

VIETNAM STUDIES
U.S. Army
Special Forces

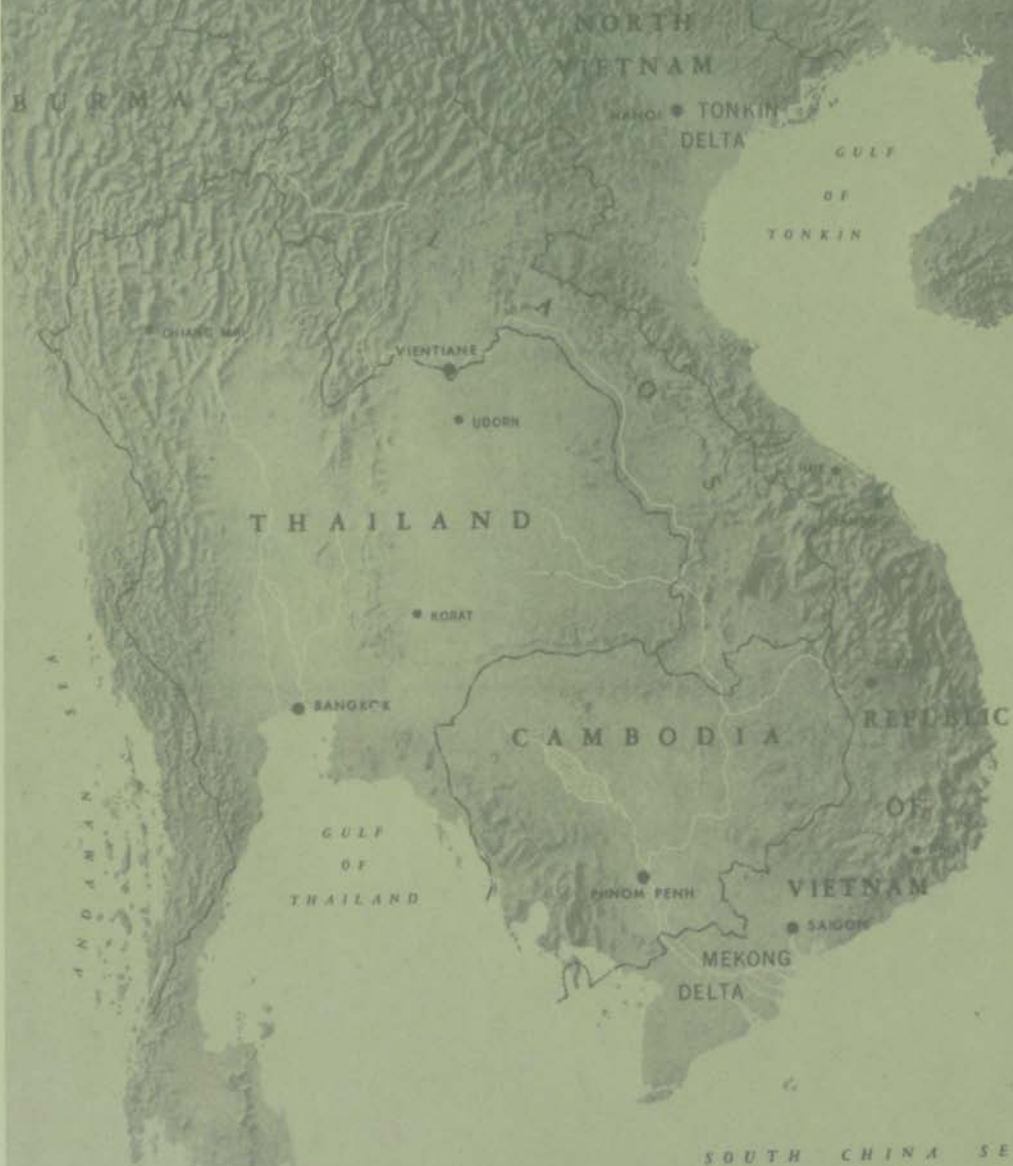
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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

SOUTHEAST ASIA



VIETNAM STUDIES

U.S. ARMY
SPECIAL FORCES
1961–1971

by
Colonel Francis J. Kelly

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
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Foreword

The United States Army has met an unusually complex challenge in Southeast Asia. In conjunction with the other services, the Army has fought in support of a national policy of assisting an emerging nation to develop governmental processes of its own choosing, free of outside coercion. In addition to the usual problems of waging armed conflict, the assignment in Southeast Asia has required superimposing the immensely sophisticated tasks of a modern army upon an underdeveloped environment and adapting them to demands covering a wide spectrum. These involved helping to fulfill the basic needs of an agrarian population, dealing with the frustrations of antiguerrilla operations, and conducting conventional campaigns against well-trained and determined regular units.

As this assignment nears an end, the U.S. Army must prepare for other challenges that may lie ahead. While cognizant that history never repeats itself exactly and that no army ever profited from trying to meet a new challenge in terms of the old one, the Army nevertheless stands to benefit immensely from a study of its experience, its shortcomings no less than its achievements.

Aware that some years must elapse before the official histories will provide a detailed and objective analysis of the experience in Southeast Asia, we have sought a forum whereby some of the more salient aspects of that experience can be made available now. At the request of the Chief of Staff, a representative group of senior officers who served in important posts in Vietnam and who still carry a heavy burden of day-to-day responsibilities has prepared a series of monographs. These studies should be of great value in helping the Army develop future operational concepts while at the same time contributing to the historical record and providing the American public with an interim report on the performance of men and officers who have responded, as others have through our history, to exacting and trying demands.

All monographs in the series are based primarily on official records, with additional material from published and unpublished secondary works, from debriefing reports and interviews with key

participants, and from the personal experience of the author. To facilitate security clearance, annotation and detailed bibliography have been omitted from the published version; a fully documented account with bibliography is filed with the Office of the Chief of Military History.

Colonel Francis John Kelly is eminently qualified to write the story of U.S. Army Special Forces. In 1960 he chaired the committee at the Command and General Staff College which produced the U.S. Army's first definitive approach to counterinsurgency, "The Role of the U.S. Army in the Cold War." He also wrote and conducted the Senior Officer Counterinsurgency Program course of study at the U.S. Army War College and served as a division chief in the Special Warfare Directorate, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations, Department of the Army. For two years he commanded the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) on Okinawa, which provided multiple operational teams for combat service in Vietnam. From June 1966 to June 1967 he commanded the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in Vietnam. Upon his return, he became the Commander of the Combat Development Command Institute for Strategic and Stability Operations at Fort Bragg. In all these positions, he strongly influenced the development of tactics and techniques, equipment, organization, and doctrine. After service in Vietnam, Colonel Kelly undertook the task of complete reorganization of the basic unit, the Special Forces Group, at the same time revising the doctrine. In September 1970 he was assigned as Senior Army Advisor to the State of Colorado in Denver.

15 September 1972
Washington, D.C.

VERNE L. BOWERS
The Adjutant General
Major General, USA

Preface

As long ago as 1957, U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers were in the Republic of Vietnam, going about their business of training, advising, and assisting members of the Vietnamese Army. Despite the old Army witticism about never volunteering for anything, the Special Forces soldier is, in fact, a double volunteer, having first volunteered for airborne training and then again for Special Forces training. From a very meager beginning but sustained by a strong motivation and confidence in his mission, the Special Forces soldier has marched through the Vietnam struggle in superb fashion.

In 1957 some fifty-eight Vietnamese soldiers were given military training by Special Forces troops. Ten years later the Special Forces were advising and assisting over 40,000 paramilitary troops, along with another 40,000 Regional Forces and Popular Forces soldiers. This monograph traces the development and notes the progress, problems, successes, and failures of a unique program undertaken by the U.S. Army for the first time in its history. It is hoped that all the significant lessons learned have been recorded and the many pitfalls of such a program uncovered. I am indebted to Major James M. Scott, Corps of Engineers, for his assistance on the Engineer effort. I am responsible for the conclusions reached, yet my thought processes could not escape the influence of the many outstanding officers and men in the Special Forces who joined in the struggle. Particularly, I must take note of the contributions of the Special Forces noncommissioned officers, without question the most competent soldiers in the world.

With the withdrawal of the Special Forces from Vietnam in 1971, the Army could honestly lay claim to a new dimension in ground warfare—the organized employment of a paramilitary force in sustained combat against a determined enemy. I know I speak for my predecessors and successors in claiming that the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) was the finest collection of professional soldiers ever assembled by the U.S. Army, anywhere, anytime.

Washington, D.C.
15 September 1972

FRANCIS JOHN KELLY
Colonel, Armor

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PART ONE

THE EARLY YEARS: 1961–1965

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The same events and pressures that shaped directly or indirectly the major part of American foreign policy during the last twenty years led to the formation and activation of the U.S. Army Special Forces.

In February of 1950 the United States recognized a quasi-independent Vietnam within the French Union and first began to consider granting aid to the French forces fighting against Communist insurgency in Indochina. In May of the same year the United States agreed to grant military and economic aid. American involvement in post-World War II Southeast Asia had begun. Four years later, in May 1954, the French Army was defeated by the Viet Minh—the Communist-supported Vietnam Independence League—at Dien Bien Phu, and under the Geneva armistice agreement Vietnam was divided into North and South Vietnam. In the course of those four years the policy-makers of the United States had an opportunity to observe the struggle of France with the insurgents and to become familiar with the political and military situation in Vietnam. It was also during those years that the U.S. Army Special Forces came into existence.

Origin of the Special Forces

The 1st Special Service Force of World War II is considered the antecedent of the present U.S. Army Special Forces. In the spring of 1942 the British Chief of Combined Operations, Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, introduced to U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall a project conceived by an English civilian, Geoffrey N. Pike, for the development of special equipment to be used in snow-covered mountain terrain. This plan, named PLOUGH, was designed for attack on such critical points as the hydroelectric plants in Norway upon which the Germans depended for mining valuable ores. American manufacturers working on equipment for the project developed a tracked vehicle known as the Weasel and eventually standardized as the M29.

General Marshall concluded that an elite force recruited in

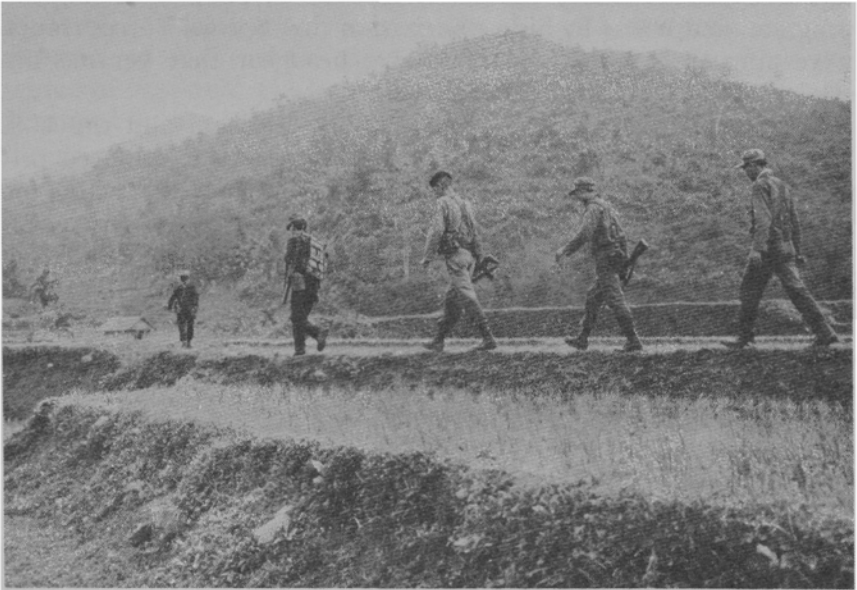
Canada and the United States would be the best military organization for conducting the raids and strikes; he selected an American, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Tryon Frederick, to assemble, organize, train, and command the U.S.-Canadian 1st Special Service Force.

Made up of three regiments of two battalions each, the unit became a separate branch of the service, with the crossed arrows of the Indian Scouts, by then inactivated, as its insignia. The men were trained in demolitions, rock-climbing, amphibious assault, and ski techniques, and were given basic airborne instruction. They fought under Allied command with great bravery and considerable success in the Aleutians, North Africa, Italy, and southern France. The 1st Special Service Force got its nickname, "The Devil's Brigade," during the Italian campaign from a passage in the captured diary of a dead German officer who had written: "The black devils are all around us every time we come into line and we never hear them." The force was inactivated in southern France near the end of World War II.

On 20 June 1952 the first of the Special Forces groups, the 10th Special Forces Group, was activated at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; it became the nucleus of the Special Warfare Center, now known as the John F. Kennedy Center for Military Assistance, at Fort Bragg. The next unit to be formed was the 77th Special Forces Group, which was also activated at Fort Bragg, on 25 September 1953.

By July 1954 the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam, numbered 342. In October of that year President Dwight D. Eisenhower promised direct aid to the government of South Vietnam, headed at that time by Premier Ngo Dinh Diem. From 1954 to 1956 Viet Minh cadres were forming action committees to spread propaganda and to organize the South Vietnamese to oppose their own government. In July 1955 the People's Republic of China announced an agreement to aid the Viet Minh, and the Soviet Union announced aid to Hanoi. In August Diem's government rejected for the third time Hanoi's demands for general elections throughout the two Vietnams, and in October South Vietnam was proclaimed a republic by Premier Diem, who became the first president.

U.S. Special Forces troops actually worked in Vietnam for the first time in 1957. On 24 June 1957 the 1st Special Forces Group was activated on Okinawa, and in the course of the year a team from this unit trained fifty-eight men of the Vietnamese Army at the Commando Training Center in Nha Trang. The trainees would later become the nucleus, as instructors and cadre, for the first Vietnamese Special Forces units.



VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS AND SPECIAL FORCES ADVISER *on training mission.*

In 1959 and 1960 the insurgents in South Vietnam, known to the South Vietnamese as Viet Cong, a contraction for Vietnamese Communists, grew in number and in power to terrorize the people. Clashes between government forces and armed Viet Cong increased in number from 180 in January 1960 to 545 in September of that year. Thirty Special Forces instructors were sent from Fort Bragg to South Vietnam in May 1960 to set up a training program for the Vietnamese Army.

President John F. Kennedy announced on 21 September 1961 a program to provide additional military and economic aid to Vietnam. The government of the United States was by this time deeply concerned over the insurgency in South Vietnam and the necessary steps were being taken to help the republic to deal with it.

On 21 September 1961 the 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces, which would eventually be charged with the conduct of all Special Forces operations in Vietnam, was activated at Fort Bragg. It was at this point, in the fall of 1961, that President Kennedy began to display particular interest in the Special Forces. His enthusiasm, based on his conviction that the Special Forces had great potential as a counterinsurgency force, led him to become a very powerful advocate for the development of the Special Forces program within the Army. President Kennedy himself made a visit

to the Special Warfare Center in the fall of 1961 to review the program, and it was by his authorization that Special Forces troops were allowed to wear the distinctive headgear that became the symbol of the Special Forces, the Green Beret.

Up to 1961 the government of South Vietnam and the U.S. Mission in Saigon in dealing with the insurgency had placed primary emphasis on developing the regular military forces, which for the most part excluded the ethnic and religious minority groups. Under the sponsorship of the U.S. Mission in Saigon, however, several programs were initiated in late 1961 to broaden the counterinsurgency effort by developing the paramilitary potential of certain of these minority groups. Special Forces detachments were assigned to the U.S. Mission in Saigon to provide training and advisory assistance in the conduct of these programs, which eventually came to be known collectively as the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program. The development of paramilitary forces among the minority groups became the primary mission of the Special Forces in Vietnam.

Originally attention was concentrated on the Montagnards, who lived in the strategic Central Highlands. The first step was taken in October 1961 with the beginning of a project designed to prevent the Rhade tribesmen in Darlac Province from succumbing to Viet Cong control. Exploratory talks were held with Rhade leaders in Darlac to seek their participation in a village self-defense program. One Special Forces medical noncommissioned officer participated in that first effort.

Early in 1962 the government of the United States under President Kennedy began to set up the actual interdepartmental machinery for aiding South Vietnam. The Executive Branch, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the United States Information Agency, the Agency for International Development, and the Central Intelligence Agency were all involved. Because of the nature of the growing conflict in Vietnam and because the Special Forces was designed for unconventional warfare, it was inevitable that the Special Forces would play a conspicuous role. It was also plain that the actions and suggestions of the various government agencies would heavily influence that role.

The Unconventional Requirements

In 1961 a serious examination of the responsibility of the U.S. Army in the cold war had been instituted at the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The strategy of

“wars of liberation” as practiced by the Communists was analyzed in detail, lessons learned were reviewed, and a comprehensive assessment of U.S. Army capabilities was prepared to show the resources available to the United States for resisting insurgency. Doctrinal gaps were identified, mission statements amended, and training requirements defined.

The initial efforts of the United States to counter subversive insurgency in Vietnam quickly became a co-ordinated departmental endeavor at the highest national level. In addition to mustering the talent, technical ability, and equipment of the military, the government called on each department to nominate certain units and numbers of forces which it considered best prepared to deal with the peculiarities of countering insurgencies. The U.S. Army chose as its vanguard unit the Special Forces, whose highly trained group of combat specialists numbered at the time approximately 2,000 men.

An assessment of insurgent strategy, particularly as it was being practiced at the time in the Republic of Vietnam, indicated that good use could be made there of the U.S. Army Special Forces. The requirement for a unit that was combat-oriented, capable of performing with relative independence in the field, ruggedly trained for guerrilla operations, and geared for co-operation with the Vietnamese was admirably met in the organization, training, equipment, and operational procedures of the U.S. Army Special Forces.

In November 1961 the first medical specialist troops of the Special Forces were employed in Vietnam in a project originally designed to provide assistance to the Montagnard tribes in the high-plateau country around Pleiku. Out of this modest beginning grew one of the most successful programs for using civilian forces ever devised by a military force—the Civilian Irregular Defense Group. Eventually the organization, development, and operation of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group proved to be the chief work of the U.S. Special Forces in the Vietnam War.

Despite the size and complexity of the program, however, the U.S. Special Forces participated in a number of other activities in the course of their stay in Vietnam, including training, advisory, and operational missions. Any comprehensive story of what the Special Forces did in Vietnam must include some account of these missions. The nature, scope, and success of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program will nevertheless occupy a substantial part of this study.

U.S. Special Forces occupied a somewhat unusual position *vis-à-vis* the Vietnamese Army, the Vietnamese Special Forces, and the



DAILY MEDICAL VISIT TO A MONTAGNARD HAMLET

indigenous population involved in the program. The rules of engagement specified that in most instances the U.S. Special Forces would serve, technically at least, in an advisory capacity to the Vietnamese Special Forces, which was charged with the direct command responsibility for the Civilian Irregular Defense Group. There were exceptions to this. For instance, the troops known as the mobile guerrilla forces were originally commanded and controlled directly by soldiers of the U.S. Special Forces. For the most part, however, the Vietnamese were in command; the Americans were there to assist them—not to assume any command. In practice, as will be seen, this arrangement was not firmly and universally adhered to from the start. There were degrees of compliance that varied considerably from one case to the next. Many of the early problems encountered by the Civilian Irregular Defense Group came from the U.S. Special Forces–Vietnamese Special Forces command and control structure imposed upon it. The obvious dilemma of two command figures, each with his own judgments, arose. No less a factor, especially in the years 1962 and 1963, was the mutual

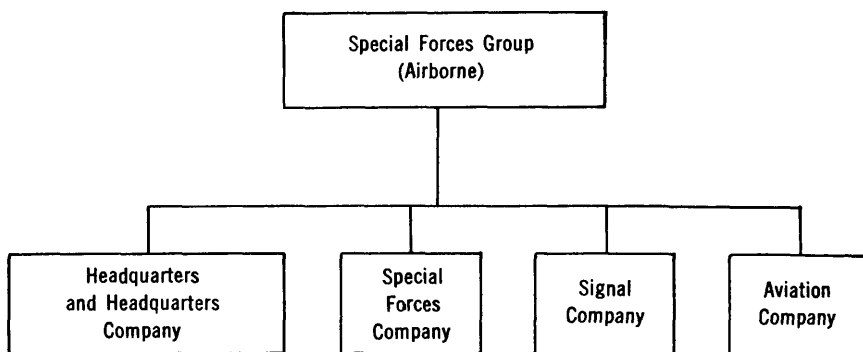
mistrust and dislike between the civilian irregulars, especially the Montagnards, and the Vietnamese military men who were commanding them.

The U.S. Special Forces had been created by the Army for the purpose of waging unconventional warfare, which by 1964 was defined in the Dictionary of United States Army Terms as "The three inter-related fields of guerrilla warfare, evasion and escape, and subversion against hostile states. Unconventional warfare, operations," the dictionary stated, "are conducted within enemy or enemy-controlled territory by predominantly indigenous personnel, usually supported and directed in varying degrees by an external source."

The Special Forces was defined in Field Manual 31-21, Special Forces Operations, in terms of its role, mission, and capabilities. Its role was to assume any responsibility and carry out any mission assigned to it by the Army. Its missions were many and varied because of the Special Forces' organization, flexible command arrangements, tailored logistical and fiscal procedures, and highly trained men. Chief among them were planning, conducting, and supporting unconventional warfare and internal security, or "stability" operations. Special Forces troops were capable of training, advising, and providing operational, logistical, and fiscal support for foreign military or paramilitary forces. They were able to infiltrate by air, land, or water, sometimes penetrating deep into enemy territory for the purpose of attacking strategic targets, rescuing friendly troops, or collecting intelligence. Special Forces troops also trained other American and allied forces in Special Forces techniques. To a large extent these definitions were determined by the problems that faced the Army and how the Army used the Special Forces to solve them. The Special Forces units evolved in response to the demands placed upon them.

The basic structure of the Special Forces Group (Airborne) consisted of a headquarters and headquarters company, three or more line Special Forces companies, a signal company, and an aviation detachment. (*Chart 1*) The headquarters and headquarters company encompassed all the usual staff sections for command and control, as well as the major portion of the group medical capability and the parachute rigging and air delivery elements. (*Chart 2*) The line Special Forces company was commanded by a lieutenant colonel and was normally composed of an administrative detachment and an operations detachment C, which commanded three operations detachment B's, each of which commanded four operations detachment A's. The A detachment was the basic twelve-

CHART 1—SPECIAL FORCES GROUP (AIRBORNE)



man unit of the Special Forces. (*Chart 3*) Supporting the entire group with communications was the signal company, which, in terms of personnel, technical equipment, and communications capabilities, resembled a battalion more than it did the usual signal company. (*Chart 4*)

In the early years of Special Forces involvement in Vietnam, 1961–1965, the concept of how best to employ the forces was developed, put into practice, and adjusted empirically. The government of the United States and the government of South Vietnam were dealing with a Communist-inspired insurgency, and for the United States it was a new experience. Many local tactics were attempted on a “let’s-try-it-and-see-what-happens” basis. If something worked, then it became an acceptable counterinsurgency tactic; if it did not, it was dropped.

During these formative years, it became clear that the part the U.S. Special Forces was to play would differ from the role foreseen for it when it was created in the 1950s. At that time, the troops of the force as organized were capable of waging unconventional war under conventional war conditions. The war in Vietnam, however, never fell smoothly into the conventional category. In Vietnam “enemy or enemy-controlled territory” was the countryside of South Vietnam, the government of which had invited U.S. military presence. The enemy insurgents were guerrillas themselves. Instead of waging guerrilla warfare against conventional forces in enemy territory, the U.S. Special Forces troops were to find themselves attempting to thwart guerrilla insurgency in “friendly” territory.

At first the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program was concerned with what was called area development. The goal was to

CHART 2—HEADQUARTERS AND HEADQUARTERS COMPANY, SPECIAL FORCES GROUP (AIRBORNE)

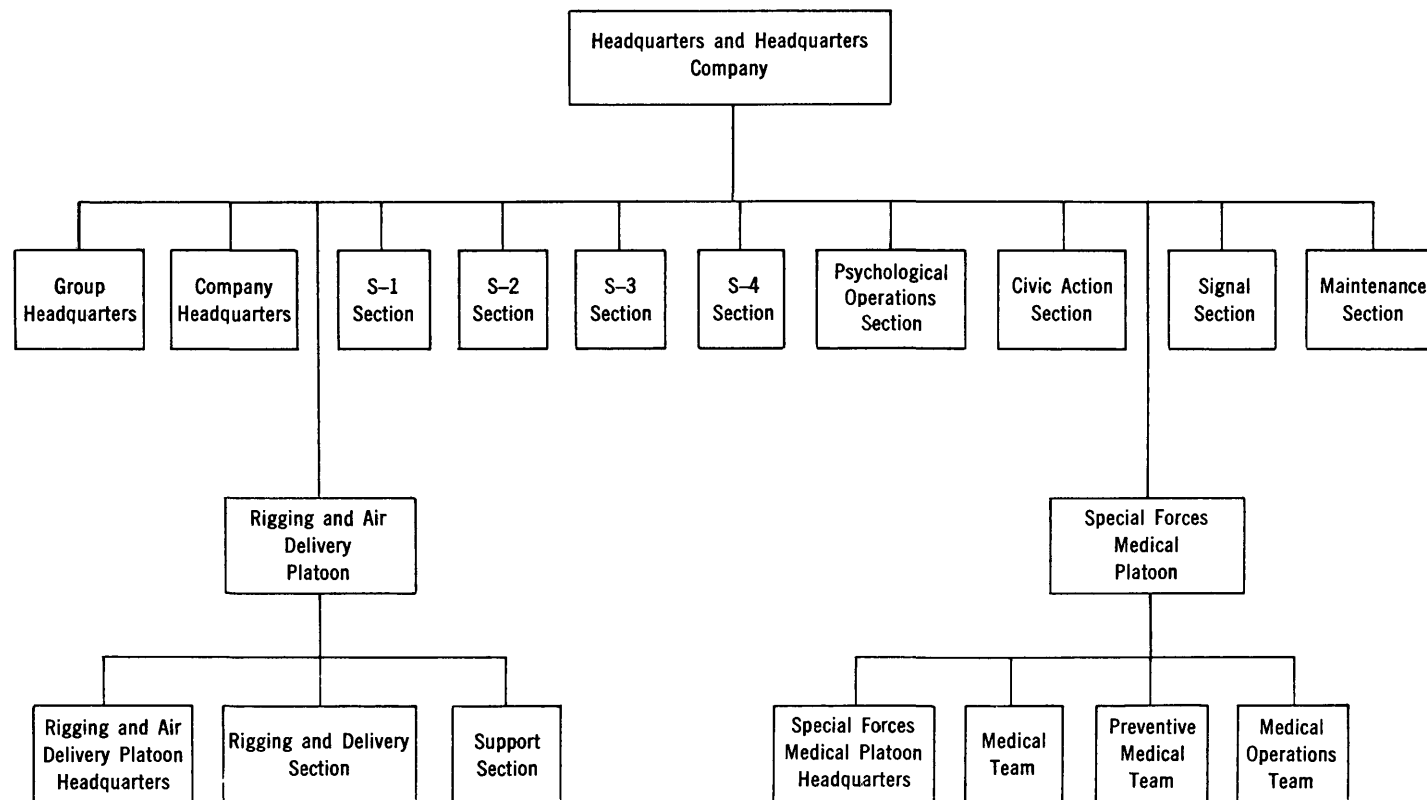
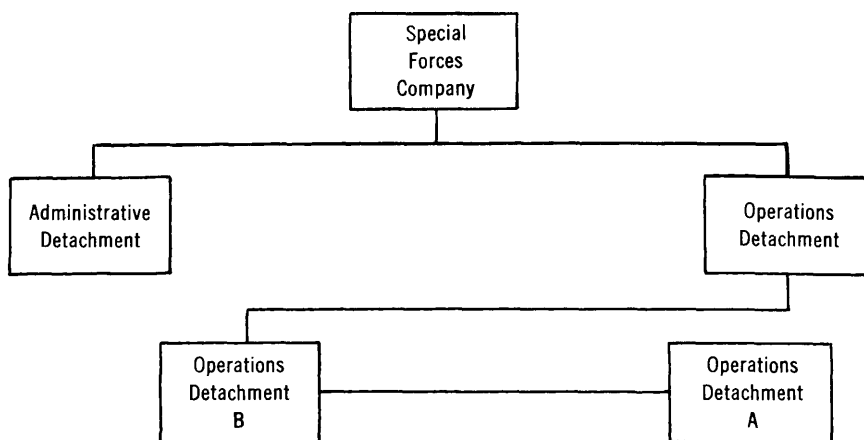


CHART 3—SPECIAL FORCES COMPANY, SPECIAL FORCES GROUP (AIRBORNE)

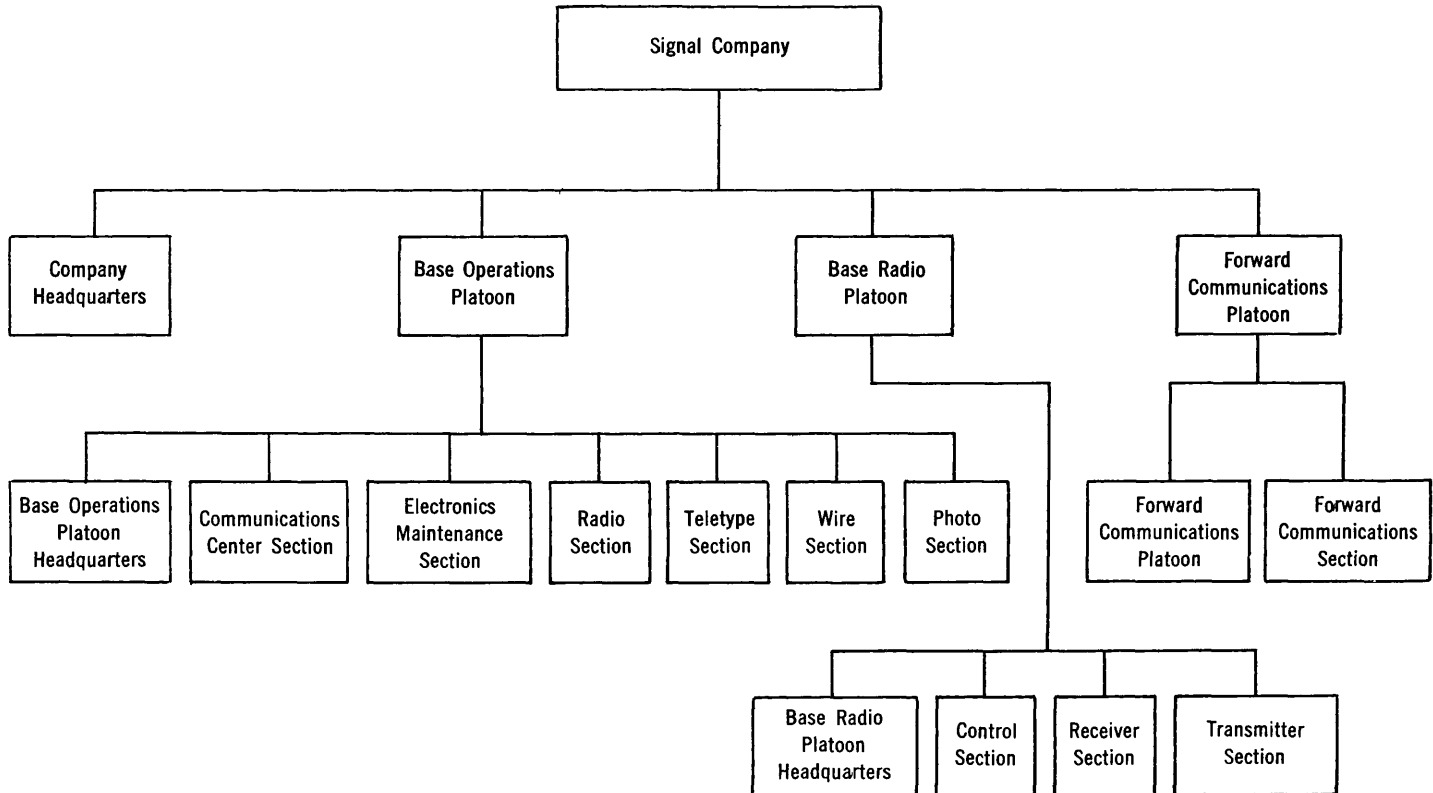


provide an area with security from Viet Cong influence and terror, to help the people develop their own self-defense program, and, if possible, to enlist support for the government of Vietnam from its own citizens. Operations took an offensive turn only because many of the areas involved were already effectively controlled by the Viet Cong.

In late 1960 the response of the governments of Vietnam and the United States, whose military involvement at that time consisted of the presence of a Military Assistance Advisory Group, to the mounting Communist insurgency was to increase the size and effectiveness of Vietnam's conventional military forces. For the most part, these did not include the ethnic and religious minority groups in the highlands of the central and northern portions of South Vietnam and in the rural lowlands of the Mekong Delta. Under the sponsorship of the U.S. Mission in Saigon several programs were initiated in late 1961 to keep these minority groups from falling under the control of the Viet Cong. U.S. Special Forces detachments were assigned to the U.S. Mission to provide training and advice for the programs, the first of which was among the Montagnards.

Based primarily on the success of a pilot project involving the Rhade tribe around the village of Buon Enao in Darlac Province, the principal program centered on establishing area development centers in remote areas where there was little government control. The area development centers were bases of operation at which Special Forces detachments, working through Vietnamese Special Forces counterparts, assisted in the establishment of village defense

CHART 4—SIGNAL COMPANY, SPECIAL FORCES GROUP (AIRBORNE)





VILLAGE SELF-DEFENSE. Moat with bamboo stakes and barbed wire fences surround some villages (left); Montagnard stands guard at his village (right).

systems based on elementary training in small arms and mortars, with minimum tactics designed for squads and with occasional platoon maneuvers. The purpose of the program was to extend government control into areas where it was lacking and to generate in the local populace a more favorable attitude toward the government. It should be clearly understood that the United States initiated this program and encouraged it. The Vietnam government participated by employing the Vietnamese Special Forces, but the program was essentially an American project. In the beginning the local Vietnamese province-sector officials were less than enthusiastic.

In 1963 the area development program expanded toward the western borders of Vietnam. In 1964 the Civilian Irregular Defense Group assumed other missions calling for operations against Viet Cong war zones or so-called safe havens and the interdiction of Viet Cong infiltration routes in Vietnam. The Special Forces continuing commitment in terms of men involved in the CIDG program grew from one medical noncommissioned officer at Buon Enao in October 1961 to the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), numbering over 1,200 in October 1964.

In terms of program management and control, the early years can be divided into three periods: from November 1961 to November 1962 when the U.S. Mission was responsible for the Civilian

Irregular Defense Group program; from September 1962 to July 1963 during which responsibility for operations was gradually turned over to the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, and the Army; and, finally, from July 1963 to the spring of 1965, when the conventional U.S. buildup began during which the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, bore full responsibility for the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program. Throughout the early years, the Special Forces effort with civilian irregulars was characterized by rapid expansion, was dispersed over a wide area, and was subject to changing emphasis in missions. The program developed along largely unplanned lines in response to changing needs and opportunities.

From 1961 to 1965 more than eighty CIDG camps or area development centers were established. Many were built from the ground up (and down) in areas where the government had no effective control. Each camp was a self-contained and comprehensive counterinsurgency effort. U.S. Special Forces men provided advice and assistance in all aspects of camp administration and operations throughout each project site's existence, from initiation to turnover of the camp and its paramilitary assets to local Vietnamese authorities.

When the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, began to assume responsibility for the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program in the fall of 1962, Special Forces detachments made the first assessments of areas in the selection of proposed campsites. Security was the prime consideration when the irregulars arrived at a new site. Often security forces from established camps were brought in until local forces could be recruited and trained.

Camp security occupied a major portion of the Special Forces detachment's time and effort. Few fortified camps were built in the early part of the program, but as it evolved the new camps were placed in "hot areas" and therefore required much more attention in both defense and security. Throughout the period, the Viet Cong harassed campsites and attacked several in reinforced battalion strength, with occasional success. After the successful attack on the camp at Hiep Hoa in November 1963, more emphasis was placed on making the camps strongly fortified positions.

One of the primary missions of Special Forces men at a camp was to advise and assist in the training of paramilitary forces recruited in that area. The Special Forces training program generally concentrated on strike force troops, although the Special Forces did participate in the training of hamlet militia, mountain scouts, and other irregular forces. The main problem in training civilian



STRIKE FORCE BILLET AT VIETNAMESE SPECIAL FORCES CAMP *amidst mortar and machine gun fortifications.*

irregular troops was establishing the respective roles of U.S. Special Forces and Vietnamese Special Forces. Theoretically, all training was a Vietnamese Special Forces responsibility, but most Vietnamese detachments were either unwilling or unable to undertake it.

Strike force operations consisted for the most part of patrols. Hundreds of contacts with the enemy occurred, and many small actions were fought. There was also a fair number of joint operations with regular Vietnam Army and Regional Forces units, particularly in 1964. In most operations, the major hindrance to success was the lack of accurate and timely intelligence.

The U.S. Special Forces men, aware of the importance of gathering intelligence, tried to emphasize that aspect of their missions and to set up intelligence nets that would produce information on the location of Viet Cong units and members of the local Viet Cong political organization. At the beginning of the program, there was no standing operating procedure for the procurement of intelligence. Each Special Forces detachment commander found it necessary to make working arrangements with his Vietnamese

Special Forces counterpart with regard to intelligence. Even after an agreement was finally reached in the spring of 1964, the Vietnamese Special Forces units were slow to accept U.S. Special Forces participation in intelligence operations. The language barrier proved to be a major obstacle to the U.S. Army in recruiting agents and acquiring information.

Perhaps the major problem encountered by U.S. Special Forces men in carrying out their mission with the civilian irregulars was their relationship with their Vietnamese counterparts. From the beginning of the program the role of the U.S. Special Forces detachment commander was to have been strictly advisory. All important responsibilities were to be assumed by the Vietnamese Special Forces, but unfortunately these were rarely shouldered by the Vietnamese Special Forces alone. To complicate the problem there were two vertical chains of command, with appropriate levels of horizontal counterpart co-ordination required up through the two commands. U.S. Special Forces men at this time, moreover, had received little training or indoctrination on what to expect from their Vietnamese counterparts, how to get along with them, and how to accomplish the operational mission through them.

The logistics involved in administering and resupplying the widely dispersed camps required unorthodox requisitioning and procurement procedures. The command and control structure up until May 1964 was unique because the nature of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program demanded it. When conventional forces worked in conjunction with civilian irregular forces, however, this unconventional structure placed an exceptional burden of co-ordination on the Special Forces.

Counter guerrilla operations by strike force units were only a part of the counterinsurgency program at Civilian Irregular Defense Group sites. Civic action and psychological operations were also conducted as part of the Special Forces mission. Their objective was to raise the living standard of the people, to develop their identity with and their loyalty to the government, and to enlist their active support in defeating insurgents. The work of the detachment medical men was a major contribution to this effort. Throughout the period, however, these programs were hampered by the inability of Civilian Irregular Defense Group and other security forces to provide adequate protection to the local population against Viet Cong attacks and terrorism, poorly motivated local government representatives, and the lack of professionally qualified U.S. soldiers who knew the area to augment the Special Forces detachment for its civic action and psychological operations

mission. In spite of these problems, Special Forces men on their own initiative accomplished many worthwhile civic action projects in this period. Emphasis is usually placed on the role the Special Forces played as soldiers in Vietnam. They were soldiers and good ones. But they were more than soldiers; they were, in a way, community developers in uniform too. The civic action accomplishments of the Special Forces are as much a source of pride to them as their accomplishments in the military arena, and justifiably so.

CHAPTER II

Beginnings of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group Program

There were two principal reasons for the creation of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program. One was that the U.S. Mission in Saigon believed that a paramilitary force should be developed from the minority groups of South Vietnam in order to strengthen and broaden the counterinsurgency effort of the Vietnamese government. The other was that the Montagnards and other minority groups were prime targets for Communist propaganda, partly because of their dissatisfaction with the Vietnamese government, and it was important to prevent the Viet Cong from recruiting them and taking complete control of their large and strategic land holdings.

One major study of the situation in Southeast Asia concluded that in 1961 the danger of Viet Cong domination of the entire highlands of South Vietnam was very real, that the efforts of the Vietnamese Army to secure the highlands against Viet Cong infiltration were ineffective, and that the natural buffer zone presented by the highland geography and Montagnard population was not being utilized properly to prevent Communist exploitation. The government was, in fact, failing to exercise any sovereignty over its highland frontiers or its remote lowland districts in the Mekong Delta where other ethnic and religious minority groups were established. This lack of control deprived the government of any early intelligence of enemy attacks and any real estimate of Viet Cong infiltration. The Communists, on the other hand, continued to exploit the buffer zone, and there was always the danger that the insurgents would use this territory as a springboard into the more heavily populated areas.

The Vietnamese had not only made no attempt to gain the support of the Montagnards and other minority groups but in the past had actually antagonized them. Before 1954 very few Vietnamese lived in the highlands. In that year some 80,000 refugees from North Vietnam were resettled in the Montagnard area, and

inevitably friction developed. Dissatisfaction among the Montagnards reached a point where in 1958 one of the principal tribes, the Rhade, organized a passive march in protest. Vietnamese officials countered by confiscating the tribesmen's crossbows and spears, an act that further alienated the Montagnards.

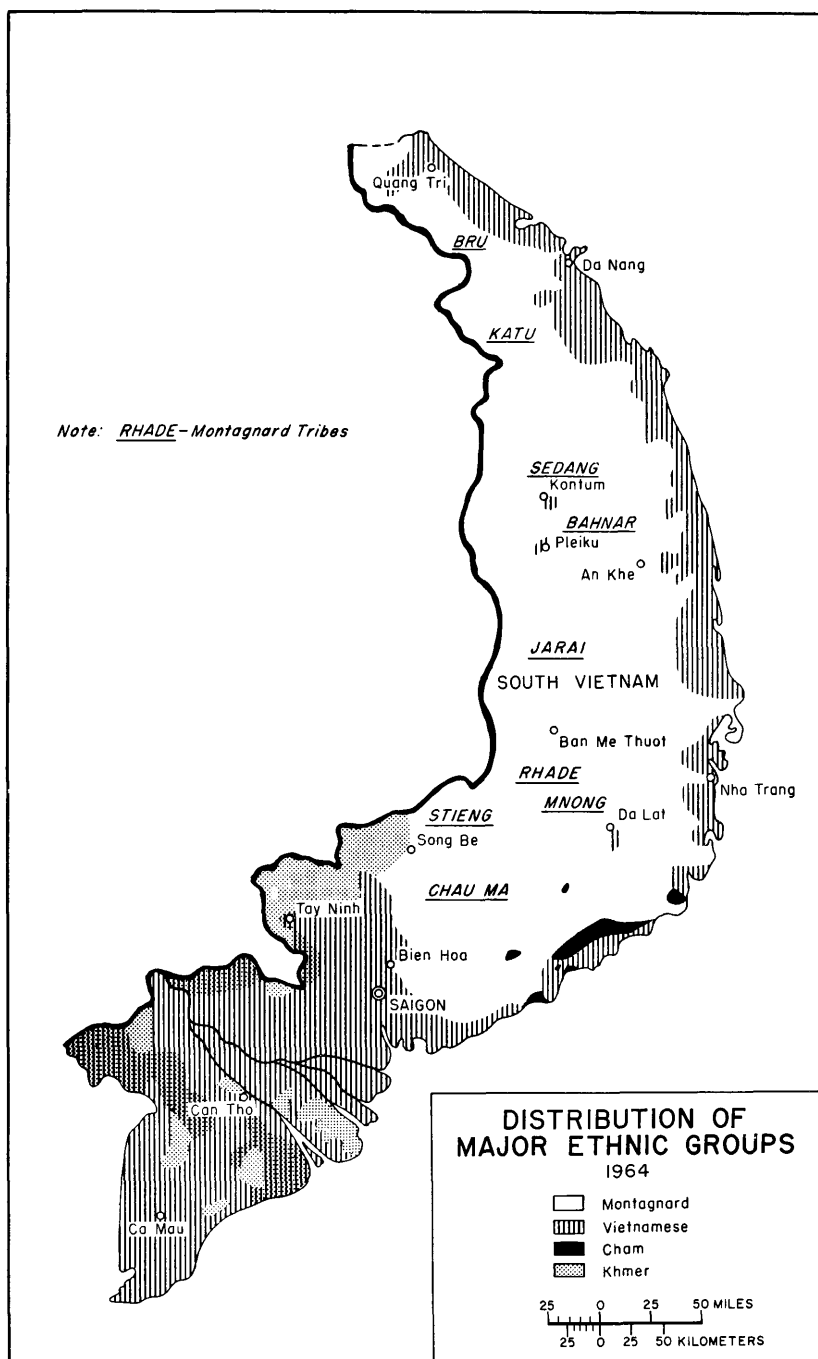
The indifference of the Vietnamese to the needs and feelings of the tribesmen grew directly out of their attitude toward the Montagnards, whom the Vietnamese had traditionally regarded as an inferior people, calling them "*moi*," or savages, and begrudging them their tribal lands. This attitude on the part of the Vietnamese plagued the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program from the beginning. Not until 1966 did the Vietnamese, in their desire to bring the tribes under government control, begin to refer to the Montagnards as *Dong Bao Thuong*, "compatriots of the highlands." Even so, the animosity between Montagnards and Vietnamese continued to be a major problem.

The Montagnard Culture

The Montagnards constitute one of the largest minority groups in Vietnam. The term Montagnard, loosely used, like the word Indian, applies to more than a hundred tribes of primitive mountain people, numbering from 600,000 to a million and spread over all of Indochina. In South Vietnam there are some twenty-nine tribes, all told more than 200,000 people. Even within the same tribe, cultural patterns and linguistic characteristics can vary considerably from village to village. In spite of their dissimilarities, however, the Montagnards have many common features that distinguish them from the Vietnamese who inhabit the lowlands. The Montagnard tribal society is centered on the village and the people depend largely on slash-and-burn agriculture for their livelihood. Montagnards have in common an ingrained hostility toward the Vietnamese and a desire to be independent.

Throughout the course of the French Indochina War, the Viet Minh worked to win the Montagnards to their side. Living in the highlands, these mountain people had been long isolated by both geographic and economic conditions from the developed areas of Vietnam, and they occupied territory of strategic value to an insurgent movement. The French also enlisted and trained Montagnards as soldiers, and many fought on their side.

Since the Rhade (Rah-day) tribe is fairly representative of the Montagnards, a description of the way of life of the villagers will serve as a good example of the environment in which the Special Forces worked in Vietnam. The Rhade were, furthermore,



MAP 1

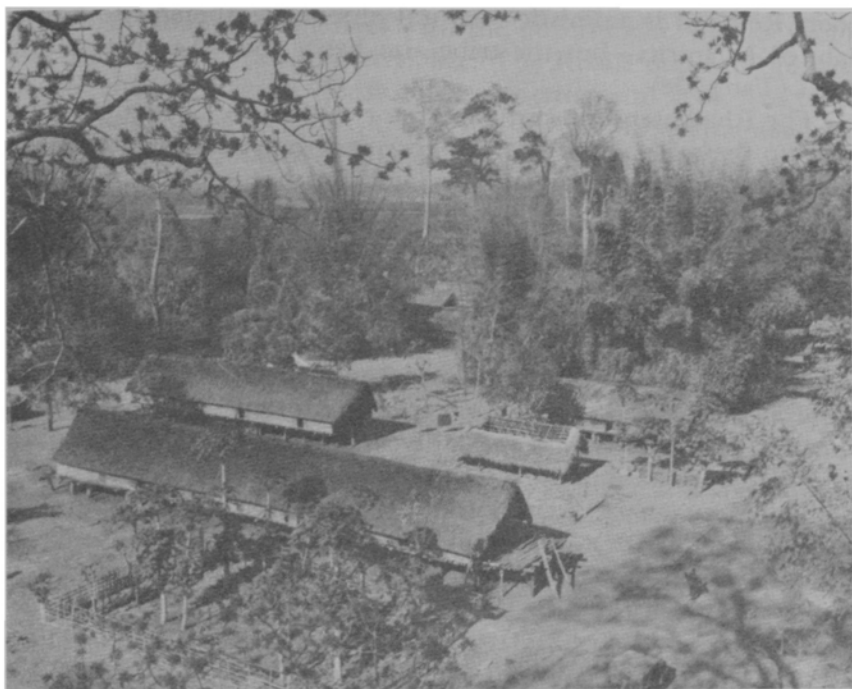
the first to be approached and to participate in the CIDG program. For many years, the Rhade have been considered the most influential and strategically located of the Montagnard tribes in the highlands of Vietnam. (*Map 1*) Mainly centered around the village of Ban Me Thuot in Darlac Province, the Rhade are also found in Quang Due, Phu Yen, and Khanh Hoa Provinces. While there are no census records for these people, it has been estimated that the tribe numbers between 100,000 and 115,000, with 68,000 living in Ban Me Thuot.

The Rhade have lived on the high plateau for centuries, and their way of life has changed little in that time; whatever changes came were mainly the result of their contact with the "civilized" world through the French. They settle in places where their livelihood can be easily secured, locating their houses and rice fields near rivers and springs. Because they have no written history, not much was known about them until their contact with the French in the early nineteenth century. It is generally agreed that most of their ancestors migrated from greater China, while the remainder came from Tibet and Mongolia.

In order of descending importance, the social units of the Rhade are the family, the household, the kinsmen, and the village. The Rhade have a matrilineal system; the man is the breadwinner, but all property is owned by the wife. The oldest female owns the house and animals. The married man lives with his wife's family and is required to show great respect for his mother-in-law. If a man is rich enough he may have more than one wife, but women may have only one husband. Marriage is proposed by the woman, and the eldest daughter inherits her parents' property.

Building a house is a family enterprise. All members of families who wish to live together pitch in and build a longhouse in accordance with the size of the families. The house is made largely of woven bamboo and is long and narrow, sometimes 400 feet long, with entrances at each end. Both family and guests may use the front entrance, but only the resident families may use the rear. The house is built on posts with the main floor usually about four feet above the ground and is almost always constructed with a north-south orientation, following the axis of the valleys.

The tasks of the man and woman of the family are the traditional ones. The man cuts trees, clears land, weaves bamboo, fishes, hunts, builds houses, carries heavy objects, conducts business, makes coffins, buries the dead, stores rice, makes hand tools and weapons, strikes the ceremonial gongs—an important duty—and is responsible for preparing the rice wine. Authority in the Rhade



RHADE VILLAGE OF BUON ENAO

family is maintained by the man—the father or the grandfather. It is he who makes the decisions, consulting with his wife in most cases, and he who is responsible for seeing that his decisions are carried out. The average Rhade man is between sixty-four and sixty-six inches tall, brown in complexion, and usually broad-shouldered and very sturdy. The men have a great deal of endurance and manual dexterity and have the reputation of being excellent runners.

The woman draws water, collects firewood, cooks the food, cleans the house, mends and washes the clothes, weaves, makes the traditional red, black, yellow, and blue cotton cloth of the Rhade, and cares for the children. The women sit on the porch (the *bhok-gah*) of the longhouse to pound the rice with a long pole and a wooden mortar.

The life of the Rhade is governed by many taboos and customs. Outsiders are expected to honor these, and therefore delicacy was required of Special Forces troops who dealt with the Rhade and other tribes. Healing is the responsibility of the village shaman, or witch doctor, and the general state of health among the Rhade is

poor. Religion is animistic—natural objects are thought to be inhabited by spirits—but the tribe also has a god (Ae Die) and a devil (Tang Lie).

The Rhade tend toward a migratory existence. Once they have used up the soil's vitality in one area, they move their village to a new place, seeking virgin soil or land that has not been used for half a century. At the beginning of the rainy season the people plant corn, squash, potatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, and bananas. Once these crops are in the ground, the rice is planted.

The Rhade proved to be enthusiastic participants in the CIDG program in the beginning because the early projects were, they felt, pleasing to the spirits and helpful to their villages. If these two requirements were satisfied (and in many instances they were not later on), the Rhade, and the Montagnards in general, were quite willing to work hard in the CIDG program.

The Montagnards were not, of course, the only minority group involved in the CIDG program; other groups were Cambodians, Nung tribesmen from the highlands of North Vietnam, and ethnic Vietnamese from the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects.

The Buon Enao Experiment

With the permission of the Vietnamese government, the U.S. Mission in the fall of 1961 approached the Rhade tribal leaders with a proposition that offered them weapons and training if they would declare for the South Vietnamese government and participate in a village self-defense program. All programs that affected the Vietnamese and were advised and supported by the U.S. Mission were supposed to be accomplished in concert with the Vietnamese government. In the case of the Montagnard program, however, it was agreed that the project would at first be carried out separately instead of coming under the command and control of the Vietnamese Army and its advisers, the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group. There was no assurance that the experiment with the Rhade would work, especially in the light of the Vietnam government's failure to follow through on other promises to the Montagnards.

The village of Buon Enao, which had a population of approximately 400 Rhade, was visited in late October of 1961 by a representative of the U.S. Embassy and a Special Forces medical sergeant. During two weeks of daily meeting with village leaders to explain and discuss the program, several facts emerged. Because government forces had been unable to protect the villagers many of them supported the Viet Cong through fear. The tribesmen had

previously aligned themselves with the government, but its promises of help had failed to materialize. The Rhade opposed the land development program because the resettlement took tracts of tribal lands and because most American and Vietnamese aid went to the Vietnamese villages. Finally, the discontinuance of the medical aid and educational projects by the Vietnamese government on account of the activities of the Viet Cong had created resentment against both the Viet Cong and the government.

The villagers agreed to take certain steps to show their support for the government and their willingness to co-operate. They would build a fence to enclose Buon Enao as a protection and as a visible sign to others that they had chosen to participate in the new program. They would also dig shelters within the village where women and children could take refuge in case of an attack; construct housing for a training center and for a dispensary to handle the promised medical aid; and establish an intelligence system to control movement into the village and provide early warning of attack.

In the second week of December when these tasks had been completed, the Buon Enao villagers, armed with crossbows and spears, publicly pledged that no Viet Cong would enter their village or receive assistance of any kind. At the same time fifty volunteers from a nearby village were brought in and began training as a local security or strike force to protect Buon Enao and the immediate area. With the security of Buon Enao established, permission was obtained from the Darlac Province chief to extend the program to forty other Rhade villages within a radius of ten to fifteen kilometers of Buon Enao. The chiefs and subchiefs of these villages went to Buon Enao for training in village defense. They too were told that they must build fences around their respective villages and declare their willingness to support the government of the Republic of Vietnam.

With the decision to expand the program, half of a Special Forces A detachment (seven members of Detachment A-35 of the 1st Special Forces Group) and ten members of the Vietnamese Special Forces (Rhade and Jarai), with a Vietnamese detachment commander, were introduced to assist in training village defenders and the full-time strike force. The composition of the Vietnamese Special Forces at Buon Enao fluctuated from time to time but was always at least 50 percent Montagnard. A program for the training of village medics and others to work in civil affairs projects intended to replace the discontinued government programs was also initiated.

With the assistance of the U.S. Special Forces and Vietnamese Special Forces troops who had been introduced in December 1961, and a twelve-man U.S. Special Forces A detachment deployed in February 1962, all forty villages in the proposed expansion were incorporated into the program by the middle of April.

Recruits for both village defenders and the local security force were obtained through local village leaders. Before a village could be accepted as a part of the development program, the village chief was required to affirm that everyone in the village would participate in the program and that a sufficient number of people would volunteer for training to provide adequate protection for the village. The program was so popular with the Rhade they began recruiting among themselves. One of the seven members of Detachment A-35 had this to say about how the Rhade received the program initially: "Within the first week, they [the Rhade] were lining up at the front gate to get into the program. This kicked off the recruiting program, and we didn't have to do much recruiting. The word went pretty fast from village to village." Part of the project's popularity undoubtedly stemmed from the fact that the Montagnards could have their weapons back. In the late 1950s all weapons, including the crossbow, had been denied to them by the government as reprisal for Viet Cong depredations and only bamboo spears were allowed until the second week in December 1961, when the government finally gave permission to train and arm the village defenders and strike forces. The strike force would maintain itself in a camp, while the village defenders would return to their homes after receiving training and arms.

The American and Vietnamese officials were acutely aware of the opportunity for Viet Cong infiltration and developed control measures to be followed by each village before it could be accepted for the Village Self-Defense Program. The village chief had to certify that everyone in the village was loyal to the government and had to reveal any known Viet Cong agents or sympathizers. Recruits vouched for the people nearest them in line when they came for training. These methods exposed five or six Viet Cong agents in each village and these were turned over to the Vietnamese and Rhade leaders for rehabilitation.

Cadres of Rhade trained by the Vietnamese Special Forces were responsible for training both local security (strike) forces and village defenders, with Special Forces troops acting as advisers to the cadres but having no active role as instructors. Villagers were brought into the center and trained in village units with the

weapons they were to use, M1 and M3 carbines. Emphasis was placed on marksmanship, patrolling, ambush, counterambush, and swift response to enemy attacks. While members of a village were being trained, their village was occupied and protected by local security troops. Since no official table of organization and equipment existed, these strike force units were developed in accordance with the manpower available and the estimated needs of the area. Their basic element was the squad of eight to fourteen men, capable of acting as a separate patrol.

Activities within the operational area established in co-ordination with the province chief and Vietnam Army units in the vicinity consisted of small local security patrols, ambushes, village defender patrols, local intelligence nets, and an alert system in which local men, women, and children reported suspicious movement in the area. In some cases, U.S. Special Forces troops accompanied strike force patrols, but both Vietnamese and American policy prohibited U.S. units or individual American soldiers from commanding any Vietnamese troops.

All villages were lightly fortified, with evacuation the primary defensive measure and some use of family shelters for women and children. Strike force troops remained on the alert in the base center at Buon Enao to serve as a reaction force, and the villages maintained a mutually supporting defensive system wherein village defenders rushed to each other's assistance. The system was not limited to Rhade villages in the area but included Vietnamese villages as well.

Logistical support was provided directly by the logistical agencies of the U.S. Mission outside Vietnamese and U.S. Army supply channels. U.S. Special Forces served as the vehicle for providing this support at village level, although U.S. participation was indirect in that distribution of weapons and pay of troops was accomplished through local leaders.

In the field of civic assistance, the Village Self-Defense Program provided community development along with military security. Two six-man Montagnard extension service teams were organized to give the villagers training in the use of simple tools, methods of planting, care of crops, and blacksmithing. Village defender and strike force medics conducted clinics, sometimes moving into new villages and thus expanding the project. The civic assistance program received strong popular support from the Rhade.

The establishment of village defense systems in the forty villages surrounding Buon Enao attracted wide attention in other

Rhade settlements, and the program expanded rapidly into the rest of Darlac Province. New centers similar to Buon Enao were established at Buon Ho, Buon Krong, Ea Ana, Lac Tien, and Buon Tah. From these bases the program grew, and by August 1962 the area under development encompassed 200 villages. (Map 2) Additional U.S. and Vietnamese Special Forces detachments were introduced. During the height of the expansion, five U.S. Special Forces A detachments, without counterpart Vietnamese detachments in some instances, were participating.

The Buon Enao program was considered a resounding success. Village defenders and strike forces accepted the training and weapons enthusiastically and became strongly motivated to oppose the Viet Cong, against whom they fought well. Largely because of the presence of these forces, the government toward the end of 1962 declared Darlac Province secure. At this time plans were being formulated to turn the program over to the Darlac Province chief and to extend the effort to other tribal groups, principally, the Jarai and the Mning.

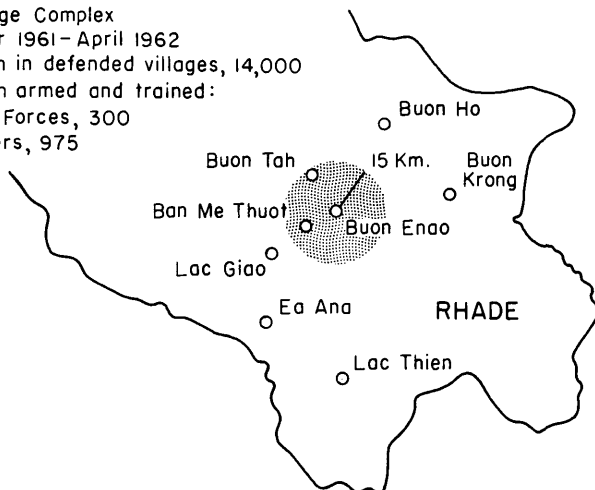
Command and Control During the Buon Enao Period

In the course of the Buon Enao experiment, the command and control structure of the U.S. Special Forces underwent a number of changes. The expansion of the Buon Enao project and the training of Vietnamese Special Forces in 1962 necessarily involved an increase in the number of Special Forces troops needed to do these jobs. This buildup of the U.S. Special Forces generated the need for a Special Forces headquarters in Vietnam, and, with the establishment of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, in February 1962, made co-ordination necessary between the U.S. Mission, which was running the CIDG program and controlling the Special Forces involved in it, and the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

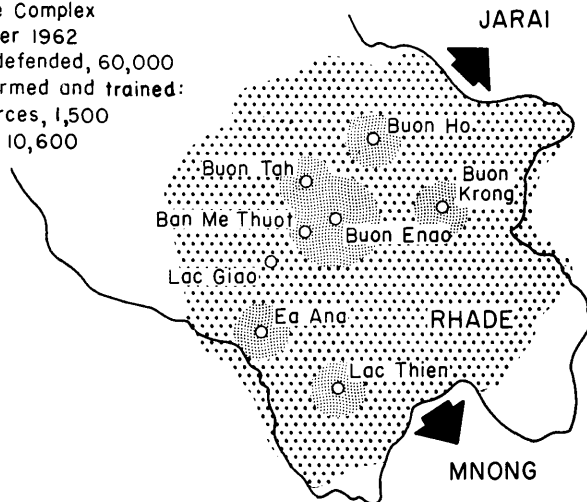
In February 1962 there was one full U.S. Special Forces A detachment deployed in Darlac Province on the Buon Enao project. When the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, was established, with General Paul D. Harkins commanding, a special warfare branch was included in the J-3 staff section. In May a joint agreement between the U.S. Mission and Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, was made to co-ordinate the CIDG program between them. The U.S. Mission initially retained complete responsibility for both the logistical and operational aspects of the program. The counterpart organization to the joint U.S. Mission and Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, structure was the

BUON ENAO EXPANSION

40 - Village Complex
 December 1961 - April 1962
 Population in defended villages, 14,000
 Population armed and trained:
 Strike Forces, 300
 Villagers, 975



200 - Village Complex
 April - October 1962
 Population, defended, 60,000
 Population armed and trained:
 Strike Forces, 1,500
 Villagers, 10,600

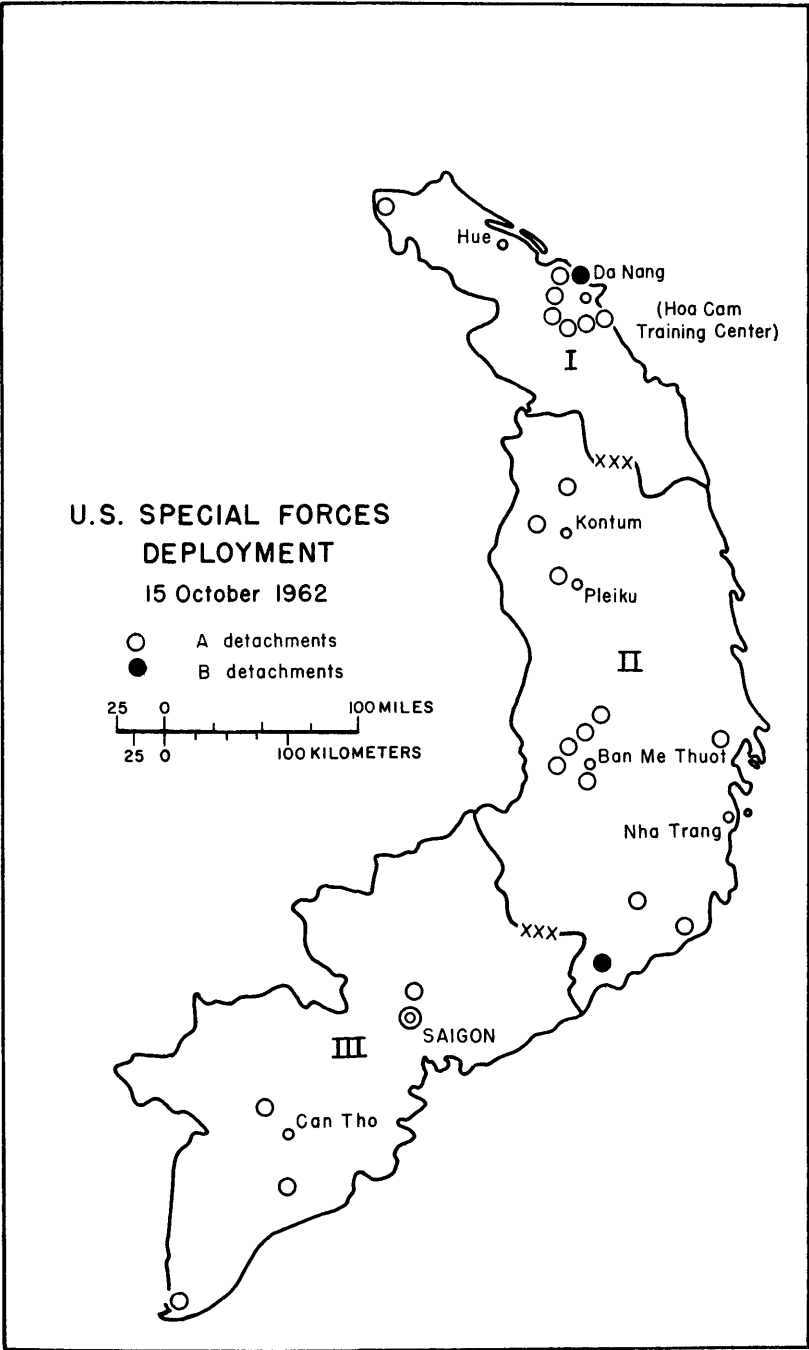


Vietnamese Special Forces under the control of the Vietnam government. In July the U.S. Department of Defense made the decision to transfer complete responsibility for Special Forces operations to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, thus making the Army responsible for U.S. support of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program. The Department of Defense arranged for a colonel qualified in unconventional operations to assume command of the Special Forces in Vietnam and provided for flexibility with respect to supply procedures and the expenditure of funds so that the efficiency and effectiveness of the CIDG program could be maintained. The transfer of responsibility—code-named Operation SWITCHBACK—was to be accomplished in phases and completed by 1 July 1963.

In September 1962 in accordance with Operation SWITCHBACK, Headquarters, U.S. Army Special Forces (Provisional), Vietnam, was activated in Vietnam under the Military Assistance Command. As of October 1962 there were twenty-four U.S. Special Forces detachments in Vietnam. (*Map 3*)

By November of 1962 the U.S. Special Forces organization in Vietnam consisted of one C detachment, three B detachments, and twenty-six A detachments. There was also a headquarters unit in Saigon. The C detachment did not exercise its usual function as an operational control detachment but rather provided augmentation for the headquarters. The normal Special Forces chain of command came into effect.

In the period December 1962 through February 1963, U.S. Army Special Forces (Provisional), Vietnam, assumed full operational control of the Special Forces A detachments in Vietnam. These A detachments had, at this point, established CIDG camps in every one of the four corps tactical zones. A control B detachment was located in each corps tactical zone to co-ordinate with the Vietnamese corps command structure and the senior adviser of the tactical zone and to exercise operational control over subordinate A detachments. Special Forces A detachments were placed on temporary duty in Vietnam from the 1st Special Forces Group on Okinawa and from the 5th and 7th Special Forces Groups at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. By December 1963 Special Forces detachments, working through counterpart Vietnamese Special Forces units, had trained and armed 18,000 men as strike force troops and 43,376 as hamlet militia, the new name for village defenders. Also in February 1963, the U.S. Army Special Forces (Provisional), Vietnam, headquarters was moved from Saigon to Nha Trang. The new location offered two advantages: first,



MAP 3

since it was situated halfway between the 17th parallel and the southern tip of the country, it was more accessible to Special Forces detachments scattered throughout the country, and, second, it afforded good facilities for unloading supply ships from Okinawa across the beach and also had available air, rail, and highway transportation.

In the beginning the program with the Rhade around Buon Enao was not officially called the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program, but was known at different times under various names, one of them area development. The troops were at one time called village defenders, at another time hamlet militia. The term CIDG actually became the official designation for the paramilitary counterinsurgency effort after Buon Enao, when the program began to expand.

The success of the Buon Enao experiment prompted a rapid and wide-ranging expansion of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program and an accompanying expansion of the Special Forces' role. The expansion period ran from August 1962, when the Buon Enao project was flourishing with a 200-village complex, to the spring of 1965, when substantial numbers of conventional U.S. combat units began to reach Vietnam.

Early Paramilitary Programs

During the period of the Buon Enao experiment with the Rhade, a number of other programs, often independent and unrelated, were initiated by the U.S. Mission in Saigon in an effort to extend government control into areas either lost to the government or under marginal control. All these programs, along with the area development program that extended out of Buon Enao in the spring of 1962 further into the Montagnard region and elsewhere, came to be designated officially as the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program. In these other programs the Special Forces, under the control of the U.S. Mission, conducted paramilitary training programs for the minority groups involved.

In December 1961 the second half of Detachment A-35 (the other half was at Buon Enao) arrived at the Hoa Cam Training Center in Da Nang, where it inaugurated a basic training program together with several specialized programs. Among the paramilitary units trained at Hoa Cam were the mountain commandos, later called mountain scouts. These men were used on long-range missions in remote jungle and mountain areas in order to provide a government presence in the areas and to gather intelligence for the military and civil authorities in their districts. An-



SPECIAL FORCES SOLDIER REMOVES BAZOOKA SHELL after gunner has jammed it in the tube.

her program in which the Special Forces functioned as training cadre was the trailwatchers program. The mission of the trailwatchers, later called border surveillance units, was to identify and report Viet Cong movements near the border in their area and to capture or destroy small Viet Cong units when possible. Montagnards living near the border of Vietnam with Cambodia and Laos who participated in the trailwatchers program were trained for eight weeks at Da Nang or at other area development centers. The trailwatchers program is significant in that it produced the border surveillance program, in which the concepts of area development and border surveillance were combined to form one of the most important facets of the CIDG program.

The Special Forces also helped train paramilitary forces in the "fighting fathers" program, wherein resistance to insurgent activity centered on Catholic parish priests and a number of priests under the program made the arming and training of their parishioners possible. The goal, again, was to secure an area for the government of South Vietnam. The Civilian Irregular Defense Group program emerged as an amalgamation of many little programs, all of which aimed at the protection of and development of minority groups against insurgency.

By the end of 1964 the Montagnard program was no longer an area development project in the original sense of the term.

There was a shift in emphasis from expanding village defense systems to the primary use of area development camps or centers (CIDG camps) as bases for offensive strike force operations. At the time the principal task as seen by higher headquarters was to supplement the current government pacification program with intensified counter guerrilla warfare. Security and camp defense took precedence over civic action, and stress was laid on the role of CIDG strike forces as "VC hunters." A second major shift in mission that gave greater importance to border surveillance occurred in 1963 as area development projects were expanded toward the western borders of Vietnam and new CIDG camps were established in border areas. Although area development continued in other localities and was combined with border surveillance when feasible, border surveillance received greater emphasis in 1964.

With the expansion of the CIDG effort among the Montagnards, other tribal groups were drawn in and more Special Forces detachments became involved. New projects were not concentrated in a specific area but were dispersed and scattered throughout the country. The original Buon Enao complex expanded in Darlac Province. Projects were also initiated to recruit tribes in I Corps Tactical Zone and the northern regions of II Corps Tactical Zone (in Kontum and Pleiku Provinces). Support was given to the Catholic youth program in the Mekong Delta. All this expansion involved area assessment and the setting up of area development centers. (*See Map 3.*)

A CIDG area development center consisted essentially of a secure base of operations at which village defenders and strike forces recruited from nearby villages were trained. As at Buon Enao, the village defenders (later known as hamlet militia) volunteered to come to the base camp for training and to receive weapons while their villages were protected by the strike force. Supervised and assisted by strike forces, village defenders, after returning to their homes, were expected to patrol in defense of their villages and their immediate area. They received no pay except during their period of training. Each village development area was protected by paid, full-time strike force troops. Operating in units of platoon or company size, they conducted aggressive patrolling throughout the operational area, assisted villages under attack, set up ambushes, and checked village defense procedures. In most cases, strike force troops were paid in accordance with Vietnam Army pay scales, although in the early stages of the program higher pay was sometimes used as an incentive for enlistment.

The general mission of an area development center or CIDG camp was to train strike forces and village defenders; bring the local populace under the influence of the South Vietnam government; employ paramilitary forces in combat operations to reinforce organized hamlets, carry out interdiction activities, and conduct joint operations with Vietnamese Army units when such operations furthered the CIDG effort; conduct psychological operations to develop popular support for the government; establish an area intelligence system including, but not limited to, reconnaissance patrols, observation posts, and agent informant networks; conduct a civic action program; and, where appropriate, establish a border screen in sectors along the Republic of Vietnam international border. During the development phase, all reasonable means were to be taken to improve the economic status of the local population by purchasing local materials and hiring local labor for the construction and operation of the camp. At this time, the CIDG area development camp plans called for eventual turnover and integration into the national strategic hamlet program after the area was "pacified." The overthrow of the Diem regime in 1963, however, altered those plans.

Throughout the period 1961–1963, the U.S. Special Forces units were conducting training programs, both in support of the Military Assistance Advisory Group—for example, Ranger training—and in support of the paramilitary programs. The major mission, however, of the U.S. Special Forces after Buon Enao was to establish base camps and conduct operations in support of the area development program under the U.S. Mission. At the camps the U.S. Special Forces advised their counterpart Vietnamese Special Forces detachments, provided operational assistance when required, and served as a channel for the logistical and financial support provided by the U.S. Mission.

Operation Switchback: November 1962–July 1963

In accordance with Operation SWITCHBACK, the Army began assuming responsibility for U.S. participation in the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program in November 1962 by first taking over training and operations. By 30 June 1963 the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, was fully responsible for logistics and funding and in July the administration of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program belonged to the command completely. There were, however, some paramilitary projects that had not yet been officially incorporated into the CIDG program and therefore did not come under Military Assistance Command con-



HELICOPTER LIFTS OFF AFTER DROPPING SUPPLIES to *isolated Special Forces team.*

trol. The most significant of these was the border surveillance program, which was not incorporated into the CIDG program until October 1963. At that time responsibility passed from the U.S. Mission to the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. Border surveillance sites were then considered as CIDG projects with a subsidiary mission of border surveillance and were administered in accordance with the CIDG program.

The unusual logistic support system used by the Special Forces in the conduct of the CIDG program had a great deal to do with its successes. The U.S. Army Support Group, Vietnam, provided the normal supply support for U.S. Special Forces detachments. Through interagency agreements, the Army, incorporating many features of the U.S. Mission's logistical system, gave the U.S. Special Forces a direct overseas procurement capability, authorized local purchases from current operating funds at all U.S. Special Forces levels, allowed for informal justification for unusual items or quantities, dropped formal accountability for items on shipment to Vietnam, and devised what came to be known as "quick-reacting supply and procurement procedures." The Counterin-

surgency Support Office was established in the G-4 section of Headquarters, U.S. Army, Ryukyu Islands, on Okinawa, to control and expedite procurement and shipment of material supplied from outside Vietnam. During Operation SWITCHBACK, a monthly average of approximately 740 tons of equipment and supplies was airlifted from Saigon and Da Nang to Special Forces A detachments.

By the end of 1962, only one year after the initiation of the Buon Enao project, 6,000 strike force troops and 19,000 village defenders and hamlet militia had been trained. Other irregulars trained included 300 border surveillance troops, 2,700 mountain scouts, and approximately 5,300 Popular Forces troops. (*Table 1*)

The expansion of the CIDG program from 1 November 1962 to 1 July 1963, the end of Operation SWITCHBACK, was fairly rapid. Approximately forty CIDG camps were opened and eight closed. The rapidity of this expansion did not permit the kind of development that took place at Buon Enao, where a great deal of time was taken to prepare the area and the people for military activity in the CIDG program. This time the emphasis was on speed. The usual approach was to establish security first, undertake civic action later, and work through province and district chiefs instead of tribal leaders. In general these projects were not as successful as the Buon Enao experiment. In many areas Viet Cong control was stronger than at Buon Enao, making recruitment difficult. Often the tribal groups were not as advanced as the Rhade. Strike forces frequently had to be moved from their home areas in order to establish a new camp. It was also during this period that emphasis shifted from the establishment of mutually supporting village defense systems to carrying out offensive strike force operations in order to open up and then secure an area. Finally, increased emphasis was placed on selecting area development campsites near the borders so that strike forces could be assigned a border surveillance mission in addition to the task of clearing and securing the assigned operational area. (*Map 4*)

The primary U.S. Special Forces mission during Operation SWITCHBACK continued to be the training of strike force troops and hamlet militia. By June 1963 approximately 11,000 strike force and 40,000 hamlet militia from over 800 villages had undergone training that averaged about six weeks for strike force troops and two weeks for hamlet militia. The Special Forces also continued to conduct training for the border surveillance and mountain scout programs.

TABLE 1—DISPOSITION OF U.S. SPECIAL FORCES DETACHMENTS,
DECEMBER 1962

Province	CIDG Campsite	Mission
I Corps		
Quang Tri	Khe Sanh	BS, ^a CIDG
Quang Nam	Da Nang	Control (B det)
	Hoa Cam	CIDG, MS, ^b AR, ^c misc.
	Phu Hoa	CIDG
Quang Tin	Tra My	CIDG
II Corps		
Quang Ngai	Tra Bong	CIDG
	Ba To	CIDG
	Mang Buk	CIDG
Kontum	Dak Pek	CIDG, BS
	Tanh Canh	CIDG, BS
Pleiku	Pleiku	Control (B det)
	Plei Mrong	CIDG, BS
	Plei Yt	MS (1 det) ^d
Binh Dinh	Van Canh	CIDG
Phu Bon	Cheo Reo	CIDG
III Corps		
Darlac	Ban Don	BS, CIDG
	Buon Enao	CIDG
	Buon Dan Bak	CIDG
	Krong Kno Valley	CIDG
Tuyen Duc	Serignac Valley	CIDG
Khanh Hoa	Nha Trang	Control (Alt Hq) } B det
		Control (III Corps) }
Ninh Thuan	Phuoc Thien	CIDG
Binh Thuan	Song Mao	CIDG, SF, ^e misc
Capital Region		
Saigon	Saigon	Command (Hq det)
Gia Dinh	Thu Duc	AR, misc
IV Corps		
Phong Dinh	Can Tho	Control (B det)
Ba Xuyen	Du Tho	CIDG
An Giang	Chau Long	CIDG (1 det) ^d

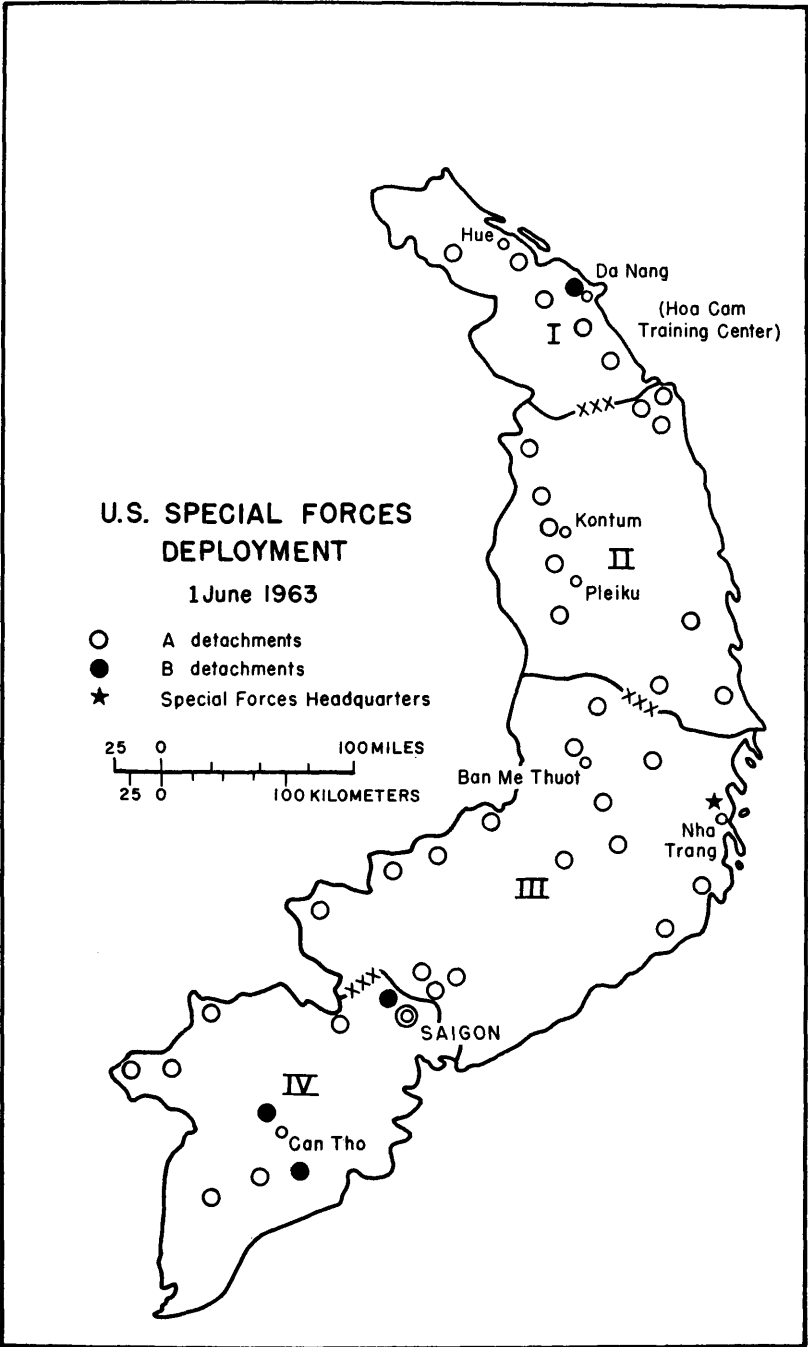
^a Border surveillance.

^b Mountain scout.

^c Airborne Ranger, Vietnam Army.

^d On-the-job training.

^e 77th Special Forces, Vietnam Army.



MAP 4

Offensive actions conducted by CIDG strike forces during Operation SWITCHBACK included ambushes, reconnaissance patrols, and combat patrols within each camp's operational area. By June 1963 the CIDG camps in II Corps had completed the training of enough strike force troops to enable U.S. Special Forces (Provisional), Vietnam, to shift emphasis from training to operations against the Viet Cong. There were joint operations with Vietnam Army units and also combined operations using CIDG forces from different camps. In June, for example, four companies of strike forces from the camps at Dak To, Plei Mrong, and Polei Krong were combined for an operation. The role U.S. Special Forces men played in many of these operations was much more positive in terms of direction and control than their role as advisers would indicate; in many instances Vietnamese Special Forces troops were unable to carry out an operation and U.S. Special Forces men were obliged to take over command. Vietnamese Special Forces officers and noncommissioned officers were not as well trained as their U.S. counterparts, and were, furthermore, often unwilling to carry out offensive operations with the civilian irregulars. This is not to say that they were afraid. Most had seen a great deal of fighting. They were just not interested in, or even remotely enthusiastic about, the CIDG program. From the point of view of the Vietnam Special Forces and the government the CIDG program was an American project. The failure of the turnover and conversion of camps grew largely out of this unenthusiastic attitude on the part of the Vietnamese. In any case, combat operations often placed an exceptional burden on U.S. Special Forces soldiers. A typical operation might involve a company of indigenous CIDG Montagnard strike force troops and one or two Special Forces men—an officer and a noncommissioned officer. If the Vietnamese Special Forces troops were along, then the Green Beret was an adviser. But in a firefight he often became the commander, and the men he had around him were not Americans. The Special Forces has more than a few decorations for acts of individual heroism under such circumstances. (*See Appendix B.*)

Viet Cong reaction to the expansion of the CIDG program in many instances took the form of mere harassment or occasional probing fire. During Operation SWITCHBACK, however, Viet Cong opposition increased. Every CIDG camp experienced some sort of enemy fire. The one instance of an attack in strength occurred on 3 January 1963 when two reinforced Viet Cong companies, with the assistance of at least thirty-three penetration agents in the strike force, attacked and overran the camp at Plei Mrong. The

cumulative effect of these attacks was an increase in camp security; specifically, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, in January 1963 issued a directive to all A detachments that called for a secondary defensive system inside the outer perimeter, along with other measures.

Finally, it was during Operation SWITCHBACK that the Special Forces began to receive augmentation. Two U.S. Navy Construction Battalion (Seabee) technical assistance teams arrived in January on a six-month temporary duty basis and were employed extensively in airfield construction. Two U.S. Army five-man Engineer Control and Advisory Detachments also came in to assist the Special Forces in constructing roads, schools, drainage systems, and other civic action projects. Augmentation also included direct assistance in civil affairs and psychological operations. In June 1963, men specially trained in civil affairs and psychological operations were assigned to Special Forces (Provisional), Vietnam, and two-man teams were dispatched to Special Forces B detachments.

The Turnover of Buon Enao

The problems encountered in turning over the Buon Enao project to the Vietnamese proved to be the same problems which arose every time turnover was attempted in the CIDG program. A discussion of the Buon Enao experience, therefore, is illustrative of the broader turnover experience.

The so-called turnover of a CIDG camp consisted of nothing more than "turning over complete authority and responsibility for the camp" to the Vietnamese Special Forces. The CIDG forces present in the camp maintained their CIDG status. The opposite was true in a so-called conversion; civilian irregulars were converted into regular Vietnamese soldiers, Regional or Popular Forces or Vietnamese Army, and lost their CIDG status. Conversion was not very popular among the CIDG, although eventually most men did convert.

The concept of the CIDG program provided that when an area could be considered secure or became accessible to Vietnam Army units and government agencies, it would be turned over to provincial control. By the end of Operation SWITCHBACK, July 1963, the expanded CIDG program was still in the developmental stage—only the villages in the Buon Enao complex were considered secure and ready for turnover. Nevertheless, the turnover of Buon Enao was a failure. A 5th Special Forces Group synopsis of the CIDG program concluded: "By the end of 1963, the Buon

Enao complex was disorganized and most of its effectiveness had been lost."

The turnover at Buon Enao gave the first indication of two major problems that would arise later in the transfer of men trained by Special Forces to the government of Vietnam. The first of these was the lack of preparation on the part of the government for taking over and continuing area development projects. The second was the reluctance of strike force troops to be integrated into conventional Vietnamese units. During Operation SWITCH-BACK some camps were closed out before the assigned mission was accomplished because of the lack of CIDG potential in the area, change of mission, or greater need elsewhere for the strike force personnel.

In September 1962 the Darlac Province chief agreed to accept thirty-two of the 214 villages in the Buon Enao complex. These villages were considered secure. It was planned to turn over an additional 107 villages at the end of March 1963 and the remaining villages by the end of June 1963.

The government arranged a very rigid schedule for the Buon Enao turnover. The province chief and the Vietnamese Special Forces were given orders to carry out the schedule to the letter. The U.S. Special Forces teams on the sites were therefore unable to alter the schedule, although there is evidence of their considerable apprehension over the possible consequences of an unprepared turnover—apprehension that apparently was not shared by the government. Despite the formal co-ordination that took place, actual on-the-scene planning and execution of turnover was handled unilaterally by the Vietnamese. The commanding officer of U.S. Special Forces (Provisional), Vietnam, was not shown the turnover plan in advance.

By the end of 1962 the chief of Darlac Province had accepted the thirty-two villages, but since he was unable to support them financially or logistically the villages were turned over on paper only. The Special Forces had to continue to support the villages and pay the strike force and other costs. On 20 March 1963 the second lot of 107 villages was turned over with province support of the original thirty-two still not forthcoming. The last 139 villages were to be assimilated into the strategic hamlet program, but because these hamlets had not yet been approved for support by regular U.S. Vietnamese funds, U.S. Mission funds continued to support all 214 villages in the complex for the next few months.

In April 1963, 604 of the 900-man Buon Enao Strike Force were turned over to the province chief to be used for the CIDG pro-

gram and border surveillance, and one company was sent to open a new camp at Bu Prang in Quang Duc Province. The day after the turnover, the province chief moved the 604 CIDG troops from Buon Enao to Ban Me Thuot for indoctrination, thus leaving the complex without a strike force during the hours of darkness. These actions were taken unilaterally by the Vietnamese and apparently without any indoctrination or psychological preparation of the strike force. Although the province chief had assumed responsibility for the pay of strike force troops on 30 April 1963, they were still unpaid by 26 July and seemed ready to desert, despite the prospect of higher pay scales at the Vietnam Army rate. Neither had the village health workers trained at Buon Enao been paid. A serious situation was narrowly averted when the Special Forces provided back pay to strike force troops and village health workers from CIDG funds.

Once the strike force troopers left Buon Enao for indoctrination, they did not return but were transferred to other parts of the province, and in the process their unit integrity was destroyed. The dependents of the strike force also started to leave; and there were other disturbing developments that added to the bewilderment and discontent of the Rhade, who had come to view Buon Enao as the source and symbol of the entire program. For example, the dispensary facilities at Buon Enao, which had played a major role in the initiation of the project, were dismantled and moved to Lao Tien and Buon Ho.

Concern in Saigon about the large number of weapons distributed to the Rhade resulted, in December 1962, in a government order to reduce the number of weapons by 4,000. Difficulty was encountered in collecting the weapons because the tribesmen had received no instructions to turn them in. The order to do so appeared to them to be inconsistent with what they had been told, namely, that the weapons given them were for the defense of their villages and families. At the time of the turnover, there were still 2,000 more weapons in the province than Saigon regulations permitted, and there were further collections. The Special Forces did not participate in the collection of weapons. Disillusionment following the turnover of Buon Enao may have contributed to the Montagnard uprising which took place in late September 1964.

The reasons for the failure of the Buon Enao turnover can be summarized as follows: mutual suspicion and hostility between the Rhade and Vietnamese province and district officials; overly generous distribution by U.S. agencies of weapons and ammunition to tribesmen whose reaction to government enforced repossession of

some of the weapons was understandably hostile; apparent disregard on the part of the Vietnam government for the interests, desires, and sensitivities of the Montagnards; inadequate Vietnamese government administrative and logistical support; and, finally, failure of U.S. authorities to anticipate these difficulties and avoid them.

Although the transfer of considerable assets took place during the early years, there were only rare instances of turnover where the mission of pacification had been accomplished and where troops were trained and ready to carry on without U.S. supervision. Of the eighty-two CIDG camps that were established prior to October 1964, more than forty were closed out or turned over by that date.

The higher priority given the border surveillance mission after July 1963 caused a shift of the principal CIDG effort from the interior to border sites and was the reason for the turnover or closeout of seventeen of the eighteen camps relinquished between August 1963 and March 1964. Inadequate initial area assessment led in some cases to the selection of unproductive sites that later had to be relocated. Some camps were situated on indefensible terrain or had limited CIDG potential. Other camps were moved or closed out altogether because of the discontent of the strike force, which had been recruited from a distant area because of the lack of local resources.