

5 August 1975

## Foreword

The purpose of this report is to provide a supplement to Command Chronologies submitted for the non combatant emergency evacuation of Saigon, here after referred to as operation "Frequent Wind".

Many thousands of words have been written about the "Frequent Wind" operation, principally due to its unprecedented nature. No attempt is made in this report to address articles, statements or opinions of outside sources, military or civilian, on actions taken. This report is intended to provide a factual account, in broad context, of the operation as seen thru the eyes of the commanders and staff within the Ninth Marine Amphibious Brigade.

If one major point can be made on why this operation was a success it is that by the meticulous planning of an integrated Marine air ground team "Any Challenge Can Be Met".

I would like to take this final opportunity to acknowledge the countless hours of hard work of the staffs of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade, 4th Regimental Landing Team, Provisional Marine Aircraft Group 39, and the Brigade Logistic Support Group. I am especially indebted to Colonel Wylie Taylor, Al Gray, Frank McLenon and Colonel Hans Edebohls for their encouragement and professional advice. A particular note of thanks and recognition must go to my G-3 Lieutenant Colonel Robert White for his patience with me and for the many arduous hours spent in assembling this report. It is my fervent hope that this report will contribute to future successes in NEMVAC operations.



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Brigadier General  
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identified by USSAG/7thAF and other headquarters in their plans:

Newport Pier - This facility, situated adjacent to the Long Binh Bridge along the Saigon riverfront, featured four deep-water berths and a number of other ramps and landings for LST's and assorted tugs and smaller craft. Parking lots provided for up to nine CH-53 landing spots. Newport was envisioned as a large scale evacuation facility accommodating up to 100,000 evacuees by waterborne means. The MAB considered USSAG/7thAF Option III as applicable to Newport Pier and planned accordingly. One battalion was considered for the Ground Security Force at Newport Pier, with platoon-size Ship's Security Forces provided as necessary. Insertion of the GSF could be by helo or up the Saigon River on ships. Extraction was equally flexible. It should be noted that this possible evacuation site was considered as a viable one right up to 29 April. See the illustration on page 22.

DAO/Air America Complex - Situated adjacent to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, this complex was the primary evacuation site considered by the DAO and the Marines in Saigon. Numerous Landing Zones were available, with some preparation, in the DAO Compound, the Annex, and across the highway on the Air America apron. Up to two battalions could be employed as a Ground Security Force in this complex. The DAO Complex itself was divided roughly into two separate areas, one called the Alamo and the other the Annex, with the Alamo housing the main headquarters building and the Emergency Command Center. The Annex consisted primarily of the Exchange and a gymnasium. See the illustration on page 23.

Can Tho - CTF 76 had developed a plan for moving up the Bassac River to Can Tho, about 50 miles southwest of Saigon, for evacuation of up to 2,000 persons. In support of this plan MAB elements were prepared to insert and extract a

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Ground Security Force by helicopter or waterborne means.

Saigon Rooftops - One of DAO's plans for assembling evacuees was to collect them at about a dozen billets throughout Saigon and then transport them by Air America helos to the DAO Compound Annex for further processing and marshalling. Four-man Marine Security elements were envisioned as rooftop security and LZ control in support of Air America.

U. S. Embassy - With only one rooftop LZ, and that was restricted to CH-46's and smaller, the Embassy was never seriously considered as a mass evacuation site. The number of evacuees from there could reach as high as 100, to include the Ambassador, his staff and the Embassy Guard. An additional LZ was considered available in the courtyard parking lot, but only with removal of a large tree and other lesser obstacles.

Vung Tau - The largest evacuation site, and the one that plagued planners from beginning to end, was Vung Tau. Hundreds of thousands of refugees, as well as remnants of the RVN Army and Marine units, had fled to the Vung Tau Peninsula by mid-April in hopes of being sealifted from there to safe havens. It was conceivable that the MAB would be committed to an amphibious landing to secure the airfield and port facilities in order to develop a marshalling/evacuation center. An estimate of the size force ranged from one Battalion Landing Team to the entire Brigade, depending on the RVN permissiveness involved. An agreement with the military remnants there was considered absolutely essential. Again, USSAG's original Option III had surfaced with Vung Tau.

#### Advanced Command Element

During the initial on-station time off Vung Tau commencing on the 11th of April, the importance of a full-time direct

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to the DAO.

(2) Coordination with Air America to effect rooftop lifts of evacuees from downtown to DAO.

(3) Rehearsal of evacuation plans.

(4) Obtaining volunteers as bus drivers, marshals for rooftops, and other tasks.

It must be reemphasized here that this group was comprised of three officers who had other duties within DAO, had never obtained "Official" sanction for their activities, and who performed their functions almost exclusively after hours.

On or about the 22nd of April, the massive fixed wing evacuation of "Americans" was ordered. The DAO was promptly tasked with this evolution, an assignment which eventually all but paralyzed the organization for other responsibilities. The immediate effect was the arrival of literally thousands of Vietnamese at DAO. The number of evacuees was running 13 to 15 Vietnamese to each American. DAO employees quickly found themselves performing the following tasks:

(1) Working in the Annex attempting to ascertain who did and did not meet standards as evacuees.

(2) Establishing and attempting to enforce quotas for

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(e) Enclose the field, which was outside the DAO fence, in multi-strings of concertina wire.

(3) LZ 37 (Tennis Court)

(a) Remove the tennis court fence which was 15 feet in height and completely encircled the two court area.

(b) Remove all light standards (8 in all), fire hydrants, lesser fences and signposts.

(c) Clear all shrubs and trees in the area in front of the DAO theater in order to accommodate a third CH-53 in the LZ.

(4) LZ 38 (South Parking Lot)

(a) Remove bus stop sunshade structure.

(b) Remove all civilian and military vehicles.

(5) LZ 39 (North Parking Lot)

(a) Remove guard shack

(b) Reposition the DAO Motor Pool Dispatcher Radio antennae.

(c) Remove 14 concrete flower pots used as traffic islands in the motor pool area.

All Landing Zones were scheduled, upon completion of the above work, to be marked with either luminescent panels or paint, or both.

Major modifications proceeded slowly for various reasons. The labor force available to the DAO engineering staff was limited, prone to strike (which they did on 23 April) and the

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force was decreasing in size daily as various laborers opted to exercise their privilege, gained through U. S. employment, of evacuation eligibility. Major among the obstacles to Landing Zone improvement was the reluctance of the Defense Attache (DATTT) to approve modifications in the DAO Compound.

Throughout this period, the plan was discussed and refined. Visual aids were provided for the briefing of USMC and Air America air crews. Personal liaison was made with the Air America Chief Pilot to determine his needs and desires and to ensure that all potential operational conflicts were covered. Air America pilots and their management were very concerned about the security of their equipment, aircraft and employees. They were concerned in particular as a result of their experiences during the fall of Danang and Nha Trang. They desired to assist the American evacuation of Saigon in every way possible. Liaison with Air America, its management and pilots, was continuous throughout D-Day.

Concurrent with the development of the Landing Zone improvement program, a briefing was presented on the proposed interface between evacuee processing and staging and the evacuation helicopter lift.

Actual Landing Zone improvements were accomplished very slowly, and only as a result of continuous pressure and insistence. In chronological order, the Landing Zones were developed as follows:

(1) LZ 35 (PX Parking Lot)

(a) 20 April - On this date, capacity was two CH-53's. This capacity assumed that automobiles in the parking lot and track in and around the parking lot could be removed

could accommodate only one CH-53.

(b) 21-23 April - Although only a sunshade needed to be removed from the center of the second CH-53 landing spot, the facility engineer did not commence requested work for two days. Late in the evening of 23 April, two laborers from the DAO Engineer Section showed up, and with crane and cutting torches had the sunshade down by 2200. Capacity now was two CH-53's contingent upon removal of three strands of overhead wire which were essential for current operations. They were left temporarily intact and added to the L-hour checklist for last-minute removal.

(5) LZ 39 (North Parking Lot and Motor Pool)

(a) 20 April - On this date, the LZ could accommodate one CH-53 contingent upon removal of one small wooden guard shack and several two-foot high flower planters.

(b) 27 April - The Landing Zone cleared of all obstacles.

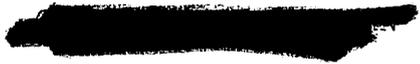
Throughout the Landing Zone improvement period, the DAO Complex was visited by members of the 9th MAB, RLT-4 and PROV MAG-39 staffs. Landing Zone progress was inspected and reported daily through staff visits to DAO or visits to BLUE RIDGE. During visits by members of the PROV MAG-39 Staff, several additional obstacles were identified for removal and these items were added to the list given the facility engineer work coordinator.

On 25 April, the Advance Command Element Air Officer visited BLUE RIDGE with a 35mm slide presentation of the DAO Landing Zones, obstacles to flight, aerial checkpoints and the ingress/

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Concurrently with the ARVN computer complex, preparations were underway for the destruction of the quarters once occupied by General Westmoreland. This task required only one drum of thermite powder and two thermite grenades. Again, final preparations were not completed until the helo evacuation at DAO was nearing completion.

By the evening of 29 April preparations had been completed, and only the order to execute was required. At approximately 2400, just prior to the final helo lift from the DAO Compound, the order was given, and within minutes the EOD team completed its tasks, leaving nothing of value to fall into enemy hands.



## CHAPTER V

## EXECUTION OF FREQUENT WIND

When 9th MAB returned from Subic Bay to the waters off Vung Tau on the 19th of April, it was subjected immediately to a six-hour alert posture, as directed by CINCPAC, with an effective date of 21 April.

As the situation in and around Saigon deteriorated, the MAB was brought to a one-hour alert posture late on the night of 27 April, responding to a directive to attain this status by first light on the 28th. This posture was reduced back to six hours later that day. Most likely affected by the air attack on Tan Son Nhut airfield during the late afternoon of the 28th, the Task Force was brought to a three-hour alert posture by COMSEVENTHFLT. Following on was a CINCPAC directive to attain a one-hour alert again.

The prelude to execution came at 2200 on the 28th with a message from USSAG directing attainment of a one hour to launch posture until relieved. Subsequently, CTF-76 directed a one-hour alert posture at 0016 in the morning attained by 9th MAB and reported accordingly at 0130 to both CTF-76 and USSAG/7thAF.

L-Hour

It should be noted that L-Hour became a bone of contention, and this should be clarified. Initially, L-Hour was defined by USSAG/7thAF as the time a helo was launched for an evacuation zone. During the last stages of planning a clarification on L-Hour was requested by CTF-76, with USSAG responding that L-Hour was that time a helo touched down in the evacuation zone. Based on this clarification it was nec-

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go through CTF 76. This is not to say that the MAB was impeded in taking appropriate action, but it did take more time when it was involved in working out details which were pertinent only to USSAG and 9th MAB. Higher headquarters employed the traditional doctrine by placing the Marine Landing Force, in this case the Ground Security Force, under operational control of the appropriate Naval commander. In any operation the immediate requirement to establish liaison is essential. The location of the forces and widespread span of control made such liaison very difficult.

Lesson Learned - There Must Be Secure Communications Between Commanders

Communications with the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC) were fine throughout the execution, but they were not secure. It goes without saying that unsecure communications provide the enemy with all he needs to know. Secure communications should have been available; however, MAB communications were all conducted on FM.

Lesson Learned - There Must Be Unity of Command

There was no question about who was in command within the MAB. Marine Corps Doctrine indicates that control would have been exercised easily by a Navy Task Force, and it would have been beneficial to have designated an Amphibious Objective Area (AOA).

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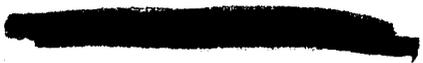
The Navy/Marine Corps team had the landing force, the tactical air, and the means by which to conduct the operation both feet wet and feet dry.

Lesson Learned - Success of Night Operations

The MAB had planned for night operations and had issued specific instructions to the PROV MAG for conducting an evacuation by helo during the hours of darkness. Yet, it was still not realized just how prolific this planning had been, for more than half of the evacuation took place throughout the night of 29 - 30 April or during periods of reduced visibility. Helopilots of the PROV MAG and the Air Force detachment proved their ability to be launched from and land on decks at sea as well as navigate to and from the various ships. And this is not to mention the precipitous-at-best Embassy courtyard Landing Zone, which necessitated a 70 foot vertical descent and ascent into and out of the zone using jury-rigged illuminations to mark the spot itself. Add the now-proven ability to fly through a high threat environment at night against sophisticated weaponry, which significantly reduces the enemy's ability to observe our flight tracks, and the distinct advantage of leaning toward operating at night is apparent. Future NEMVAC operations should be envisioned with darkness as a major factor woven into planning. The favored daylight, fair-weather operations may not be possible, and evacuation forces must prepare and train for the worst possible situation. FREQUENT WIND proved this out.

Lesson Learned - There Must Be Correct Application of Force

The rapid and overpowering insertion of a correctly



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aircrews, should be apprised of the possible requirement to utilize RCA with its inherent hazards. Finally, in all cases, where practicable, air-ground NEMVAC operations should be practiced. Command Post exercises are extremely valuable to test communications and coordinating, and field exercises should be conducted. Air-ground coordination should be foremost, as NEMVAC operations epitomize the requirement for closest coordination.

Lesson Learned - Command Representation is a Necessity

For future operations of this nature appropriate command liaison and representation must be made at all levels, and the plan should include a capability to place appropriate command representation at all evacuation sites as early as possible.

Lesson Learned - The Force Must be Constituted Early

The force did not convert to a doctrinal Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAG) until 19 April -- just ten days prior to execution. Until this time it had been constituted as three separate Marine Amphibious Units (MAUs). While in that configuration the MAUs were, in essence, tied to their Phibron counterparts, which also dictated ship loading. In actuality, the necessity for early intensive planning necessitated the Brigade headquarters, which was in a planning role up to that time, to consider the MAUs as viable MAB elements, thus bypassing the Phibron commanders. Fortunately, this requirement was understood, and the Phibron Commanders did everything in their power to ensure cooperation and planning on a concurrent basis. The fact alone that the MAB did take the initiative early is considered the primary reason for the rapid transition from MAUs to a doctri-

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Flight Hours

Helicopter operations were continuous from first light on 29 April until the operation was concluded at 0835 on 30 April. The statistics compiled by PROV MAG-39 were monumental, and indicate the superior effort put forth not only by the aircrews but the ground crews as well. Statistics are shown in the box score readout below:

	<u>CH-53</u>	<u>CH-46</u>	<u>AH-1J</u>	<u>UH-1E</u>	<u>Total</u>
Flight Hours	313.4	206.1	34.1	6.1	559.7
Day Sorties: Evac/GSF	172/25	90/12	20	3	322
Night Sorties: Evac/GSF	<u>140/22</u>	<u>128/32</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>360</u>
Total Sorties: Evac/GSF	312/47	218/44	47	14	682

Sorties By Type Mission

GSF Insert/Extract	47	7	0	0	54
Evac	312	218	0	0	530
MEDEVAC	0	18	-	0	18
SAR	0	18	-	-	18
Helo Escort	-	-	47	-	47
Command & Control	-	-	-	14	14
Sparrow Hawk	0	0	-	-	0

In all, helicopter crews flew an amazing total of almost 1200 flight hours during FREQUENT WIND. The high-time aviator in a CG-46, logged 18.3 hours, and the average crew operated for 13 hours.

Sorties

PROVMAG-39 compiled a remarkable total of 689 sorties

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# JOURNAL

Reference	TIME In Out	DTG	ORIGINATOR	EVENT/SUBJECT	ACTION TAKEN
0001		1301148Z May	CTF 79	9th Marine Amphibious Brigade G-3 Journal activated at Subic Bay, R.P.	file
0002		1301148Z May	CTF 79	Activation of the 9th MAB to be 132400Z Bgen Carey is designated CG.	To: CTG 79.1
0003		130534Z May	COMSEVENTHFLT	Loading of helos on USS HANCOCK	To: CTF 76
0004		130920Z May	CTF 79	Reorganization for special operations, chopping of 2/4, HMH-462 to 9th MAB	To: CTG 79.1
0005		130215Z May	USS ANCHORAGE	Moverep of 3/9	AIG-60
0006		130252Z May	CTU 79.1.7	SitRep (Strength and disposition of AFSF Ret. as of 111200Z May 75	To: CTF 76
0007		130304Z May	COMSEVENTHFLT	Requesting intelligence info on Kom Pong Som/Ream area, Paulo Wai and Hon Panjong Islands	To: CINPAC FLT
0008		130404Z May	CTF 79	Requesting Class V basic allowance to support BLT 3/9 embarked on USS MOBILE	To: NAVMAG SUBIC, R.P.
0009		130410Z May	CTF 79	Load planning	To: USS ANCHORAGE
0010		130518Z May	CTF 76	Composition Arg Alpha, 31st MAU and response time to Kom Pong Som	Info: 79.1
0011		130716Z May	COMSEVENTHFLT	Sitrep 005: Arg Alpha composition and assault force aboard USS HANCOCK	To: CinPac FLT
0012		131315Z May	CTG 79.4	USS OKINAWA helo status report	To: CTF 79
0013		131604Z May	COMSEVENTHFLT	Planning options under consideration to recover U. S. Flag ship SS MAYAGUEZ	To: COMDESDON 23
0014		131748Z May	USSAG/7AF NKP	SS Mayaguez surveillance report	To: 347TFW/ PO/intel Korat, Thai.

Reference	TIME		DTG	ORIGINATOR	EVENT/SUBJECT	Action Taken
	In	Out				
0015			131807Z May	CTF 79	Numbers of USMC personnel to be flown to Thailand	To: CTG 79.4
0016			131940Z May	COMSEVENTHFLT	Expanding of mission planning to include Koh Tang Island.	To: CTF 76
0017			132036Z May	COMSEVENTHFLT	Intelligence update	To: CTF 75.1
0018			132047Z May	CIN PACFLT	Moving of BLT to U Tapau by air. 2/9	To: COMSEVENTHFLT
0019			132056Z May	MARHEAVHELBRON 463	Aircraft readiness report as of 0900, 13 May	To: CGFMFPAC
0020			132104Z May	COMSEVENTHFLT	Coordination of air ops. intentions/requirements	To: CTF 77
0021			132250Z May	CTF 79	BLT 2/9 BEGAN movement at 132105Z May, 75	To: CINPACFLT
0022			140048Z May	COMSEVENTHFLT	Sail order on USS HANCOCK & attachments	To: CTF 76
0023			131647Z May	CTG 79.1	Requesting personnel to be augmented to 9th MAB staff	To: CTF 79
0024			131857Z May	CINPACFLT	Task force units plan on operating in support of COMUSSAG/7AF	To: COMSEVENTHFLT
0025			140235Z May	2nd Bn 4th Mar	Communication shift of 2/4 to USS HANCOCK	To: USS HANCOCK
0026			140240Z May	USS HANCOCK	Comm. shift of MARHEAVHELBRON 462 to HANCOCK	To: NTC Cubi Pt. R.P.
0027			140629Z May	CTG 79.3	Reorganization for special ops.	To: CTF 79
0028			140645Z May	CTF 76	TF 76 operations Sitrep 001	To: COMSEVENTHFLT
0029			140700Z May	USS DULUTH	Moverep	To: AIG 60

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	In	Out				
0030			140637Z May	CTG 79.1	Moverep (TG 79.1-CTG 79.1-2/4(-)-HMH 462)	To: AIG 60
0031			131610Z May	JCS Wash, D.C.	Execute Message	To: CINPAC
0032			140426Z May	USS DULUTH	Arg Alfa loadout	To: CTG 76.4
0033			140527Z May	CTF 79	Requesting a Comm CO for augmentation to 9th MAB.	To: CTG 79.2
			140816Z May	CTG 79.9	Comm. shift, activation of CTG 79.9	To: FASU U-Tapao, TH.
			140838Z May	CTG 79.9	Activation of GSF	To: CTG 79
			141440Z May	USS MT. VERNON	Sitrep 001	To: CTG 76.4
			150713Z May	MAG 36	Special Airlift request	To: CGISTMAM
			151607Z May	USSAG/7AF MKP Th.	Termination of Operation	Info: 79.1
			141410Z May	CTG 79.1	Breakdown of 9th MAB units aboard USS HANCOCK and USS MOBILE	To: CTF 79
			141330Z May	CTG 79.9.1	Moverep of 2/9	To: AIG 60

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			140838Z May	CTG 79.9	Activation of GSP	To: CTG 79
			141140Z May	USS MT. VERNON	Sitrep 001	To: CTG 76.4
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			151607Z May	USSAG/7AF MKP TH.	Termination of Operation	Info: 79.1
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0009		130410Z May	CTF 79	Load planning	To: USS ANCHORAGE
0010		130518Z May	CTF 76	Composition Arg Alpha, 31st MAU and response time to Kom Pong Som	Info: 79.1
0011		130716Z May	COMSEVENTHFLT	Sitrep 005: Arg Alpha composition and assault force aboard USS HANCOCK	To: CinPac FLT
0012		131315Z May	CTG 79.4	USS OKINAWA helo status report	To: CTF 79
0013		131604Z May	COMSEVENTHFLT	Planning options under consideration to recover U. S. Flag ship SS MAYAGUEZ	To: COMDESDE 23
0014		131748Z May	USSAG/7AF MKP	SS Mayaguez surveillance report	To: 347TFW/PO/Intel Kor Thail.

Reference	TIME In Ocn	DTG	ORIGINATOR	EVENT/SUBJECT	Action Taken
0015		131807Z May	CTF 79	Numbers of USMC personnel to be flown to Thailand	To: CTF 79.4
0016		131940Z May	CONSEVENTHFLT	Expanding of mission planning to include KohTo: CTF 76 Taog Island.	To: CTF 76
0017		132036Z May	CONSEVENTHFLT	Intelligence update	To: CTF 75.1
0018		132048Z May	CIN PACFLT	Moving of BLT to U Tapanu by air. 2/9	To: CONSEVENTH FLT
0019		132056Z May	MARHAWHELBRON 463	Aircraft readiness report as of 0900, 13 May	To: CGFMFPAC
0020		132104Z May	CONSEVENTHFLT	Coordination of air ops. Intentions/ requirements	To: CTF 77
0021		132250Z May	CTF 79	BLT 2/9 BEGAN movement at 132105Z May, 75	To: CINPACFLT
0022		132308Z May	CONSEVENTHFLT	Said order on USS HANCOCK & attachments	To: CTF 76
0023		131647Z May	CTG 79.1	Requesting personnel to be augmented to 9th MAB staff	To: CTF 79
0024		131857Z May	CINPACFLT	Task force units plan on operating in support of COMUSMACV/7AF	To: CONSEVENTH FLT
0025		140235Z May	2nd Bn 4th Mar	Communication shift of 2/4 to USS HANCOCK	To: Us HANCOCK
0026		140240Z May	USS HANCOCK	Comm. shift of MARHAWHELBRON 462 to HANCOCK Pt. R.P.	To: NTCG Cub1
0027		140629Z May	CTG 79.3	Reorganization for special ops.	To: CTF 79
0028		140645Z May	CTF 76	TF 76 operations Sitrep 001	To: CONSEVENTHFLT
0029		140700Z May	USS DULUTH	Hoverrep	To: AIG 60

Reference	In	Out	Time	DTG	ORIGINATOR	EVENT/SUBJECT	Action Taker
0030				140637Z May	CTG 79.1	Novrep (TG 79.1-CTG 79.1-2/4(-)-HHH 462)	To: AIG 60
0031				131610Z May	JCS Wash, D.C.	Imacute Message	To: CINCPAC
0032				140626Z May	USS DULUTH	ARG Alfa loadout	To: CTG 76.4
0033				140527Z May	CTF 79	Requesting a Comm CO for augmentation to 9th IAB.	To: CTG 79.2
				140516Z May	CTG 79.9	Comm. shift, activation of CTG 79.9	To: FASU U-Repaso, TH
				140536Z May	CTG 79.9	Activation of GSF	To: CTG 79
				141440Z May	USS HT. VERNON	Slarep 001	To: CTG 76.4
				150713Z May	MAG 36	Special Airlift request	To: CG1STMAN
				151607Z May	USSAG/7AF MKP TH.	Termination of Operation	Info: 79.1
				141110Z May	CTG 79.1	Breakdown of 9th MAB units aboard USS HAWCOCK and USS MOBILE	To: CTF 79
				141330Z May	CTG 79.9.1	Novrep of 2/9	To: AIG 60