

Tactical Markings on USMC Vietnam era Tanks

The 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th Tank Battalions generally followed the same format (with some slight variations).

Battalion tanks were in H&S Company.

Two gun tanks (M-48A3) were reserved for the Battalion C.O. and X.O. (but were seldom used by them).

They were H51 and H52 (pronounced as "Hotel" five one and five two).

Flame tanks (M67A2) tanks were in H&S Company.

The T/O called for nine per Battalion.

They were in sections (or Platoons) of three tanks designated as F11, F12, F13, F21, F22, F23, F31, F32 and F33. (Pronounced as "Foxtrot" one one and so on) (3rd Tank Battalion used a "Y" suffix pronounced as "Yankee"). They were farmed out to the Battalion gun companies with three to a Company and then one each per Platoon.

The Gun Companies (letter Companies).

Each Company had seventeen M-48A3 tanks (exception noted below).

A, B, and C (pronounced "Alpha", "Bravo" and "Charlie" (except 1st and 2nd Tank Battalions had a D ("Delta" Company which had seventeen M-103 Heavy Tanks which were never deployed and eventually phased out).

Each Gun Company had three Platoons and a Headquarters Section.

The HQ Section had two M-48A3 tanks designated for the C.O. and X.O (though seldom used by them) marked as "Company Letter" 51 and 52 (five two was usually a "Blade Tank"). Company HQ also had a Maintenance Section with an M-51 Tank Retriever marked as "Company Letter" 53. The Company HQ also controlled the assigned Flame Tanks.

The Platoons each had five M-48A3 Gun Tanks designated as "Company Letter" "Platoon Number" 1 through 5. The Platoon was usually broken down in to two Sections.

Designated as follows. The first number was the Platoons number from 1 to 3.

11 (one one) Platoon Leaders Tank

12 (one two)

13 (one three) Heavy Section Leaders Tank

14 (one four) Light Section Leaders Tank

15 (one five) Platoon Sergeant's Tank

The tactical markings were marked in yellow on both sides of the tank turret and in some cases also on the air filter boxes. The turret markings were usually covered up with extra

track blocks. Some replacement tanks never got tactical markings at all. Another tactical mark usually (but again not always) on the tank was the Battalion mark. This was usually a yellow shield on the hull front centered below the driver (also sometimes on the air filter box and/or left rear fender). Within the yellow shield, in red was the Battalion Number such as 1 TK, 2 TK, 3 TK or 5 TK.

The crew also personalized most tanks in Vietnam with names on the gun tube and/or on the Zeon light cover.

With the entire above said platoon members could usually determine which tank was which by the way external gear was stowed on the tank even without tactical markings displayed. Of course if the tank had something (a name or slogan) painted on the gun tube, it made identification a lot easier.

Hope this helps the viewer in identifying photos of Marine tanks in Vietnam.