

LAAM's 'B' Btry. complete

Dusty by Sgt. Bill Henderson

It was almost a year ago when the first helicopter deployment of the Improved LAAM Missile System was accomplished.

It has been Marine teamwork between the 1st Marine Air Liaison Battalion's Missile Detachment (1st LAAM Bn.), Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron (MHHS) 365 from MCAB 301, Santa Ana, and Camp Pendleton-based 1st Shore Party Battalion to successfully helo-lift the system to a desert training site each year.

On November 1, the third helicopter deployment of the Improved LAAM Missile System began. Named after its predecessor, the operation was dubbed Dusty III.

The weather was typical for this dry season of southwestern Arizona... were dry days and very cool dry nights.

The Marines of "B" Btry, 1st LAAM Bn. had to start their early in the morning of November 1... trucks would begin moving their barracks here for the 2-111 hours into staging area at 7 a.m.

Platoon of heavy-armed Leathernecks loaded their personal gear, stowed aboard, and headed for a four-day field exercise. Every Marine and each piece of equipment would soon be airlifted to the operation area, some 30 miles southwest of Yuma in the midst of the Arizona desert.

Meanwhile, Helicopters circled the flight line when the large Sikorski CH-53 "Sea Stallion" helicopter made its landing gear become entangled by the brilliant orange of Arizona's morning sun.

A steady coolness lay across the area of concrete at the air station's flight line. The calm of the early morning was only broken by muffled voices coming from around the helicopters of MHHS 365, whose pilots and crew members profligate the big birds for the long day that lay ahead.

At 7:40 a.m. when the shrill whine of Yankee Doodle's engines signaled the severity of an otherwise peaceful morning. The pilot had landed the crew members of what lay ahead and now it was simply a matter of getting to the task at hand. 12:30 was followed by the other lumbering "Sea Stallions" as it ground its way from the main runway to pickup its first load of cargo. This would be a platoon of Marines and their equipment.

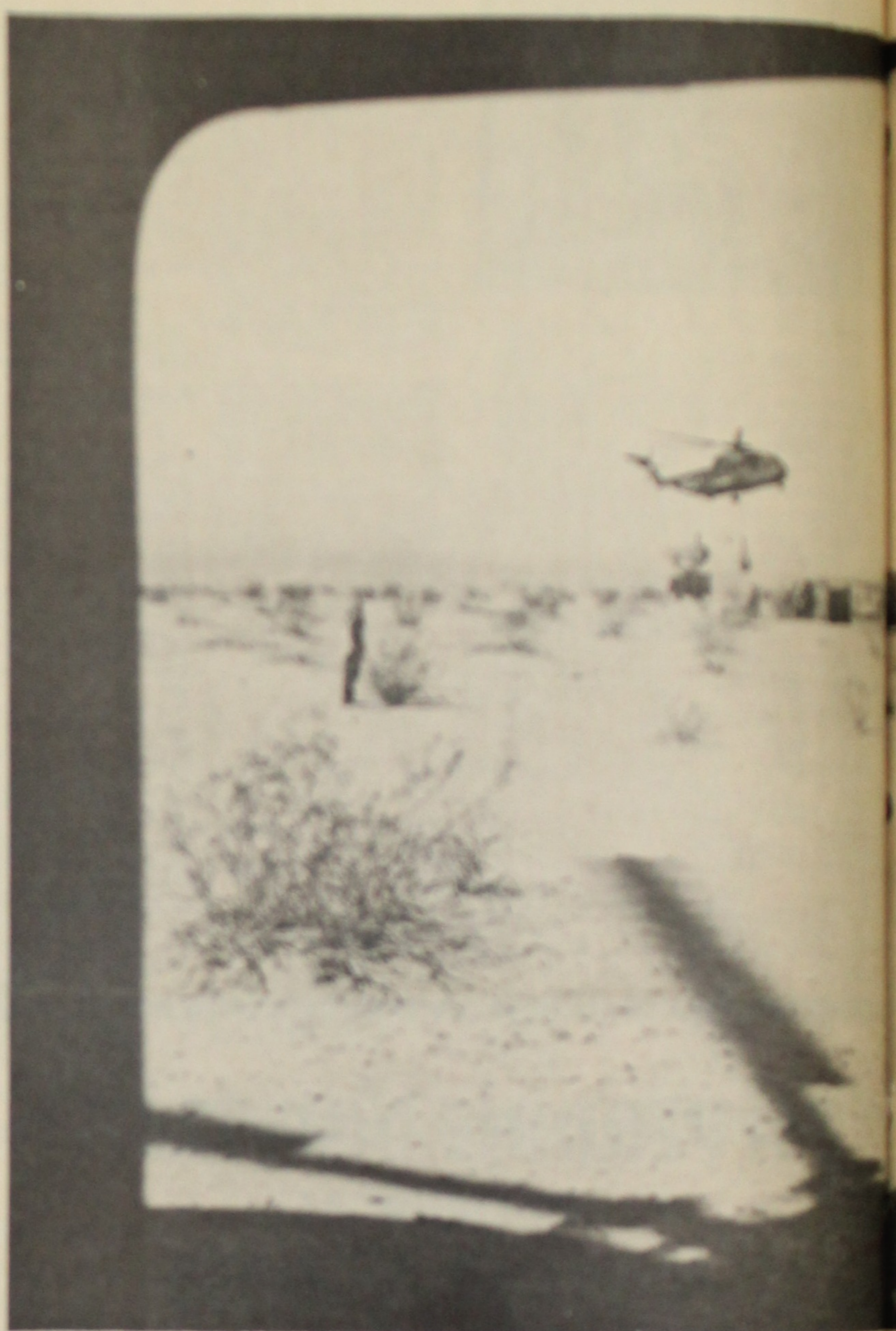
Before 12:40 lifted off, two of its main ships had picked up cargo and were already changing their way to the remote desert training site.

On the ground, 1st LAAM Bn. and 1st Shore Party



'Dusty' day's end

Dusty III chronology	
Nov. 1, 1970	Nov. 2, 1970
<p>0600 - Members of "B" Btry, 1st LAAM Bn. begin receiving their equipment from the 1st LAAM Bn. at Camp Pendleton.</p> <p>0700 - The 1st LAAM Bn. begins moving their barracks here for the 2-111 hours into staging area at 7 a.m.</p> <p>0740 - The 1st LAAM Bn. begins moving their barracks here for the 2-111 hours into staging area at 7 a.m.</p> <p>0800 - The 1st LAAM Bn. begins moving their barracks here for the 2-111 hours into staging area at 7 a.m.</p>	<p>0600 - The 1st LAAM Bn. begins moving their barracks here for the 2-111 hours into staging area at 7 a.m.</p> <p>0700 - The 1st LAAM Bn. begins moving their barracks here for the 2-111 hours into staging area at 7 a.m.</p> <p>0800 - The 1st LAAM Bn. begins moving their barracks here for the 2-111 hours into staging area at 7 a.m.</p> <p>0900 - The 1st LAAM Bn. begins moving their barracks here for the 2-111 hours into staging area at 7 a.m.</p>



From chopper to chopper...a



Be it ever so humble...home



Dodge City... .50 cal. style

Marines rushed about preparing equipment and supplies for lifting as HMH-365's heavy workhorses flew into the area one after another.

It was a race against time for each Marine involved in the operation - a test of their mobility and quickness to react. Missed hookups of belly laden cargo would be both costly in time and fuel. And, although working quickly, this was an infrequent occurrence. Loads were at the maximum. Helicopter crews pushed their big birds across the clear Arizona skies, cramming in as many trips as possible within the two hours of flying time between refueling stops at the air station.

By 10:30 a.m. the last load was unhooked at the desert operation site. Every man, and every piece of equipment, had been successfully helo-lifted in less than four hours time.

While 1st Lt. Barry Foster and his detachment from 1st Shore Party Bn. took a brief reprieve after a more than hectic morning... 2nd LAAM Bn. Marines continued on. For them, this operation has just commenced.

While helicopters dusted their way in and out of the operational area, Marines from "B" Btry. were busy hooking up power cables, pitching tents and getting their equipment ready for "action." By 2:30 that afternoon, generators were humming, radar antennae were turning and Marines of LAAM Bn. were busy tracking targets of opportunity.

The initial phase of Dusty III was now history - on-the-ground training was now the order of the day.

The desert site where the missilemen were bivouaced was flat and dusty with ankle deep sand. Low parched desert brush dotted the area. There was no sign of civilians as far as the eye could see in any direction.

To the east, the Leathernecks were flanked by barren, rocky mountains rising from the desert floor. To the north, west and south, the desert lay flat with only an occasional rise or pinnacle breaking the monotonous landscape.

This would be home for "B" Btry, and its Shore Party comrades until Thursday, when the heavies of HMH-365 would return to billow up sand and carry them back to greener, familiar surroundings.

As the day wore on to late afternoon, and the sun rapidly dropped toward the western horizon, the sharp crack of automatic weapons fire shattered the desert stillness.

A firing range had been established at the site and each Marine would be taking his turn at familiarization firing of the .50 cal. machine gun and its smaller



Dusty

Dusty III

return.
proves its
warfare en-
Warfare
ing meal.
the firing
30 and .30
meal and
on site to
to new
16 miles
remainder

of battery begins normal tracking of targets of opportunity. This move proves versatility of battery. Actual MedEvac to MCAS initiated.

Nov. 4, 1976

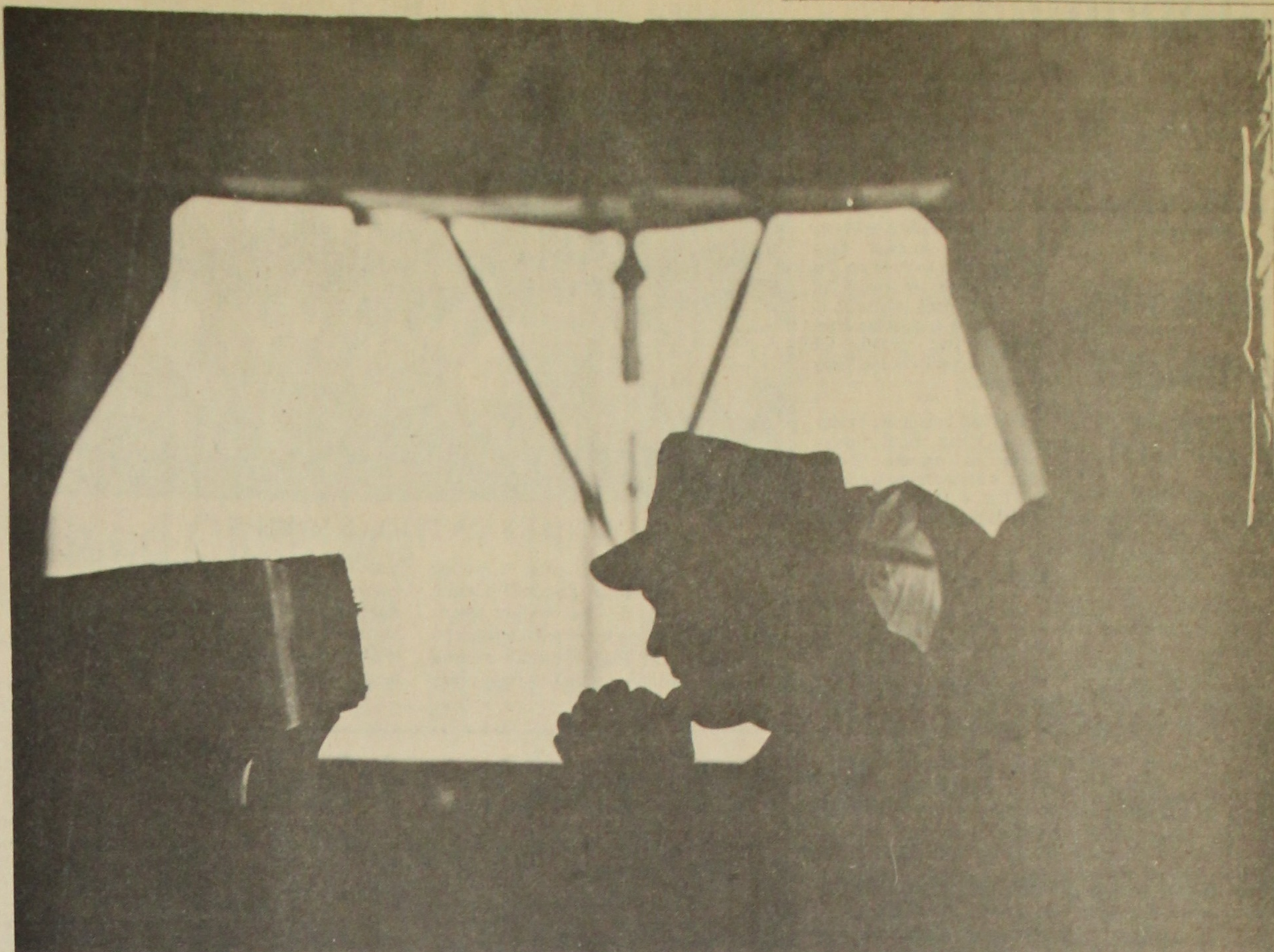
0600 — Reveille, morning meal and final cleanup.

0800 — Six CH-53A "Sea Stallion" from HMH-363 on site to begin retrograde movement to P-111 desert site.

1030 — Retrograde movement complete — all equipment in place and secured; all Marines ready for transport back to MCAS. Operation Dusty III secures. Tamed highly successful by both battery commander and battalion commander.

1130 — Noon meal.
1300 — Fire Assault Unit returns. Normal tracking operations under way. Battalion CO, LtCol. Maurice Holder, accompanied by Maj. Arthur Cravets, battalion operations officer, and the battalion's sergeant major, SgtMaj. Ford, visit site.
1600 — Operations secure.
1830 — Land navigation training and NBC drills commence.
2230 — Training secures for night.

Photos by
Sgt. Bill Henderson
and PFC Tom Williams



Last thoughts before touchdown

brother, the .30 cal. automatic rifle.

Each subsequently took turns on a turret mounted .50 cal. and tripod mounted machine gun on the ground. Then they shot the .30 cal. automatic rifle from both a prone position with the muzzle resting on a bipod and from the standing position with the rifle stock secured snugly against the hip.

The shattering fire continued into the night as more than 35,000 rounds of the 70,000 allotted for the operation were expended.

The second day was a busy one for the LAAM Bn. Marines. On this day, they tested their skills in an electronic warfare environment against the Marine Corps' most sophisticated electronic warfare aircraft ... the EA-6 Intruder.

The morning of November 2 came all too early for this battery of desert Marines ... an extra hour of sack time would have been a welcome reward for the rigors they had undergone the previous day. But, they had a timetable to meet and it didn't allow for late sleepers.

By the time the sun crested the mountains to the east — casting long shadows across the pale orange light reflecting from the desert sand — operations were already underway.

More targets of opportunity were searched out on radar scopes of missilemen whetted their keen edge and awaited arrival of EA-6 aircraft which were due to commence an attack that morning.

At 11 a.m. the first bandit was spotted — and repulsed. They came both low and high — from every conceivable angle — but the sophisticated plane couldn't outmaneuver the HAWK system's all-seeing eye. By noon, the aircraft had returned to their home base at MCAS, El Toro, Calif. A revision of strategy and tactics was in order as the "birds" were slated to make a second attempt to slip past the 2nd LAAM Bn. radar net that afternoon.

After a welcome noon meal, "B" Btry. Marines were again at their stations, tracking targets of opportunity ... waiting for the second wave of EA-6 aircraft.

This time the "Intruders" arrived at 3 p.m. ... faster and more cunning than before. The Improved HAWK Missile System again held them in check — proving its

superb anti-aircraft protection capability in the ground-to-air defensive position.

The second day ended as did the day before with the cracking of automatic gunfire as grey dusk deepened into black night. Blazing flashes and shattering clamor of small arms weapon fire carried on into the night as the remaining rounds of ammunition were spent.

Day three began as day two, with shivering, tired Marines gathering around flickering fires in the early morning twilight.

Breakfast in the field with a Marine unit is something in itself to behold as "Leathernecks" test their culinary talents against cans of "C" rations. Some concocted peculiar recipes in their steel helmets balanced over open fires ... trying to arouse their palates with some sort of similarity of home cooking.

Although some younger Marines received raised eyebrow reactions from older, wiser vets, their somewhat less than 5th Ave. cooking quelled appetites and prepared them for the longest of the four days they spent in the field during Dusty III.

By 8 a.m. pots had been cleaned and a HMH-363 was on-site ready to transport the assault fire unit to a detached location some 16 miles southeast of the main battery.

Second Lieutenant Charles E. Boyd readied members of the assault fire unit after receiving last minute instructions from "B" Btry. commander, 1stLt. Don A. Richardson. They departed the area in a cloud of dust and churning rotor blades for the next stage of the exercise — a stage that would further prove the versatility of LAAM Bn. missilemen.

Operating as a "battery minus," the remainder of "B" Btry. began tracking targets of opportunity, coordinating their efforts by radio with the assault fire unit. This extended arm of the system provided an added reach relative to responding to enemy aircraft.

By noon, the assault fire unit and its operators were on their way back — ready to rejoin the main battery — where LtCol. Maurice Holder, 2nd LAAM Bn. commander, would be briefed on success of the exercise.

Operations secured at 4 that afternoon and the remaining hours of daylight were devoted to preparing

equipment and supplies for the return trip home the following morning.

Included in the operation was an additional task — essential military subjects training. This included land navigation and Nuclear, Biological and Chemical warfare drills.

Such training offered a break from what had been day-to-day operations in the field and provided practical field application in the use of a compass. A less agreeable side was the gas exercise, during which the Marine's ability to react to a gas attack was tested. Each was subjected to a "gas attack." Marines were required to don their gas masks and clear them within a minimum amount of time.

By 10:30 that night, all training had been secured and it was — in more ways than one — time for a welcomed night's sleep.

By 8 a.m. the following morning, six CH-53A "choppers" were on site. It was like day one all over again ... dust and noise as giant "Sea Stallions" helo-lifted gear back to the P-111 desert site.

By 10:30, all equipment and supplies had been returned to P-111 and secured. A battery of tired — yet satisfied — Marines began their long awaited trip back to MCAS. It was now only a short hop away to a well deserved day of rest after completing a rigorous week of field operations.

For Maj. Robert F. Wemheuer, commanding officer of the HMH-633 detachment, and his pilots, mechanics and crew members, it was a third feather in their cap. They remain the only helicopter squadron in the Marine Corps to successfully helo-lift an entire Improved HAWK Missile System, the Marines who man the system and all required supporting equipment.

For the Marines of the 2nd LAAM Bn. and 1st Shore Party Bn., it was their third feather too ... something they take personal pride in. They are part of a team of pioneers in the HAWK helo-lift effort — to date, the only ones to accomplish that task successfully.

Each of the three firing batteries of the 2nd LAAM Bn. have now successfully been helo-lifted to the field and back ... if there should be a Dusty IV ... it's sure to be a spectacle worth watching.

four days



Down the 'hell hole'