Captain James Wells: This is Captain James E. Wells of the Marine Corps Supply Center in Albany, Georgia. 7 January 1966. This is unclassified interview with Major Pat Morgan concerning his duty with Marine forces in Okinawa and Vietnam from 1 September 1964 until 7 August 1965. Major Morgan, you were the battalion S3 and planning officer of 3rd Service Battalion during the planning phase for the deployment of the 9th Brigade and Logistics Support Group to the Republic of Vietnam, and you were also designated Executive Officer and S3 of that group. What was the length of time of the planning phase and what was your planning factors for the deployment?

Major Pat Morgan: The planning phase for this deployment lasted about two, perhaps three weeks. There was no definite date that marked the commencement of the planning phase, that I can recall. We had been planning before this operation to go on Operation Jungle Drum during the months of January and February and the operation was considered somewhat similar for a brigade operation. To get to the planning factors in specific detail, the first one was that the brigade logistics support group would go to Da Nang and relieve the wing element already there, of the support of the common functions that we had, such as the bakery, the common supply items of Marine Corps supply, etc. Another planning factor was that we would have a specific personnel ceiling of approximately four-hundred and fifty. This did not include shore party or certain other
functions. The guidance was not clear in this area. This was a drastic cut from the normal total group of about twelve hundred, which did include shore party, Navy beach group, and the total brigade logistic support group as set forth in the 201 orders of the 3rd Marine Division. This drastic personnel shortage haunted us all the rest of operation in Vietnam. Another planning factor was in consideration of the supply and re-supply of the Marine forces being introduced into Vietnam at that time. There was confusion between the planning staffs as to whether we would operate under a 37D plan or 201 orders. This was never made explicit. However, both plans provided that the units going in would have fifteen days of supply going with them and there would be automatic re-supply of all items for an additional ninety days, so that we had no particular problem of re-supply, theoretically, for a hundred-five days. After that time we would go to supply sources as established by COMUSMACV. The other functions of shore party, Navy beach group, medical, dental, motor transport, and maintenance operations were considered that they would be normal under brigade logistic support group control. They were not considered to be major items of consideration in our planning. We were more concerned with our personnel ceiling and our task organization once we were in Da Nang. The planning phase continued for about a week or ten days after the advance party left, and I’m not familiar with the details of planning at that time because I left to take command of the advance party going to Vietnam on D-plus-2, which was 10 March.

JW: You said you commanded the advance party of the brigade logistics support group that flew to Da Nang to join the 9th Marine Brigade. What sort of problems did your advance party encounter upon arrival in Vietnam?

PM: The first problem we found was that the shore party element already there was not sufficiently manned or equipped to establish and run a beach support area or any type of a logistics support area. They were operating the beach facilities only, and they had been doing that for about a day-and-a-half or two. Specifically, there was no control of the supplies or the equipment, except that which was done by Captain Loveland, the only person that we had sent with the shore party when they left on D Day to fly down to Vietnam, and that control exercised by the two separate battalion supply officers, or battalion S4s from BLT39 or BLT13. The second problem is that the advance party consisted of only of twelve people and they were all technicians. We were sent down to
prepare the way for the brigade logistics support group to come in. We were not sent to
take command or control of anything but merely to pave the way and make preparations.
We had no communication, motor transport, or any other type of headquarters facility
which would permit taking command and control. Regardless, we were directed to
commence operations immediately with the battalion detachments that came with BLT39
and 13 from the service battalion, FSR, motor transport, medical battalion, dental
company—everything except shore party. The shore party remained under direct
command. I had to take my twelve technicians, try to find the people from the
detachments from the battalions and try to run some form of logistics support group
during the two weeks that I had remaining until the main body of the actual brigade
logistics support group came in and landed. The third problem is that the total fifteen
days of supply did not come in nor did any automatic re-supply come in. This was a very
serious handicap. The morning after I arrived, I sent my forces about to gather up all the
supplies that were scattered from one end of the airfield to the other and from all the way
from the beach into the airfield where we were located, and hold inventory on the
supplies. We were rather shocked to find that we had only three days of supply for Class
One rations to feed about thirty-five-hundred people. Class Three, we found only thirty-
six drums of MOGAS. The Class Five, we did find sufficient ammunition, provided
there wasn’t much firing to be done except for illumination. Illumination was a critical
item even from the beginning. This is the way that we started our supply program,
having to provide our own re-supply from COMUSMACV sources initially, not having
any leeway of a hundred-five days. The fourth problem was that we had no contact or
communications with forces on Okinawa except via the 9th Brigade. There was no way
that we could request personnel or equipment or other supplies except via the 9th Brigade
headquarters, which in turn had to send its messages via the 3rd MAF headquarters back
on Okinawa, which in turn relayed to the division, which in turn relayed to the service
battalion or FSR, or whichever parent battalion was concerned. This was a tremendous
handicap on us, to try to conduct any sort of business with such a handicap on our
communications. The last major problem that I would like to include here is the
consideration of administrative landing versus a tactical landing. In an administrative
landing, we cannot go in and lay our bulk fuel lines immediately right across cemeteries
and graveyards and private property, as we can in a tactical landing. We had to consider
the rights of private property everywhere we went and this slowed us down considerably.
In reality, it took us over four months, I believe, before we could finally get even a bulk
fuel line from the beach six miles into the logistics support area. In a tactical landing this
would have been done within hours. The plans that we thought that we were under—and
we found out later that we weren’t—called for a tactical landing. This meant that we
would go in and do our job the best that we could, trying to take care of private property
with due consideration but not be limited by it. Under the administrative landing that we
went under we were unduly handicapped, and we were at a tremendous disadvantage
trying to provide supply and re-supply to our customers while being hamstrung with
administrative considerations of private property. As I saw it, there was an apparent lack
of clear coordination between the 9th MAF headquarters, 3rd MAF headquarters back in
Okinawa and the division and wing headquarters and their respective staffs. The 3rd
MAF headquarters, I was told, was a planning staff only.

JW: Upon arrival, the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel George Smith,
and the main body of the brigade was logistics support group. During the latter part of
March 1965 you resumed your positions of Executive Officer and S3 of the group. What
sort of problems did you encounter during the build-up phase in Vietnam?

PM: Our first problem was originally and continued to be a drastic shortage of
personnel and equipment. The personnel shortage was complete throughout our entire
organization, except perhaps in maintenance. Especially we needed supply people and
surgeons in our medical branch. The equipment that became most drastic and critical in
the shortage was generators and rough terrain forklifts. This plagued us in the worst
possible way. The second problem would be the confusion that we found on sources of
supply that we were to go to for all classes, and the build-up requirements. In other
words, did we have to build up a full thirty days of supply, or what? Under the MACV
directives, we were to draw all common items of supply with the Army from MACV
sources. This would naturally would include all Class One and Class Three supplies and
a large portion of our Class Five supplies and even some on Class Two—especially Type
Two, the replacement parts. Several of the staff members of various staffs periodically
would interject that we should be drawing from Okinawa sources. There was never any
clear-cut guidance on this that could be followed as gospel. A third major problem was
the very slow reaction time to our supply requisitions. Even items that were Pri-One and
Two and Pri-Five seemed to take for ever and ever to arrive in Vietnam. In several
instances, items that were Pri-Twelve and lower came by ship and got there before the
Pri-One and -Two, and -Five items that came by air. We were told repeatedly that tons of
Pri-One, -Two, and -Five items were sitting at Fatima in Okinawa but could not come
because there was not enough air space to bring down, to be brought down by Marine
aviation. It was not our position to question it. In some instances the aviation brought
down their organic equipment ahead of our priority supplies. This was known by the
commanders, so presumably this was in accordance with the directives. A fourth major
item is considering the Automatic Data Processing Platoon that we had with us, and its
capabilities. When it worked, it was very good. We had to rely on it almost exclusively,
and when it was down we were completely hamstrung. It was down several times for a
period of two or three weeks, and this really put us in a bad way. I think that probably
the major reason was the Marines who were the technicians had not had enough
experiences back on Okinawa in fixing the machines when they went down there.
Because when they went down on Okinawa the civilians would come and fix the
machines, whereas the civilians would not come to Vietnam except under very limited
conditions. There was another problem, the fifth problem, in considering small unit
supplies, particularly in the area of the task organizations known as the BEG and the
BAG and the BLSG—specifically, the brigade engineer group, the brigade artillery group
and the brigade logistics support group itself. There were all composed of small units:
detachment, platoon, and section size, not above company size. And they did not have
unit supply officers—although we had one with brigade logistics support group—that
could readily handle the supply problems. The classic example is in the brigade artillery
group. They had two separate batteries of artillery from different battalions that were
married together under the command of the Senior Battery Commander and identified as
the brigade artillery group. They had no idea what their JON structure was or how they
should request supplies. They had no information at all about their fiscal accounting.
This caused considerable confusion and problems. Same thing was true in the brigade
engineer group, and we had a problem with our own internal brigade logistics support
group because we had elements from all over the map: the 3rd FSR, separate companies of the Service Battalion, 3rd Motor Battalion, 9th Motor Battalion, 3rd Medical Battalion, 3rd Dental Company. And they were all intermingled by individuals, sections, platoons, and the brigade logistics support groups. And there’s no way to identify how to charge even so much as a roll of toilet paper, which people are going to use it. We had to charge every thing to one common JON for the brigade support group, regardless of the parent command back on Okinawa. Another major problem was the vagueness of doctrine regarding the use of shore party versus logistics support group, and the use of direct support detachments as set forth in service battalions TOs and TEs. We developed our own doctrine as best we could, but we never found any concrete guidance from Marine Corps level on how the doctrine was to be employed. A seventh major problem was the administrative difficulties encountered under a prolonged task organization. Many administrative problems—the classic example again is the promotion of enlisted personnel. The administrative difficulties under task organization were not insurmountable, but they extremely difficult and sticky, especially when they involved separate enclaves. It was our understanding that a task organization was to last only for a limited period and then parent organizations, parent battalions, would resume control of their own units and detachments. For those that belonged to the brigade logistics support group, this did not happen. Especially for the 3rd FSR and other elements, this was a continuous problem, the administrative control. The last problem area I would like to mention under the build-up phase is the perennial communication problem. We had excessive trouble trying to communicating between the various enclaves, various switch board going through many drops in the same vein we had too much reporting to do, both many written and verbal reports. We were drastically short of personnel, even in our free shop. I had only one officer and staff NCO to assist me. And I was trying to double as both the executive officer and S3…We had to spend so much time reporting and we didn’t have enough time to work. This is continuing problem, I understand, in all commands. (Remaining 10 minutes of audio is generally unintelligible because of over-recording.)