



# Marine Corps Tank Battles in Vietnam

*Oscar E. Gilbert*

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In 1965 the large, loud, and highly visible tanks of 3rd Platoon, B Company, 3rd Tank Battalion landed across a beach near Da Nang, drawing unwelcome attention to America's first, almost covert, commitment of ground troops in South Vietnam. As the Marine Corps presence grew inexorably, the 1st and 3rd Tank Battalions, as well as elements of the reactivated 5th Tank Battalion, were committed to the conflict.

For the United States Marine Corps the protracted and bloody struggle was marked by controversy, but for Marine Corps tankers it was marked by bitter frustration as they saw their own high levels of command turn their backs on some of the hardest-won lessons of tank-infantry cooperation learned in the Pacific War and in Korea.

Nevertheless, like good Marines, the officers and enlisted men of the tank battalions sought out the enemy in the sand dunes, jungles, mountains, paddy fields, tiny villages, and ancient cities of Vietnam. Young Marine tankers fresh out of training, and cynical veterans of the Pacific War and Korea, battled two enemies. The battle-hardened Viet Cong were masters of the art of striking hard, then slipping away to fight another day. The highly motivated troops of the North Vietnamese Army, equipped with long-range artillery and able to flee across nearby borders into sanctuaries where the Marines were forbidden to follow, engaged the Marines in brutal conventional combat. Both foes were equipped with modern anti-tank weapons, and sought out the tanks as valuable symbolic targets.

It was a brutal and schizophrenic war, with no front and no rear, absolutely no respite from constant danger, against a merciless foe hidden among a helpless civilian population. Some of the duties the tankers were called upon to perform were long familiar, as they provided firepower and mobility for the suffering infantry in a never-ending succession of search and destroy operations, conducted amphibious landings, and added their heavy guns to the artillery in fire support missions. Under constant threat of ambushes and huge command-detonated mines that could obliterate both tank and crew in an instant, the tankers escorted vital supply convoys, and guarded the engineers who built and maintained the roads. In their "spare time" the tankers guarded lonely bridges and isolated outposts for weeks on end, patrolled on foot to seek out the Viet Cong, operated roadblocks and ambushes, shot up boats to interdict the enemy's supply lines, and worked in the villages and hamlets to better the lives of the brutalized civilians.

To the bitter end? despite the harsh conditions of climate and terrain, confusion, endless savage and debilitating combat, and ultimate frustration as their own nation turned against the war? the Marine tankers routinely demonstrated the versatility, dedication to duty, and matchless courage that Americans have come to expect of their Marines.

OSCAR E. GILBERT, Ph.D., is a former marine artilleryman and currently a geoscientist living in Texas. His previous published works include the widely acclaimed "Marine Tank Battles in the Pacific" (2001) and "Marine Corps Tank Battles in Korea" (2003).

## REVIEWS

"Highly recommended for anyone interested in the Vietnam period, especially the experiences of the Marine Corps. "

Armorama.com, 04/2008

“... a monument to the remarkable men who sweated, fought, were wounded (sometimes in more than a simple physical sense) and who died for nothing more (or less!) than that their fellow Marines depended on them. Mr Gilbert has rightfully earned the title of the “go to guy” on the subject of USMC tank operations; this reviewer eagerly looks forward to the next book in this series from this author...”

Missinglynx.com 5/2008

“... A first class page turner. .. profound, profane and somewhat humorous”

USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, 05/2008.

“... A fascinating personal account... explains in graphic detail what it was like to be ‘in the thick of it’...If you have any interest in the Vietnam War or military history in general, I can thoroughly recommend MARINE CORP TANK BATTLES IN VIETNAM as a great read that’s very hard to put down...”

Model Military International, 7/2008

"There are many who have no idea how - or even if-Marine tanks were employed in Vietnam...Gilbert brings the Marine tanker warriors' attributes to the reader through the tankers' eyes...experiences...jump off the pages...a great read, painting a real life picture of how Marine tankers fought the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong Enemy, defeating them in every encounter."

Leatherneck Magazine, 07/2008

"The author, himself ex-Marine Corps, has drawn upon official histories, liberally laced with no-holds barred interviews, to build up an effective picture of the war from a Marine Corps tanker's point of view... If you want to know what it was like to fight a relentless enemy, on their ground, from the inside of an M48 'bullet magnet'... then get a copy of this book."

Classic Military Vehicle, 07/2008

“The author, himself ex-Marine Corps, has drawn upon official histories, liberally laced with no-holds barred interviews, to build up an effective picture of the war from a Marine Corps tanker's point of view... If you want to know what it was like to fight a relentless enemy, on their ground, from the inside of an M48 'bullet magnet'... then get a copy of this book.”

AFV Modeler, 07/2008

“...rich with “I was there” anecdotes that really bring home the events ...an excellent reference on Marine Corps in Vietnam...”

Internet Modeler , 05/2008

“...an authoritative insightful look at commanders, commands, and the tanks and armor that supported them.”

IPMS, 10/2008

“...a fascinating read from start to finish, a real life portrait is painted of what life was like from a Marine Tanker’s prospective. I thoroughly recommend this book to anyone wishing to learn more of the involvement and History of the Marines in the Vietnam conflict.”

Military Modeling.com 10/2008

“Full of gripping and thought provoking first hand accounts... If you really want to get a feeling for what it was like during those times..then this is a book you simply must read.”

Model Madness, 12/2008

‘...does a fine job of combining the personal stories (of which there are many) of Marine tankers with well-documented descriptions of both tactical and strategic situations as they developed throughout the war....near the top of my must read military history list’.

MILITARY, March 2011

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