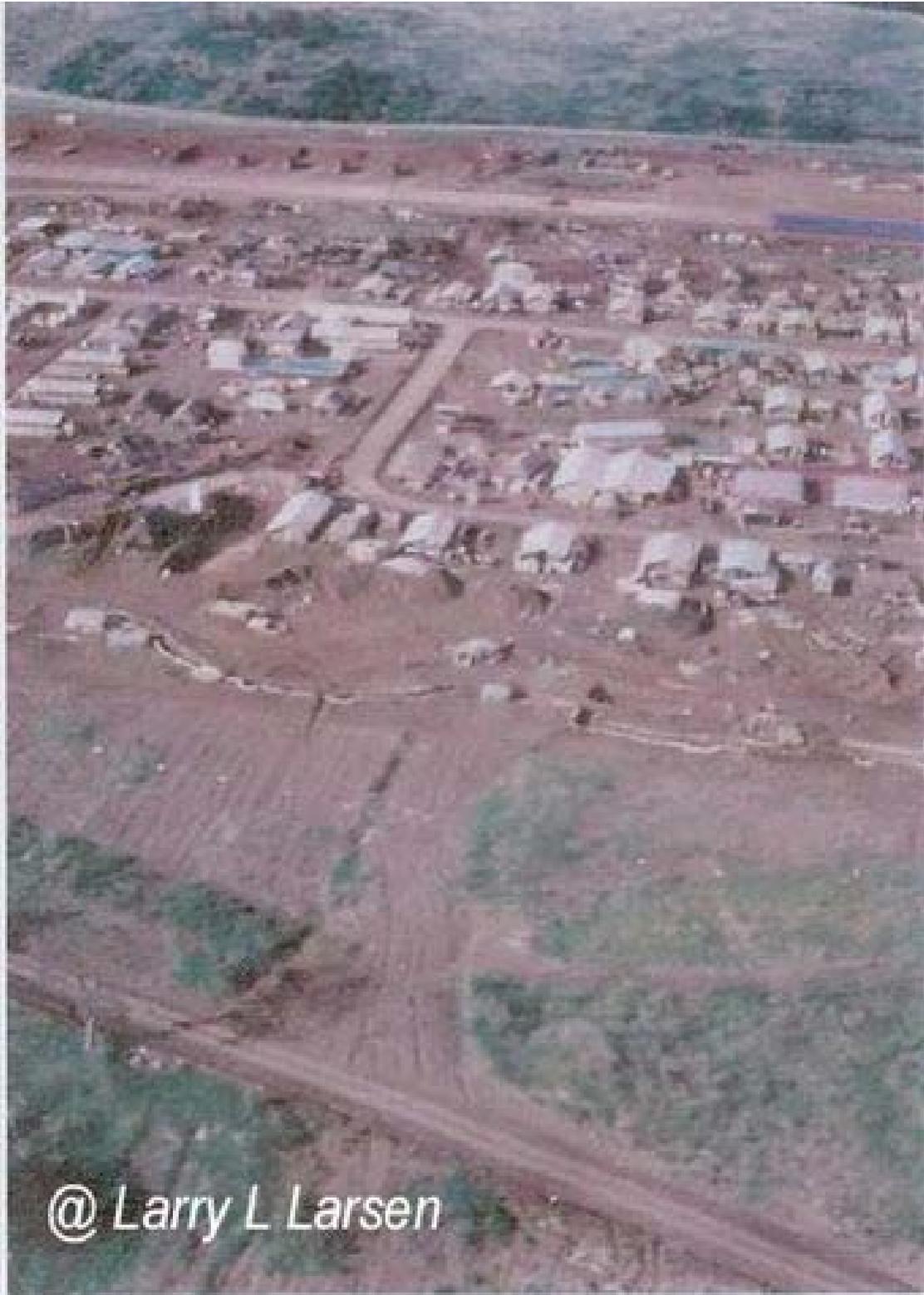
**This was what LZ Baldy looked like in January 1970, according to Espinoza. (Photo by SSgt. Barney Espinoza Jr., MSgt., USMC Ret., HMM-263 S-3 SNCOIC/part-time Sea Knight gunner)**



**Cpl. Dwight Williams took this shot of what he seems to recall was a remote outpost on high ground in the mountains southwest of An Hoa firebase in Vietnam. Note the metal sheeting for helicopters to land on and the low watchtower to the right center of the photo. (Photo by Cpl. Dwight Williams, HML-167 Comprise Huey crew chief)**



**This humorous crude sign was erected at the entrance of the Khe Sanh Combat Base in 1967...probably by Marines. It reads: WELCOME TO KHE SANH, BUILT BY SEABEES, PROTECTED BY MARINES, ENJOYED BY THE AIR FORCE. (Photo by Sgt. Alex Dominguez of Norwalk, California, Sub Unit 5, and courtesy of Larry L. Larsen)**



@ Larry L Larsen

**PFC Larry Larsen, 23, of Alcova, Wyoming in 1967 was in Sub Unit 5, Headquarters Battalion, 3rd Marine Division (basically a Headquarters & Services Battalion) when he took this photo of the Khe Sanh Combat Base in October**

1967 before it became a major target of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops pounded by rockets and artillery. "I left Khe Sanh at the end of October 1967. We were still above ground. That all ended in January 1968 when the siege started," said Larsen. "Bravo 1/9 was there as well. The Hill Fights in April-May changed all that. Or as a sign at Khe Sanh said, 'Home is where you dig it.' Sub Unit 5 continued to exist as a support unit for the 26th Marines until January '68." Most of what you see went underground in bunkers as the NVA/VC pounded the combat base. Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson had a sand table mock up of Khe Sanh made for him to see who held what terrain around the base. He feared another Dien Bien Phu (where the French lost their base stuck out in the middle of nowhere to the Viet Minh in the 1950s) and wanted a close watch kept on the Marines defending the disputed ground. (Photo by Larry L. Larsen)



"Anyone who spent any time at Khe Sanh will recognize this horizon. That's Hill 1015 in the center and Hill 950 to the left. In this picture there is an airstrike going on Hill 1015. We had men on 950 for a very long time. It was a radio relay station so that KSCB could communicate with the rest of the world. The NVA tried several times but we were never kicked off of it. This skyline was directly north of the base," recalled PFC Larry L. Larsen. Note the Marines on the bunker and off to the bottom left of the photo rubbernecking watching the show put on by the Marine Air Wing, U.S. Air Force or U.S. Navy pilots. It was a life and death pitched battle situation for the Marines and

**their Navy Corpsmen holding those heights. The defenders of Hill 950 had an ace in the hole though with the support of air and artillery. (Photo by Larry L. Larsen)**



**"I believe the photo above was actually the result of one of our short .81mm mortar rounds at Khe Sanh in 1967 during the Hill Fights. We called it the 'swimming hole' because it filled up with water during the monsoons. I'm not sure whose tent it was. It was right next to the wire platoon's tent," said PFC Larry Larsen. Note all the damage the shell caused. (Photo by Larry L. Larsen)**



**This was the 2nd Battalion, 26th Marine Regiment's Rear base or better known as the Rockcrusher which was on the west side of Division Ridge. The base was surrounded by ridgelines in a U-shaped formation. I was going to make a comment the U.S. flag and South Vietnamese flag were supposed to be flown at the same height but it appears as if our flag was somewhat taller than the RVN flag in this picture. Sandbags are on the tin roofs to hold them in place in high winds. That looks like the mess hall on the right down the hill. At the top of that tall ridge is where I saw my first firefight in the distant Arizona Territory late one night. Enemy green tracer rounds stitched the night followed shortly by our Marines' answering red tracer rounds. We were so far away we never heard a sound...just saw these Roman candle-like display of red and green colors flying around glowing in the dark with occasional silent flash of**

**M-79 or baseball grenade explosions. Later Sea Knight medevac helicopters and gunships dispelled any beauty of what I thought I was seeing. Marines were killed or wounded by those "green" colors. It just seemed so surreal. A zig-zag road leads to the top of the ridgeline allowing jeep, tank and other 4-wheeled traffic. (Photo by Michael Dan Kellum)**



**A look back towards Da Nang to the south on Highway 1 en route to Hai Van Pass and 2/26's forward battalion base to the north. Note the lack of traffic along renowned Highway 1 into the Annamite Cordillera and the small military base in the foreground. Waterfalls cascaded from the taller mountains and ran under bridges along Highway 1. French Citroen vehicles full of Vietnamese scared the bejesus out of me and my company driver periodically whipping around blind curves at high speeds forcing us to the precipitous edges of the roadway. Once arriving at 2/26's forward base cloaked in cloud cover reducing visibility to about 40 feet, a new adventure awaited us as a sniper was taking the whole base under fire from a nearby mountain peak. In 2003 2/26's former CO Col. William C. "Wild Bill" Drumright, USMC, Ret., surmised that the "sniper" was actually a bored bush Marine giving the rear office pogues some "combat" excitement...which some of us could have done without. (Photo by Michael Dan Kellum) See Chapter 10, *Book I, American Heroes: Grunts, Pilots & "Docs."***



With a sense of history, I shot this photo from the back of a 6-by truck on March 6, 1970 as replacement troops entered the front gates of Camp Lauer for the first time. Ten of the Marines were aboard from 2/26 sent to 2/1 to complete their Vietnam tours. (Photo by Michael Dan Kellum) See Chapter 12, *Book I, American Heroes: Grunts, Pilots & "Docs"* for observations upon arrival at 2/1, Camp Lauer.



**Not the best photos of Camp Lauer's company row with the battalion HQ in there as well. It always warmed our hearts and made you feel somewhat better to come through the front gates of Camp Lauer and see the Stars & Stripes billowing in the wind. It was just one of those patriotic special moments. Note the sandbags on the roofs to keep the tin roofs from blowing away during typhoons but also from helicopters' rotor wash from the nearby LZ. Top right and in the photo at the bottom is the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment signature sign**

**and also a facsimile of what our end of tour plaque looked like and said to be given to each departing Marine and Navy Corpsman in 1970. (Photos courtesy of Michael Dan Kellum)**