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# 2d Battalion, 5th Marines

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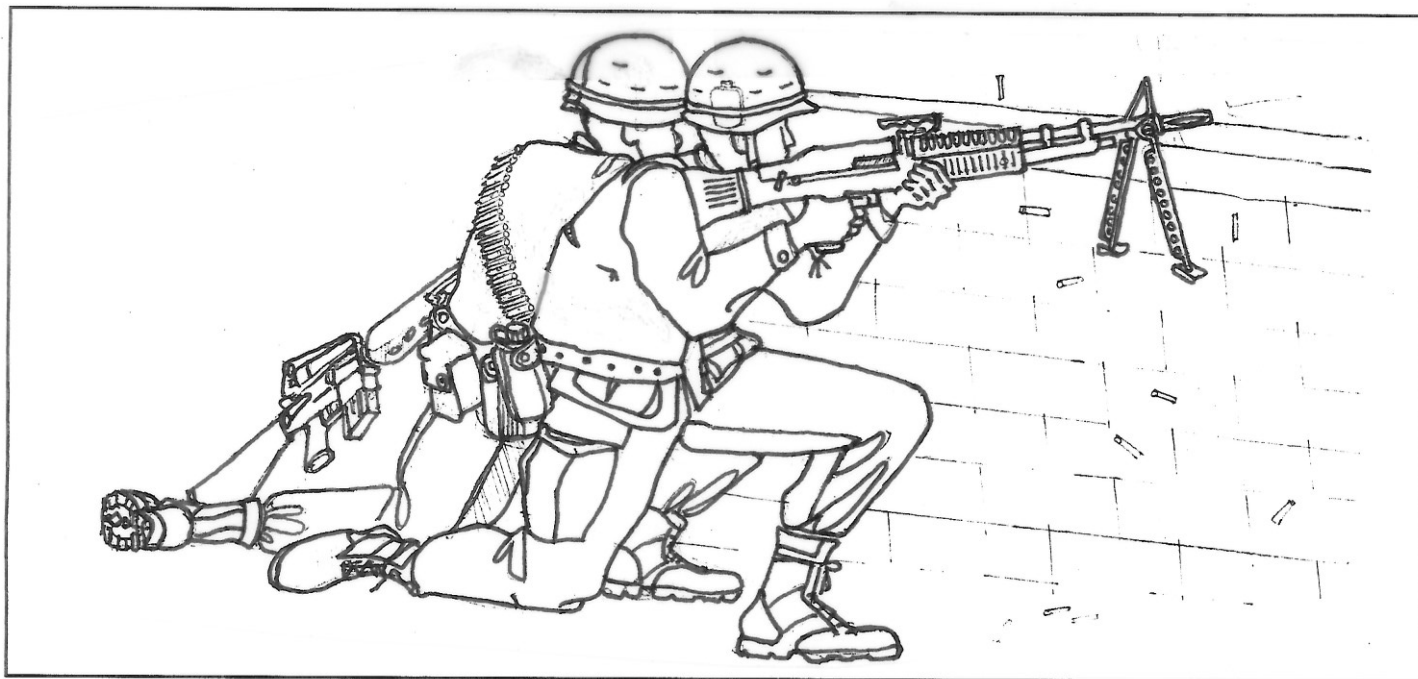
# HUE

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31 January 1968

A Pocket History



## USMC Utility Uniform at Hue City

The Marines of 2/5 fought in Hue armed with the M16 5.56mm Automatic Service Rifle. The M-60 shown above was the general purpose machine gun. Additional heavy weapons used in Hue included 3.5in Rocket Launchers and 106mm Recoilless Rifles. M-79 Grenade Launchers and grenades were also extensively used.

The Marine infantryman's utility uniform was sateen green. A flak jacket was worn in combat. The web equipment included a pistol belt with bayonet, first aid kit, and plastic one-quart canteens. All 2/5 Marines carried gas masks in Hue. The steel helmet was covered by a camouflaged helmet cover.

**Hue City, Vietnam.** Hue (pronounced *hway*) was a city of two-parts. In the north was The Citadel, a castle fortress two miles on a side, completely enclosed by sixteen-foot walls and surrounded by moats. Built in the 1800s, it protected the ancient Imperial Palace. In the south across the Perfume River was Hue's South Side, the principally residential area.

In 1968, The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) 1st Division Command Post was located inside the Citadel. U.S. Military Assistance

Command, Vietnam (MACV) maintained a compound for military advisors on the South Side. Hue was quiet and untouched by the Vietnam war.

**31 January 1968.** On the second night of the Tet Holiday, thousands of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldiers and Viet Cong (VC) guerrillas poured out of the jungle and into the cities of Vietnam. Fighting erupted across the entire country. This became known as the Tet Offensive.

In Hue, two regiments of 7500 NVA soldiers

swiftly took over the center of the city and all the key installations. They captured the Provincial Headquarters and the University on the South Side and most of the Citadel on the north side. By dawn, a huge VC flag flew in front of the Imperial Palace. With the exception of the MACV compound and ARVN CP, the city was in communist hands.

Retaking Hue fell to the U.S. Marines. On the 31 of January, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines was trucked towards Hue as a relief force. This company was hit and stopped by intense enemy fire at the An Cuu Bridge. At 1030, Golf Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, was sent to help. Golf Company, under Capt Chuck Meadows, had 160 Marines. As it crossed the An Cuu Bridge, small arms fire hit from dead ahead. The Marines quickly debarked and Capt Meadows grabbed a street map inside a nearby Texaco station. The company continued to move north on the right side of the raised road. Golf came across many A/1/1 casualties being treated in the road. The two companies linked up, Golf moved to the front, and the battered Alpha Company followed. They fought to the MACV compound and reached it by 1445 that afternoon. Five Marine tanks also arrived at the compound.

Golf's initial mission was to relieve the ARVN CP inside the Citadel. At 1610, Golf attacked north across the Nguyen Huang Bridge. 2d Platoon, under 2dLt Steve Hancock led off. LCpl Barney Barnes' squad was at point. 2dLt Mike McNeil's 1st Platoon followed. At the center of the bridge, the NVA hit Barnes' squad with machine gun fire from the far side. They returned fire with M-60s, receiving 10 casualties. Cpl Lester Tully of 2d Squad charged across the bridge, attacked the gun position with grenades, and killed five NVA soldiers, earning himself the Silver Star. The bridge was secured. Golf, now with 1st Platoon in the lead, advanced. The company turned left and proceeded west in front of the Citadel wall, then turned into the first gate through the wall.

As Squad Leader Cpl Glenn Lucas led 1st Platoon into the citadel, the NVA opened fire on the entire company. The lead squad was cut to pieces. A wounded Corpsman, Donald Kirkham, bravely treated injured Marines until he was killed by AK fire. Captain Meadows' company was trapped under fire for nearly two hours. Of the 160 men in the company, 5 were killed and 44 wounded. Finally, Golf popped yellow smoke and pulled back across the bridge to the MACV compound. A civilian truck was used to evacuate the wounded. This first day was a clear indication of the intense fight to come.

**Thursday, February 1.** At 0700, Golf sent Lt McNeil's 1st Platoon to try to secure the Provincial

Prison, six blocks to the west of the MACV compound. After crossing one street, the platoon could make no progress against the NVA positions. Lt Hancock led 2d Platoon south to rescue two State Department officials. 3d Platoon was tasked with convoy security, escorting the MedEvacs south. The platoon commander, 2dLt Bill Rogers, was also told to report the intensity of the Hue defenses to higher headquarters.

In the afternoon of the 1st, Fox Company, 2/5, under the command of Capt Michael Downs, flew into Hue in CH-46s. The helos took enemy fire on the way in. Attached to the company were two 81mm mortars and two 106mm Recoilless Rifles. Like Golf, Fox brought no packs. They were not anticipating a long fight. Fox immediately sent 2dLt Rich Horner's 2d Platoon to relieve Golf's 1st Platoon. Cpl Chris Brown's squad led the Fox Platoon to the Golf Marine's position. Horner's Fox Platoon was then sliced by fire as the street came alive with green tracers criss-crossing from windows and roof tops. 3d Platoon Fox, under 2dLt Donald Hausrath, was then ordered to help them withdraw. Huddled behind two Marine tanks, 3d Platoon pulled the 15 wounded and dead of 2d Platoon back.

While rescuing his last man, Lt Horner was wounded.

**February 2.** Hotel Company, 2/5, under the command of Capt Ron Christmas, drove into Hue under withering enemy fire and moved to the MACV compound. During the fighting to get into the city, the company artillery FO, Lt Donald Perkins, had been crushed under the wheel of a truck. 2/5 now had three of its four rifle companies in the city.

That night Fox sent its 1st and 3d Platoons against the strong NVA positions surrounding the MACV compound. This force, under Lt Hausrath, took 17 casualties.

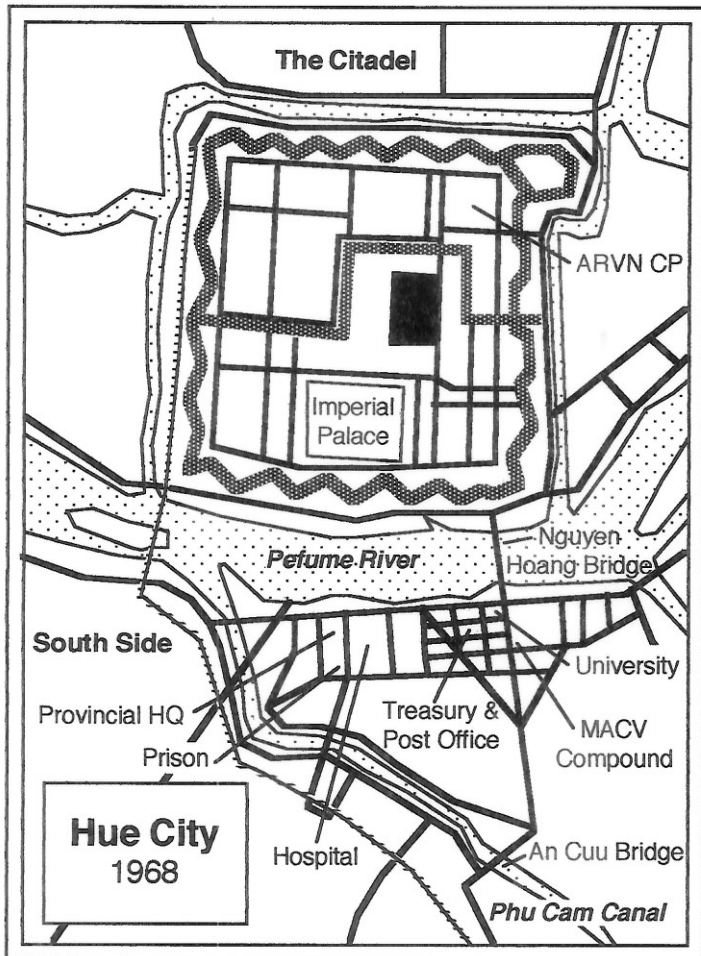
Golf had seized the University building that day. Hotel relieved them in that position that night. At 1815 the NVA attacked the University and was repelled.

**On Saturday, February 3,** LtCol Ernest Cheatham, the Commanding Officer of 2/5, arrived in Hue and took command of his battalion. Echo Company, reinforced by two 81mm mortars, remained outside the city in order to guard a bridge. The CO arrived with the remaining six 106mm recoilless rifles, gas shells, C4, 3.5in rockets and even a flamethrower - every heavy weapon available to fight in built-up areas. 2/5 eventually made much use of these weapons in the city. 3d Platoon, Golf Company returned with the CO and arrived at the MACV compound at 1258.

2d Battalion, 5th Marines now prepared to counterattack. The battalion planned to clear the

South Side from the MACV compound, west along the river, to the Phu Cam Canal. The sector was eleven blocks across and nine blocks deep.

That afternoon, LtCol Cheatham issued orders to his company commanders. The Battalion would advance to the Treasury and Post Office Buildings. The Treasury was built of concrete and had an eight foot wall surrounding it. This area contained the NVA headquarters and most of the NVA troops. It was strongly defended. Fox would lead the main assault. Hotel would seize the public health building to the north and support Fox by



fire. Golf would be the battalion reserve.

2/5 moved into the attack. Hotel quickly seized the public health building but withdrew later that night. Fox tried unsuccessfully to assault the Treasury. The company took numerous casualties and made little progress under intense enemy fire.

**Sunday, February 4.** Hotel Company, under an intense support fire of rocket launchers, LAAWS, M-79 grenade launchers and M-60s, moved aggressively to seize the public health building again. The lead platoon rushed the building following a rocket attack which blew apart an enemy machine gun position.

To assist the Fox Company attack, the Battalion XO, Maj Salvati, found a second-floor position overlooking a key NVA machine gun. This enemy gun controlled the street in front of the Treasury. A 350 lb, 106mm recoilless rifle was manhandled into position under the Major's direction. One devastating shot silenced the NVA position.

Maj Salvati then managed to scrounge two tear gas launchers from the MACV headquarters. He started firing hundreds of gas canisters into the Treasury Building. The NVA did not have gas masks.

Behind this gas attack, Fox Company assaulted the Treasury. As a rocket blasted the main doors, Lt Hausrath's 3d Platoon charged the building wearing gas masks. Leading with grenades and firing at everything that moved, the Marines cleared room to room and floor to floor. By 1700 both the Treasury and Post Office were secure along with the public health building that had been taken earlier.

**Monday, February 5.** After the bitter battle of the day before, the battalion seized the Cercle Sportif Club and the Hue University Library with relative ease. These objectives were taken before 0900 in the morning. The City Hospital, however, was better defended. The entire battalion moved against strong NVA resistance. Fox secured the left flank, while Hotel and Golf, initially stalemated by heavy enemy fire, took the Hospital after lunch. Golf fought heavily through the hospital, clearing room to room. 30 wounded NVA soldiers, patients in the hospital, were captured. At 1830 2/5 stood down in their newly-won positions.

The final objectives on the South side were the Provincial Headquarters and the Prison. From the Provincial Headquarters, which was surrounded by an eight-foot wall, an NVA flag still flew above the city.

**On Tuesday, February 6,** Hotel Company, 2/5 took the enemy flag down.

The prison to the south of the Headquarters was captured by Fox and Golf by 1415.

In the morning of the 6th, Hotel prepped the Provincial Headquarters with gas, but the wind blew it away. At 1425, after stalled attempts all morning, Capt Christmas ordered 1st Platoon to attack. Lt Leo Myers' Platoon, wearing gas masks, rushed to the base of the outside wall. This gave some protection from the NVA fire. A tank came up to support. Capt Christmas grabbed the tank phone and directed 90mm fire onto the building. 81mm mortars and more gas grenades hit the building. 1st Platoon blew a hole in the wall and charged across the open courtyard. The Marines blew open the front door, threw grenades inside and sprayed the building with M-16s.



Capt Christmas and 2d Platoon, under SSgt John Miller, followed by 3d Platoon under Lt Mike Lambert rushed the building. GySgt Frank Thomas, the company gunny, tore down the enemy flag and raised the U.S. flag at 1600, with the help of PFC Walter Kaczmarek and PFC Alan McDonald. These three Marines plus Lt Myers showed the NVA flag they had captured to photographers.

CBS reported, "There was no bugler and the...Marines were too busy to salute, but not often is a flag so proudly raised."

"This assault is being won...on the basis of sheer courage. And there's no shortage of that in the Marines."

The capital building was found to be the NVA Command Post. LtCol Cheatham reported to regimental headquarters: "Be advised we have taken Provincial Headquarters..."

In four days of vicious combat, 2/5 had broken the backs of two and possibly three NVA infantry battalions and an unknown number of VC units. Days of close-in fighting against a numerically superior and well-entrenched enemy resulted in the destruction of the 4th NVA Regiment and the recapture of Hue's Hospital, Prison and Provincial Headquarters. Organized resistance south of the river was wiped out with an estimated 1,053 enemy dead. This was the end of Phase I. Phase II would be the fight for the Citadel.

The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines was ordered to cross the Perfume river and seize the Citadel. This fight, which was as bitter as the fight on the South Side, lasted until the end of February

During 1/5's fight for the Citadel, 2/5 patrolled the South Side, mopping up scattered enemy resistance. Fox rescued the mayor of Hue who had been hiding from the NVA for a week. Golf rescued the mayor's family at a separate location.

On February 10, Maj O.K. Steele became the XO of 2/5 when Maj Salvati rotated.

By February 11, Fox had secured an apartment complex by the Phu Cam Canal. In 3d Platoon, as Lt Hausrath briefed some 3d Platoon replacement Marines, he was killed by AK-47 fire.

On February 13, Fox and Hotel crossed the Phu Cam Canal to clear the west side. As Hotel moved west out of town, they were attacked by mortars. Caught in the open, Captain Christmas was hit by rocket fire. While he was being bandaged, more mortars hit his company. GySgt

Thomas climbed on top of his skipper to protect him. Twenty-three Hotel Marines were hit, including all the officers, and all but two of the SNCOs. Lt William Harvey, the battalion S-3A, took command of Hotel Company.

On 26 February, LtCol Cheatham led 2/5 on a battalion-sized night march south through the city, across the canal, and then back north to trap stragglers between them and the canal. Thirty-seven NVA were killed in this action.

On February 22, 1/5 seized the southeast wall of the Citadel and the ARVN took the Imperial Palace. On February 26, the city was declared secured. It had taken a month of fierce street fighting, in which 142 Marines had died and 857 were wounded. The city was in ruins.

Almost half the Marines involved in the Battle of Hue were injured or killed. LtCol Cheatham and Capt Christmas were awarded the Navy Cross,

Maj Salvati, Capt Meadows and Capt Downs were awarded the Silver Star.

For the heroism and fighting spirit displayed by the battalion during the battle of Hue, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.



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Project Leatherneck  
Training and Operations  
2d Battalion, 5th Marines  
Box 555473  
Camp Pendleton, California 92055  
(619) 725-7884

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