

*Of the approximately 5,000 Marines who went into this program, less than half survived. Of the survivors, it has been estimated that 70% were wounded once, 40% were wounded twice, and approximately 65% received decorations for heroism. In 1968, the Combined Action Program comprised less than 3% of all U.S. personnel in the I Corps area, yet they accounted for 43% of the enemy KIA's. This program was the smallest combat unit existing in Vietnam, but it was also the most highly decorated.*

The Combined Action Program was conceived and operated by the United States Marine Corps from 1965 to 1971. It was designed as a pacification program. In its six year history the program was rarely known outside of its own members and a few Marines fortunate enough to have had some contact with it. Following the end of the War, the program was all but forgotten, except, of course, by its survivors.

The reasons for this lack of recognition are varied. However, the major reason lies within the nature of the unit itself. At the height of the Combined Action Program, there were 114 units, each comprised of 14 Marines, 1 Navy Corpsman, and approximately 20 Popular Force troops. These units were strategically scattered from Chu Lai to the DMZ. Each unit was located within a village or hamlet and was, in essence, completely on its own with regard to its pacification activities, and, more importantly, its security and defense. There existed virtually no artillery nor air support for these units. Medevacs frequently waited 6 to 8 hours after enemy contact before evacuating the wounded. Indeed, so remote and isolated were some CAP units that often Marines would go 6 months without seeing an officer, or returning to a rear area.

The consequences of having been a volunteer in the Combined Action Program are perhaps made clear by the following information.

- The average CAP Marine, having already served for 13 months in Vietnam, volunteered to extend his tour for 6 more months in order to be a member of this pacification effort.
- The Marines were required to have had 4 months combat experience and received rudimentary training in the Vietnamese language, history, customs, and military and governmental organization.

Armed with this limited knowledge, and an overpowering belief that their individual participation in this program might shorten the war, and ultimately save lives, these men--these heroic young men--risked their lives and never lost their humanness.