



(ABOVE) During a welcome home parade through the city of San Diego, memorial ceremonies were held for members of the regiment who had given their lives in Vietnam. (RIGHT) Col Adolph G. Schwenk, CO of the 27th Marines, led his troops in the homecoming parade.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SSGT BRUCE MARTIN

The 27th Marine Regimental Landing Team (RLT), the first major combat unit to come home from the war in Vietnam, was made up of two-four veterans.

PERHAPS it's a three-way tossup over who was happiest that the 27th Marine Regimental Landing Team (RLT) was pulled out of the Vietnam war and returned to the U. S. The returning Marines, all veterans of one previous tour in Vietnam with other units, were undoubtedly happy to be home. Unquestionably, the dependents of the Marines were happy, too. We can assume that the communists in the I Corps area of Vietnam are happy they won't have to tangle again with the regiment that accounted for 992 confirmed communist kills on Operation "Allen Brook."

When the giant jet transport returning the lead elements of the first American unit to be withdrawn from the Vietnam war descended on San Diego, California's, night-darkened Lindbergh Field, there were no crowds waiting to cheer or military bands to play martial music. But none of the returning two-four veterans seemed to notice as they filed

stolid-faced off the aircraft. They were home from Vietnam, and for the moment, that was all that mattered.

On hand to greet the members of the RLT was BGen Leo J. Dulacki, commanding general of the Fifth Marine Division, the parent organization of the 27th Marines. Col Adolph G. Schwenk, commanding officer of the returning regiment, was the first Marine off the aircraft. He had taken the regiment to Vietnam to begin his first tour there, and was scheduled to return to Vietnam to continue his tour after the regiment was again installed at Camp Pendleton, Calif., the Fifth Marine Division's home base.

None of the Marines filing from the aircraft commented audibly on the lack of a welcome-home audience. They knew their aircraft was four hours ahead of its scheduled arrival and that there would be time for a proper homecoming welcome later. The city of San Diego, they had



heard, was planning something special for them.

"I gotta make a phone call," one corporal said, looking across the runway in search of a non-existent phone booth.

"Is the club open?" another Marine asked, running his hand across his dry lips and the stubble that had grown on his face during the 18-hour flight from Okinawa.

"Smell that good air!" a sergeant said as he inhaled deeply. "It might have a little of that L.A. (Los Angeles) smog in it, but it sure don't have any Charlies around fouling it up."

And then, the sea stories began to flow as tension eased and the Marines boarded buses for a customs inspection area. The realization of the fact that they were home again began to spread over the Marines and sporadic cheering and a loud chorus of laughter could be heard from the darkened buses.

Nearly eight months had passed since the 27th Marines had received the word: "Prepare for possible deployment to Vietnam." They got that word on February 12, and two days later advance elements of the 2d Battalion, commanded by LtCol Lewis J. Bacher, was winging its way from Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, Calif., to Da Nang, Vietnam.

Included in the battalion were Marines heading back for their second tour of combat, like Cpl Donald Usery, a veteran of the Third Marines; Sgt Philip Rivera, who had previously served with the Fourth Marines; Sgt Jack Valencia, who had been in combat with the Fifth Marines; and Cpl Jack Musial, whose first tour in Vietnam had been with Force Recon.

Deployment of the regiment to Vietnam was a quickly conceived and rapidly executed plan: two battalions went by air, and one went by ship.

The regiment's 1st Battalion, under the command of LtCol John E. Greenwood, based at Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, was afloat as a battalion landing team on its way to the Philippines and Okinawa for training exercises. It changed course and began landing at Da Nang on February 23.

Meanwhile, the last units of the 2d Battalion arrived at Da Nang on February 18. The 3d Battalion, commanded by LtCol T. J. Woodham, Jr., began its deployment to Vietnam by air on February 17. Within nine days of the original order to "prepare," the entire regiment was ashore in



SSgt Jackie Chinn was met by his wife and the youngest of their five children shortly after he arrived at San Diego's Lindbergh Field.

Vietnam and under the command of Col Schwenk. Less than 48 hours later, some of the regiment's units were operating in the field, supporting other Marine units in search of the communists.

In addition to the regiment, 16 supporting detachments and units from the Fifth Marine Division accompanied the 27th Marines to Vietnam to form the RLTF.

"There was no question in our minds why we were sent in," offered Cpl Douglas I. Kiffer. "There was more action going on in a day's time throughout the entire country than there had been during almost all of my first tour back in 1965."

The combined North Vietnamese Army-Viet Cong "Tet Offensive" in South Vietnam's larger cities had forced the Allies to pull major elements out of the countryside to fight in the cities. This left the outlying posts and defenses around the cities vulnerable to communist attack. Da Nang was one of the cities about which the Allied command was most concerned. That's why the 27th Marines began their initial operations there.

"We got in our first shoot-out around the end of February," explained Sgt Harley L. Bolin of the regiment's 3d Battalion, "but no one on either side got hit. Just a few snipers taking pot-shots at one of our sweeps. We returned a few hundred rounds for the five they fired at us, and they hatted-up and left us alone."

Perhaps May was the biggest month for the regiment as far as taking the war to the communists was concerned. Operation "Allen Brook" began with the regiment's Co. "I" tearing into an NVA unit 15 miles south of Da Nang.

The company-sized, sweep-and-clear operation mushroomed into a multi-battalion operation under the control of the 27th Marines. Of the 992 communists killed, nearly two-thirds were North Vietnamese regulars.

Throughout its tour, the regiment operated in areas ranging from about 30 miles south of Da Nang to just north of Hue. Nearly 2,000 Purple Heart medals were awarded to members of the regiment, many of them for a second wound.

In September, the word was passed among the regiment that members who had completed a previous tour were coming home and the regiment would return its colors to the Fifth Marine Division. Marines on their first tour in Vietnam—who were mostly junior personnel with less than a year in the Corps—were "assimilated" by remaining Marine units as replacements. Other Marine units took up the combat outposts occupied by the regiment's battalions.

The withdrawal plan called for returning the 2d and 3d Battalions to Camp Pendleton and again stationing the 1st Bn. on Hawaii where it again became part of the Fifth Brigade. Of the regiment's 4,800 Marines who deployed to Vietnam in February,

740 were returned to the States, 60 returned to Hawaii, and 2,000 remained in Vietnam with other units. The remaining 1,500 Marines of the 27th RLT had either been returned to the U. S. for discharge at the end of their enlistments, received humanitarian transfers or had been evacuated as casualties.

Six commercial jet liners and one Air Force jet transport were used to return the 27th RLT to San Diego. A dependents' reception center was set up at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, where the returning men were reunited with their families and dependents. U. S. customs officials, augmented by qualified Marine officers, set up customs inspections to speed the returning Marines to their families.

Although the first aircraft to bring back the initial elements of the 27th RLT arrived at night, others arrived the following day to be greeted by Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., along with Secretary of the Navy Paul R. Ignatius and MajGen Lowell E. English, commanding general, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego.

General Chapman also visited Marines wounded in the Vietnam conflict who were patients at the nearby U. S. Naval Hospital at Balboa, and paid two calls on dependents awaiting the return of Marines at the Reception Center. Mr. Ignatius accompanied Gen Chapman on one visit to the reception center.

The day after the 27th RLT returned, the city of San Diego staged a welcome home parade down Broadway Street. It was the first time since the Korean War cease-fire that such a parade had been held in the city.

Marching units, led by the 27th Marines, came from Camp Pendleton and El Toro. Military hardware, such as the HAWK missile and towed howitzers rumbled through the streets, passing thousands of spectators who turned out to welcome the Marines. Overhead, Marine aircraft from El Toro's Third Marine Aircraft Wing flew over the crowds.

During the parade, the main body of the 27th RLT was halted in front of the reviewing stand where ceremonies to honor the regiment's dead were held. And Col Schwenk relinquished command of the regiment he had taken to Vietnam to LtCol Edward L. Meyer, whose task it became to rebuild the regiment into a unit capable of answering another call for rapid deployment.

With the parade and ceremonies out of the way, many of the regi-



(ABOVE) LCpl Gary Cagne called home as soon as he could reach a phone. (BELOW) Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., went to the Naval Hospital at Balboa to visit Marines who had been wounded while serving with the 27th RLT. Accompanying the CMC was MajGen Lowell E. English (R), commanding general, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego.



ment's Marines departed on leave while others traveled to Camp Pendleton. There was, perhaps, one event of their first three days back home which stood out, momentarily, above the rest. It was the "peace demonstration" carried out by only two women carrying two small children and a sign superfluously advising that "War is Unhealthy!"

"I couldn't agree more with the woman carrying the sign," expounded Sgt Leonard Toliver in a tone of disgust. "War is unhealthy . . . but in Vietnam, it's a necessary means to end an even more unhealthy possibility. I mean freedom *sometimes* has to be won under unhealthy conditions!"

