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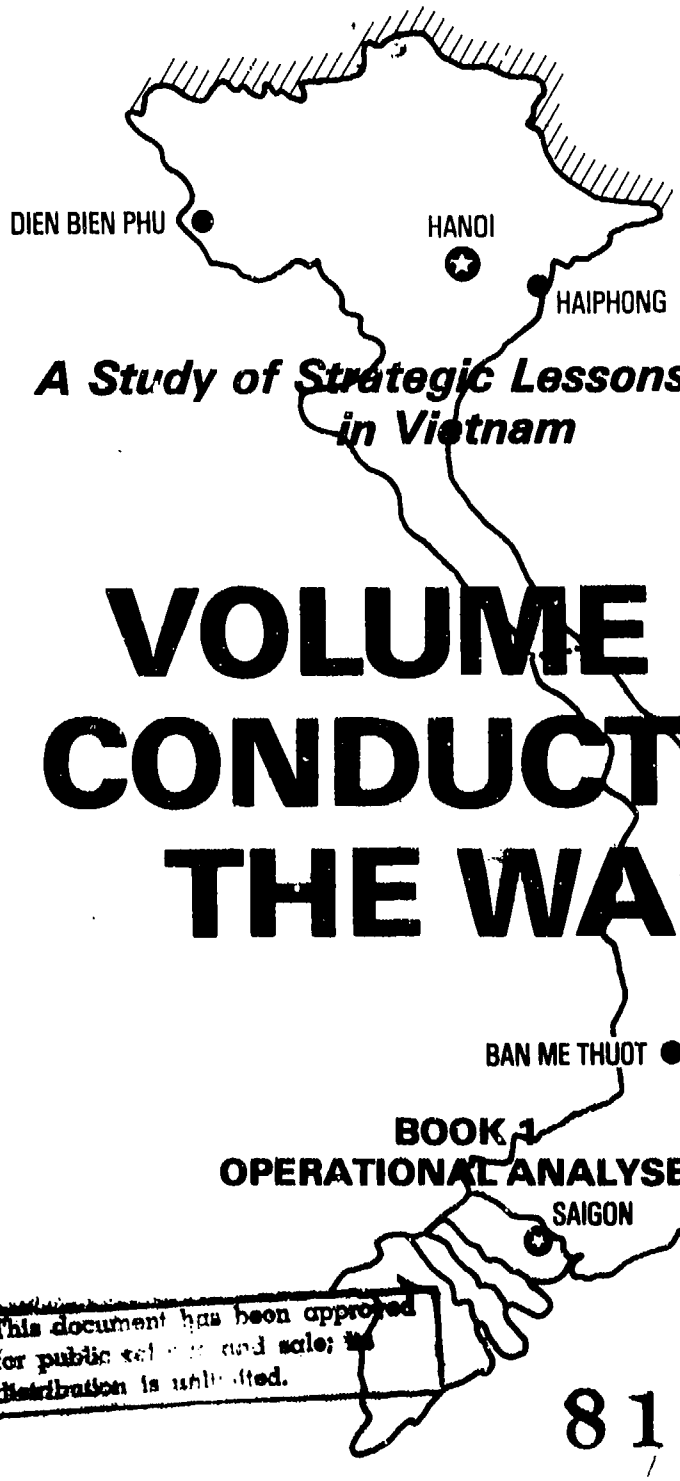

A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam

VOLUME VI CONDUCT OF THE WAR

BOOK 1 OPERATIONAL ANALYSES

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US ARMY WAR COLLEGE
STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

REPLY TO ATTENTION OF

AWCI

9 March 1981

SUBJECT: Declassification of the BDM Study, "The Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam"

Defense Technical Information Center
ATTN: Ms. Betty Weatherholtz
Cameron Station
Alexandria, VA 22314

1. Your organization was on the distribution list for the BDM study, "The Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam." The study was assigned AD numbers B048632L through 641L.

2. In December 1980, the Army War College Security Office notified all recipients of the study by telephone that it contained classified information and should be secured.

3. BDM now has revised the appropriate pages of the study to delete all classified information and has conformed to all other requirements required by the clearance review.

4. A revised copy of the study which is unclassified and approved for public release is inclosed. DTIC Form 50's are inclosed for assignment of new AD numbers.

Incls
as

Andrew C. Remson, Jr.
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A STUDY OF STRATEGIC LESSONS LEARNED IN VIETNAM, VOLUME VI, CONDUCT OF THE WAR, BOOK 1, OPERATIONAL ANALYSES.

This draft is submitted to DAMG-SSP.

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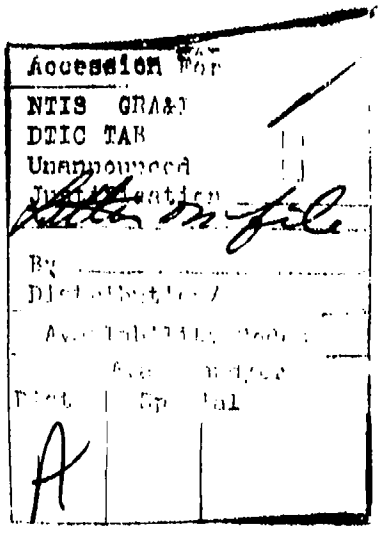
FOREWORD

This Study is a final draft submitted to DAMO-SSP in accordance with the provisions of Contract No. DAAG 39-78-C-0120.

The tasks are to identify and analyze lessons that should be learned from three decades of US involvement in Vietnam. This is Volume VI of the Study.

Volume I	The Enemy
Volume II	South Vietnam
Volume III	US Foreign Policy and Vietnam 1945-1975
Volume IV	US Domestic Factors Influencing Vietnam War Policy Making
Volume V	Planning the War
Volume VI	Conduct of the War
Book 1	Operational Analyses
Book 2	Functional Analyses
Volume VII	The Soldier
Volume VIII	The Results of the War



The views, opinions and/or findings contained in this report are those of the authors and should not be construed as an official Department of the Army position, policy, or decision unless so designated by other documentation.

PREFACE

A. PERSPECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary intent of this volume is to shed some light, from a military perspective, on how one can "win" most of the battles and still "lose" the war. This far-from-unique phenomenon resulted in the "death" of RVN, and the severe "wounding" of the US in pride, prestige, confidence, will and strategic flexibility. A longer-term view reminds us, however, that the United States lost most of the battles, yet ultimately won in both our Revolution and the War of 1812. For us those wars were "total", but for Britain they were "limited" in a number of ways. Ironically, Britain's greatest hours followed those two defeats. The future course and influence of America still is in a state of flux.

The Second Indochina War was fought on many levels and in several key locii which included Saigon, Hanoi, Peking, Moscow, and above all Washington. Among the numerous intra and interagency "battles" within the US government was the little-recognized one between the shifting factions which supported, more instinctively than consciously, either the artistic (historical) or the scientific (modern) approach to war. The battle had been building in intensity for decades but was brought to a head by the costs and ambiguities of that conflict; the correct balance between those two approaches has yet to be studied rationally, let alone agreed on. Nor has a decision been reached between the complementary and conflicting virtues of, and demands for, the skills of managers and leaders. (The latter is a major subordinate fight of the larger battle). Generally, the opposing sides were manned by those in mufti and those in uniform, but by no means exclusively so.

> The enemy we fought for the past nine years used, under the name of self-criticism, a time honored practice of our own armed forces which we simply call the critique. This collective self appraisal which routinely followed upon our field exercises has been our best means for studying and improving ourselves.

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> The application of this same technique of introspection to the brutal realities of war may appear highly unusual. Yet, we must review the causes of our failures and of our successes to ensure that the lessons which we bought so dearly with our dead not remain locked away in the memories of the survivors.
>
> We can also admit that an army with a long history is sufficiently well endowed to be able to hear the truth.*

The scale, length, and complexity of the war were such that it was necessary, for adequate coverage, to divide this volume into two books:

- Book One (Operational Analyses), for the most part, compares and contrasts selected "friendly" and "enemy" military operations in a chronological sequence. Air, naval, and unconventional operations, however, are analyzed in separate chapters. On balance, this book examines the "Art of War" as it unfolded in Indochina.
- Book Two (Functional Analyses) cover such areas as intelligence, logistics, command and control, and measurements. With exceptions, these are the major components of the "Science of War."

B. PURPOSE OF VOLUME VI "CONDUCT OF THE WAR" -- BOOK 1

The nature and extent of US military participation in Vietnam differed markedly during various periods of the quarter century in which attention focused on Vietnam. Book 1 of Volume VI traces and analyzes the early advisory efforts and examines the combat support provided by US units during the counterinsurgency phase of the Second Indochina War. Extensive treatment is provided for the period from 1965 through 1968 when America took charge, a time when the big battles took place, culminating in

---

* Opening statements of General Paul Ely, French Commander in Chief, Far East, on May 31, 1955, in his cover letter to the Lessons of the War in Indochina, (Vol. 2); translated by V. J. Croizat for the Rand Corporation (RM-5271-PR; May 1967).

the 1968 Tet Offensive that was launched by the PLAF with PAVN support. If any conventional warfare lessons are to be derived from the Vietnam experience, this would appear to be the period that offers the most useful examples of what to do and what not to do.

Pacification and Vietnamization are also treated briefly here and in detail in Volume V; these programs nearly succeeded and had it not been for the inplace ceasefire and the unwillingness or inability of the US to respond to the naked aggression of the DRV in violation of the cease-fire so painfully arrived at in 1973, there might still be a Republic of Vietnam today; but still the odds would have been quite long.

RVNAF and GVN programs and problems are evaluated for the period in which those forces and that government stood alone, depending on substantially decreasing American support while Soviet support for their enemy increased alarmingly. The precipitate erosion of economic and materiel aid, coupled with the failure of the US to provide essential air and moral support in the face of major enemy attacks in late 1974 and early 1975, hastened the end of the Republic. In the view of many ranking US career diplomats and soldiers, this constituted a betrayal of the South Vietnamese by the US.

Air, naval, and unconventional operations are each treated in separate chapters in a chronological sense, each chapter covering the full span of US operations in Vietnam. Capabilities and limitations of VNAF and VNN are evaluated, as are the various US air and naval operations. In this context, both air and naval operations had important impacts on the conduct of the war. Conversely, the limitations that were self-imposed on the conduct of unconventional operations rendered them relatively ineffective, and they made no significant contribution to the conduct or outcome of the war.

Book 1, therefore, seeks to describe and analyze ground, air, naval, and unconventional warfare operations in the distinct phases of the war with an eye tc identifying important insights concerning how well or poorly US leaders arrived at the important or key decisions that guided US participation in the war, how those decisions turned out, and how well or poorly US troops and their leaders performed their jobs in Indochina.

C. THEMES THAT RUN THROUGH BOOK 1 VOLUME VI

Early US aid and advice were seriously flawed by inadequate and/or faulty knowledge of the enemy, the allies, and the nature of the conflict. Lessons concerning French mistakes and accomplishments were largely ignored.

Having ignored much of the French experience, many of the initial US counterinsurgency concepts and programs were inappropriate, and that unfortunate situation was compounded by an excess of competition and an insufficiency of coordination and cooperation among US Services and agencies. Having already been tainted in the eyes of their countrymen by their submissiveness to the French, senior RVNAF officers became and remained highly politicized with the overthrow of President Diem, and, with some notable exceptions, they failed to provide the same quality of leadership and inspiration as did their counterparts in the PLAF and PAVN. Clearly the US aid and advice proferred during the counterinsurgency period failed, or massive US intervention might not have been necessary on the same scale.

US air and ground strategies were severely self-constrained during most of the war because of unnecessary fears or unsound theories. Awkward and ineffective command and control relationships prevailed throughout the war despite the fact that the ineffectiveness of those command relationships had been pointed out frequently, and despite the fact that the enemy treated Indochina as a single theater of operations in contrast to the fragmented politico-military areas of responsibility recognized by the USG. The US strategy of attrition, with its apex at Khe Sanh, was partially the result of the self-imposed restrictions and partially because it seemed to suit the traditional US way of war. That strategy failed to achieve its objectives and played a major role in turning the US polity and their Congress against the war.

Despite the enormous and costly effort, the US and GVN were on the military, political, strategic, tactical, and especially the psychological defensive throughout the war, illustrating the difficulties facing a major coalition fighting a limited war against an oppunent fighting a total war.

At several stages of the war (i.e., 1960, 1965, 1972, and 1975) RVNAF was in the wrong posture organizationally and tactically and inferior to the more experienced PLAF and PAVN (former Viet Minh). In all cases except for the final DRV offensive US power provided the equalizer that enabled the RVNAF to survive.

Like most democracies, the US was at a serious disadvantage trying to compete with a strong and dedicated opponent in the "fight-talk" arena. At the same time RVNAF, which had been created in part in the image of the US forces, had become almost totally dependent on US ways and means of war, and without US physical support was incapable of successfully opposing the Soviet-supported DRV which was permitted to retain its much superior geostrategic position. US failure to live up to presidential commitments was a major factor leading to the rapid fall of RVN.

Throughout the war much of US air power was employed improperly and at great cost--human, fiscal, psychological, and political. By the time air power was used more correctly in 1972, the US political will and capability to reap the benefits gained had been sapped.

Naval operations during the war provide some interesting sidelights but provided nothing dramatically new in the annals of naval warfare. Riverine operations did not differ materially from those conducted by the French except for a greater infusion of helicopters.

Clandestine operations were handcuffed from the beginning by the constraints imposed on itself by the USG. As a consequence, several highly specialized units were misemployed. The Phoenix program, which was targeted against the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI), was begun too late and unfortunately came in for adverse publicity, but it provides some useful insights for countering insurgency. Similarly, the US raid on Son Tay prison camp near Hanoi in 1970 furnishes an excellent example of the use of all-source intelligence and exemplary detailed planning and execution of a hazardous mission; it also provides a case study condemning the lack of such a raid capability routinely and suggests that the fixation on a high probability of success delayed execution of the mission until after the US

POWs had long since been removed. Despite a number of excellent individual and small unit efforts, US and RVNAF unconventional operations in Indochina made little notable contribution to the outcome of the war, and they raise the question of the validity for conducting such operations when massive forces are being used in overt operations at a time when the overthrow of the major enemy power has been ruled out publicly.

D. HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF BOOK 1

Figure VI-1 reflects selected events that relate to the conduct of the war in Indochina. The first five chapters of this book deal with ground combat operations in each of five distinct periods, from 1950 through 1975. The remaining three chapters treat air, naval, and clandestine operations, each over the entire span of the war. Inevitably there will be some redundancy in the latter three chapters because of the desire to have each stand on its own. There is also some redundancy between these chapters and those of Book 2, Volume VI, for the same reason. This book provides a background for the functional analyses found in Book 2.

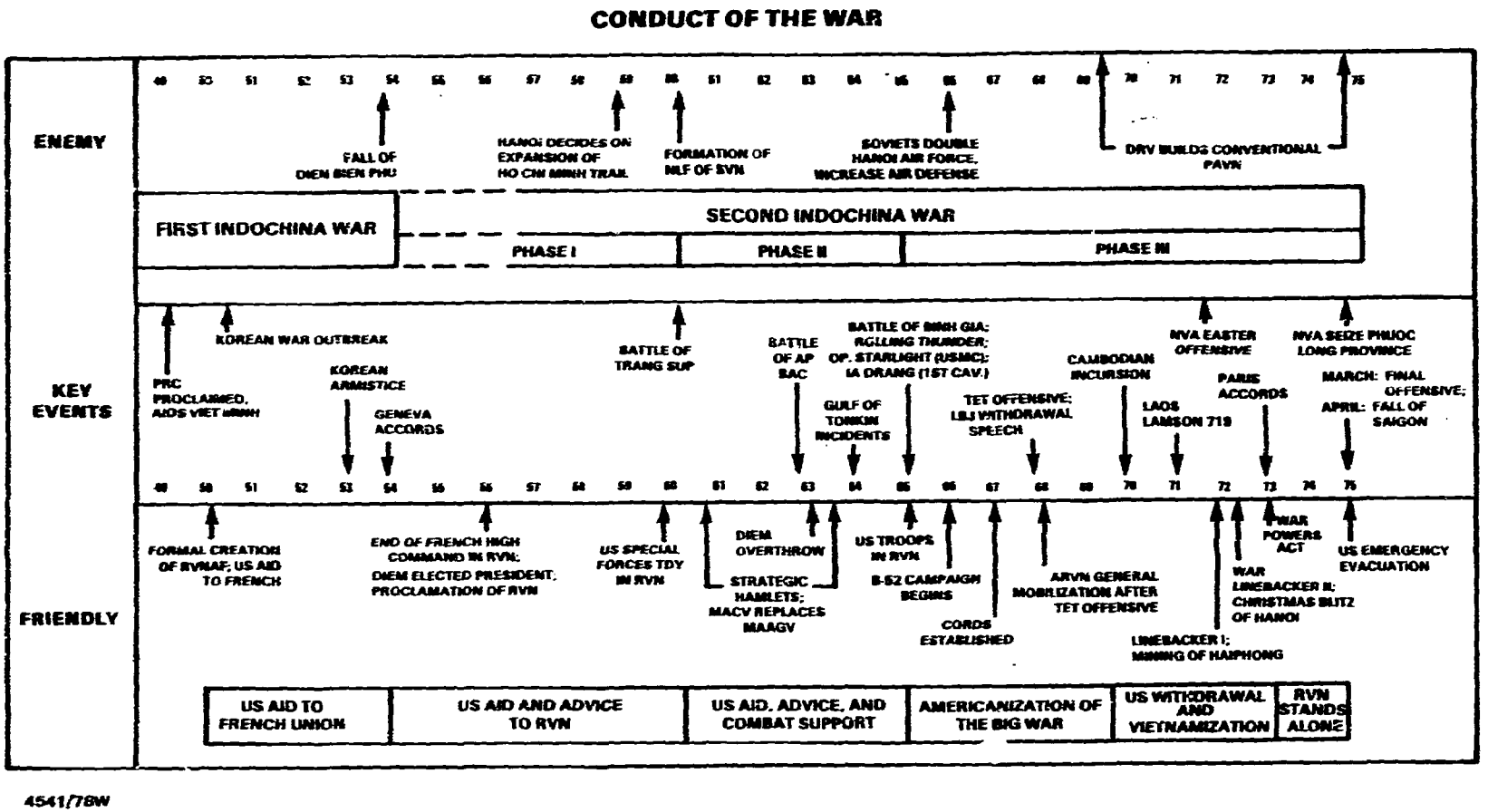

Figure VI-1. Selected Events Affecting the Conduct of the War

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is Book 1, Operational Analyses, of Volume VI, Conduct of the War, of the Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam. The course of the ground war is treated chronologically in the first five chapters, reflecting the following:

(1) US Aid and Advice (1950-1960) - often based on faulty perceptions of threat and the natural tendency to create an ally in our own image;

(2) The Counterinsurgency Era (1960-1964) - which resulted from the failure of earlier advice and support and the endemic political instability in South Vietnam;

(3) America Takes Charge (1965-1968) - when the US deployed the best combat forces it has ever put in the field at the outset of a war, and a period when the massive US presence stabilized the military situation in RVN but deprived both the RNVAF and the GVN from learning how to stand on their own; also US and international public support for the war declined steadily;

(4) US Phases Out (1969-1972) - when public and congressional attitudes made it necessary for the US to turn the war over to the RVNAF, and a period during which serious morale and disciplinary problems wracked many US units;

(5) RVNAF Stands and Falls - Alone (1973-1975) - when US presidential promises for aid and support failed to materialize and the RVNAF proved unable to stand against the combined arms onslaught of the expanded and modernized PAVN operating from a superior geostrategic position.

Air, naval, and unconventional operations are analyzed in the closing three chapters, and in each case the data and analyses cover the entire span of the war.

Book 2 of Volume VI presents a series of analyses of the functional or specialist aspects of the war, including the serious command and control problems that are only alluded to in Book 1.

Much of the data presented herein were peculiar to Vietnam and must be viewed in that light. However, the Vietnam-oriented insights and particularly those set forth in this book, which, more than anywhere else in the volumes of the Vietnam Study, deal with US ground combat operations, are worth considering before and during future armed conflicts, especially those in the Third World. As in other volumes, the lessons were drawn from the analyses and insights and have general application for various types of future conventional and unconventional conflicts. As the analysis progressed, it became increasingly clear that the US approach to and implementation of both national and military strategies sorely need deep, objective and continuing restudy.

INSIGHTS

US Aid and Advice (1950-1960)

- The US learned too little, too late from the very relevant French experience (of almost a century) in Indochina; nor did we listen often and well enough to the South Vietnamese. The "costs" of not doing so are impossible to gauge correctly in retrospect, but they could not have been insignificant.
- An inaccurate assessment of the relative threats to the security of RVN - in time, scope, and nature - resulted in RVNAF being configured and prepared for the wrong "war" at the wrong time; belated efforts to train them "down" to counter the realities of the insurgency were often inappropriate and too seldom effective.
- Timely and detailed knowledge and thorough understanding of the enemy's goals, organizational structure, political-military strategies and tactics, support systems, patterns, habits, etc. would have provided the US with at least the opportunity to establish the correct priorities in helping GVN/RVNAF to meet the multiple and time-phased threats to their security.

LESSONS

Goals, policies, strategies, force structures, and tactics which are based on inaccurate and/or untimely appreciations of the conflict environment are bound to be inferior, which significantly raises the costs, time, and chances of achieving one's objectives; nor should one's assessments be unduly biased by, or limited to, one's own experiences, perceptions, and concepts.

Decision makers - civilian and military - must listen to a spectrum of those who do have the time and ability to think, and must require their overworked staffs to do their homework. The enemy in Vietnam worked harder and better at analyzing our significant strengths and weaknesses than did we concerning his.

INSIGHTS

The Counter-insurgency Era (1961-1965)

- Inadequate and belated understanding of our allies and the enemy, and the complex nature of the conflict when combined with our national pride, naivete, and impatience precluded the US from developing and implementing a timely, effective, and coordinated counter-insurgency effort.
- USG agencies, in Washington and Saigon, were not organized and coordinated properly to plan and control the massive, sensitive and interwoven programs demanded by the situation in Vietnam.
- The tacit US support of the coup against Diem resulted in such political and military instability that it is doubtful if any counterinsurgency plan would have succeeded during the period.
- Generally US, and thus RVN, strategies and tactics were inferior to those of the enemy; e.g., focusing the bulk of the early efforts and resources against the enemy's replaceable regional and main forces permitted the more critical political-military infrastructure to expand rapidly in power and influence.
- The traditional but artificial separation of political and military matters made it difficult for US leaders to comprehend and counter a sophisticated "People's War."
- Despite - and partially because of - US aid and advice, the security forces of RVN were poorly prepared to cope with the insurgency, and in late 1964 were unable to stand up to the better armed and more realistically trained Main Force units.

LESSONS

It is doubtful if the US has yet learned how to defeat - in a reasonable time and at an acceptable cost - a well-organized and led "People's War"; the institutional knowledge and experience gained in Indochina largely have been discarded or degraded, as have been the interest and incentives.

External aid and advice, especially when based on misconceptions, cannot provide a client state with the requisite leadership, determination and cohesion to defeat a pervasive and sophisticated insurgency.

INSIGHTS

America Takes Charge (1965-1968)

- During the twentieth century the US strategic approach had been increasingly based on materiel and technological superiority, while that of the enemy in Vietnam, due to both necessity and philosophy, was more subtle and sophisticated; the enemy's approach was more appropriate for the nature and environment of the conflict in Indochina.
- US strategy was disjointed geographically, organizationally and functionally while that of the enemy was unified and coherent.
- The American ways of life and war are very expensive and "heavy handed," and had profound and pervasive impact on the government, economy, society and armed forces of South Vietnam; all of those national elements became more or less tied to our ways without having the leadership, experience, and means to carry them through to success.
- A primary intent of both sides in the conflict, was to attrite the other for political and psychological as well as for military purposes; despite disproportionate losses, attrition was more suited to and successful for the Lao Dong leadership than it was for the US.
- Attrition took time, resources, and patience and thus led to a costly protracted war which was increasingly difficult to understand, explain and "sell" to the US news media and the public; serious study of alternative strategies came too late.
- The enemy's 1967-68 winter-spring offensives exposed his "rear base" in RVN to exploitation while, ironically, crumbling the already fragile US "rear."
- The US could not afford to lose even one major battle (e.g., Khe Sanh) while the enemy could (and did) lose many, while persevering, and eventually prevailing.
- The enemy's strategic deception and dispersion plan (his Phase I) was aided and abetted by his study of predictable US methods and habits; conversely, US knowledge of his approach to strategy was more superficial and subjective.
- On the whole, US military units carried out their difficult and often frustrating tasks quite well during the period. In executing the given strategy, the majority of the commanders and their staffs displayed flexibility, dedication and overall professionalism. Unfortunately, too many of the young leaders and soldiers carried out their duties with more determination and bravery than tactical skill--not their fault.

- During the Tet offensives, RVNAF gained confidence and started to "come of age"; with US aid and support they reversed the previous moral and physical ascendency of PLAF and gradually gained at least a rough equivalence with PAVN in its contemporary state.
- The strategic dialogue between the military and civilian leaders of the USG, which was incomplete and generally mutually unsatisfactory, was brought to a head by the cumulative effects of attrition, Tet '68, Khe Sanh, the Pueblo incident, and by the untimely and poorly reasoned and presented request for 206,000 more troops.
- Despite suffering extremely heavy losses during the Tet/Khe Sanh offensives, the enemy entered the fight-talk phase in a stronger position than did the US.

LESSONS

Current US strategy, doctrine and tactics still are based primarily on attrition; since such an approach did not work well against a smaller and militarily weaker opponent, it should be highly suspect against a larger and in many ways stronger antagonist.

The US approach to military strategy is basically a direct and unsubtle one which is heavily biased towards the materiel and technological end of the scale and slights the psychological and political elements; a serious, comprehensive and continuing reappraisal of the bases for future US political-military strategy is overdue.

The US Way of War is extremely expensive and getting more so each year; all US services need to rethink a rational balance between high, mid and low-cost equipment and forces (e.g., for the Army the proper employment of reinforced light infantry for the defense and seizure of urban areas for light air-portable armor).

The US (like other modern western-style democracies) is ill-suited to sustain a large-scale, costly, inconclusive and protracted limited war, especially against a determined, tough and clever opponent who is capable of exploiting our internal and international vulnerabilities or contradictions.

INSIGHTS

The US Phases Down (1969-1972)

- In 1969 the combination of Vietnamization, Pacification and the withdrawal of US forces (along with greatly reduced casualties) was probably the best strategy available to the new administration that had even a chance of gaining minimum US goals in Vietnam; the people and the Congress of the US were thoroughly tired of the war, but most did not want an ignominious surrender.
- Although development of political-military strategy was concentrated at the highest levels of the USG as never before in the war, the secretive and competitive way in which it was formulated and promulgated made it very difficult for the military to execute.
- The sound military rationale for disrupting the enemy sanctuaries and LOC in Cambodia and Laos was counterbalanced by the political costs of the belated operations designed to buy time and protection for Vietnamization and US withdrawal; the incursion into Cambodia did gain some time, but Lam Son 719 was ill conceived and poorly executed and that operation visibly demonstrated serious weaknesses in RVNAF. Those strategic moves brought increased public pressure and congressional restraints on the executive.
- The RVNAF, still enmeshed in the dilemma of trying to find a correct balance between the requirements of territorial/population security and mobile warfare, was not properly prepared, psychologically or tactically, to stand up to the expanded and upgraded PAVN during the Easter offensive; without massive US advice, aid and support especially from airpower, it is likely that the RVNAF would have been severely defeated in 1972.
- The vast difference between the effects of weak and strong leadership in RVNAF was dramatically portrayed, again, during the Easter defensive; it also was made apparent how thin was GVN's base of good senior leaders.
- The sustained competition for the allocation of airpower for the tactical battles in the South (RVN) or for the larger range strategic objectives in the North (DRV) highlighted the doctrinal differences among the US services and also between MACV and the White House; the compromises arrived at permitted the achievement of the minimum aims of the various antagonists.

- By the time the "cease-fire" became effective on paper, the PAVN had improved significantly its geo-strategic position in the South, and, with the predictable diminution of US aid to the RVN, could count on the balance of power irreversibly shifting in their favor.
- ". . . the fatal flaw in our strategy was in failing to threaten the survival of the enemy and his system," said General Frederick Weyand, US Army (Ret).

LESSONS

The traditional, but largely artificial, separation between political and military ways and means in the US severely impedes the effective use of military forces in helping to gain the objectives set by the political leaders.

To achieve its optimal goals in the "fight-talk" arena against a totalitarian regime, a liberal democracy must carefully synchronize and orchestrate its politico-diplomatic-military weapons; with respect to negotiations, the application of combat power can be persuasive or counterproductive, depending upon the nature, timing, and extent of its use and the degree to which the public perceives or understands the issues at stake.

US aid and advice to an ally should be designed to support an agreed strategy that exploits the enemy's weaknesses and capitalizes on the ally's indigenous strengths.

US military aid and support should not be so foreign and specialized in given areas that withdrawal of that aid and support could leave the host country with serious gaps in those areas.

INSIGHTS

RVNAF Stands and Falls - Alone (1973-1975)

- The DRV was prepared for and was capable of fighting a protracted war, and recognized that the United States was not able psychologically to carry on with an inconclusive war in support of an ally that did not enjoy the respect of the US public.
- The Lao Dong Party leadership resisted all diplomatic efforts by the US to end the war until it was apparent that the primary US goals in Indochina had changed from that of having a free, viable, and independent RVN to that of recovering its POWs and extricating its forces from RVN; then the Lao Dong settled on their own terms, which included the "leopard spot" in-place cease-fire that gave them a vital geo-strategic advantage over RVNAF.
- The Lao Dong Party was unswerving in its ultimate goal to unite Vietnam and dominate all of Indochina, and all of their military actions were in support of that political goal.
- The DRV used the two-year period from January 1973 to the final drive for victory in 1975 to tie down and attrite the RVNAF, modernize their own armed forces through reequipping and retraining them, and then redeploy them strategically for the final thrust. PAVN learned to coordinate and control large combined armed-forces in mobile operations; RVNAF did not.
- After the US withdrawal, the balance of power shifted to the DRV/PAVN, and this situation was greatly exacerbated by the cut in US aid and moral support.
- Physically and psychologically the RVNAF was unprepared to fight a "poor man's war," having become reliant on US know-how and resources.
- Lacking US support, VNAF was defeated by PAVN's air defense system (supplied by the USSR and with extensive experience gained over the years in defense of the DRV and the Laotian Panhandle) and VNAF was unable to provide to RVNAF the air support needed in defense of RVN.
- Faulty planning, poor execution, and lack of intelligent leadership, especially in Military Region II, speeded the final collapse.
- President Nixon made commitments to the GVN for US aid and support, implementation of which was beyond the purview of the executive branch and which depended on the will of the Congress at a time when the American public and the Congress were clearly withdrawing their support from the South Vietnamese and any further combat by US forces.

LESSONS

The American Way of War cannot be exported successfully unless it is appropriate to a given situation; it tends to make an ally dependent upon continued high levels of expensive and sophisticated American support.

The temporary support and subsequent abandonment of an ally can cost any nation its credibility as an ally or foe. Only by refraining from making commitments which it is unable or unwilling to see through to the end, and by demonstrating its willingness to go the whole distance with those allies which it does support can a nation establish and maintain credibility as an ally.

INSIGHTS

In the Air

- There was no single air war and no single US air commander during the Second Indochina War.
- Presidential insistence on a deliberate policy of gradualism failed to threaten the DRV seriously and enabled the DRV incrementally to develop and refine one of the most effective air defense networks in the world.
- CINCPAC ran much of the air war in North Vietnam, subject to presidential license, and he did so through his component commanders CINCPACAF and CINCPACFLT, whose headquarters were too far removed from the scene to function optimally.
- Failure to form a unified Southeast Asia command resulted in each nation of Indochina being treated as a separate entity, thereby giving the resident US ambassadors unique military authority and fractionalizing command, control and assets.
- Air power, as used during the period 1961-1968, was not appropriate for the critical task of defeating the guerrilla infrastructure.
- Much of the air power was counterproductive in the guerrilla and other combat environments within RVN, and its often incautious use created refugees who either sided with the VC or became wards of the GVN. Military gains by air or ground power do not necessarily represent political gains, and in a counterinsurgency the political side of the coin is the more important. In the international arena it was the air attacks more than any other factor that drew condemnation.
- Within RVN, air power was most demonstrably effective when the enemy had the initiative and was on the offensive with main force units; otherwise, the enemy kept "off the skyline," avoided heavy, direct confrontations, and relied on relatively effective active and passive defense measures. The allied air forces were unable to exert control of the battlefield except on the few occasions after the PAVN had re-equipped with modern gear and initiated major attacks, such as at Khe Sanh, Quang Tri, etc.
- In this context, reliance on air power increased significantly as the US began to withdraw troops. The enemy's modernization program made him considerably more vulnerable to air attack, and air became the primary weapon.

- In Laos, US air support was a major factor in sustaining Vang Pao from the early 1960s until after US withdrawal from RVN and establishment of a coalition government in Laos.
- Despite the proved capability of the various gun platforms to kill trucks at night on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the Lao Panhandle, the US interdiction effort spanning eight years was costly but unimpressive, and it had no decisive long-term effect, even though PAVN paid a heavy price in men, material and time.
- Public and congressional awareness of the operations in Cambodia caused further restrictions to be placed on the administration's conduct of the war. Although air support was largely instrumental in keeping Lon Nol in office, in the end it was not decisive in Cambodia because it was not used properly, mainly because of political sensitivities.
- Techniques for defeating enemy AAA and SAM defenses became highly sophisticated as the war progressed and the US gained exceptionally valuable experience in that form of warfare. So, too, did the DRV and USSR, the latter having supplied the air defense weapons, technicians, and training.
- It would appear that a substantial part of the 1965-1968 air effort in North Vietnam could have been diverted, except that no other region could have made any better use of it under the existing ground rules. Therefore, perhaps much of the air effort was not productive, some of it was counterproductive, and a lower order of air operations might have reduced the losses of airmen and aircraft without materially affecting the war within RVN.
- Except for Linebacker I and II, US air operations in North Vietnam were not sufficiently effective to warrant the losses of airmen and aircraft suffered.
- Because of the great numbers and variety of fire support available, it was used on the slightest pretext. As a consequence, it tended to be counterproductive. At a minimum, it was wasteful. Progress in the war was measured by statistics, so the more H&I rounds fired, the more bombs dropped, the more fire missions and sorties--often in free fire zones and more than half of it not observed--the greater the progress. If anything, too much air and ground fire power was used in RVN throughout the US presence; lavish firepower upset the balance between fire and movement but did save US lives in the short run. Unfortunately, too little was available after the US withdrew.

LESSONS

Air power is used most effectively when the theater of operations is assigned to a single unified commander who is provided with a clear-cut mission and the tri-Departmental assets needed to carry out his mission. Dividing the air responsibilities among several commands not only attenuates the effectiveness of air power, but it also tends to fractionalize the intelligence structure, thereby depriving many commanders of important information.

Rules of engagement (ROE) are essential; they set necessary limits on combat commanders to assure that the fighting remains within certain prescribed bounds. Presidents of the United States can be expected to establish or review major ROE in most crises and combat situations. To influence those ROE from being overly restrictive, the military must present compelling arguments, and therefore, must thoroughly understand the political-military, socio-economic, and cultural situations. Development of and adherence to ROE are simplified in a single unified command.

Interdiction of a local area of the battlefield with air and ground fire power, supported by good all-source intelligence, can be accomplished successfully for extended periods, assuming that air superiority can be maintained and that it is a combined arms effort. Interdiction of a theater of operations in an insurgency situation is not likely to succeed unless it strikes at the external sources of support or the ports of entry, but it is likely to cost more in men and machines than the limited attrition is worth.

In a counterinsurgency situation, there can be too much air and ground firepower used against the insurgents. Excessive use of firepower kills innocents, creates refugees, drives others into the enemy's camp, and draws down severe criticism from enemies, neutrals, and often from friends.

-- Planners and policymakers must employ reliable and credible units of measure to determine the success of an air campaign.

-- Duplicity or appearances of duplicity should be avoided in military reporting. If a regular military operation is worth doing, it should enjoy reasonable protection under the appropriate security classification.

-- The use of airpower must be fully coordinated with and supportive of the employment of other elements of national power in planning and executing both grand and military strategies.

-- An important, if not always pivotal, consideration is that the employment of airpower to achieve US political objectives will inevitably generate POWs and MIAs as well as psychological propaganda opportunities for a clever opponent.

INSIGHTS

Blue and Brown Waters

- Vietnamese Army control over the Navy through the Joint General Staff led to poor utilization, minimal interest, and reduced priorities for the VNN. When US Navy units largely preempted the missions of coastal and river patrolling and river assault operations, the VNN was denied the opportunity to develop necessary capabilities. US Navy advice and assistance did not succeed in building a self-sufficient VNN.
- The US was not well prepared militarily or psychologically for the type of Naval operations that the Vietnam War demanded. The proper types and numbers of watercraft needed were not available, nor were the trained personnel or tactical procedures to cope with the counterinfiltration effort called for.
- To meet the riverine requirements, the Army designated and trained a brigade to perform with the Navy. Valuable time was lost in attaining the needed capability, but the resulting organization proved reasonably effective and performed with distinction.
- Modern US cargo vessels were not completely adaptable to cargo-handling in Vietnam. Off-loading facilities for container ships and Ro-Ro ships were not available during the early stages of the war, and supplies had to be transferred from cargo ships to lighters or landing craft for delivery to shore.
- Diversity of control of air activities, particularly between TF77 and the Air Force, presented some handicaps in aerial bombing until 1966 when adoption of a "route package" system of designating target areas greatly alleviated conflicts between Navy and Air Force flight operations. Air force officials, however, consider the Route Package system to be anachronistic -- a compromise made necessary to accommodate Navy parochialism. They prefer to see the air component commander in a position in which he (a USAF general) has operational control of all air assets -- USAF, Navy, Marine and Army.
- The use of marine mines was severely limited in Vietnam despite the recognized effectiveness of mining in restricted waterways and harbors in past wars. For political reasons, the US failed to employ mines in the major North Vietnamese ports of Haiphong, Hon Gai and Cam Pha until May, 1972. Mining of those harbors was so effective that no ocean vessels transited those ports from the placement of the mines until thirteen months later when the mines were removed by the US Navy.

- Underway replenishment (UNREP) of the fleet was more common than in the past since ships spent a great proportion of their available time underway, and ports in the immediate area of the war zone could not be used for resupply of fleet units due to limited pier space and higher shipping priorities. As a consequence UNREP was developed almost to a science.
- Amphibious operations in RVN were sometimes useful, but they introduced a host of new problems which impacted significantly on the doctrine contained in Naval Warfare Publication NWP-22B and required development of a CINCPACFLT/COMUSMACV "Agreement for US Naval Support Operations in RVN." That experience highlighted the need to evaluate amphibious doctrine in the context of new and changing situations, particularly when such operations are conducted against an elusive enemy in a friendly country in which a US ground forces commander (COMUSMACV) has already been established ashore.
- Amphibious raids and/or threats (feints) against North Vietnam could have caused the DRV to divert more troops and resources to the ground defense of their coast line: the US failed to capitalize on that capability.

LESSONS

In a hostile environment, when aiding and advising naval forces of a smaller and less developed country without its own naval traditions, there is a tendency for the larger nation to do the job itself and, in the long run, to deprive the smaller partner of the evolutionary process necessary to develop the technical skills and master the art inherent in naval warfare.

In concert, the US Army and Navy have developed useful tactics and techniques for riverine warfare, and that body of data should be kept current and available insofar as priorities and funding permit.

Modern Ro-Ro and Container ships and associated shoreside facilities are required for fast and secure loading and unloading in an expeditionary environment.

Air-planted marine mines are effective for interdicting inland and coastal waterways and ports, particularly when employed against an enemy who lacks a sophisticated mine-sweeping capability; retention of this capability requires that the Navy personnel system have the means to identify regular and reserve aviators who have demonstrated skill in sowing minefields during actual operations.

INSIGHTS

Unconventional Warfare

- The US government's publicly announced policy that it did not seek to overthrow the government of the DRV severely limited the unconventional warfare options available to military planners and rendered ineffective much of UW activity that did take place.
- The US and GVN had not used the decade after the 1954 Geneva Agreement to build and nurture an effective network of agents in the North, therefore, there was no friendly base to support covert or clandestine operations within the DRV.
- During hostilities there did not appear to be any attempt to exploit the Catholic population or any of the mountain tribes that remained in North Vietnam but which might have been sympathetic to efforts to topple the Lao Dong Party leadership.
- COMUSMACV did not have the status of a wartime theater commander; therefore, he had no control over the CIA, and UW operations had to be cleared at national level.
- Despite the formation of what purported to be a joint unconventional warfare task force (JUWTF) known by its cover name of the Studies and Observations Group (SOG), unconventional operations were not centralized at MACV or PACOM level. Instead, the CIA, SOG, 5th Special Forces Group (Abn), PRU with US advisors, Air Force SOS, and others conducted special operations, often subject to the approval and control of the cognizant US ambassador.
- US-sponsored PSYOP did not offer enemy populations any viable alternatives that were within their power to choose, largely because of US policies toward the DRV.
- US Special Forces participation under CIA direction in the CIDG program provides a good example of population denial, but when that program was transferred to the military under Operation Switchback, the program was militarized and lost much of its potential political impact.
- The Son Tay raid demonstrated that US special operations could be executed successfully in the enemy's rear, but the public outcry in the US over the perceived failure of that operation militated against similar operations thereafter. Emboldened by the accelerating US withdrawal after 1969, the DRV had put the bulk of its fighting forces in Laos and RVN, leaving its rear quite vulnerable, but that situation was never exploited by US or RVNAF special operations forces.

- Cross-border operations in Laos and Cambodia, directed against the Ho Chi Minh Trail, were generally very constrained but nevertheless proved to be productive in gaining information on the enemy supply system and personnel movements. Casualties were inflicted and some supplies were destroyed by the special operations forces directly or through the gunship or fixed-wing air support they had available. For political reasons, those operations were not expanded and full advantage was not taken of the US/RVNAF capabilities for ground force interdiction of the trail.

LESSONS

Unconventional warfare operations can be optimally effective only when certain principles are followed:

- There must be a coherent national policy which permits the implementation of UW to the best advantage of the US.
- The policy and planning for UW operations should be centrally controlled, but execution of field operations should be decentralized for flexibility and secrecy.
- The required dedicated assets should be provided to facilitate rapid action/reaction by special operations forces and to minimize reliance on external agencies.

The enemy's rear is usually vulnerable to some kind of special operation on the ground, and ground force penetration of the rear, even in small-scale hit-and-run raids has a nuisance value that creates morale and psychological problems for the enemy leadership as well as inducing him to commit more military forces to the defense of his rear (as opposed to merely emplacing anitaircraft installations to defend against air raids, for example).

When paramilitary operations are made the responsibility of a military commander, it is imperative that he be given the same command relationship with the CIA assets in his area as would exist in a wartime situation and as prescribed in the Command Relationships Agreement (CRA).

CHAPTER 1
US AID AND ADVICE (1950-1960)

> [The Americans'] first mistake was a product of military arrogance, i.e., their complete rejection of any lessons that may have emerged from the French experience up to 1954.1/

> There were two lessons to be learned: More should have been known from the start, and better use should have been made of what was known.2/

A. INTRODUCTION

The active US involvement in the Indochina wars started on a modest scale in 1950. Other wars - hot and cold - in Korea, Europe, and the Middle East dominated the USG's attention and resources. A quarter of a century later the Second Indochina War ended in humiliation for the US and disaster for our ally - the Republic of Vietnam. In the interim we had spent over $150 billion, lost over 55,000 dead, and saw our national unity and confidence badly damaged. As the opening quotations suggest, it can be argued that the stage and plot for the tragedy were set in those early, naive days. According to General Maxwell D. Taylor, former ambassador to the RVN, our misperceptions of our allies, the enemy, the nature of the conflict, and indeed even of ourselves led to increasingly grave and costly errors.3/

B. MAAG INDOCHINA

1. The Beginning

If the Viet Minh were the Southeast Asia proxies of "monolithic" communism they, too, had to be contained. The US, with its hands quite full in defending Korea and in reinforcing Europe, had no military forces to spare. Money and equipment were made available to the French, who wanted and needed assistance but no advice. The role and effectiveness of

the early MAAG was thus minimal. This was irritating - to say the least - to the proud and successful officers of a strong military force which had "never lost a war."

What little that the MAAG and visiting US officers saw of operations, they didn't like: hundreds of "Beau Geste Forts," the defensive attitude of commanders and troops, no night patrols, etc.4/ The French didn't appreciate this kibbitzing, since they were doing the fighting and bleeding; besides, they had fought and defeated colonials around the world for over a century, and already had been fighting the Vietnamese "rebels" for almost four years.

2. Early French Experience

The bulk of the French Union forces were equipped and trained for a European style war. They were frustrated because the Viet Minh would not stand and fight against superior firepower and mechanical mobility. The Viet Minh fought only when they could do so with surprise and a large numerical superiority and then quickly faded away; the ambush and the night raid were their favorite and effective tactics. Yet, "even after three years of unsuccessful campaigns, the [French] army still underestimated the enemy and grossly overestimated its own valor."5/

But what sort of people were they fighting?

> The Annamites are beyond doubt superior to all the neighboring peoples. The Cambodians, the Laotians, the Siamese could not withstand them. None of the nations composing the Indian empire has their virtues, and one must go as far as Japan to find a race as valuable and one resembling them. Annamites and Japanese have an ancient heritage. Both are intelligent, industrious, and brave. The Annamite makes an excellent soldier, disciplined and courageous. He is a model worker, a good farmer in the country, and a good laborer and deft and clever artisan in the cities. As laborer as well as soldier, he is superior to all the peoples of Asia to which he might be compared.6/

That judgment was made around the turn of the century by Paul Doumer, the most influential administrator of French Indochina, (at that time he wouldn't have had the opportunity to evaluate the martial qualities

of the Koreans). How many French and American leaders ever read those comments and considered them in their calculations?

The Chinese Red Army reached the northern border of Vietnam in 1949, and soon played a significant role in supplying and training the growing regular Viet Minh units. In September 1950, Giap unleashed a series of assaults on the French border garrisons and overwhelmed them one by one.

> From overconfidence, the French mood now veered to near panic.... When the smoke cleared, the French had suffered their greatest colonial defeat since Montcalm had died at Quebec.... The Indochina war was lost then and there.7/

Even with the Northern half of Tonkin irretrievably lost, the French hung on for another four years.

C. GIAP'S BIG GAMBLE FAILS IN 1951

Those heady victories caused Giap to become overconfident and impatient for final victory. He persuaded himself and the then senior Party leadership that the balance of forces had shifted in their favor, and that it was time to launch Phase III of Peoples' War - The General Offensive. Several Viet Minh divisions were available to help Giap honor his boast of being in "Hanoi by Tet."

His ambitious dream was shattered by a new and formidable opponent: General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, who was appointed Commander-in-Chief and civilian high commissioner, in December 1950. "In his first address de Lattre promised little: no improvements, no reinforcements, no easy victories. But he made one promise he kept to his dying day: 'No matter what, you will be commanded.'"8/ His firm and intelligent leadership literally worked magic among both soldiers and civilians.

Badly defeated in three separate battles around the rim of the Red River Delta, the Viet Minh faded back into the jungles to lick their wounds. Giap and his commanders also went "back to school." They had the intelligence, patience, and objectivity to learn from defeats, as the

French (and later the Americans) learned to their grief. They would painstakingly analyze their own and the opponents' strengths and weaknesses, and refine strategy and tactics accordingly.

Those victories raised the morale and prestige of the French as well as the willingness of the US to spend more money there; by 1954 the US was paying for about 80% of the costs of the Indo-china war.9/

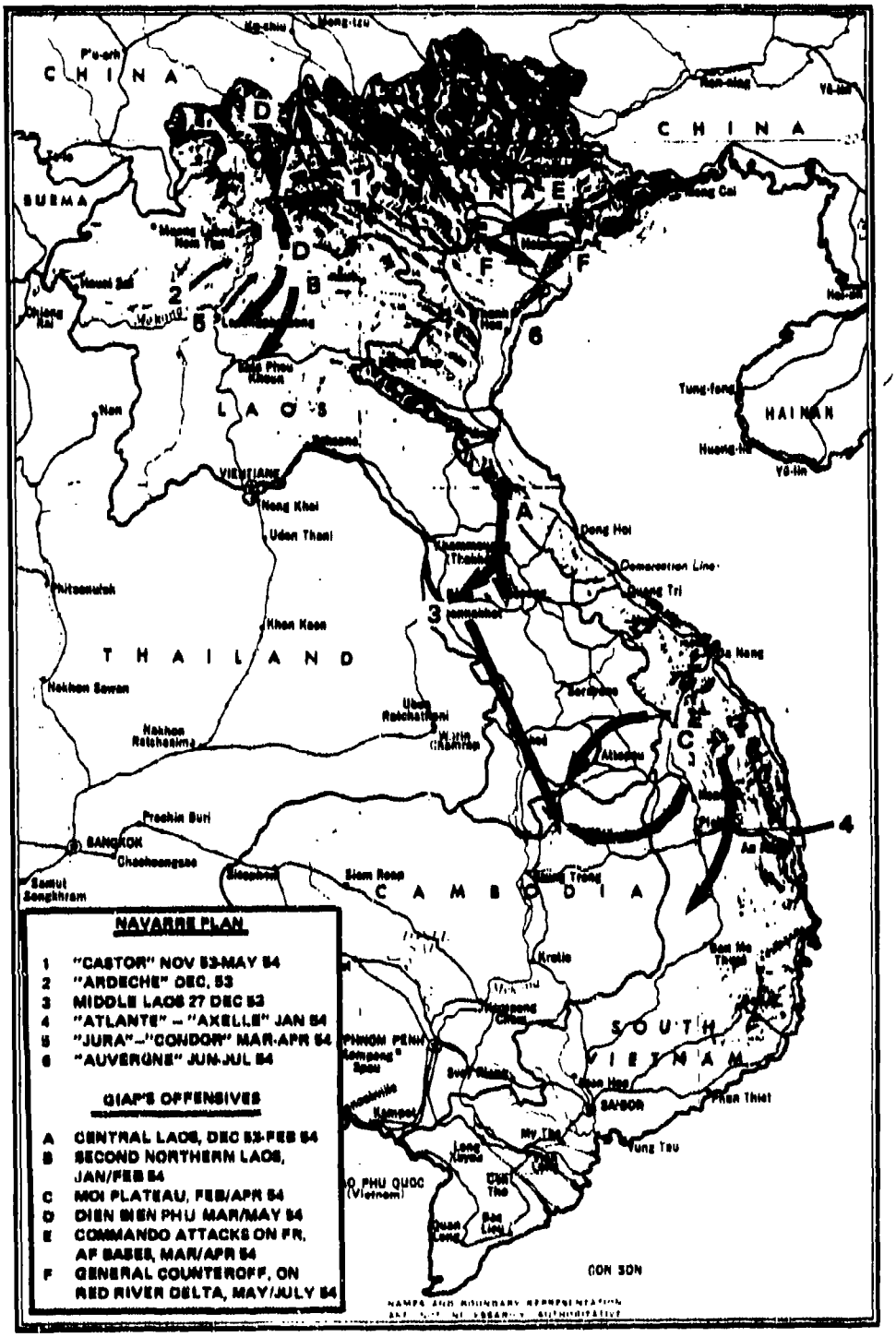
D. THE NAVARRE PLAN LEADS TO DIEN BIEN PHU

1. Navarre vs. Giap

Too soon, de Lattre left to die of cancer; he was replaced by General Raoul Salan (1951), and he by Henri Navarre (1953). The latter made several bold moves to regain the initiative. He increased the size and - to a lesser degree - the effectiveness of the native armed forces (Vietnamese, Laotion and Cambodian) and turned over to them more territorial security and pacification responsibilities. In this way he increased his mobile reserves available for multiple offensive actions. His optimism and his plan were endorsed by the USG with pledges of increased aid. The scope and timing of Navarre's Plan are displayed on Map 1-1; 10/ also shown are Giap's major offensives.

As Navarre's offensives unfolded, French and US spirits rose in Indochina, Paris, and Washington. There was genuine hope for a military victory in 1954. Some illustrative comments, by key "actors" in the last act of that drama, demonstrate the growing optimism:

> I fully expect victory ... after six more months of hard fighting. Having lost all hopes of winning a decisive battle in the Red River Delta, the Viet Minh disperses its forces ... We have the advantage ... A campaign begun under such conditions can but turn in our favor.11/
>
> - Major General Henri-Eugene Navarre, Hanoi, January 2, 1954
>
> The battle ... offers us genuine chances of success. So far, General Giap's army has never dared



4841/78W

SOURCE: Fall, The Two Vietnams

Map 1-1. Communist Offensives and the Navarre Plan, 1953-1954

face a mission as formidable as that of attacking Dien Bien Phu.12/

- Maurice Dejean, French commissioner general, cablegram to Paris, January 3, 1954

General O'Daniel's most recent report is more encouraging than is given to you through French sources. I still believe that [what is] most needed for success is French will.13/

- President Dwight D. Eisenhower, cablegram to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in Berlin, February 10, 1954, quoted by Eisenhower in Mandate for Change

In the next several months optimism evaporated and turned to gloom and near despair. (A similar rapid and radical change in Washington's official mood took place between early January and mid February 1968).

The French "blocking position" at Dien Bien Phu turned into a self-inflicted wound which soaked up all available airpower - combat and transport. Bernard Fall reports that the Commander, MAAG (MG Thomas Trapnell) inspected Dien Bien Phu on Nov. 29, 1953 and Jan. 14, 1954, as did LTG John O'Daniel on February 2, 1954; apparently both approved of the soundness of that position.14/ The mid-1953 truce in Korea permitted the PRC to increase significantly its aid to the Viet Minh, which included artillery, antiaircraft weapons and relatively plentiful quantities of ammunition. Giap was able to concentrate and support four of his best infantry divisions - backed up by his "heavy" division (artillery-engineer) - in order to lay siege to the French Union strong points. At last the French had that long-sought standup, showdown fight!

Was that yet another, but even more desperate, gamble by Giap and Ho? Some French military commanders appeared to believe it true, as did Admiral Radford.

Vietminh prospects for victory in Indochina are non-existent ... The French have developed a broad

> strategic concept which within a few months should insure a favorable turn in the course of the war.
>
> - Admiral Arthur W. Radford, chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee, closed session, February 18, 1954.

> The Vietminh offensive is slack, or at about its peak. The Vietminh has reached the highest point of its pretensions and ... furnished proof that it has exceeded its logistic possibilities. Giap's offensive is blocked.
>
> - General Henri Eugene Navarre, news conference, Saigon, February 19, 1954.15/

Interestingly, much later, confirmation of the Viet Minh's plight came from two high-level communist sources. Khrushchev wrote:

> After one of these sessions in Catherine Hall of the Kremlin, Chou En-lai buttonholed me and took me into a corner. He said, "Comrade Ho Chi Minh has told me that that situation in Vietnam is hopeless and that if we don't attain a cease-fire soon, the Vietnamese won't be able to hold out against the French. Therefore they've decided to retreat to the Chinese border if necessary, and they want China to be ready to move troops into Vietnam as we did in North Korea. In other words, the Vietnamese want us to help drive out the French. We simply can't grant Comrade Ho Chi Minh's request. We've already lost too many men in Korea - that war cost us dearly. We're in no condition to get involved in another war at this time."16/

And Janos Radvanyi, the Hungarian diplomat, who was given a "lecture" on how the battle was won, stated that Giap surprised him with his candor:

> The battle of Dien Bien Phu, he told us, was the last desperate exertion of the Viet Minh army. Its forces were on the verge of complete exhaustion. The

> supply of rice was running out. Apathy had spread among the populace to such an extent that it was difficult to draft new fighters. Years of jungle warfare had sent morale in the fighting units plunging to the depths.17/

In several of his books, Bernard Fall concluded that Giap had to move before increased US aid would arm large indigenous forces. True or not, those observations add credence to the theory that decisive battles often hang, for a period, on a very delicate balance obscured by the "fog of war."

The biggest shock to the French at Dien Bien Phu, was Giap's skillful use of artillery - it was dispersed, concealed, protected, sited on the forward slope of the mountains, and it was accurate, thanks to Chinese advisors. The Viet Minh also displayed skill and perseverance in the methods of siege and trench warfare; French artillery and air attacks were not up to the challenge. The March and April Commando (Sapper) attacks on French air bases further reduced the fire and resupply support available to the increasingly beleaguered garrison.18/

2. Radford vs. Ridgway

It wasn't long after the Viet Minh assaults started (13 March 1954) that the French and the US could see that Dien Bien Phu was a shrinking vulnerable box.

> As the battle developed, the optimism which had pervaded Washington statements, public and private, on the war was replaced with the conviction that unless new steps were taken to deal with Chinese aid, the French were bound to go under.19/

General Paul Ely, the French Chief of Staff, came to Washington on 20 March to obtain further assistance, especially B-26 bombers, and assurances that the US would intervene if the Chinese used their airpower in Indochina. Admiral Radford, for one, lent a sympathetic ear. It appears that the French and US staffs had formally conceived of a bold plan (code named Operation Vulture) for a night air attack by US B-29's from Clark Field, supported by fighters from the US Seventh Fleet.20/

General Matthew Ridgway, then Chief of Staff of the US Army, placed himself squarely in the role of chief opponent to Radford, who recommended aid for the French military in hopes of saving Dien Bien Phu. The Army, seriously diminished and weakened by the altered priorities of the "New Look," was in no condition to fight another major land war in Asia. Based on his experiences in World War II and Korea, Ridgway did not believe that air and naval power alone could be decisive. His staff determined that the job would require 7 to 12 US divisions, depending on various assumptions about the French and the Chinese.21/

The US Army position received support from a clear-headed and prescient sailor, Vice Admiral A. C. Davis of the office of the Secretary of Defense, who wrote:

> ... Involvement of US forces in the Indochina war should be avoided at all practical costs. If, then, National Policy determines no other alternative, the US should not be self-duped into believing the possibility of partial involvement -- such as 'Naval and Air units only.' One cannot go over Niagara Falls in a barrel only slightly.

Admiral Davis then went on:

> Comment: if it is determined desirable to introduce air and naval forces in combat in Indochina it is difficult to understand how involvement of ground forces could be avoided. Air strength sufficient to be of worth in such an effort would require bases in Indochina of considerable magnitude. Protection of those bases and port facilities would certainly require US ground force personnel, and the force once committed would need ground combat units to support any threatened evacuation. It must be understood that there is no cheap way to fight a war, once committed.22/

With the scheduled Geneva Conference only a few months away, the US urged the French, for political and psychological reasons, to fight on for victory. Earlier the French had ignored Ho's peacefeeler and had decided to "keep fighting - seek talking," but under the pressures of impending defeat at Dien Bien Phu they wavered.23/

In early April Secretary of State Dulles and Admiral Radford met with eight influential congressmen. During the meeting, Radford reportedly outlined his plan to conduct a 200 naval plane strike to aid the French. Nuclear bombs were probably on the carriers Essex and Boxer but apparently there was no serious consideration given to their use.24/ The Congressmen, led by majority leader Lyndon B. Johnson, informed the President that the Congress would not support US intervention.

President Eisenhower's desire for "united action" was, according to Fall, thwarted primarily by Senator Johnson and Congress, more than the lukewarm response of Churchill's government. The French also opposed this coalition approach later because they believed that any such action would be too late to save Dien Bien Phu; they did continue to hope for and seek US intervention, however.25/

In the absence of congressional and allied support, and lacking any French guarantee of Indochinese independence, Eisenhower decided not to intervene unilaterally.26/ After 55 days of heavy fighting, Dien Bien Phu fell* - as did Saigon in 1975! Ho and Giap had built a political-psychological-military "model and a myth" that was to be severely tested in the future.

E. TO LEARN FROM THE FRENCH OR NOT?

1. July 1954

The Geneva Accords rendered the US MAAG Indochina irrelevant, so a major portion of it was redesignated MAAG Vietnam. It still had to work with, and through, the French High Command. But when the strongly nationalistic--and thus anti-French - Ngo Dien Diem was appointed premier (and later elected president), the US had a powerful friend in court. Diem and his brother Nhu desperately needed US aid of all sorts and initially were fairly receptive to US advice. The French had lost and would soon be on their way home or to Algeria.

---

* To add insult to injury the Viet Minh destroyed Group Mobile 100 (composed largely of French veterans of Korea), on 24 June 54, on Route 19 near An Khe.

2. Learn What?

Assuming that the French were willing to talk openly and candidly about this experience against the Viet Minh and that US officials were willing to listen objectively, what might have been learned from over 80 years of colonialism and eight years of conflict in Indochina? Illustrative possibilities include:27/

- Extensive information about the people of the region, including the sects and minorities.
- Historical data on the geography and climate.
- In-depth analyses of the subtle nature of the Ho-Giap version of "Peoples' War," including the importance and pervasiveness of their political-military infrastructure.
- An evaluation of the strength and depth of the Viet Minh's willpower, toughness, patience, and ingenuity.
- The strengths and weaknesses of the GVN and RVNAF, and particularly of their leaders.
- "Do's and don'ts" about pacification schemes, (by use of the sects and others, the French were reasonably successful in large parts of the Mekong Delta and elsewhere).
- Seasonal and geographic patterns and habits of the enemy. (We slowly rediscovered them the hard way).
- The nature, extent and even location of the Viet Minh's base and supply systems, and how they invariably "prepared the battlefield."
- The complexity of and interrelationship of the dual nature of the fighting part of the conflict - territorial/population control (pacification) and mobile (main force) warfare.
- Details of the enemy's favorite - and most effective - tactics and techniques.
- The rationale for and results of various French strategies and tactics.
- Vulnerability of bases, and lines of communication in a "war without fronts," and thus the need for effective territorial security forces.

- A multitude of logistics, personnel, medical and intelligence "lessons."
- The need for close coordination and central control of all governmental agencies and programs - political, economic, psychological, police, and military.
- The details of the enemy's generally quite successful mode of political-psychological warfare, and which French "counters" worked, which didn't and why.
- French successes and failures in unconventional (counter-guerrilla) war.
- The potential perils of "Vietnamization" (they tried too little and too late in the early 1950's).
- A first hand, inside story of Dien Bien Phu.

The list could easily be expanded several fold, but the point is that there was much of relevance that could and should have been absorbed from the French and those South Vietnamese who fought with and against them.

3. Why Not Solicit Advice?

The answer to that question is grounded basically in the psychological and political attitudes of three nationalities.28/

a. The South Vietnamese

- The nationalistic, anti-French bias of Diem and Nhu has already been mentioned, and there were many others who felt the same.
- As long as the French forces remained in country and retained substantial influence, it was difficult for GVN to "prove" to the world and their own people that they were truly independent and not merely a colony under another name.
- The US was the richest and strongest country in the world, and had never lost a war, so why should one listen to stale and discredited French advice?
- RVNAF officers, especially those below the top ranks, gradually became enchanted with - and later captive to - the bountiful US "Way of War".

- Even those Vietnamese officers who believed that they had learned something of value during the conflict generally held back from pressing their thoughts on their US advisors out of politeness, pride, and the fear of having their ideas scorned (loss of face).

b. The French

- The proud and tradition-bound military elite found it most painful and difficult to tell the brash American why and how they "lost" the war.
- They believed that the US was trying to force them out of Vietnam politically, economically, militarily and even culturally; they were more right than wrong. (The French did not appreciate Diem's determination to withdraw from the French Union, with US support).
- The US attitude and policies about colonialism irritated and frustrated them, and the US intervention during the Suez crisis of 1956 infuriated them.
- There were grave differences between France and the US on the politics, economy, and defense of Western Europe; when Charles De Gaulle regained power, his independent attitudes and policies widened the gap.
- Frenchmen often display a superior air and even arrogance about such crucial matters as politics, war, wine, food, women and logic; this trait did not enhance open communications. (Even the largely Americanized Bernard Fall "turned off" many of his American "students" on Vietnam).29/
- The language barrier was another impediment. Too few US officers assigned to Vietnam spoke French well enough to discuss technical and tactical matters. The more numerous French officers who spoke English fluently still preferred their own language out of both pride and desire for precision.

c. The Americans

- The French had lost a war - again. As one US General responded to a question, "The French haven't won a war since Napoleon. What can we learn from them?"30/

- The somewhat aloof and imperious attitude of the French command during the years of MAAG Indochina was not appreciated by the Americans; they wouldn't accept advice from us, so why the reverse?
- The US success stories in aiding and advising Greece, the Philippines, and especially the South Koreans left the American military with the belief that our ways and means were best.
- The USG realized that we were vulnerable to charges of neo-colonialism and thus wanted to put visible distance between ourselves and the French.
- The French and their native auxiliaries had made a lot of obvious and costly errors - why repeat them? Most American officers are more action-oriented than historical and philosophical in perspective.
- Very few US officials - civilian or military - understood the true nature of the conflict and many assumed that poorly armed guerrillas, even in swamps and jungles, shouldn't be too difficult to beat.
- Perhaps the most telling reason lay in the American experience and psyche; <u>any</u> problem could be solved if only attacked with sufficient resources, American know-how, and the good old "can do" spirit.
- The "Not invented here!" syndrome often prevailed among American officials.

4. <u>The Results</u>

Even if we had digested and profited from all the French could teach us, would we have done significantly better than we did? The potential gains remain buried in the realm of "what ifs?," but educated guesses can be advanced. For example, more timely and complete knowledge of the enemy, or ally, and the nature of the conflict could have provided us with the <u>capability to</u>:

- Develop more realistic and less costly political and military strategies.

- Deal more effectively with GVN and RVNAF.
- Organize, equip, train and advise RVNAF for the right war at the right time.
- Understand enemy habits, patterns, and methods sooner and thus devise better counters.
- Explain better the nature of the conflict and the enemy to USG and military officials, our soldiers, the press and the public. (Could this have avoided, or at least kept more narrow, the "credibility gap?")
- Develop and implement earlier and better Pacification and Vietnamization Programs.
- Concentrate efforts earlier on attempting to weed out the critical political-military infrastructure of the enemy.
- Reduce needless casualties and setbacks.

> On July 2, 1964, an ammunition convoy of the Vietnamese Army, shepherded by a US Army helicopter, proceeded on Road 19 from the coastal town of Quang Ngai towards Pleiku.
>
> It had passed An Khe without incident and at 1115 had entered the small valley which precedes the entrance to Mang Yang Pass, when its lead trucks blew up on the well-concealed land mines which barred the road. Within a few minutes the Viet Cong ambush unfolded fully and the stunned Vietnamese fought for their lives....
>
> The ambush had taken place at the foot of the monument commemorating the end of G.M. 100 - ten years, eight days and three hours earlier.31/

- These potential benefits only scratch the surface - a comprehensive list would fill a volume.

5. Would the French Really Have Helped?

Despite the contrary factors listed in paragraph 3b above, the French lessons were available to us early:

> It is fair to ask whether the French, after the problems of the 1950s and the strains of the 1960s,

would have been willing to help the United States by sharing the details of their experience and lessons learned. There is at least one piece of evidence that, if asked, they would have. Their military attache in Saigon circa 1964 was handpicked by the French Government because of his exceptional knowledge of the English language and his distinguished record in Indochina and Algeria. He was told to help the Americans in whatever way he could. During the first eighteen months of his assignment, the only American who visited him to ask about the war was an American defense contractor of French origin.32/

Col. Victor Croizat, USMC, spoke French fluently, had extensive experience in Indochina, and had translated the French official study of Lessons of the War in Indochina.* In the preface he wrote:

> While Mao Tse Tung, Vo Nguyen Giap, and even Che Guevara are avidly read and liberally quoted, the French, who were among the first of the western nations to gain practical experience of modern revolutionary war, are seldom heard from outside of their own country. Moreover, after the United States began the rapid expansion of its advisory effort in South Vietnam in 1962, the British experience in Malaya was often cited by Americans in Saigon as a model of how to handle an insurrection, but little if anything was ever said of the French experience in Indochina...
>
> What is of even greater significance is that today the United States is fighting essentially the same enemy that the French first engaged more than two decades ago, and is doing this over much the same terrain and under the same climatic condition. Finally, and most important of all, is the fact that the present leadership of North Vietnam is the very same whose determination and tenacity helped it to prevail over the French. The lessons that the French learned in the course of their prolonged conflict should, therefore, offer something more than simple historical data.33/

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* For RAND in 1967

Major General George Keegan, then the Intelligence Officer for the 7th US Air Force, stated that he had consulted closely with French veterans of Indochina in order to focus better the gathering and analysis of intelligence for the battle of Khe Sanh:*

> We were assisted with some excellent strategic and tactical advice provided by French survivors of Dien Bien Phu. Using sand-table models, they spelled out in detail what was wrong. Within days we knew that airlift would be crucial, as would the suppression and interdiction of AAA; night tunneling would have to be stopped with napalm.34/

Losers can, and sometimes do, learn from their mistakes and defects; e.g., the Germans between World War I and II (up to the invasion of Russia), the Vietminh in the First Indochina War, and the DRV and the NLF in the second. The French Lessons had been translated as early as May 1955 by the US Far East Command.35/

6. A Final Word

Recently Croizat wrote in a letter:

> With reference to the question regarding whether our leaders could have learnt more from the French experience in Indo-China I can answer with an emphatic "yes." The French had prepared the three volumes on the lessons learnt within a year after the Geneva Agreement. This information was available and remained available through all the intervening years until I made a translation of Volume II.
>
> I recall specifically bringing the existence of the French lessons to the attention of General Paul Harkins. But, he like so many others, found the British lessons from Malaya far easier to read despite the fact that they dealt with a different geo-political environment, a different enemy and a different type of operations. I believe the reluctance of the Americans to listen to the French goes back to the feeling that

---

* In a 29 August 79 interview with BDM study team members, General Westmoreland disputed General Keegan's role in getting French advice. He also stated that a French General came out to see him, and the Vietnamese, about every six months and was sympathetic and helpful.

> was clearly evident in 1954. Our people saw in the French defeat a repudiation of their experience, this was shortsighted indeed.36/

The French learned their lessons well, and "won the war, militarily", in Algeria but lost it politically - again in Paris and in the world arena.

The rationale presented in this section does not imply, by any means, that the French did most things well in Indochina - they did not. Politically, psychologically and eventually militarily they were in more of a "no-win" situation than was the US; they were bucking, head-on, the post-World War II powerful buildup of anticolonialism and nationalism. In their attempt to regain control of Indochina they were faced by extremely dedicated, skillful, and determined opponents whom they could not effectively counter. We could and should have studied, early on, the underlying causes of their failures. Since the predominant feeling in the USG, to include the military, was that the French were "arrogant losers," we shrugged off their experiences and "lessons" and duplicated most of their errors and shortcomings on a much grander scale.

F. MAAG-V BUILDS RVNAF

1. The French Depart

After the 1954 Geneva Accords, the French Union Forces relocated to the Southern Zone of Vietnam. The US wanted them to stay, at least for a while, in order to act as a shield against a march to the south by the victorious Viet Minh. But several factors cut short their stay; Diem and Nhu and the vast majority of the South Vietnamese wanted them out, and the French had serious political and financial problems at home and a spreading insurgency in Algeria. RVN became a US "baby."

2. The US Assesses the Problem

The original US plan for rebuilding the armed forces of the RVN was to reduce the personnel strength from about 270,000 to about 90,000, largely composed of small mobile battalions for internal security.37/ Due

to the objections of GVN and the withdrawal of the French shield, that plan was shelved.

US authorities recognized that there was both an internal and external threat to the new RVN, but evaluated the latter as the most serious. They concluded that part of RVNAF would have to be constructed and trained to be capable of slowing an overt invasion by the DRV, and possibly even the PRC, until the US - and hopefully SEATO - could intervene in strength. In 1955 the bulk of ARVN was organized into ten divisions - four field and six light. The heavier field divisions were to provide a minimum counterweight to the DRV's veteran formations. The light divisions were designed as a back-up for the field divisions and the territorial security forces - the latter composed of territorial regiments, the paramilitary forces (Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps), and the police. (For a more detail discussion of this subject See Chapter 5, "The Military," of Volume II).

3. Early Disagreements

Lieutenant General Samuel T. ("Hanging Sam") Williams was chief of the US MAAG for five critical years - October 1955 to September 1960. He firmly believed that ARVN should have only one type of all purpose division in order to standardize equipment, training, and doctrine. He organized a series of staff and field exercises designed to produce the best possible division structure for the missions, terrain, climate, and threat with an eye to the funds available. As a result seven standard divisions were organized, while the field and light divisions were disbanded, as were the territorial regiments.

That concentration on the conventional approach to security was objected to by both the South Vietnamese military and the US Embassy. GVN and RVNAF believed that the experience of the First Indochina War called for both mobile and locally recruited territorial forces.38/ US Ambassador Elbridge Durbrow also favored and strongly supported the battalion over the division approach.39/ Since the MAAG - supported by CINCPAC, the JCS, and OSD - had control over the type and quantities of military aid and materiel, it quite naturally won the debate.

4. Why the More Conventional Approach?

There are a number of reasons why the US military opted for the traditional solution, some of them fundamental but others more mundane. Brig. General James L. Collins, Jr. wrote that:

> In organizing and training the South Vietnamese Army, the United States relied heavily on its recent experience in South Korea. The apparent similarity between the Vietnamese situation of 1954 and the Korean situation of 1950 prompted the Military Assistance Advisory Group in Vietnam to concentrate on developing a South Vietnamese force capable of meeting an overt invasion from North Vietnam. While the threat of an external aggression was real, it was not until 1959 that the internal subversion and insurgency only supported by the north was recognized as the major threat and that a strong effort to give South Vietnam a counterinsurgency capability began.40/

Yet President Eisenhower referred to the dual threat in his 23 October 1954 letter to Premier Ngo Dinh Diem when he wrote, "The purpose of this offer (of American aid directly to the GVN) is to assist the Government of Viet-Nam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means."41/

The US responsibility for improving the security of RVN was bureaucratically and artificially divided in Saigon and Washington. United States Operations Mission (USOM), later to become US Agency for International Development (USAID), was charged with the internal security mission. As a consequence, the police (trained by a Michigan State University contract team), the Civil Guard 42/ and the Self Defense Corps were all poorly trained, equipped and led. MAAG was responsible for external security and initially dealt only with RVNAF. US bureaucratic biases and organizational loyalties early on helped foster an unrealistic and unwise division of the conflict into separate components. The small size of the MAAG, restricted by the Geneva Accords, also inhibited the MAAG in its training mission, as did the restrictions which kept advisors out of combat until 1961.

Less grand reasons also contributed to the initial US approach to organizing RVNAF. After the Korean War, ample stocks of standard US weapons and equipment were available. US training, tactical and technical manuals and TOE's were also available for translation into Vietnamese. RVNAF officers were sent to US Service Schools where US doctrine and tactics were taught. It was faster and easier to teach the Vietnamese English and US ways than for Americans to learn their language and ways.

Above all, as highlighted in this and previous volumes, there was far too little concrete understanding of our allies and the enemy, and the nature of the conflict. Before 1962 far too little was taught, or even known about the interwoven components and complexities of a "People's War." Besides, there was an abundant reservoir of faith in our "ways of life and war."

Not all of the US officials - civilian or military - in Saigon or elsewhere viewed the traditional use of military force as the solution to the security problems facing GVN. (See Appendix A for several contrasting viewpoints.)

5. RVNAF Tested

In the middle fifties, the young RVNAF performed unexpectedly well in subduing the armed sects - Binh Xuyen, Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao. They also played an important part in Diem's campaigns to eliminate the political-military Viet Minh staybehinds. Inherent weaknesses, however, were exposed dramatically in January 1960 when the resurgent Viet Minh guerrillas (now derisively called Viet Cong by GVN) easily overran a regimental headquarters at Trang Sup, near Tay Ninh, and captured a large number of weapons and munitions. That attack - plus others during the early part of 1960 throughout RVN - was a signal to a few experts that Phase II (Tactical Offensive) of the Ho-Giap version of People's War was underway. US officials in Saigon and Washington finally understood that the security situation was serious.

Diem, Nhu and some of their military realized that a conventionally organized and trained army was not the ideal and sole instrument to counter small but apparently ubiquitous bands of guerrillas. Early in

1960 Diem "lectured" General I. D. White, CINCUSARPAC, and LTG Samuel Williams, Chief MAAG V, complaining that the US had robbed him of his ability to fight and defeat the insurgency in RVN. Diem pointed out that his US military advisors, with Pentagon backing, had insisted that he form divisions instead of smaller mobile units, and that they be trained for conventional warfare against overt aggression from the DRV.43/ Against the wishes and advice of the MAAG*, ARVN disbanded the fourth rifle company of each battalion in 1960, to create spaces for 65 independent special action or Ranger companies - all told about 10,000 men.44/ Late in the year the new Chief MAAG, LTG Lionel C. McGarr, appointed a US advisor to the Rangers and granted the Ranger units full MAP support. US Special Forces teams, which earlier had trained ARVN cadres in unconventional tactics, were assigned the extra duty of training the Ranger companies. The fact that Diem created the Rangers against MAAG advice does not imply that he favored a softer approach, for in reality he often used military force to try to solve his myriad problems; he and Nhu merely desired a more elite, and hopefully discrete, force to defeat the enemy at his own game. Although the Rangers eventually joined the ranks of the elite, they were too seldom discrete and became just another "army."

A major effort was made to devise tactics to counter the multiple forms - political, psychological, economic and military - of the enemy's "struggle."

> In March 1960 the US Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) began to unite all US and South Vietnamese elements behind a common objective. At the same time, the Joint Chiefs reversed their past policy and recommended that the Vietnamese Army develop a counterinsurgency capability over and above that supplied by the territorials.45/

These belated moves came too late in the game to eliminate the heart and mind of the insurgency - the so called political-military infrastructure (VCI) - during its most vulnerable period between 1954 and

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* Many Senior US officers dislike and distrust special (elite) units, believing that a well trained and led infantry unit can perform any mission; they also fear the inevitable drain of precious leadership talent.

1959. In 1958 the GVN made strong but often clumsy efforts to destroy the infrastructure, but weak and fragmented intelligence hindered the operations. Nevertheless, the VCI were severely hurt by 1959* and requested more concrete help from Hanoi. The other side of the coin was that the harsh tactics of RVNAF and other forces created resentment in the countryside and provided excellent propaganda themes for the enemy.46/

> ARVN and CG combat were usually not given adequate information on the local VCI; besides, they were also little interested in this type of information, regarding the VCI not as their main target.47/

Like the US MAAG, RVNAF leaders were more interested in locating and fighting the Main Force companies and battalions. The PLAF (VC) forces, however, fought only when they were ready and then for a political purpose. They planned and rehearsed carefully, achieving local superiority and usually surprise; they usually won. They attacked isolated outposts and ambushed the relieving units. They backed up the armed propaganda team and the assassination/kidnap squads. They were provided missions, intelligence, supplies, porters and replacements by the VCI. The operation seemed to be a rerun of the early years of the First Indochina War (See Figures 1-1 and 1-2 for a summary of the phases of a People's War and their tactical creed.) 48/ & 49/

The formal establishment of the National Liberation Front (NFL) and their People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF), in December 1960, indicated that the DRV's Lao Dong Party was confident that their Phase II political-military plans and actions were off to a solid start. Their leadership, methods and tactics had been sternly tested for eight years and seemed correct. They could and did improvise and improve their "model" to meet changing circumstances, but the basic system remained intact until final victory. (They were not unduly restricted by formal phases, etc.)

The newly emerged leaders of GVN and RVNAF, however, were faced with trying to sort out the best and the worst of traditional Vietnamese,

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* The same year the Southern Viet Minh "regoupies" started infiltrating into RVN.

Phase*	1	2	3
Infrastructure Activity**	Laying the Infrastructure	Holding	Counter-attacking
Predominant Feature	Political-Psychological	Flexible Mix	Military***
Tactical Operations	Defensive	Offensive	General Offensive**** General Uprising
Balance of Power	Government	Moves to Equilibrium	Insurgents

* The phases were not rigid in either time or space, and could overlap
** There are a number of versions of this
*** But the Party still controls "the gun" for political ends
**** Unique add-on in the Ho-Giap Model (Traditional Vietnamese)

Figure 1-1. The Phases of a "People's War"

1 Slow and 4 Quicks

Slow	Quick
Plan and Prepare	Move to objective Assault Mop-up Withdraw

Mao Tse-Tung: The Strategy of guerrilla warfare is to pit one man against ten, but the tactics are to pit ten men against one.

Note: The periodic lulls during the "slow" phases often misled US officials, in the early years, as did the cyclical pattern of the NLF/PLAF offensives.

Figure 1-2. Tactical Creed of Viet Minh and NLF

French, and American ways of solving their many problems. The Americans - unfamiliar with the Vietnamese and disdainful of the French methods - held the purse strings and so were able to "sell" most of their concepts.

The US-organized-and-trained RVNAF met its first real test in a People's War and came out second best. The best chance to defeat the insurgency had passed. At the end of 1960 the issue was still very much in doubt as to how RVNAF would perform in Phases II and III.

G. CONTRASTS: PLAF VS. RVNAF (See Volumes I and II.)

In 1960 the RVNAF apparently had a wide edge over their in-country enemy the PLAF, or VC; that superiority was in firepower, supplies, vehicular and air mobility and sheer numbers. When counting the paramilitary forces GVN possessed well over the traditional 10 to 1 numerical advantage over the rapidly growing PLAF and VCI. The GVN also had the support of the richest and most powerful nation in the world.

Yet the PLAF also had many inherent but asymmetrical advantages, including: first claim (in the South) on the "mantles of nationalism and anticolonialism;" the blessing of "Uncle Ho;" the aura of the Viet Minh and their victory over the French; tested dogma, doctrine, organization, and tactics; experience and proven political and military leadership; better intelligence, superior foot and sampan mobility; and the advantages accruing to dedicated insurgents competing against a relatively inexperienced and disunited troops who lacked a clear and persuasive creed. Their overall direction and support came from the "secure base" in the DRV, which received increasing assistance from the PRC and USSR.

In traditional military terms RVNAF was created near the top of the scale while PLAF regenerated its force and momentum from the lower end of the spectrum. Starting with small cells of three men, they built squads, then platoons, then companies, and even a number of battalions by 1960. Generally that force escalation was done in one of two ways: splitting cadre, like amoebae, to form new units, or "graduating" the better ones up the organizational ladder from village/hamlet (part time) guerrillas to the

local (full time) guerrilla units and finally to the elite Main Force (mobile) units. The better weapons also followed the same pattern. Starting with weapons hidden since the First Indochina War or made locally, the PLAF gradually came to depend on those captured from the RVN forces. Beginning in 1959, an increasing number of ex-Viet Minh came down the then crude Ho Chi Minh Trail to join the VCI and to flesh out or lead the PLAF units; weapons and ammunition normally were infiltrated by sea.

The bases for the strategies and tactics of both sides were quite different. The RVNAF was "force fed" alien Western concepts - first by the French and then by the US - which were grounded on the writings of Jomini and Clausewitz. The enemy developed their doctrine from the techniques of Sun Tzu, Marx and Lenin (thus some of the more subtle Clausewitz) and Mao and Lin Piao (who substituted peasants for proletariats, and countryside for city) with pure Vietnamese touches by Ho and Giap.

The bulk of regular ARVN divisions were disposed to repel, or delay, an overt attack from the north and from the west through the Central Highlands; the NLF and PLAF grew fastest in the Mekong Delta, the arc around Saigon (the countryside surrounding and choking the cities), and along portions of the coastal plain - old Viet Minh base areas revisited. In 1960 not only was the structure of RVNAF unwieldy but also their posture.

H. AN UNSOLVED DILEMMA: THE TWO-FACED COIN

The US had difficulty in deciding the nature, scope, and interrelationship of the threats to RVN: external, internal or a confusing and complex mixture? The bureaucratic response was to divide them: the military would advise and assist RVNAF in countering the overt, external (big war) threat, while the civilian agencies would help GVN in controlling the political-military internal ("other war") threat. Unfortunately, the opponents' "game plan" wasn't vulnerable to that artificially divided scheme of defense. There was only one conflict (struggle) with the two faces of the coin complementing and supplementing each other. That synergism placed often conflicting and shifting demands and pressures on the defender. Which had priority and when: the needs of the territorial and

population face or those of the mobile/big unit face? A partial illustration of that dichotomy is displayed on Figure 1-3.

Because of their history and their participation in or contact with the Viet Minh, many South Vietnamese were fairly familiar with the enemy's formula and had a few ideas of their own on how to cope with it.

> During the first few years of its existence, South Vietnam wanted to maintain a military force composed primarily of volunteers. From the lessons learned during the 1946-1954 war, South Vietnamese military leaders believed that for the defense of their new nation to be effective, this military force should have the capabilities to maintain territorial security and fight a mobile war at the same time. Therefore, in addition to regular forces which were upgraded from mobile groups to infantry divisions in early 1955, they advocated the activation of local force regiments with men recruited locally. This concept was based on the simple logic that these men were intimately familiar with the geographical and social environment of their locality and, attached as they were by tradition to their native villages, they would be more dedicated to fight for their defense if the necessity should arise.
>
> This concept was not shared by US advisers of the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) who maintained that the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) should be a mobile ground force consisting primarily of draftees.50/

In retrospect, the concept of a volunteer force comprised of a regular army and locally recruited security forces makes sense, thus raising a question. Did not the Vietnamese push their concept well or hard enough, or did US officials not listen carefully or understand what was said?

I. THREE VIEWS ON THE ISSUE

> The defense of South Vietnam was founded on an inappropriate basis at the start, focusing too much on anti-invasion and too little on internal security. War did not materialize under the form of a conventional invasion across the DMZ [/] NVA major units nor did it result in big conventional battles as in Korea during 1951-1953. Our main enemy -- Communist North

"Other War"	Conflicting and Shifting Demands	"Big War"
Secure and control population, territory, resources and LOC	Objective	Locate and defeat (Destroy) enemy forces and bases
Unconventional (Indirect)	Mode	Conventional (direct)
Political (GVN)	Control	Military (RVNAF)
Countryside, with focus on population and resources	Geographic	Often in remote, difficult areas
Sustained	Time	Relatively short term
Priority to Infrastructure and local forces	Intelligence	Priority to Main Forces, bases and LOC
Relatively static and defensive* in nature ("Clear and Hold")	Operations	Primarily mobile and offensive ("Search and Destroy" or Recce in Force)
Minimum necessary	Firepower	All available
Smaller, lighter, and dispersed	Military Forces	Bigger, heavier, and concentrated
Essential and integral	Police	Helpful near populated areas
Fixed and Territorial	Logistics	Flexible and Mobile

Problem: How to organize, equip, train, and employ relatively limited resources to counter both threats simultaneously? Priority to which one?

* But requires active patrolling, raids, and ambushes, etc. - day and night.

SOURCE: BDM Analysis

Figure 1-3 Military Dilemma Facing US and RVN

> Vietnam -- waged instead a people's or insurgency war with the purpose of taking over control in South Vietnam. All of the underground political organizations and local guerrilla forces that the enemy had built during his 1941-1954 war against the French and left behind below the 17th Parallel after the Geneva Agreements were revived and expanded with the re-infiltration of southern-born Viet Minh political and military cadres who had regrouped to the north.51/
>
> - General Cao Van Vien, ex chairman, RVNAF JGSS

> At first the Americans concentrated on creating a military force which was conventional in tactics and equipment, patterned after the standard US organization, and capable of withstanding an invasion from the north. This Army proved incapable of coping with an internal insurgency. Before 1960 its organization was too centralized and its equipment too heavy to counter the rapid growth of the guerrilla war.52/
>
> - Brig. General James L. Collins, Jr., Commander, US Army Center for Military History

In a recent interview General Westmoreland claimed, however, that RVNAF was not created in the "US Image," but was lighter and smaller. He also said that the "mirror image" criticisms were unfair and uninformed.53/ Yet the operational concepts and techniques taught by American military advisors were largely conventional in nature.

J. SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

The dual nature of the conflict - territorial (unconventional) and mobile (conventional) required that the GVN be provided with suitable forces to deal adequately with both threats. That problem was not unrecognized by the US in the early days; the different approaches, however, rested on priorities, relative balance, and timing. In retrospect, it is obvious that a major error was made in placing a disproportionate share of the emphasis and resources on preparing to counter the conventional (direct) threat. It is also clear that in the early 60's the new RVNAF would have been unable to put up more than a flimsy resistance to the more numerous, veteran Viet Minh (PAVN) divisions, since they were unable to

fight and win decisively even against PLAF (VC) units -- Ap Bac for example.

The same attention and resources, if properly employed (doubtful, given the then current weaknesses in GVN and RVNAF leadership), might have permitted the GVN to unravel and decimate the irreplaceable VCI before the insurgency caught fire. The DRV would then have faced a dilemma: let the southern movement die alone, or invade before being properly prepared and face possible strong US and SEATO counteractions. In either case the issue would probably have been brought to a (temporary?) conclusion sooner and at much less cost.

Over the long run the RVN would have needed effective conventional forces to defend her borders, but the question remains "when to start and how to get there"? The Ho-Giap progression of building up from small dispersed guerrilla bands to large Main Force units demanded that RVNAF understand and stay abreast - if not ahead - of that predictable escalation. A possible solution would have been to place the initial priority on building a sound territorial force while forming the regular RVNAF as a much smaller and lighter force; gradual expansion would have been more productive if a well trained and disciplined cadre had been created initially. Following the enemy's format, the better men - or even units - from the territorial forces could have been upgraded to mobile conventional forces.54/ (This was done, to some extent, in the last years of the Republic, but it was too late - PAVN had too big a head start).

This line of reasoning leads to interesting and important side issues: is it easier and more productive to build and train "up," or train "down" under pressure? Which method would provide a higher "tooth to tail" ratio, be more economical, and be more suitable for an emerging nation?

K. SUMMARY ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

For many reasons, then considered cogent, the US learned too little, too late from the very relevant French experience (of almost a century) in Indochina; nor did we listen often and well enough to the South Vietnamese.

The "costs" of not doing so are impossible to guage correctly in retrospect, but they could not have been insignificant throughout the entire gamut of our approaches to our ally, the enemy, or the multifaceted conflict.

An inaccurate assessment of the relative threats to the security of RVN - in time, scope, and nature - resulted in RVNAF being configured and prepared for the wrong "war" at the wrong time; belated efforts to train them "down" to counter the realities of the insurgency were often inappropriate and too seldom effective. (See Chapters 4 & 5 for the need to train and equip "up" in 1970-1975.)

Timely and detailed knowledge and thorough understanding of the enemy's goals, organizational structure, political-military strategies and tactics, support systems, patterns, habits, etc. would have provided the US with at least the opportunity to establish the correct priorities in helping GVN/RVNAF to meet the multiple and time-phased threats to their security, immediate -internal and longer-range-external.

L. LESSON

Goals, policies, strategies, force structures, and tactics which are based on faulty, inaccurate, and/or untimely appreciations of the past, current, and projected conflict environment (all critical elements) are bound to be inferior, which significantly raises the costs, time, and chances of achieving one's objectives; nor should one's assessments be unduly biased by, or limited to, one's own experiences, perceptions, and concepts.

BUT

> Such an explanation would seem to convict our decision-makers of having committed the country to a disastrous course of action on the basis of insufficient information, but in fairness to them, one should recognize that the requirement for a decision always preceded the availability of most o the needed information.
>
> - Maxwell Taylor, Swords and Plowshares, p. 400.

AND

"When do I have time to think?"
- J. F. Kennedy

SO

Decision makers - civilian and military - must listen to a spectrum of those who do have the time and ability to think, and must require their overworked staffs to do their homework. The enemy in Vietnam worked harder and better at analyzing our significant strengths and weaknesses than did we concerning his.

POST SCRIPT

For the most part, American leaders (civil and military) tend to be impatient, action-oriented pragmatists who lack a solid historical and philosophical foundation. Therefore, when historical precedents (e.g., "No more Munichs!" or " Who Lost China?") are cited as bases for political-military action they are more likely to be emotion-laden slogans rather than well analyzed and relevant principles. Straight line extrapolation of such "maxims" from one era and environment to other quite different ones can lead to fundamental misunderstandings and thus serious problems.

APPENDIX

Various Early US Views on the Threats to RVN and How to Counter Them

- In 1957, General I. D. White, Commander, US Army Pacific reported to Washington that US plans for RVN were unrealistic as they placed too much emphasis on countering an invasion from the North and too little on the more likely "guerrilla warfare."55/

- Ambassador Durbrow and others in the US mission in Saigon wondered, in April 1960, if Diem's demands for Ranger units might not be construed as evidence that the MAAG had not prepared ARVN properly for antiguerrilla warfare?56/

- Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams, in June 1960, vigorously denied that the US MAAG had built a conventional army composed of divisions too large and unwieldy for fight a guerrilla war. He stated that they had been designed to conduct operations "against either conventional or guerrilla forces," and the ARVN soldier had "the same foot mobility, as the Viet Cong guerrillas." Therefore, Rangers were not needed and were wasteful of time, men and funds.57/

- When Lieutenant General Lionel McGarr assumed the position of Chief US MAAGV in September 1960, he considered that counter-insurgency was a different and distinct form of warfare and required different doctrines, tactics, techniques, and even special units. He therefore, supported the equipment, training, and expansion of the new Ranger Command.58/ (Note: BG Donald D. Blackburn, US/Army (Ret) was sent to RVN in 1960 to evaluate the insurgency and training situation. When General Blackburn reviewed portions of this volume he commented that, despite General McGarr's recognition of CI as a distinct form of warfare, the MAAG CI plan for 1961 reflected "two up and one back company/ platoon training.)59/

IN RETROSPECT

- General Maxwell Taylor stated that the US Southeast Asia War Plans (1955-1959) dictated the construction of RVNAF along more conventional lines in order to meet an overt invasion; this was consistent with our Korean experience. China, and not the DRV, was considered as the major threat to the area.60/

CHAPTER 1 ENDNOTES

1. Remarks of M. Elliott-Bateman at a R.U.S.I. seminar on Lessons from the Vietnam War (London: R.U.S.I. for Defense Studies, n.d., probably 1969), p. 4.

2. Note from Mrs. Douglas Pike to The BDM Corporation, September 12, 1979.

3. BDM interview with General Maxwell D. Taylor, July 11, 1979, at his residence in Washington, D.C.

4. Major General Graves B. Erskine, USMC, Chief of the military group of the Joint State-Defense Mutual Defense Assistance Program Survey Mission (Erskine - Melby Mission) to Southeast Asia, visited Vietnam in 1950 to evaluate French use of US aid. He strongly disagreed with the French use of "Beau Geste" forts and his report was leaked to the French and made them extremely mad, according to General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, USA, (Ret.) in a BDM interview, 15 June 1979. In a 1975 interview by Mr. Benis Frank, USMC Oral History Program, General Erskine related that upon arrival in Saigon three bombs exploded in the foyer of his hotel. He "... suspected that the French had a hand in this to frighten us, to show us how bad things were, so we'd say, 'Oh my God, let's go home and get the hell out of here' and give the French anything they want" and that was the ambassador's attitude (Donald Heath). Later at the embassy in the presence of the ambassador and some French generals, Erskine was asked what he thought about the bombing incident. He replied, "Well, I'll tell you what my thought is very simply. I am a major general of the Marines and I rate 13 guns, and you can fire the other 10 any time, and I'll be present." The French generals and Ambassador Heath were upset by Erskine's remarks. General Graves B. Erskine, USMC (Ret.) transcript, History and Museums Division, US Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., pp. 472-473.

5. Bernard Fall, The Two Vietnams (New York, Praeger, second rev. ed. 1967), p. 109. General Erskine stated that he asked French General Carpentier "...why they didn't organize and train the Vietnamese and let them do the fighting and pull at least the bulk of the French troops back into general reserve and gradually remove them from the country, when the Vietnamese were able to take over. Then he threw up his hands and said, 'They are absolutely unreliable, you can't trust them, they'll never make good soldiers.' And he said that was an impossible thing, absolutely impossible, and I said, "Gen. Carpentier, who in the hell are you fighting but Vietnamese? It seems to me if the natives can train a group of guerrillas that can whip you, then you ought to be able to train the same people to whip the guerrillas." General Erskine oral history transcript, pp. 474-475.

6. Paul Doumer quotation in: J. Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled (New York, N. Y.: F. A. Praeger, 1967), Vol. I, p. 453.

7. Fall, The Two Vietnams, pp. 110f

8. Fall, p. 115. Also see Commander in Chief of the Far East, Lessons of the War in Indochina. Translated from the French by Victor J. Croizat, Colonel, USMC (Ret.) for the Rand Corporation, RM-5271-PR May 1967. Hereafter cited as French Lessons.

9. George K. Tanham, "Insurgency, NATO, and Vietnam," South East Asian Perspective (July, 1975), p.3.

10. Sketch map: Fall, The Two Vietnams, p. 123.

11. Navarre quote in: Clyde E. Pettit, The Experts (Secaucus, N. J.: Lyle Stuart, 1975), p. 51.

12. Dejean quote in Pettit, p. 51.

13. Eisenhower quote in Pettit, p. 54.

14. Fall, Hell in a Very Small Place (Philadelphia, Pa.: Lippincott, 1967), pp. 106, 108.

15. Radford and Navarre quotes in Pettit, p. 55.

16. Nikita Khrushchev, Khrushchev Remembers (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1970), p. 482.

17. Janos Radvanyi, Delusion and Reality (South Bend, Indiana: Gateway, 1978), p. 8. But note Fall's report that in the first week of April, 1954 "French Intelligence. . . picked up urgent radio messages from Gen. Giap to his own rear services to provide him with replacements from his 25,000-men reserve pool dispersed in well-camouflaged camps throughout North Vietnam. At the same time messages to Red China were intercepted, requesting delivery to the Viet-Minh forces of another flak regiment with sixty-seven guns of 37-mm. caliber." B. Fall, Hell in a Very Small Place, p. 223.

18. Fall, Hell in a Very Small Place, pp. 159, 243.

19. US Dept. of Defense, United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967 (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1971), Book 1, II, page B-19; hereinafter cited as DOD, US/VN Relations.

20. DOD, US/VN Relations, Book 1, II, pp. B19f.

21. Army position paper submitted to the National Security Council in the first week of April, 1954, quoted in DOD US/VN Relations, Book 1, II, p. B-10.

22. Vice Admiral A. C. Davis, Director of the Office of Foreign Military Affairs in OSD, as quoted in DOD US/VN Relations, Book 1, II, p. B-6.

23. Ibid., Book 1, II, pp. B-17f.

24. Ibid., p. B-23.

25. Ibid., pp. B-23 to B-28.

26. "Why U.S. Steers Clear of a Fight in Asia," U.S. News and World Report, Dec. 10, 1954, pp. 62f.

27. List compiled from a variety of sources, including B. Fall, French Lessons, G.R.C. monographs, Thos. C. Thayer, Giap, Ho, and observations of numerous US officers who served there.

28. Ibid.

29. Col. Thos. Ware, USA, who encountered Fall at the Military Assistance Institute (1960), the Armed Forces Staff College (1965), and at West Point (about 1964).

30. Thos. C. Thayer, "Patterns of the French and American Experience in Vietnam," in The Lessons of Vietnam, ed. W. Scott Thompson and D. D. Frizzell (New York, N. Y.: Crane, Russak, 1977), p.36.

31. Bernard Fall, Street Without Joy (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole, fourth ed., 1967), pp. 249-50.

32. Thayer, p. 38.

33. French Lessons p. iii.

34. Major-General George Keegan, USAF, in D. D. Frizzell, "Dissatisfaction with the Air War," in The Lessons of Vietnam, p. 138.

35. Maj. John D. Howard, "GCMA/GMI: A French Experience in Indochina," Military Review (April 1976), pp. 80-81.

36. Letter from Col. Croizat to Mr. J. Angus MacDonald, BDM, Sept. 11, 1979.

37. "U.S. Inherits Another Headache," U.S. News and World Report Dec. 10, 1954, p. 25.

38. LTG Ngo Quang Trong, ARVN, Territorial Forces Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph (McLean, Va: General Research Corp., 1978), p. 24 (CAD-CR-155).

39. BDM interview with Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, Jan. 9, 1979.

40. BG James L. Collins, The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army 1950-1972 (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1975), p. 12.

41. Department of State, American Foreign Policy 1950-1955: Basic Documents (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957), Vol. II, pp. 2402-2403.

42. Ibid., p.22. The Civil Guard started receiving MAP support and training in 1961.

43. Related by LTG Williams to then Colonel D. D. Blackburn, USA who served as an advisor in IV Corps in 1960. Interview with BG Blackburn, (USA Ret), at the BDM Corporation, 8 January 1980.

44. Ibid., p. 17 and LTG Ngo Quang Trong, Territorial Forces, p. 25.

45. Ibid., p. 18.

46. Gen. Cao Van Vien, ARVN, and LTG Dong Van Khuyen, ARVN, Reflections on the Vietnam War Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph, (McLean, Va.: General Research Corp., 1978), pp. 22-23.

47. Ibid., p. 24.

48. LTG Ngo Quang Truong, p. 2.

49. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, Reflections p. 137.

50. LTG Ngo Quang Trong, p. 24.

51. Gen. Cao Van Vien, ARVN and LTG Dong Van Khuyen, ARVN, Reflections, p. 24.

52. BG James L. Collins, p. 127.

53. General Westmoreland interview at The BDM Corporation, Aug. 17, 1979.

54. BG Donald D. Blackburn, US Army (Ret) disagreed with this point on the basis of psychological disadvantages in the realm of pride and elan. He commented that there should be "no second team." BDM study team interviewer on 8 January 1980. General Blackburn was sent to RVN to assess the insurgency situation and the organizational structure designed to cope with it.

55. Gen. I. D. White memorandum to Gen. Lemnitzer, Oct. 9, 1957.

56. Memorandum, Ambassador Durbrow to Gen. Williams; subject: Anti-Guerrilla Training, April 19, 1960, folder 77, Williams Papers at OCMH.

57. Williams memorandum to U.S. Ambassador, subject: Training of RVNAF, June 1, 1960, Folder 77, Williams Papers at CMH.

58. First Twelve Month Report of Chief, MAAG, Vietnam, September, 1961. Copy in Lionel McGarr Folder, Historians' File, CMH.

59. Manuscript comments by BG D. D. Blackburn, USA (Ret) on draft of this manuscript, 8 January 1980.

60. BDM interview with Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, Washington, D.C., July 11, 1979.

CHAPTER 2

THE COUNTERINSURGENCY ERA (1961-1965)

> The over-all situation is improving. In the military sector of the counterinsurgency, we are winning. Evidences of improvement are clearly visible, as the combined impact of the programs ... begin to have effect on the Viet Cong.
>
> - Secretary of Defense, McNamara, May 1963 1/

> During those years, in the South, in spite of barbarous terror and massacre by the US imperialists and the traitors, our Southern compatriots have never submitted. On the contrary they have carried on an extremely valiant armed and political struggle. The South Viet Nam people have defeated the US "special war" ...
>
> - Ho Chi Minh, October 1967 2/

A. INTRODUCTION

Shortly after the inauguration of John F. Kennedy, the "Missile Gap" miraculously closed; but did not the "credibility gap" open a bit? Members of the new administration had their hands full with a series of genuine crises: the disastrous Bay of Pigs fiasco, Khrushchev's public humiliation of Kennedy in Vienna, and then the Berlin and Laotian crises. Eisenhower had warned the incoming president about the critical importance of the Laotian domino, but, since the US military was reluctant to get actively involved in that landlocked country, the USG needed a place to reassert its credibility: South Vietnam was elected. (Strengthened by a show of US force in Thailand, Averell Harriman was later dispatched to "neutralize" Laos).

During the search for sharp issues with which to outjoust the Republicans during the electoral campaign, Robert Kennedy -- and some of his bright young aides -- became intrigued with Maxwell Taylor's thin, but meaty, book titled the Uncertain Trumpet; Bobby was the one who introduced

"Max" to Jack and "Camelot." 3/ It wasn't long before the US military strategy of "Massive Retaliation" was changed to one of "Flexible Response" - the latter apparently being more suitable for a measured but firm response to Khrushchev's public support for "Wars of National Liberation."

This chapter is focused on two primary issues relevant to the period under examination:

- Was the "counterinsurgency concept" a legitimate child of its "Flexible Response" father?
- Why did the US counterinsurgency concept fail in practice?

B. A NEW DRUMMER AND NEW MUSIC

1. The Changing Scene

The new strategy was quite naturally preceded by a fresh set of faces in the top ranks of the National Security Establishment - White House, State, Defense, and CIA. On the average they were young, smart, eager to shake and shape, unhampered by ancient history, and unawed by rank and "professional judgments"; Halberstam labeled them "The best and the brightest." Dean Rusk and Maxwell Taylor were the senior citizens of that select group; the latter was called in to head an ad hoc group charged with examining the reasons and remedies for the Bay of Pigs failure. Pleased with Taylor's thoroughness, objectivity, and clarity, Kennedy asked him to stay on as an advisor. He did so, and got along well with the top team if not with some of their young, ambitious and irreverant underlings.

Events in Asia were soon to impact on the new administration. Khrushchev, Mao, and Ho agreed that the type of political-military conflict then taking place in Vietnam was the "game of the future" which would outflank and isolate the shrinking capitalist world via South America and Africa as well as Asia. (Events in 1980 do not contradict that viewpoint.) In December 1960, the formal establishment of the NLF signaled the enemy's intent and determination to subdue the RVN. President Kennedy -- without the GVN's advice or consent -- decided that Vietnam was to be the

"laboratory" for devising ways and means of defeating such indirect wars. But it soon became obvious that the USG apparatus wasn't configured or fully motivated for such a coordinated effort. Taylor wrote:

> Cold War planning turned out to be primarily a matter of planning defenses against subversive insurgency of the kind encountered in the post-World War II period in various countries on the Sino-Soviet periphery. President Kennedy entered office deeply impressed with the significance of this form of Communist-inspired aggression, and in his first NSC meeting on February 1, 1961, he asked Secretary McNamara to consider means of placing additional emphasis on the development of counterinsurgency forces. He took very seriously Khrushchev's speech of January 6, 1961, which promised Soviet support on a global basis for People's Wars or Wars of National Liberation on the model of the guerrilla war in South Vietnam. Moreover, the Bay of Pigs experience injected a new urgency into Kennedy's concern for counterinsurgency preparations and led him to direct a number of actions to assist underdeveloped countries, particularly in Latin America, in increasing their military and police protection against the internal Communist threat supported externally by Castro. 4/

Those presidential decisions set the beat for what came to be known among many staffers as the "counterinsurgency kick."

2. The Beginnings (?) of Counterinsurgency

Responsible US civil and military agencies in Washington, Hawaii, and Saigon started to compose various Counterinsurgency Plans (CIP), but normal bureaucratic (and interservice) jealousies and the normal inertia in Washington were difficult to overcome. In order to get the act together Kennedy, in January 1962, established the Special Group Counterinsurgency (CI) with Taylor as its chairman; other members were Robert Kennedy (Justice), Alex Johnson (State), Gilpatrick (OSD), Lemnitzer (CJCS), McCone (CIA), "Mac" Bundy (NSC), Murrow (USIA), and Hamilton (AID). How did that impressive but heterogoneous group function? In Taylor's words:

> As an irreverent bureaucrat with a low opinion of the committee system, I found the Special Group a

> refreshing exception to my past experience. It was unique in that the principals gave top priority to their duties on it and rarely missed a meeting. Furthermore, they could bring no staff with them; hence, they were obliged to do their homework before they came to speak their own pieces after getting there. Being the heads or deputy heads of powerful agencies of government, they had vast resources immediately available to them when they returned to their offices. Finally, the chairmen reported their day's work to him immediately after each meeting. The presence of Bob Kennedy on the committee, with his energy and interest in its work, was another force which vitalized the membership and guaranteed unusually candid testimony on the part of those called before the Group. Bob was a bit rough on evasive witnesses. 5/

Meanwhile, back with the Country Team in Saigon (circa 60-61) the interagency fights went on; each had its own "stovepipe" to and from its head in Washington, and each tried to "scoop" the others. The poor relations between the Embassy and the MAAG which existed during the Durbrow-Williams regimes still lingered even after the latter had been replaced; later, however, Ambassador Nolting and General McGarr did cooperate much better. 6/

The different perceptions of the nature and scope of the problems facing RVN and the correct solutions to them, created additional friction during the preparation of the Country Team's CIP. Durbrow wanted to hold back some of the MAAG's military aid and force-expansion proposals as "bargaining chips" to pressure Diem into making needed political and economic reforms; the MAAG took the direct military approach of "let's get on with the job." The military advisors wanted to train the Civil Guard (CG) to enable the GVN to guard against a potential direct attack and to counter the building indirect one. Durbrow discounted an immediate overt threat and argued that troops should be sent from the northern provinces to the Delta and near Saigon where they were needed. 7/

3. Force Expansion

When LTG Lionel McGarr took over as Chief MAAG in September 1960, he was psychologically attuned to the primacy of the internal threat (due to studies he had conducted while Commandant of the Army Command and

General Staff College), but he also believed that additions to RVNAF and the militia were essential to defeat the insurgents. His position was backed by CINCPAC, JCS, and OSD. Faced with that formidable array, the shock of the attempted paratroop coup, and the ominous escalation of the insurgency in RVN and Laos, Durbrow and the State Department concurred with the force increases. 8/

After the CIP was approved by the president, the MAAG staff worked overtime turning out a voluminous paper called "Tactics and Techniques of Counterinsurgency Operations" which was presented to the RVNAF JGS for translation and implementation; General McGarr personally wrote and edited parts of the paper. 9/ Although freely using a lot of the then popular "buzz words" such as "hearts and minds" (Templar), and "fish swimming in water" (Mao), there wasn't a great deal of knowledge in the US military - in Saigon or Washington - about what "People's War" was really all about. There was even less expertise about how to defeat the Ho-Giap version. The CIP and the "Tactics-Techniques" had something for every US and GVN agency.

The predominant military belief at that time, was that if our side killed or captured enough of the guerrillas, the internal threat to RVN could be contained and eventually worn down (precursor to attrition?). The organization, composition, functions, methods and importance of the central political-military structure - the so-called VCI - still was too little understood. The fundamental differences between an ordinary guerrilla war and a true "People's War" had yet to be sorted out.

4. The Special Forces

The Kennedy brothers discovered the US Army's Special Forces and thought that they might be the ideal "tool" to implement their concept of counterinsurgency; the President, in effect, became the "Patron Saint of the Green Berets." Recently, Maxwell Taylor recounted that if Bobby had had his way the entire army would be composed of Special Forces. 10/ The other services eventually received the message and created -- or polished up -- their own counterparts.

It was believed that the Special Forces Teams and our other advisors would be able to teach the RVNAF to defeat the guerrillas at their own game - with some help from the other US and GVN agencies of course. But an insurgency is essentially offensive in nature and generally holds the initiative, while a counter insurgency - as the name implies - is basically a defensive and reactive mode - especially as practiced in 1961. The inherent asymmetries between the two were little understood at the time. (See Figure 2-1).

5. The Experts

Sir Robert Thompson arrived, fresh from the successful anti-terrorist operation in Malaya, to advise Diem and to "lecture" the US Country Team. The "Ugly American," Edward Lansdale, was also in Saigon attempting to "sell" the Magsaysay version of counterinsurgency; neither of the two was very popular with the MAAG, but at least they both spoke English and so were preferable to the French. Bernard Fall was slowly gaining a few disciples for his version of the gospel. Whom to believe? The natural course of action was to modify - as little as possible - what one already knew and then to execute it with vigor and confidence.

C. THE FIRST ISSUE: COUNTERINSURGENCY CONCEPT - VALID OR NOT?

1. Flexible Response

The Flexible Response theory certainly seemed to be more appropriate to the situation in Southeast Asia than did the threat of Massive Retaliation. Should the US have risked nuclear war with the USSR to save Dak To or even Saigon? Or should Peking and Hanoi have been held as nuclear hostages? Those options were not seriously considered since they were obviously inappropriate and irresponsible.

Flexible Response, on the other hand, contained provisions - on the lower end of the spectrum - for shows of force and "brush fire wars"; visible, but restricted, demonstrations of US determination and capability to preempt another "Munich" and thus an eventual World War III - a very respectable policy to a majority of influential liberals in those days.

Factors	Insurgency	Counterinsurgency
Aim	Seize Political Control	Retain political control
Economy and Communications	Disrupt/Exploit	Maintain/Improve
Psychology	Offensive	Defensive
Territorial control	Unimportant at first	Essential throughout
Appearance	Invisible and Mysterious	Public and Massive
Time	Ally	Enemy
Cost	Cheap	Expensive
Operational Mode	Unusually Indirect	Generally Direct
Inititative and Surprise	Normal	Rare
Initial Power*	Slight	Prepondarant
Force Ratios**		
o Strategic	1 to 10	10+ to 1
o Tactical	10 to 1	3 to 1 (offensive) 1+ to 3 (defensive)
Organize Equip and Train	"Up" from small and un-conventional	"Down" from large and conventional

*/ General and relative; there are always exceptions
** Mao's precept vs. Western "rules of thumb"

SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

Figure 2-1. Major Asymmetries* Between Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

Despite the growing strains created in the US body politic during the last two years of the Korean stalemate, limited war was still considered preferable to either alternative extreme - nuclear war or step-by-step global retreat.

Rationally, such a policy still makes sense, but emotionally it goes against the American grain of "win quickly or get out"; few admire a coach who is willing to settle for a tie. Of equal importance is the fact that the opponent may not be willing to play by the same "rational rules"; e.g., what may be limited objectives for us may be total for him. Just such a dichotomy was central to the American frustrations in Vietnam.

2. The Name of the Game

Counterinsurgency, which initially cost only aid and advice, apparently was a natural option in the range of flexible responses. Under other guises it had worked before elsewhere in the world. But in Vietnam it was faced with a tougher, better organized and more experienced foe, and had to be exercised through feeble instruments - the GVN and the RVNAF. Additionally, the self imposed limits (only reluctantly and belatedly expanded) on the scope and mode of counters employed perhaps precluded a fair test of the concept.

In April 1962 President Kennedy in a memorandum to the United States Army laid down both a mission and a challenge: counterinsurgency was the "name of the game."

> By whatever name, this militant challenge to freedom calls for an improvement and enlargement of our own development of techniques and tactics, communications and logistics to meet this threat. The mission of our Armed Forces -- and especially the Army today -- is to master these skills and techniques and to be able to help those who have the will to help themselves.
>
> Pure military skill is not enough. A full spectrum of military, para-military, and civil action must be blended to produce success. The enemy uses economic and political warfare, propaganda and naked military aggression in an endless combination to oppose a free choice of government, and suppress the rights of the individual by terror, by subversion and by force of arms. To win in this struggle, our officers and men

> must understand and combine the political, economic and civil actions with skilled military efforts in the execution of this mission. 11/

Knowing the broad outline of a new game, however, does not insure that one is able to step in and play well. As David Galula put it,

> What, then are the rules of counterrevolutionary warfare? Here we can observe another curious fact. Although analyses of revolutionary wars from the revolutionary's point of view are numerous today, there is a vacuum of studies from the other side, particularly when it comes to suggesting concrete courses of action for the counterrevolutionary. Very little is offered beyond formulas -- which are sound enough as far as they go -- such as, "Intelligence is the key to the problem," or "The support of the population must be won." How to turn the key, how to win the support, this is where frustrations usually begin, as anyone can testify who, in a humble or in an exalted postion, has been involved in a revolutionary war on the wrong -- i.e., the arduous--side. 12/

3. The Insurgency Catches Fire

a. The Growing Threat

By early 1961 it was apparent to USG officials, in Saigon and Washington, that the insurgency was growing much faster than was RVN's ability to cope with it; infiltration of cadres from the DRV was also increasing. High level US missions were sent to RVN to evaluate the situation and to develop recommendations concerning US policies toward the Republic.

In May Vice President Lyndon Johnson arrived carrying a personal letter to Diem from President Kennedy promising additional military and economic support. In his post-trip report to the President, Johnson said:

> The fundamental decision required of the United States -- and time is of the greatest importance -- is whether we are to attempt to meet the challenge of Communist expansion now in Southeast Asia by a major effort in support of the forces of freedom in the area

> or throw in the towel. This decision must be made in a full realization of the very heavy and continuing costs involved in terms of money, of effort and of United States prestige. It must be made with the knowledge that at some point we may be faced with the further decision of whether we commit major United States forces to the area or cut our losses and withdraw should our other efforts fail. I recommend we proceed with a clear-cut and strong program of action. 13/

In July, Dr. Eugene Staley led a six man economics mission to follow up on Johnson's visit. Military leaders came from the States and Okinawa, more frequently, to survey the situation on the ground in order to update training and contingency plans. Typical statements of visiting senior officers - Army and Marine alike - included such unrealistic ones as, "If I had my brigade (regiment) here I could clean up the whole country in six weeks!"14/ Reminiscent of the initial days of World War II and Korea?

The Taylor-Rostow mission in October resulted in one of the major turning points of the US involvement in Indochina. That mission determined that the RVNAF'combat effectiveness was 30 to 40 percent below potential because of:

> .....lack of intelligence, a defensive outlook, a bad civil-military relationship in the provinces, and Diem's style of over-centralized government. Of course, there were also assets in the south: growing armed forces, a surprisingly resilient economy, and Diem, a man of stubborn courage and basic integrity. But time was pressing. To convert such assets into successful programs it was clear that American aid and guidance must be made available rapidly and in quantity to bridge the period of waiting for the development of new forms of indigenous strength.15/

b. The US Response

The Taylor-Rostow report recommended that nearly every type of existing support be increased, substantially and quickly, and that new programs be activated to include:

- More than a ten-fold increase in advisors.

- Assignment of US advisors at the province level, and later at the district level.
- Provision of US-manned helicopters and aircraft for RVNAF.
- Provision of armored personnel carriers (APC) and swamp boats.
- Deployment of US reconnaissance aircraft.
- Major increases in RVNAF and the militia.

The president approved most of the recommendations except for provision of a US logistics task force with an accompanying security unit. 16/

c. The Results

The enemy had been covertly circumventing the Geneva accords for some time, and now the US did so openly. The USG had taken a major step forward in committing resources and prestige to the preservation of the RVN; it was also an intermediate step towards the eventual commitment of US air, naval and ground forces.

The major increase in US forces and missions demanded a new and larger headquarters to control them; in February 1962 MACV was established under the command of Paul D. Harkins, newly promoted to General. The MAAG plus the US Army Support Group (later command) and the USAF's 2d ADVON (later Air Division) were placed under the operational control of COMUSMACV whose mission was:

> To assist the Government of Vietnam and its armed forces to defeat externally directed and supported communist subversion and aggression and attain an independent South Vietnam functioning in a secure environment. 17/

The US military - and, to a lesser extent, other USG agencies -- pulled out the throttle. Hundreds and then thousands of advisors and support personnel poured into RVN. At that stage many were poorly selected and ill prepared for the demands of their assignments. Yet, on balance, the initial effects were beneficial. Civilian and military morale in RVN rose significantly, while that of the enemy was temporarily set back by the speed and magnitude of the US response.

The GVN's Strategic Hamlet Program got off to a fast - if poorly received - start and soon became the primary arm of the strategy to separate the people (sea) from the guerrillas (fish). The CIA, with a major assist from the US (and later RVN) Special Forces, launched the ambitious Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Program which armed and trained the Montagnard tribes for defense of their villages, and thus the strategic Central Highlands.

Those programs plus the power and mobility of the new APC's, boats, helicopters, and US-piloted attack aircraft (Farmgate) increased the range, aggressiveness, and effectiveness of RVNAF. ARVN Rangers and their advisors even penetrated deep into sacrosanct base areas such as War Zone D. 18/ Except to impede the enemy's freedom of action, however, the programs did little to hurt the all-important political-military infrastructure of the NLF. Following his tested doctrine, the enemy pulled in his horns a bit and "went back to school", methodically studying the strengths and weaknesses of the new weapons and tactics. He then formulated relatively inexpensive but effective counters. That temporary tactical retreat created an exaggerated sense of progress in Saigon and in Washington. (See Figure 2-2).

d. Selected Comments on the Period 19/

> We are going to win in Vietnam. We will remain here until we do win. I think the American people understand and fully support this struggle. ... We have full confidence in President Diem.
>
> - Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, Saigon, February 18, 1962

> I am delighted with the progress made since my last trip, January 15.
>
> - Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, on arrival from Honolulu, February 27, 1962

> I came back optimistic.
>
> - Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs W. Averell Harriman, on arrival from Honolulu, February 27, 1962

Prime Requisites: 1) Detailed and objective study of opposing strengths and vulnerabilities
2) Early and accurate intelligence on enemy capabilities and plans

Allied Advantage		Enemy Counters: Passive	Enemy Counters: Active
1. Tactical Aircraft		Dispersion	Anti-air fire (from rifle up)
	Frequent change of location	Location of Bases & LOC Camouflage Bunkers/Tunnels	Rocket/mortar and sapper attacks on bases
		Night Movement	Surprise and speed
	Change in patterns/ habits	Commo Security Dummy installations	"Hugging" tactics Deceptive commo
2. Helicopters		(Same as above-plus) Mines and booby traps (some in trees)	Pre-register mortars on potential LZ's
		Planted poles in LZ's (generally ineffective)	Decoy to anti-air traps
			Ambush LZ's
3. Armor		(Most of 1 above plus)	
		Mines (pressure and command detonated)	Snipers for drivers/ machine gunners
			Recoiless Rifles
		Destruction of key roads and bridges	Rocket-Propelled Grenades (RPG's)
		Fortified hamlets and hedgerows	Night attacks on "Laagers"-
			Close-range ambushes
			Hunter-killer team (RPG's)

Note: Many of these counters also used against artillery

SOURCES: BDM Research and CMH (GRC) Monograph, Strategy and Tactics

Figure 2-2. Some Enemy Counters to US/RVN Tactical and Materiel Advantages

If we can use our heavy weapons and still get mobility, we can get at the Viet Cong where we can lick 'em.

- Major General Robert E. Cushman, 3d Marine Division, quoted by Time, April 30, 1962

The South Vietnamese are beginning to hit the Viet Cong insurgents where it hurts most - in winning the people to the side of the Government.

- Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, Honolulu, July 24, 1962

Victory is remote. The issue remains in doubt because the Vietnamese President seems incapable of winning the loyalty of his people ... visions of ultimate victory are obscured by the image of a secretive, suspicious, dictatorial regime .... Should the situation deteriorate further, Washington may face the alternative of ditching Ngo Dinh Diem for a military junta or sending combat troops to bolster the regime.

- Homer Bigart, New York Times, July 25, 1962

There is an incontestable turn for the better .... Government forces have taken the initiative ... passing to the offensive ... sowing insecurity in the Communists' reputedly impregnable stongholds, smashing their units one after another ... We are recovering the initiative, even during the rainy season, which heretofore the enemy has considered favorable to him. Victory is not only sure but imminent.

- President Ngo Dinh Diem, address to National Assembly, Saigon, October 1, 1962; on October 26, The National Assembly voted to extend for another year Diem's power to rule by decree

It is fashionable in some quarters to say that the problems in Southeast Asia are primarily political and economic. I do not agree. The essence of the problem in Vietnam is military.

- General Earle K. Wheeler, November 1962

BUT

> The French fought nine Years in Vietnam and were kicked out. The Americans may fight fifteen years if they want but it will not help.
>
> - Premier Nikita Khrushchev,
> Sofia, Bulgaria, May 18, 1962

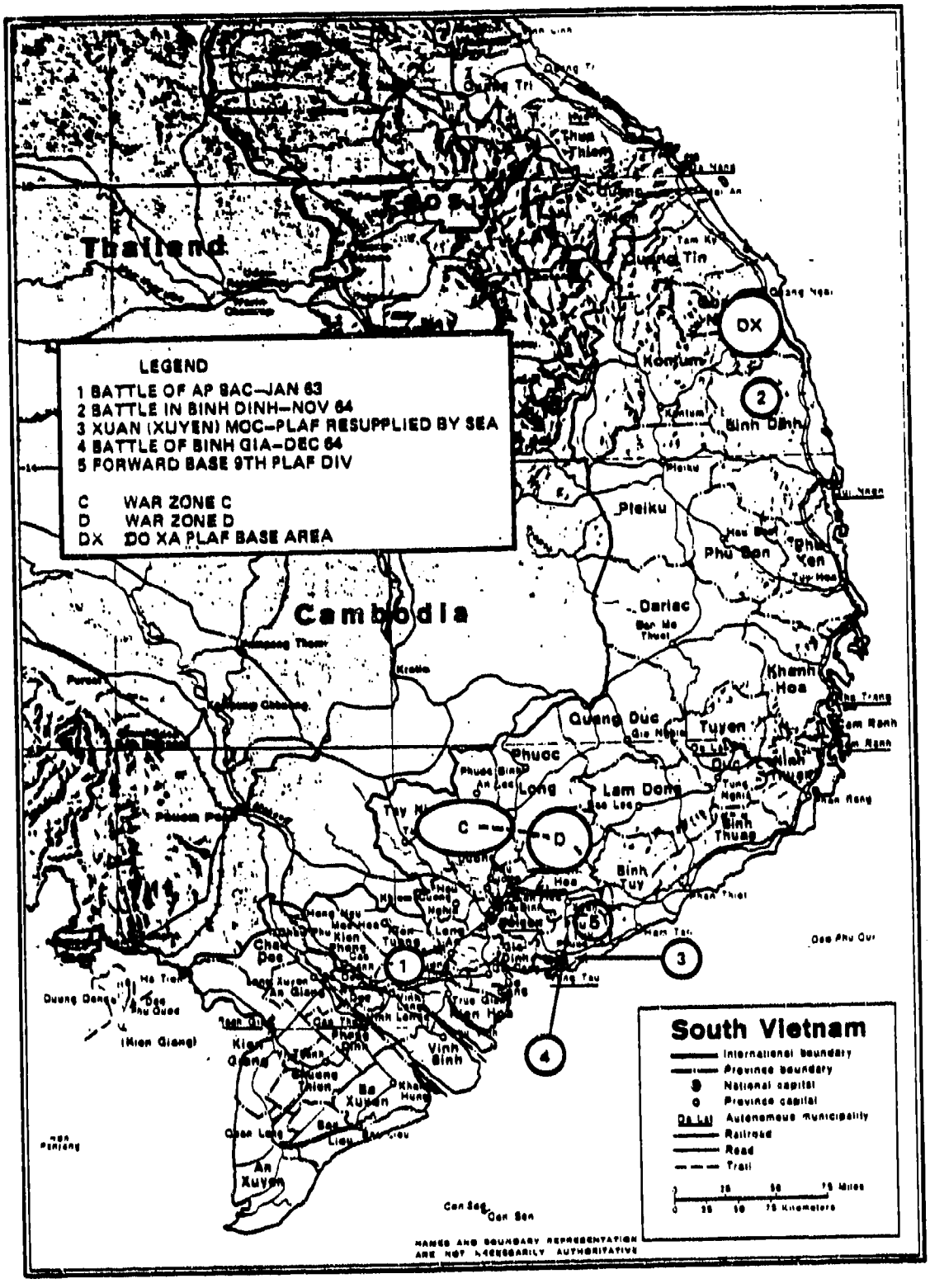
> President Kennedy should know history. History has proved that when a people are of one mind and united in the struggle for independence and freedom (as his own forefathers were in the past and the South Vietnamese people are at present), they are bound to win victory. Therefore it is certain that:
>
> Our Southern compatriots will win:
> North and South will be reunited in one family;
> and
> Our beloved Fatherland will be peacefully reunified.
>
> - Ho Chi Minh
> May 8, 1963 20/

4. ARVN At Ap Bac: What Happened? (See Map 2-1)

a. The Situation

"If only Charley would stand and fight, we'd clobber him!" Like the French before them, the Americans wanted an opportunity to use their superior firepower and technology to decimate the elusive and frustrating enemy. The opportunity finally came in early January 1963, but the results were less than encouraging.

> While in command of the 7th Infantry Division, Major General Huynh Van Cao initiated a pattern of activity which in time became an established routine for the division. He would commemorate every important national event such as the National Day or President Diem's birthday by conducting an operation of political significance. When he left the 7th Division to command IV Corps, General Cao was replaced by Colonel Bui Dinh Dam, also a presidential appointee like himself. Both were Roman Catholic, loyal to the regime and no doubt high-ranking members of the all-powerful Can Lao Party. 21/



4841/78W

SOURCE: BDM Research

Map 2-1. Counterinsurgency Fails

President Diem's birthday was on January 3 and Col. Dam wanted to give him a victory as a present. An observation plane had spotted about 100 VC in the village of Ap Bac which was near My Tho, the 7th Division Headquarters. (The latter was close enough to Saigon for journalists to hop in a cab, drive down Route 4, smell a bit of gunpowder, and be back at the Hotel Caravelle for cocktail hour). Wanting to be sure of his "kill," Col. Dam planned to employ three infantry battalions, two Ranger and four Civil Guard (CG) companies, six howitzers, and a troop of 13 APC's.

After an air and artillery preparation the assault began; the first two CG companies were repulsed at close range by the well dug in and concealed enemy. Col. Dam decided to land fresh troops in the village by US H-21 helicopters: three were shot down immediately followed by two more soon after. Other infantry attacks failed even when closely supported by APC's, of which four were destroyed and four damaged. On the scene by then, General Cao was agitated: he had orders from Diem to keep casualties down. For different reasons the senior advisor to the 7th Division, Lt. Col. John Paul Vann, was also very disturbed. A misdropped Airborne Bn. (after folding their parachutes as trained to do) was too late to close an escape route. Furious, Vann deployed the clerk, cooks, and drivers of his advisory team to the blocking position. 22/ As usual, the enemy escaped at night with his wounded and most of his weapons and dead.

b. In Retrospect

The enemy turned out to have been the tough 300-man 512th Mobile Bn. of My Tho Province, possibly reinforced. It is probable that through informers and radio intercepts they knew of Col. Dam's plans. They killed and wounded about 400 RVNAF Soldiers. 23/ Only nine enemy bodies were left on the field. High GVN and US officials in Saigon proclaimed Ap Bac to have been a great victory. But:

> LTC Van [sic] spilled his gut to the press on this occasion. As I walked up to the small group of tents that constituted the Division C. P. at Tan An, I observed LTC. Vann talking to Halberstam of the New York Times. They were standing in full view and within hearing of the Headquarters, Vann was red in the

face and loudly denouncing the ARVN for cowardice and incompetence. 24/

c. The Press Reports

Halberstam and other journalists made a telling point when they contrasted, in print, what they had seen and heard in the field with the official reports from Saigon. 25/ Photographs of the crashed US helicopters, their dead and wounded crew members, and several wounded advisors drove that point home. Among other results, the battle and the follow-on charges and counter charges had an impact on the widening "credibility gap."

Recently General Harkins wrote that "We had a young ambitious and excitable advisor there who tried to take over command rather than advise. He got to the press and berated the SVN troops. This caused major headlines and major headaches for all concerned. But Ap Bac was not the beginning of the hostile press ... " 26/ (Harkins calls the battle and the resulting furor as his "Aping Back.")

Over five years later ComUSMACV reported,

> Since the introduction of American helicopters to provide added mobility to the ARVN, Viet Cong units had generally refused to stand and fight when South Vietnamese forces were airlifted into close proximity. But in January, at Ap Bac in the Delta, a Viet Cong force engaged a superior ARVN force attempting to surround it by using heliborne assault tactics in conjunction with conventional ground movement. Five American helicopters were destroyed and nine damaged. The VC inflicted heavy casualties and later withdrew. The ARVN forces did not close the trap they had set and failed to take aggressive advantage of their superiority. The results of this battle increased the Viet Cong's confidence in their ability to fight successfully against government forces with superior equipment. 27/

5. Diem, Nhu, and JFK Murdered

After Ap Bac, the fighting escalated but also continued to ebb and flow according to seasonal patterns and the opposing campaign plans.

RVNAF, on the whole, was not yet beaten or demoralized, and won a fair share of the fights. US aid and advice continued to pour forth and perhaps reached the saturation point.

As hastily and poorly administered as it was, the Strategic Hamlet Program began to hurt the enemy by denying him resources - food, money, intelligence, and recruits - and restricting his freedom of movement. Concentrating on the weaker, more exposed hamlets first, the PLAF began a major counter offensive.

At least publicly, optimism still ruled in Washington:

> The South Vietnamese armed forces have now attained the experience, training and necessary equipment required for victory ... Victory is in sight.
> - General Paul D. Harkins, March 5, 1963

> The war is turning an important corner ... government forces clearly have the initiative in most areas of the country. 28/
> - Secretary of State Dean Rusk, March 9, 1963

A rather small but politically astute band of militant Buddhists began to flex their muscles. They claimed - overall unfairly - that GVN was dominated by a Catholic minority which discriminated against and even persecuted their "majority." GVN's inept handling of the crisis which followed the "flag riots" in Hue reinforced and publicized Tich Tri Quang's campaign against Diem and Nhu. 29/ The "burning bonzes" and pagoda raids presented the US news media with a ready-made best seller, which they fully exploited. The impact in the US was tremendous and key figures in the administration decided that Nhu and Diem had to go. 30/ The November 1963 coup which overthrew the government and ended with the murder of the brothers was probably the single most deleterious event in the conflict until 1968. The ensuing instability in GVN and RVNAF played a major part in frustrating or defeating virtually every program - political, psychological, economic, and military - for the next three years. (The causes and effects of the coup are analyzed in Volumes III and V of this study).

Later in November, President Kennedy was assassinated. The short-term impact on US policy and programs in Southeast Asia was minimal since Lyndon Johnson quickly announced his intention to follow the same policies, and keep on board the key governmental assistants. The longer term effect is impossible to determine, and so must remain in the fuzzy realm of conjecture.

6. Taylor and Westmoreland Take Charge

a. The New Team

In January 1964, LTG William Childs Westmoreland was assigned as Deputy COMUSMACV, and in June was promoted and relieved General Harkins as the commander. Then in July, the again retired, Maxwell Davenport Taylor was appointed as the US Ambassador to RVN with the experienced and able diplomat U. Alexis Johnson as his deputy. The three of them comprised a close and harmonious team of leaders.

President Johnson had given Taylor a very broad mandate which could have cut CINCPAC out of the chain of command; much to the latter's relief, the new Ambassador chose to interpret his charter (below) liberally.

> As you take charge of the American effort in South Vietnam I want you to have this formal expression not only of my confidence, but of my desire that you have and exercise full responsibility for the effort of the United States Government in South Vietnam. In general terms this authority is parallel to that set forth in President Kennedy's letter of May 29, 1961, to all American Ambassadors; specifically, I wish it clearly understood that this overall responsibility includes the whole military effort in South Vietnam and authorizes the degree of command and control that you consider appropriate.
>
> I recognize that in the conduct of the day-to-day business of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam you wish to work out arrangements which do not burden you or impede the exercise of your overall direction.

> At your convenience I should be glad to know of the arrangements which you propose for meeting the terms of this instruction so that appropriate supporting action can be taken in the Defense Department and elsewhere as necessary.
>
> This letter rescinds all conflicting instructions to U.S. Officers in Vietnam.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Lyndon B. Johnson 31/

Taylor, true to his military background, delegated considerable authority to Westmoreland. The previous Ambassador, John Cabot Lodge, disliked administration and ran a rather loose country team which resulted in uncoordinated programs. 32/ Taylor immediately established a Mission Council which met once a week and was an excellent vehicle for informing and coordinating the various US agencies in RVN. He also initiated a much needed Southeast Asia Council of the US regional ambassadors, but later admitted that not much had come of it. 33/ Professional diplomats prefer to rule their own roosts and to deal directly with the State Department - a proclivity which impeded a coordinated US strategy for Indochina.

b. The Agency

Another important member of the team was John Richardson, who headed the CIA station in RVN. William E. Colby, who had been reassigned to Washington from Saigon in 1962, was overwatching the CIA activities in Southeast Asia. He wrote:

> In Vietnam, the station worked hard to improve intelligence on the enemy in the countryside, giving priority to the Viet Cong political apparatus rather than the Communist military units, which the American and Vietnamese army commands concentrated on. We coined the word infrastructure to describe the secret Communist political network in South Vietnam and its "political order of battle" - the provincial committees and subcommittees, the organizers and activists and the local guerrilla and terrorist squads who acted as the "enforcers" of the Communist authority in the local committees, executing village chiefs, conscripting young men for training and assignment to main force units, mining roads, and dropping grenades in the

> morning markets to demonstrate their power and inability of the government to protect the people. With this phrase to identify its target, the station began to work to get the various American and Vietnamese intelligence agencies, civilian and military, to cooperate and exchange information about this "command and control structure" of the people's war enemy. CIA sponsored and built a national interrogation center in Saigon under the auspices of the Vietnamese Central Intelligence Organization to conduct proper and professional interrogations of Communist captives and defectors, and trained Vietnamese in the right techniques to use in it. 34/

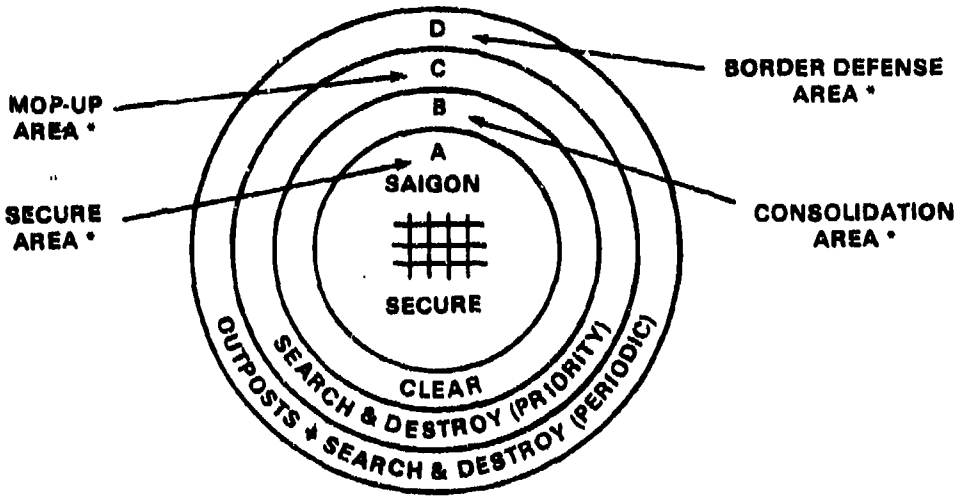
The US military intelligence effort was still heavily oriented on main force order of battle data, at least up through mid 1967; 35/ the VCI continued to grow in size and influence.

7. HOP TAC (Cooperation) 36/

a. The Scheme

Largely because of the political instability and ineptness in Saigon, the enemy made vast political and military gains. There was serious concern for the security of the capital and the surrounding provinces. As early as July 1960 Bernard Fall pointed out to a class at the Military Assistance Institute how the enemy was beginning to "encircle" Saigon, similar to Mao's concept of the countryside surrounding and choking the cities. The US Embassy and MACV agreed on a coordinated political-military plan to spread pacification efforts radially from Saigon; General Westmoreland received USG approval for Hop Tac at the Honolulu conference in June 1964.

The scheme was launched in September under a combined US/GVN coordinating group. The concept was designed around varying types of operations and activities in four concentric circles radiating from Saigon-Cholon. These operations were called search and destroy, clearing operations, and security operations. (See Figure 2-3). The Vietnamese called the concept the spreading "oil slick", as did the French before them. It



SEQUENCE	TYPES OF OPERATIONS	FORCES EMPLOYED
1.	SEARCH & DESTROY: FIND, FIX, FIGHT, & DESTROY (OR NEUTRALIZE), ENEMY FORCES, BASES & SUPPLIES	REGULAR FORCES, PLUS SPECIAL FORCES, & BORDER DEFENSE UNITS (IN RING D)
2.	CLEARING OPERATIONS: DRIVE OUT ENEMY MAIN FORCES & START PACIFICATION (LOCAL GUERRILLAS & VCI REMAIN)	REGIONAL FORCES (KEY) PLUS POPULAR & SELF DEFENSE FORCES & NAT'L POLICE; REGULAR FORCES (IF REQUIRED)
3.	SECURING OPERATIONS: PROTECT PACIFICATION TEAMS, AND ATTACK & ELIMINATE LOCAL GUERRILLAS & VCI	NATIONAL POLICE, POPULAR & SELF DEFENSE FORCES

NOTE: CONCEPT WAS TO GRADUALLY EXPAND THE SECURE AREA FROM THE CENTER OUTWARD (OIL SLICK)

*GVN/RVNAF TERMINOLOGY

4541/78W

SOURCES: Sharp and Westmoreland, Report on the War in Vietnam, and CMH (GRC) Monograph, Strategy and Tactics

Figure 2-3. The Hoc Tap Concept - 1964

was central to their "Victory Plan" which contained four area security classifications: secure, consolidation, mop-up, and border defense.

b. The Results

The scheme, designed as a prototype, did improve the security in Saigon, but ultimately failed due to:

- Political instability
- Lack of civil-military coordination
- Lack of trained cadres
- Inadequate force ratios
- Generally poor performance by RVNAF (too static and defensive)

Westmoreland had persuaded the JGS to move their 25th Division from the highlands to Hau Nghia Province, between Saigon and a nearby Cambodian sanctuary. The deployment backfired because many of the troops deserted to rejoin their families and the rest were unhappy and generally ineffective. 37/ (See Chapter 5, Vol. V for further details).

8. Other Major Military Events In 1964

a. In the Wake of Diem

Soon after the overthrow of Diem and Nhu, the new regime made a significant decision:

> The Strategic Hamlet program of the First Republic, though severely criticized, was regarded by succeeding leaders of the South as the basic strategy to counter the North's plan to take over South Vietnam. Modifications in the techniques of execution were required, however, to correct weaknesses and to profit by the experiences of the First Republic. The Plan for Victory (Chien Thang) made official in March 1964, required some modifications, the first of which was renaming Strategic Hamlets; they became New Life hamlets. 38/

Regardless of the attempted reforms or the new name, the enemy continued to dismantle the hamlets in rapid order.

General Nguyen Khanh overthrew "Big" Minh and soon replaced most corps and division commanders and many province and district chiefs with men loyal to him -- another big step in exacerbating political and military instability.

The CIDG, earlier transferred from CIA to MAAG control, organized mobile strike forces and border defense units, thus further leading them away from the original concept of a home defense militia (there also was a touchy Montagnard, or FULRO, uprising that year). For better or for worse, the US MAAG was dissolved, and the people and functions were absorbed in MACV. 39/

The Gulf of Tonkin incident took place and was followed by the one time US retaliatory air strikes and then by the Congressional Resolution. (A blank check for the President?). That was the first direct engagement between US and DRV forces.

b. The Enemy Modernizes

The enemy started to modernize and standardize his arms by acquiring splendid AK-47 assault rifles, light machine guns, 82mm mortars, 57mm and 75mm recoiless rifles, and the very effective RPG-2 (B-40) rocket launchers. RVNAF was now beginning to be outgunned as well as outnumbered in a battalion vs. battalion fight. 40/

The PLAF (VC) organized their first division, the 9th. The major elements were the 271st and 272d regiments which had been organized in War Zones C & D in 1963. The division then marched through the jungles north of Saigon to Xuan (or Xuyen) Moc on the coast to receive and train with a new family of weapons. 41/ (See Map 2-1). Individual North Vietnamese were tentatively identified serving as cadre in PLAF units. 42/ (The source of reinfiltrated Southern ex-Viet Minh had dried up).

A number of large battles were fought in the delta and along the border and coast, generally in areas where the Viet Minh had been strong; RVNAF "won" less than half. 43/

c. Ominous Developments

Pacification was crashing to a halt, as were efforts at small unit patrolling. General Westmoreland wrote that:

> Because of growing enemy strength in units of battalion size or larger, ARVN units often had to abandon their pacification assignments, their relatively static defense of the population, in order to oppose the big units. Ignore the big units and you courted disaster. Failure to go after them in at least comparable strength invited defeat.
>
> That was what happened in the mid-coastal province of Binh Dinh (which, ironically, means "pacification") where the ARVN incurred a serious defeat for which I bear a measure of personal responsibility. At my urging, ARVN leaders broke down their forces into small units, parceling them out to district chiefs to provide protection throughout the province and to patrol extensively in hope of inhibiting VC movement. The tactic worked fine for a while, but in November 1964 two main-force VC regiments came out of the hills and opened a general offensive.
>
> One by one the big VC units defeated the small ARVN and militia detachments. Lacking an adequate reserve, ARVN leaders were powerless to strike back. To help salvage the situation, I gained approval to bring in several U.S. Army Special Forces detachments on temporary duty from Okinawa to retrain the militia and bolster morale. The ARVN units had to be rebuilt and put through a lengthy training program. A long time would pass before the damage in Binh Dinh province could be rectified. It was a lesson to be long remembered, one that I was often to recall in later months as many among my colleagues and in the American press agitated for paying less attention to the enemy's big units in order to assign more troops to the process of pacification. 44/

In October the enemy staged a most successful mortar attack on Bien Hoa airbase and destroyed and damaged a large number of aircraft, including a heavy proportion of the B-57's in RVN. Ambassador Taylor's strong recommendation for a retaliatory air strike against the DRV was rejected on the eve of a US election. 45/

Yet more ominous developments! (Map 2-1). On 28 December the new 9th PLAF Division moved out of its jungle training area and seized the Catholic village of Binh Gia, only 40 miles east of Saigon. In an unprecedented move, they held their ground for four days, and ambushed and virtually destroyed relieving forces, which included the 4th Marine and 33d

Ranger Bn's plus mechanized and armored forces. 46/ A large number of US helicopters were shot down. It was Ap Bac on a much grander scale.

By the end of the year three regular PAVN regiments (32d, 95th, and 101st) were in, or on their way to, the Central Highlands, -- another first! 47/

9. Implications

On balance, counterinsurgency was a legitimate offspring of Flexible Response. The problem lay elsewhere. Knowing what to do was relatively simple compared with discovering how to get it done in that complex and confusing environment. It was obvious that the Lao Dong Party had decided that the political and military situation was heavily in their favor, and that they intended to go for the kill (Phase III - General counteroffensive) as rapidly as possible. PAVN, with PLAF support, was getting into a position from which they could cut RVN in half.

Counterinsurgency had failed. (It would get a second chance under a new name years later). The NLF and the PLAF were more confident and stronger than ever, while the GVN and RVNAF were weakened and generally dispirited. Most elite units such as airborne, Marines, Rangers were in better shape and spirit than were the rest of the units, but even they were weakened. Gen. Westmoreland aptly titled 1964 as "the Year of Crisis".

D. ISSUE #2 (WHY COUNTERINSURGENCY FAILED)

At the turn of the year some US officials still were cautiously optimistic - at least publicly. For example:

> I expect 1965 to be a better year for United States interests in South Vietnam.
> - General Maxwell D. Taylor, January 2, 1965
>
> But
>
> Pessimistic reports continued to come to me from my advisers and from the field. Early in January 1965 Taylor sent in a report concluding that "we are presently on a losing track and must risk a change .... To

> take no positive action now is to accept defeat in the fairly near future." That was the view of every responsible military adviser in Vietnam and in Washington. Painfully and reluctantly, my civilian advisers were driven to the same conclusion by the hard facts. 48/

Counterinsurgency may not have been officially dead at the end of 1964, but it was certainly failing fast. The seeds for failure were planted in the earlier period (1954-1960), as examined in chapter 1. During the four years covered in this chapter those initial US and GVN shortcomings and failures were compounded as the enemy gained political and military strength and momentum.

1. RVN Shortcomings (See Chapter 7, Constraints, Vol. II)

The overthrow of the Diem government must head this list. Despite its many weaknesses, it had legitimacy and a political base unavailable to the "revolving door" governments which followed for several years. Other major shortcomings were these:

- Stability and continuity - prime requisites for successful counterinsurgency - were non-existent.
- Good civil and military leadership was patently scarce, spread too thin, and too often changed.
- There was no central cause or theme - except anticommunism - to rally and motivate the people and the soldiers; the Viet Minh and then the NLF had preempted the nationalism and anticolonialism issues.
- There was lack of unity and coordination of effort in and between GVN and RVNAF. (The US had the same problem)
- GVN had no viable strategies of its own. Its major initiative - Strategic Hamlets - failed in execution by trying to do too much, too fast and that poorly. Both GVN and RVNAF became increasingly dependent on US concepts, ways, and means.
- RVN was placed on the strategic and usually the tactical defensive, politically and militarily; again, the Strategic Hamlet Program was an exception.

- A long coast and extensive jungled border placed RVN in an unfavorable geo-strategic position, particularly in view of its limited and vulnerable communications and logistics infrastructure.
- Intelligence agencies were many, weak and more competitive than cooperative. No insurgency can be comprehended properly, let alone defeated, without good and timely intelligence directed at the right targets.
- RVNAF was improperly prepared to cope with elusive guerrillas, and especially the critical VCI, and later was generally inadequate against the Main Force units.
- The police were not strong enough or good enough to perform their essential counterinsurgency role.
- The RVN ended up with too many semi-private "armies" which spread scarce talent and other resources too thinly. (See Figure 2-4).

2. US Failures

Once again one must point to the lack of understanding of the nature of the conflict and enemy. For too long key senior US officials believed that counterinsurgency consisted of better antiguerrilla operations, reinforced with some psychological warfare operations plus some civic actions.

> ... few Americans understood the true nature of a war of this type - Guerrilla Warfare, Partisan Warfare, a People's War, a War of National Liberation, Revolutionary War or whatever name one uses to describe it. Such wars are basically and predominantly political in nature, and not military undertakings. Military power is important in dealing with an insurgency, but its usefulness is limited. The point is that all military actions are subordinate to and supportive of the political interests and aims, not vice versa.
> - General Bruce Palmer 49/

Maxwell Taylor recently admitted that it took him a long time to understand what President Kennedy really meant about counterinsurgency, and that he, in turn, had trouble getting the concept across to the other US military chiefs. 50/

Regular RVNAF	Paramilitary
Army Corps, Divisions* and Regiments	Civil Guard (later RF)
Armored/mechanized units	Self Defense Corps (later PF)
Artillery units	
Airborne Brigade (later Division)	(later, Border Rangers)
Ranger Battalions	Police Field Forces
Air Force (includes helicopters)	
Navy (coastal and river)	Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG)
Marine Brigade (later Division)	
Special Forces	Provincial Counter-Terror Teams (later PRU)
Engineers	Father Hoa's "Sea Swallows," etc.
Support and Service units	People's Self Defense Force (PSDF) (in 1968)

* Also ad hoc special units such as the elite Hac Bao Company (small battalion) of the 1st ARVN Division.

SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

Figure 2-4. The Many "Armies" of the RVN in 1964

> Although the U.S. Army had anticipated guerrilla warfare and had organized a special warfare center at Fort Bragg to concentrate on studying and training for counterinsurgency warfare, the Army failed to pay sufficient attention to a combination of guerrillas, local forces, and invading regular troops. Similarly, the United States Government as a whole failed to anticipate the critical importance of economic and political factors. As events developed in South Vietnam, it took considerably more than Green Berets to deal with these.
>
> - General Westmoreland 51/

The US sorely lacked unity of effort in Saigon and Washington. In mid 1964 Ambassador Taylor's broad charter and his Mission Council reduced but did not eliminate the interagency competition.

There were too many, and often unrealistic, US programs which changed too often; GVN and RVNAF were overwhelmed.

> This may be the place to comment on a serious problem which I have not mentioned up to now -- the danger represented by the excessive good will of our friends in Washington and their ever burgeoning crop of new ideas. With a critically sick government on our hands in Saigon which had not responded to previous treatment, there were always panacea peddlers in Washington who wanted to try some new prescription on the grounds that the patient was in extremis anyway, and a new pill might do some good. The result was that the feeble government was in constant danger of being overfed, overphysicked, or constipated by the excessive zeal of his American physicians. 52/

Americans in general, and President Johnson in particular, were impatient for positive results:

- The US election cycle exerted pressure, as did the desires for the "Great Society." That impatience confused and frustrated GVN, and abetted the enemy's protracted war strategy. 53/
- Too much was expected of GVN and RVNAF by the USG, the press, and the public; they were judged by our experience and standards. 54/

- The US approach was too militarily oriented; e.g., concentration on main force units vice VCI. Thus the US repeated and even magnified many of the French errors.
- Our initial intelligence efforts were inadequate, fragmented and poorly coordinated with those of GVN and RVNAF. 55/

3. The Enemy (See Vol. I).

The enemy (DRV/PAVN and NLF/PLAF) deserve at least as much credit for the failure of the counterinsurgency effort as do the US and RVN. The continuity, overall cohesion and perseverance of their leaders, and the general correctness of their tested and consistent strategy made a striking contrast with those of their opponents:

- Their political-military organization and doctrine had been shaped and refined during their protracted conflict with the French. Bernard Fall often said that the Viet Minh had "out administered" the French, and that the NLF had done the same to the GVN. 56/
- They seized, early, the political - military initiative and seldom relinquished it; GVN and RVNAF were forced to react with hasty and often inappropriate measures.
- Their form of "People's War" was more appropriate to the total environment in Indochina than was the US/GVN strategy. (Jeffrey Race wrote a lucid and well-researched account of how the NLF seized de facto control of Long An Province by 1965). 57/
- While their strategy was consistent, their tactics and techniques were flexible; their method of "going back to school" produced timely and generally effective counters to most US technological and materiel innovations.

E. INSIGHTS

- Inadequate and belated understanding of our allies and the enemy, and the complex nature of the conflict when combined with our national pride, naivete, and impatience precluded the US from

developing and implementing a timely, effective, and coordinated counterinsurgency effort.

- USG agencies, in Washington and Saigon, were not organized and coordinated properly to plan and control the massive, sensitive and interwoven programs demanded by the situation in Vietnam.
- The tacit US support of the coup against Diem resulted in such political and military instability that it is doubtful if any counterinsurgency plan would have succeeded during the period.
- Even when the USG, to include the military, decided what had to be done it was almost impossible to get anything accomplished efficiently and in time by the rotating leaders of GVN and RVNAF. 58/
- Generally US, and thus RVN, strategies and tactics were inferior to those of the enemy; e.g., focusing the bulk of the early efforts and resources against the enemy's replaceable regional and main forces permitted the more critical political-military infrastructure to expand rapidly in power and influence.
- The traditional but artificial separation of political and military matters made it difficult for US leaders to comprehend and counter a sophisticated "People's War."
- Despite - and partially because of - US aid and advice, the security forces of RVN were poorly prepared to cope with the insurgency, and in late 1964 were unable to stand up to the better armed and more realistically trained Main Force units.

F. LESSONS

It is doubtful if the US has yet learned how to defeat - in a reasonable time and at an acceptable cost - a well organized and led "People's War"; the institutional knowledge and experience gained in Indochina has been discarded or degraded as have been the interest and incentives. Attempts to defeat a true Revolutionary (or People's) war expose a number of serious internal/external "Contradictions" inherent in a liberal western

democracy, and raise the costs (political, psychological, and economic) to the point where the means employed are well out of proportion to the ends orginally sought. External aid and advice, especially when based on misconceptions, cannot provide a client state with the requisite leadership, determination and cohesion to defeat a pervasive and sophisticated insurgency.

CHAPTER 2 ENDNOTES

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22. LTC Andrew P. O'Meara, USA memo to Col. Thomas Ware, USA, February 27, 1978, p. 2.

23. General Vien, Leadership, pp. 54 f.

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26. General Paul Harkins letter to The BDM Corporation, August 29, 1979.

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28. Pettit, The Experts, p. 133.

29. A series of incidents occurred in May 1963 between militant Buddhists and the GVN. The latter had permitted Catholics to fly their flags during a celebration but later prohibited the Buddhists from so doing. Diem declared martial law on August 20, accompanied by forcible entry into pagodas and mass arrests of Buddhist leaders. See "The Buddhist Crisis," Gravel Edition, The Pentagon Papers, Volume II (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), pp. 183-184.

30. The Overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem, May-November 1963: Renewed Coup Plotting. Gravel Pentagon Papers Volume II, pp. 232-270. Also see Chapter 3, Volume III of this study, pp. 3-27 to 3-32 and Appendix A, pp. A-37 to A-40.

31. Admiral U.S.G. Sharp, Strategy for Defeat, Vietnam in Retrospect (San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1978), p. 37.

32. William C. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 68 f.

33. BDM Corporation interview of General Taylor, July 11, 1979.

34. William Colby, Honorable Men (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1978), pp. 229 f.

35. Ibid., p. 267.

36. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, pp. 82-85.

37. Sharp-Westmoreland Report, pp. 89-91; BDM interview of General William DePuy, September 24, 1978; and Col. Hoang Ngoc Lung, ARVN, Strategy and Tactics (McLean, Va.: General Research Corporation, July 10, 1978), pp. 34-36.

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58. Taylor, Swords and Plowshares, p. 311.

CHAPTER 3

AMERICA TAKES CHARGE (1965-1968)

> Do not put a premium on killing ... Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy ...
>
> Sun Tsu 1/

> Now I do not see any end of the war in sight. It's going to be a question of putting maximum pressure on the enemy anywhere and everywhere we can. We will have to grind him down. In effect, we are fighting a war of attrition, and the only alternative is a war of annihilation, which I think we have ruled out as a matter of policy.
>
> General Westmoreland, April, 1967 2/

A. INTRODUCTION

This period of the war provided the clearest opportunity to test the relative strengths and weaknesses of two contrasting "ways of war" - the robust and massive Western, versus the modernized but still more subtle Eastern. The strategies, tactics, means, and (above all) will to persevere of the Americans were "one on one" with those of the Vietnamese Communists. The support provided by external communist nations was an important factor but certainly not the most crucial one. As discussed previously in Volume II, the GVN/RVNAF had little opportunity to develop and implement strategies of their own; enmeshed in their own heritage, the French legacy, and the American pervasiveness, they naturally bent with the prevailing wind.

The focus of this chapter is on the opposing strategies - a brief genesis, a summary of how they unfolded, the significant results, plus a comparison of the French and US approaches versus those of the Viet Minh and the DRV/NLF. The analysis will be concentrated on the ground war; air, naval, and unconventional operations are covered in separate chapters of this volume.

It is generally recognized by military and many civilian strategists that the medium in which they must plan and operate consists of time and

space. Sometimes neglected, however, is the third dimension - the psyche (soul and mind). It is most slighted by those who possess abundant resources - men, material, technology, and finances. All three elements of the strategic medium played a major part in the final outcome of the conflict, but quite likely the unquantifiable human factor was decisive.

Issues

- Given the political and geographic constraints and the "American Way of War", was the US strategy of attrition the best available? What were the results? Were there any viable alternatives?
- What was the impact of the Americanization of the war on the RVN and the conflict?
- What were the military results of the Tet Offensive and the Battle for Khe Sanh?
- Why and how was the enemy able to score political and psychological gains out of attrition and military defeats while the opposite was generally true for the US and the GVN?

B. THE OPPOSING STRATEGIES: EAST VERSUS WEST

1. Contrasting Cultures (Chess vs. Wei-Ch'i)

In a quite broad and general sense only, one can view the "Western and Eastern" approaches to strategy and tactics by comparing the major philosophical and physical differences of chess and the game of Wei-Ch'i. Sun Tzu, Mao and others often made reference to Wei-Ch'i in explaining principles.

Obviously no board game can come close to representing war (or politics); absent are the extraordinary demands placed on leadership, the influence of the human will and leadership, and the often indeterminable effects of weather, terrain, logistics, fatigue, shock, and fear. Nevertheless, in days gone by, military men were trained in the art and strategy on the respective game boards. Perhaps, in the West, military leaders and their civilian chiefs have tilted too far towards the management and scientific end of the scale. Appendix 1 presents a brief comparison of the two games in relation to the war in Vietnam.

2. Genesis (A Brief Review)

Vietnamese history, legendary and written, is heavily laced with struggles against stronger invaders: first the Chinese and Mongols, later the French, and finally the US. In between those sets of wars, the Vietnamese expanded and colonized to the south, first conquering the Kingdom of Champa in Central Vietnam (Annam) and later the Khmers in the Mekong Delta region (Cochin China).3/ (Also see Volumes I and II of this study).

In 1975, after forcefully absorbing RVN into the newly named Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) they expanded their influence within Laos and invaded Cambodia. As a result they once again had to fight against a brief but bloody mini-invasion from their centuries-old nemesis - and 30-year ally - China. Their next target may be Thailand.

The Vietnamese historical approach to war inevitably was heavily influenced by that of their long-term occupiers, and thus by the teachings of Sun Tzu. Ho Chi Minh also was impressed with and adopted much of the doctrines and many of the methods spelled out by Marx and Lenin, who had von Clausewitz as a military model. Very current and relevant was Mao Tse Tung's version of "People's War", which was based primarily on the peasants and countryside instead of the proletariat and cities.

To Vietnamese communists, words and ideas were as important as weapons - and in the fight against the US, perhaps more so. What they said, preached, and often believed, were based on the teachings of Hegel, Marx, and Mao and went well beyond ordinary propaganda. They were able arbitrarily to redefine the "moral battlefield."

> Revolutionary War not only updates the long effective rule of divide-and-conquer, it also employs the judo principle and turns the weight of an enemy's philosophic system against himself. It works best, therefore, against a democracy of decent people (and least against barbarians or fanatics).
>
> It agrees victory will go to the just because justice must triumph. But it does not claim that the enemy is unjust with a brush that tars all in the enemy camp. Rather, the enemy is an abstraction, the unjust and misled leadership, perhaps a few selected other individuals.

> ... the DRV/NLF stands not for victory but for justice. The struggle then becomes a test of virtue.
> Douglas Pike 4/

That approach was the basis for building the regional and international psychological arm of their doctrine and strategy. Even knowing that tactic, the USG and the GVN had extreme difficulty - and scant success - in countering it both at home and abroad. We were out maneuvered polemically and thrust on the moral defensive.

What influence did the psychological strategy have on our unilateral bombing halts? How many MIGs and SAMs was it worth? For some examples of effective "reverse speak" see Figure 3-1.

Having observed and resisted French ways and means for decades, Vietnamese nationalists, including Ho Chi Minh and principal military strategist Vo Nguyen Giap, developed a concept to defeat them. It was heavily dependent on a sound analysis of the opposing strengths and weaknesses - political, psychological and military. They adopted Mao's dictum that "power grows out of the barrel of a gun" and that "the party controls the gun." They also employed and refined Mao's practice of "self criticism" and collective post mortems in order to derive and exploit "lessons learned."

The Viet Minh's (and later the DRV's/NLF's) grand strategy was based on the principle of "struggle" (dau tranh) which had two arms - military and political. "Every sub-strategy, if you will, branched off from this whole; every element of strategic thinking and planning had to relate to the basic doctrine which never faltered." (See Figure 3-2)5/

In 1949 Mao's forces reached the northern borders of Indochina. That fact permitted the organization, equipping, and training of large Viet Minh units to include infantry and heavy divisions. It also spread Chinese Communist doctrine wider and deeper among the Vietnamese.

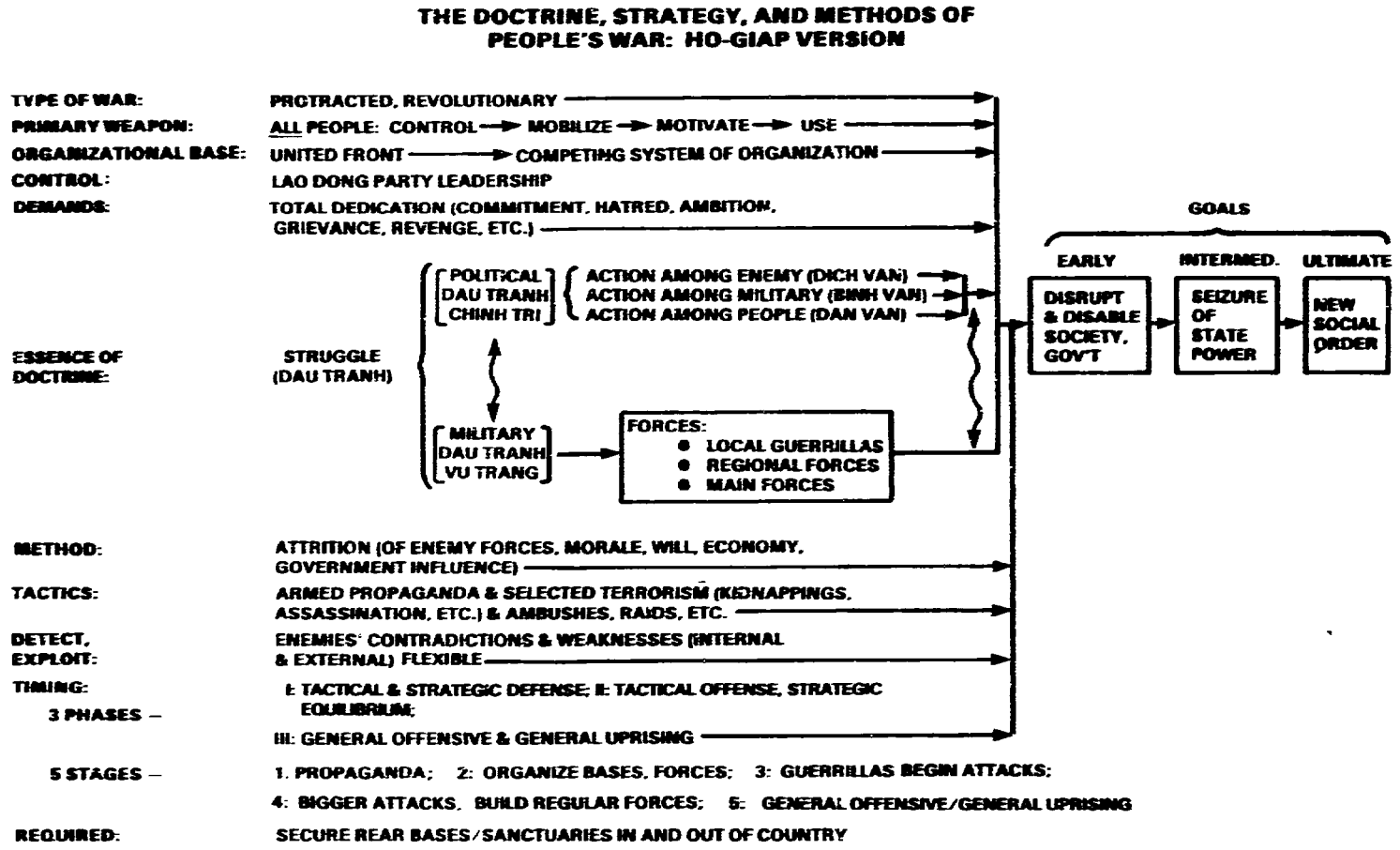
Nevertheless, the Viet Minh were not mere copycats. Besides realistically modifying "People's War" to fit their own heritage and environment, Ho and Giap employed several major innovations: the "fortified hamlet" based on Vietnam history, and the "General Uprising" as a supplement to Mao's "General Offensive." Although they based their initial

	OWN CAMP	ENEMY CAMP:
CAUSE	JUST	UNJUST
GOAL	DEFEND/REUNITE	ATTACK/DIVIDE
OBJECTIVE	FREEDOM, PEACE	SUBJUGATION, WAR, DESTRUCTION
THINKING	OBJECTIVE	SUBJECTIVE
BASES	NATIONALISM, ANTI-COLONIALISM, LIBERATION	US IMPERIALISM; AND ITS GVN PUPPETS NEOCOLONIAL OPPRESSION, SUBJUGATION
LEADERS	PATRIOTS	US-TYRANTS, GVN-TRAITORS
SIZE	SMALL ("GRASSHOPPERS")	LARGE ("ELEPHANTS")
COURAGE	BRAVE	COWARDLY
PEOPLE	KIND	CRUEL
	MORAL	IMMORAL
	PATIENT	IMPATIENT
FRIENDS	ALL PEACE-LOVING PEOPLES (INCL. THOSE IN RVN, US)	FEW, GREEDY, POWER-MAD
ENEMIES	US AND GVN/RVNAF LEADERS	"THE PEOPLE"; PEASANTS; PROLETARIATE, ETC.
RESULT	INEVITABLE VICTORY	INEVITABLE DEFEAT

*BASED ON HEGEL, MARX, AND MAO, AND ESSENTIAL TO THE INTEGRATED POLITICAL-MILITARY "STRUGGLE."

SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

Figure 3-1. DRV/NLF Doctrinaire Definitions*: Key Terms of Analysis and Evaluation



SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

Figure 3-2. The Doctrine, Strategy, and Methods of People's War: Ho-Giap Version

centers of power in the countryside, they did not neglect organization and "struggle" in urban areas. Nor did they depend solely on "self-reliance" - much to Mao's disgust - but actively sought foreign aid of all sorts. They also refined the use of "fronts" to draw from the deep well of nationalism and anti-colonialism. Eight years of war against the physically stronger French Union produced a hard and experienced corps of political and military leaders who believed in themselves and in their methods.

Ho and Giap were compared with the legendary Vietnamese heroes who fought against long odds and defeated foreign armies: the Trung sisters against the Han Dynasty, Tran Hung Dao who defeated the Mongols, and Emperor Quang Trung, whose surprise attack preempted a Chinese invasion. The Vietnamese spirit of national survival is still glorified in the Trung sisters' final words: "Rather dead than living in shame."6/

After the split of Vietnam into two "temporary zones" at Geneva in 1954, the Lao Dong leadership was faced with a new situation. The Party was fully determined to reunite the country under its terms, but there were major obstacles in the way:

- Several trying years would be required to consolidate their control and strengthen the "rear base" in the northern zone.
- The anti-French and anti-Communist Ngo Dinh Diem who proclaimed the RVN independent in 1955 also declared that there would be no country-wide election in 1956.
- The French (co-signers of the Geneva accords) were rapidly losing influence in RVN and were being replaced by the much more powerful US.
- World opinion and support would demand at least the appearance of abiding by the terms agreed to in Geneva.

Their solution was ingenious and difficult for the US and GVN to counter:

- The staybehind political-military cadre of the Viet Minh formed the core of "patriotic resistance" to US "neo-colonialism" and to the "puppet" regime of Diem.

- The 90,000 or so Viet Minh "regroupees" were retrained and indoctrinated and then most were infiltrated back to their native South when and as required.
- Non-communist support - actual and pretended - for the "indigenous revolt" in the South was to be facilitated by the establishment of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in December 1960, with the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) as the control element. (The NLF was conceived and directed by the Central Committee of the Dang Lao Dong in Hanoi, of course.)
- The identity and role of the southern branch of the Lao Dong Party were further concealed under the camouflaged umbrella of the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) set up in January 1961.
- During the 1968 Tet offensive (second phase of the Winter-Spring offensive) the "alliance" (short title) was announced to portray broader support (again more pretended than actual) for the "struggle" and to facilitate the hoped and planned for "general uprising."
- In March 1968 countrywide "democratically elected" People's Liberation Councils were decreed, and in June 1969 it was announced that they had, at their "Congress", established the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) as the counterweight and alternative to the GVN.

3. The USA (The West)

a. Origins of American Military Policy

The American approach to war and strategy was shaped primarily by European influences - first the British, and then a touch of the French with just a dash of the American Indian; our protracted conflict with the latter, however, had little more than a transient influence on our strategic and tactical thinking.

Starting in the early 19th Century, our military leaders studied and debated the concepts of Clausewitz and Jomini who based much of their thinking on the Napoleonic campaigns. Our Civil War put a world spotlight on technology, mass production, railroads, the telegraph, and

iron-clad steamships. It also dramatically highlighted the value of hasty field fortifications against mass attacks. Grant chose to use his huge superiority in men and materiel in order to wear and tie down Lee's force thus permitting Sherman to win the war in Georgia; the Union paid a terrible price for that tactic of attrition, but it eventually worked. Ironically, students of war in Europe studied the campaigns of Jackson and Sherman while those in the US tended to concentrate on the big battles. Nevertheless, European generals soon turned World War I, especially on the Western Front, into one huge bloody battle of attrition, and they were our mentors; tacticians became logisticians, and the science of war achieved supremacy over the art form. As is too often the case, the losers learned more from their failures than did the nominal victors. (The US Army had not produced a strategic philosopher of the caliber of Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan.)

b. World War II

The initial German operations were near masterpieces of strategy and the principles of war in action: surprise, mass, economy of force, maneuver, flexibility, the objective, etc. For several years it appeared as if the Germans had rediscovered the optimum - and unbeatable - balance between the art and science of war. The series of quick, and relatively bloodless, successes were too heady for Hitler, so he accepted the challenge of war on two - later three - fronts. His magic failed in the depths of the Russian landmass, mud, snow, and manpower as well as in the sands of Africa. He reverted to what he had learned as a corporal in the trenches - hold everything at all cost. But Germany had neither the men nor the means to fight several wars of attrition concurrently.

After viewing with grave alarm the apparent omnipotence of the German blitzkrieg, the US ran hard to catch up. Luckily American industry precluded the need for subtle strategy. Ships, planes, tanks and guns by the tens of thousands gave us the capability of beating our enemies practically anywhere we wanted to fight them. Our few major setbacks, such as the Battles of Kasserine and the Bulge, were due as much to our inexperience, and later overconfidence, as they were to the enemy's surprise tactics. Superb tacticians, like Patton, were exceptions.

The war in the Pacific was quite different. In several important ways it provided a fertile field for intelligent and imaginative strategists to plow. The vastness and nature of the geography involved was a major factor as was the initial paucity of American forces. MacArthur early decided to bypass and isolate strong points while striking at weaknesses. (An amusing and revealing anecdote has it that after Germany surrendered, MacArthur wanted the US troops from Europe but not their generals!) The Navy and Marines learned a too costly lesson at Tarawa and also decided to do more feinting and bypassing. (The Pacific provided their biggest opportunity to demonstrate the merits of a maritime strategy.)

On balance, during that war we became even more wedded to the worship of science, technology, and mass production; those combined with a gift for building and moving things (logistics) became the core of our strategic concepts - the psychological and moral factors of war were condescendingly treated as poor and distant cousins. The inherent weaknesses in that imbalance were concealed under the aura of our seeming invincibility: we were number one, the undisputed champions.

The American penchant for keeping political and military affairs separated left the State Department in the shadows for most of the war. Except for sponsoring the UN, the US was outhustled by the Russians and the British concerning the post-war world. Armies were maintained to occupy Germany, Japan, and Korea. (Later, as leader of the "free world" the US reluctantly but forcefully entered the cold war.)

That war brought an end to separate and loosely coordinated Army and Navy strategies and commands. Joint and combined warfare were enshrined as facts of life. The establishment of a separate Air Force and the defacto recognition of the Marine Corps as a separate service doubled the competitors for roles, missions, and funds; intra-service "fights" further confused the building of national strategies and force structures.

c. The Nuclear Age

The explosions of the two atomic bombs over Japan changed war forever, or did they? The military struggled, and even fought each

other, for new doctrines, organizations, tactics, and hardware in order to retain a rationale for mere existence. But it was just too big a jump for the traditional military leadership to make. The resulting strategic void was filled by scientists and academicians, such as Herman Kahn, who took the lead in "thinking the unthinkable."

During and after World War II more and more use was made of electricity for communications, guidance, detection, display, deception, and so on. Then one had to counter the enemy's electronic war, and he then tried to counter that. Computers made their first big move to replace the stubby pencil and the map crayon (grease pencil). The uniformed strategist had to open his inner sanctum to the mufti-clad mathematician and scientist.

d. Back to China

At the end of World War II Chiang Kai-shek continued his battles against Mao. We knew of Chiang's faults and weaknesses, but we still found it difficult to comprehend why he did so poorly against Mao's outnumbered and underequipped "agrarian reformers."

Was there really a new model of political-military warfare being perfected over there or was it just so much oriental treachery and propaganda? Who "lost" China and why? What lessons did we learn from that revolution, and how was "People's War" treated in our military schools? Just who was Sun Tzu and what did he say?

e. Korea

We organized, equipped and trained the Republic of Korea (ROK) army as a compromise between a heavy constabulary and a light conventional force. The North Koreans easily brushed them aside. The fortuitous Soviet walkout from the UN Security Council permitted that war to be fought under the mantle of the UN and with troops from some of its members. The US initiative in organizing SEATO was one more regional response to our strong commitment to collective security.

After taking some heavy casualties initially for being understrength, underequipped, undertrained, but overconfident, the US units settled down to what they do best - smother the enemy with bombs, shells, and bullets: back to attrition.

The bold and brilliant landing at Inchon was made despite the fears and reservations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Too much success often breeds contempt for adverse advice, overconfidence, and eventually carelessness; and so it came to pass for General MacArthur. Undeterred by solid evidence that the Chinese were entering Korea in strength, his badly dispersed forces headed for the Yalu in violation of JCS instructions. The defeat which followed was one of the greatest that US forces ever suffered, and serious thought was given to either evacuation or the use of nuclear weapons--a true Hobson's choice.

The Chinese eventually ran out of supplies and steam, and General Matthew Ridgway settled the shaken US troops and dramatically turned them around. Once the peace talk started, however, it was again back to firepower and attrition; the "meat grinder" phase.

The problem then facing the USG was how to get out of a protracted, costly, limited war with "face" and minimum objectives achieved. The enemy opted for the "talk-fight" tactic and that always places a liberal democracy in a nutcracker. The US suffered more casualties after the talks started than before them, which led to two questions: Who was attriting whom? And aren't morale and will also subject to attrition?

f. Down in Indochina (See Chapter 1)

US aid, but little advice, was given to France starting in 1950 as a natural outcome of the worldwide containment policy. Eisenhower's decision not to intervene militarily to save the Dien Bien Phu garrison was heavily influenced by the non-support of major allies, especially Britain. General Ridgway's strong reservations and warnings also served as a major veto.

g. Managing a Huge Business

Following World War II, the US for the first time in history maintained large standing military forces in peacetime, and they were increasingly expensive. Hard-headed businessmen such as "Engine Charley" Wilson, were brought in to shake and tighten up the sprawling new Department of Defense (DOD).

In order to ensure tighter civilian control and management of the military, more political appointees were inserted in DOD, creating more of a buffer between the uniformed strategists and the commander-in-chief. The temptation to assume the role of "arm chair/ivory-tower strategists" was often accepted.

When Robert Strange McNamara took control of DOD in 1961, he relied heavily on a fairly new management "tool," Systems Analysis, to help him make decisions on "cost effectiveness," "weapons systems trade-o'fs," etc. He employed a refined planning and budgeting system to gain and maintain control over the services. The comptroller thus became a key "strategist." The military ran hard to catch up

h. Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis

Embarrassed and humiliated by the fiasco at the Bay of Pigs, many officials in the new administration blamed the JCS - at least partially unfairly. The prestige and influence of the military and their advice slipped another notch.

In 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the fear of a possible nuclear war was real and pervasive. The President, the Attorney General, and the Secretary of Defense became directly involved in making operational decisions. For both better and worse, another major precedent had been established. Civilian control over the military had been tightened and exercised to an excessive and perhaps irreversible degree.

i. A Change of Strategies

In the early days of the new administration, the US strategy was changed from Massive Retaliation to one called Flexible Response. Its chief proponent, retired Army General Maxwell D. Taylor, was called in as a senior advisor and troubleshooter.

As discussed in previous chapters, President Kennedy was determined to demonstrate US will and ability to defeat Khrushchev's "Wars of National Liberation" and Mao Tse Tung and Lin Piao's "People's Wars." Vietnam was chosen as the "laboratory" and counterinsurgency (COIN) as the instrument.

4. The Geo-Strategic Position in January, 1965 (See Map 3-1)

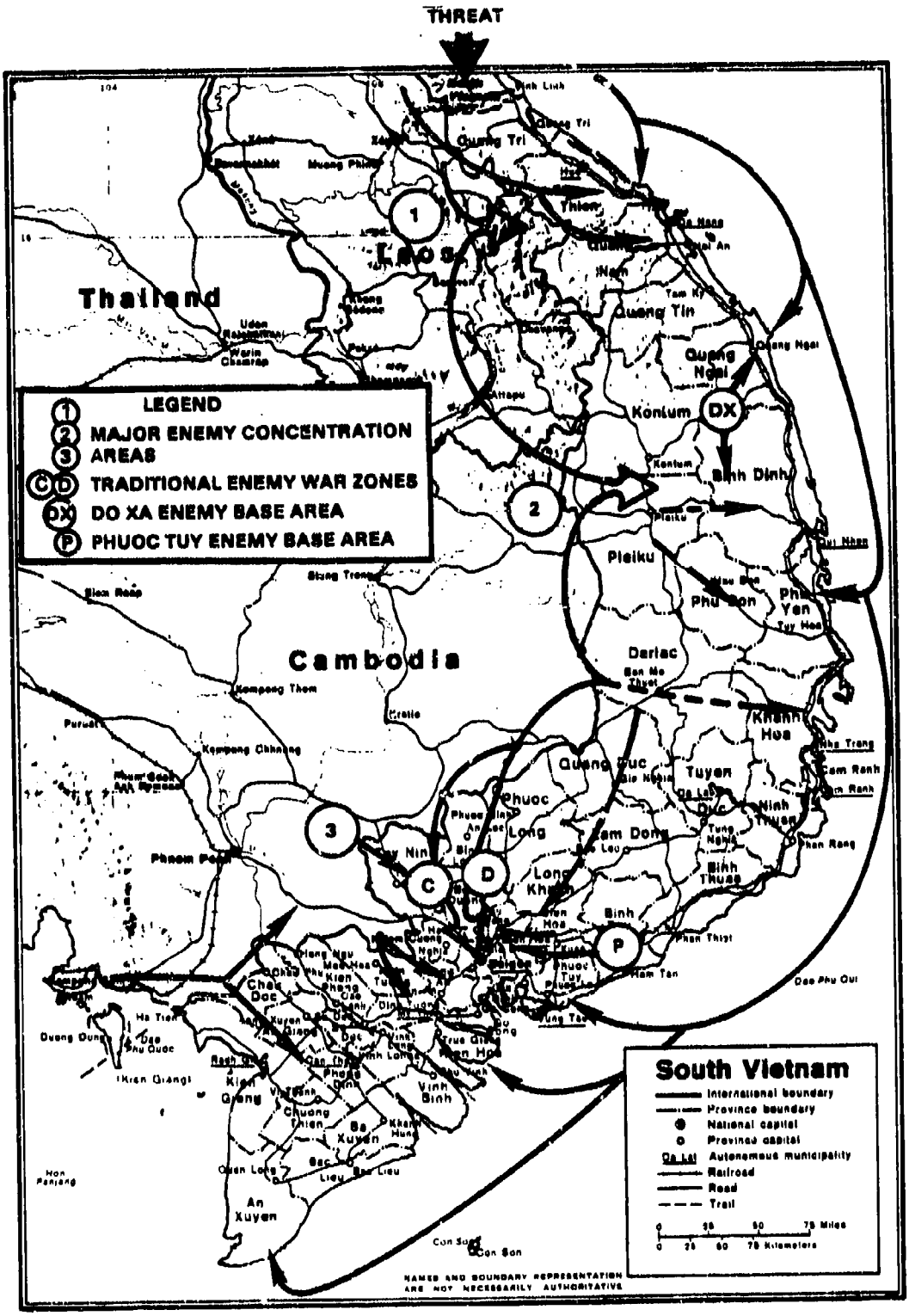
The Battle of Binh Gia, which commenced in 1964, lasted into the new year. The PLAF's new 9th Division, equipped with a new family of automatic weapons and employing large unit tactics, acquitted itself well. As mentioned in the previous chapter, that battle had also been the opening shot of Phase III of the "People's War" (General Offensive-General Uprising). Although no Dang Lao Dong timetable has been discovered yet, it is not unlikely that Party leaders hoped to defeat the RVN in 1965; nevertheless, they prudently prepared for a more protracted war. Then and now most knowledgeable US officials believed total victory was within their grasp at that time, if the US hadn't intervened with major ground, air, and naval forces.

The geo-strategic position of the RVN was relatively weak, based on its geography, the greater strength, experience, and cohesion of the DRV plus that of the NLF, its weak "neutral" neighbors (Laos and Cambodia), and the USG's desire to keep the conflict limited.

The overall military objectives of the enemy were: Saigon (the political heart and mind), the Delta (food and people), Hue (historical and psychological), and Da Nang (port and airfield). The key to their strategy was the Central Highlands where they would be in a position to cut the country in two and to march on Saigon.

The roughly 900 miles of mostly jungled borders made it extremely difficult to defend such a long and narrow country against a clever and determined enemy. Despite the VNN's junk fleet and patrol craft, the even longer coast line was open to infiltration of arms and ammunition by sea. (The PLAF had strong bases near the sea such as at Do Xa, Phuoc Tuy, Ca Mau and U-Minh).

The configuration of the terrain and the flow of the rivers made movement from west to east generally easier than from north to south. Along the coast, Route 1 and the railroad paralleled mountainous terrain, and Highway 14 (Ban Me Thuot-Pleiku-Kontum) was relatively open and vulnerable on both flanks.



Map 3-1. Three Enemy Centers of Gravity

5. The Dang Lao Dong Strategy

The Vietnamese Communists' long-term strategy for Phase III consisted of creating three main centers of gravity:7/ (See Map 3-1)

- In the north there was the constant threat of a direct attack across the DMZ, while flanking movements through the A-Shau and Elephant Valleys would threaten Hue and Da Nang.
- The continuing expansion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail system improved access to bases in and near the key Central Highlands and Plateaus of Darlac-Kontum. (The bisection of RVN would be facilitated by the cooperation of major PLAF forces near the coast).
- Bases in eastern Cambodia and in War Zones C and D created a near, potent, and continuing threat to the safety of Saigon itself.

Local, regional, and periodic main force attacks throughout RVN were intended to tie down the bulk of RVNAF on security duties. By alternating the threats from the three main centers of gravity, the enemy hoped to draw off and wear down the RVN's relatively small general reserve forces.

The strategic aim was constant while the tactics were flexible and designed to gain primarily political, but also psychological and military, ends.

The "General Uprising" would take place on Party orders when the military, political, and psychological situation was ripe for it; it would be aided and abetted by clandestine cells in the cities as well as within the GVN and RVNAF. A climactic and dramatic military victory was essential; there would be no more compromises or political settlements such as imposed in Geneva in 1954. Although negotiations were acceptable as a tactic, power would be gained through the gun barrel.8/

6. US Strategy

The original US strategy of helping the GVN and RVNAF stand on their own through aid and advice appeared to be failing fast in early 1965. On the average one RVNAF battalion and/or one District Headquarters was being destroyed each week.9/ In addition direct attacks were made on US advisors in their quarters: the Brink Hotel in Saigon on Christmas eve

1964, Camp Halloway in Pleiku on 7 February 1965, and in Qui Nhon city three days later. The US had to reasses its role and take decisive action or admit total defeat of and in RVN.

In March 1965, US Marine Corps elements landed in Vietnam to strengthen the defense of the Da Nang Air Base. Shortly thereafter the Army's 173d Airborne Brigade arrived in the Bien Hoa area. Three years later the US had well over a half million troops in RVN. How best to use them? (The decisions leading to the dispatch of US ground troops are covered in Vol. III).

In response to the VC attacks on Pleiku and Qui Nhon, relatively small and ineffective "tit for tat" air raids were conducted by US aircraft in the southern portion of the DRV; the "signal" was ignored by Hanoi. Shortly thereafter President Johnson authorized the beginning of "Rolling Thunder" the on-and-off again "program of measured and limited air action."10/ (The Air War is covered in Chapter 6)

Then-Ambassador Taylor saw three clear objectives for that bombing:11/

- To warn Hanoi that they would pay an increasingly heavy price for controlling and supporting the insurgency in RVN.
- To raise the morale of the South Vietnamese.
- To slow infiltration and make it more costly.

US strategic options for the war were shaped and constrained by several key considerations:12/

- Containment of the conflict to Indochina.
- Avoidance of USSR and/or PRC intervention and thus a major war.
- Collective security policies.
- The need to maintain US credibility as an opponent or as an ally.
- Other major commitments such as the support of Western Europe, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, etc. (Plus concern for Israel and Middle East oil).
- The carry-over "Munich" and "who lost China?" syndromes.
- The national pride about never having lost a war.

- Faith in our wealth, might, and pragmatic energy.
- The correctness and rightness of our global efforts to contain communist expansion.
- The fact that, by 1965, US prestige and resources were already deeply involved in Indochina.
- The desire for and demands of President Johnson's "great society."

The cumulative impact of those and other considerations limited the "real world" options open to civilian and military strategists. The end result was that US participation in the conflict (65'-68') would be:

- Of minimum possible provocation to the USSR and the PRC.
- Limited - in goal, geography, and ways and means employed.
- Defensive - no threat to the existence of the DRV.
- Tightly controlled by the President.
- Fed and fought incrementally - only enough resources to keep RVN from losing or to maintain a rough equilibrium; thus came "gradualism."
- Reactive - the enemy generally maintained the strategic, and often tactical, initiative.
- Protracted, and thus more a test of wills than of means.
- Increasingly costly, frustrating, inconclusive and divisive for the US (an extension and magnification of the last two years of the Korean War).
- A major conflict between ends desired and means required.

7. The Basis of the US Strategy

US strategy in 1965 was based on one overall aim and four primary legs:

a. The Aim

To get the Lao Dong leadership to cease and desist in their attempts to take over the RVN by force and subversion.

b. The Legs

- Pressure and "signals" to Hanoi (Rolling Thunder was the "stick").

- The ground war in RVN with the objective of staving off the defeat of RVNAF, and of convincing the DRV that their objective was out of reach. The ground war was supplemented by interdiction programs (primarily air) in the Laotian and DRV panhandles.
- The original objective of aiding and advising GVN and RVNAF so that, eventually, they could stand on their own feet.
- The desire and hope for meaningful negotiations (various bombing halts and promises of post-war economic reconstruction aid being the "carrots".)

c. Some Problems

- The aim of the Lao Dong leadership was firm, consistent, and in reality, non-negotiable. (Although many in the US assumed, or hoped, that it was.)
- The political-military conflict was "total" for the DRV, the NLF, and the RVN, but was "limited" for the US.
- Being on a totally different "frequency," Hanoi missed and/or misread the "signals" (they probably read the political and psychological imperatives that generated them quite accurately).
- The four theoretically complementary "legs" of the US strategy were synchronized at only one place--the White House, and ultimately by only one man, President Johnson; international affairs and military realities were not among his many strong points.13/ Below him were many competing US agencies and personalities in Washington, Hawaii, Saigon, Bangkok, and Vientiane.
- All three elements of the strategic medium (time, space, and the psyche) favored the enemies' strategy more than ours.
- The US strategy was based on a lack of understanding of the will, ingenuity, perseverance, and "threshold of pain" of the enemy. The majority of the available evidence supports the former interpretation, but either way - to

be ignorant or to ignore - is not conducive to devising and implementing a sound strategy.

C. THE MARINES AND CAVALRY WIN

1. The Enclaves

Ambassador Taylor argued for an "active enclave" concept, as a test for US units: active patrolling outside the base in conjunction with air mobile operations up to about a 50-mile radius to rescue or reinforce RVNAF units in trouble. (Taylor never used the term "enclave" however.)15/

General Westmoreland wanted a more active and unrestricted role for the units, especially in the critical highlands, but admitted that Taylor had made a convincing case to the President for his "experimental" approach, which was made US policy for a short period. Westmoreland was also concerned about the effect of US troops operating near heavily populated areas.16/

As the security situation in RVN further deteriorated, more US units were dispatched, to include the new airmobile division - the 1st Cavalry. The publicly announced mission of defense quickly changed:

> That came as a surprise to me, for when President Johnson changed the mission of American units from a defensive posture and authorized them to engage in "counterinsurgency combat operations," that was to me a broad authority.
>
> On May 8, I had forwarded to Washington my concept of how operations were to develop. In Stage One the units were to secure enclaves, which I preferred to call base areas, and in defending them could operate out to the range of light artillery. In Stage Two the units were to engage in offensive operations and deep patrolling in co-operation with the ARVN. In Stage Three they were to provide a reserve when ARVN units needed help and also conduct long-range offensive operations. At the same time I pointed out that once the coastal bases were secure, the troops should move to secure inland bases and operate from those.17/

With the confusion over the change in mission, the credibility gap in Washington widened between the press and the President over the role of the US troops. After that it never closed.

2. Amphibious and Airmobile (See Map 3-2)

Eventually the MACV approach was approved and new troops came into the RVN. The Marines were reinforced near Da Nang and the First Cavalry later was based at An Khe. In a rare disagreement with Westmoreland, CINCPAC (Admiral Sharp), preferred that the division be stationed initially at Qui Nhon instead of in the Central Highlands because of the tenuous nature of route 19 and the huge demands that would be made on airlift (600-800 tons per day); Taylor and one or more of the JCS supported Sharp while Generals Wheeler (CJCS) and Harold K. Johnson (CSA) backed Westmoreland.18/ The bolder and more risky course of action won out.

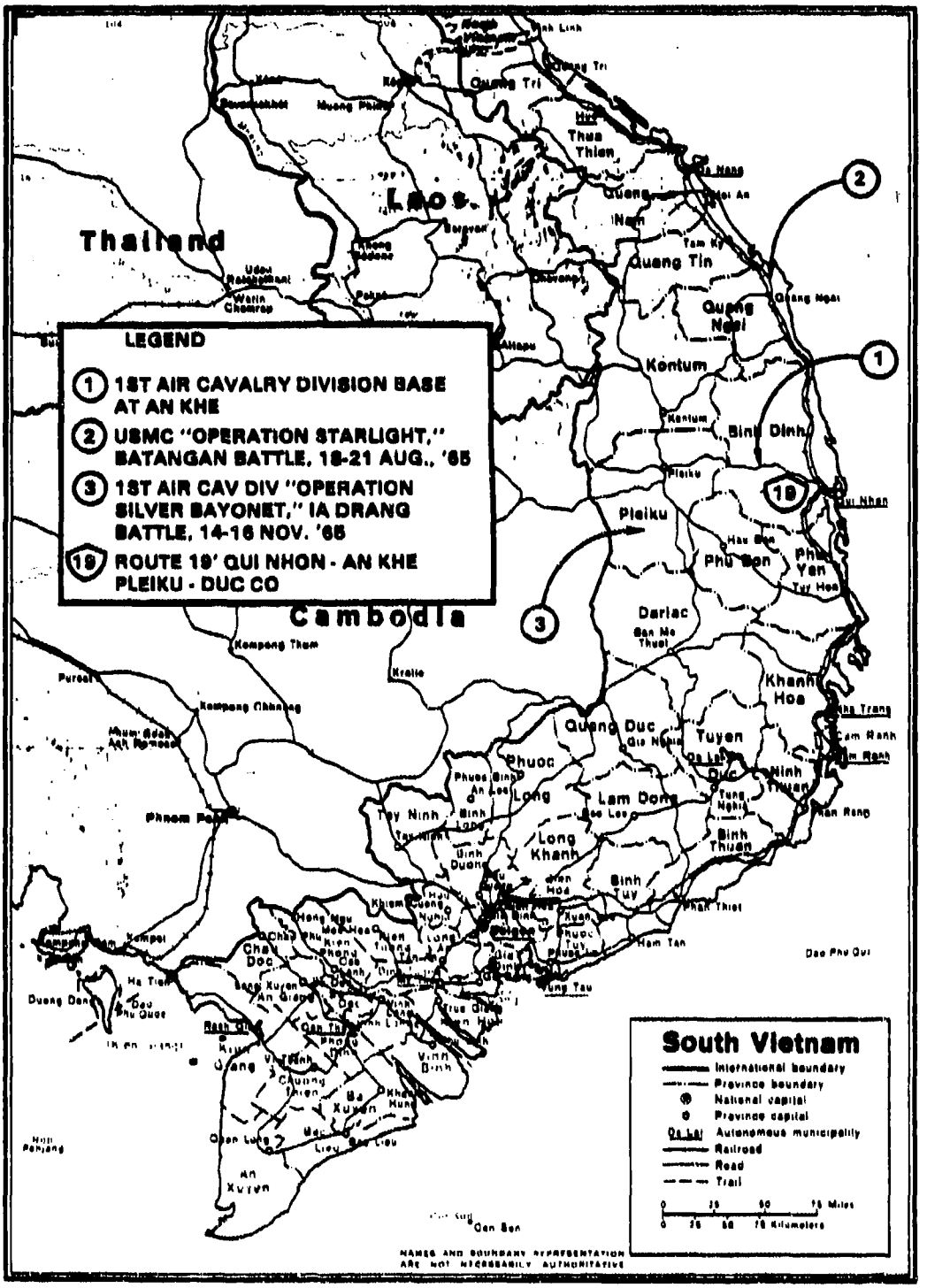
a. The Marines 19/

The first major battle between the US and enemy main force units took place in August. Intelligence had placed the bulk of 1st VC (PLAF) regiments in the Van Tuong village complex on the Batangan (or Phuoc Long) Peninsula just south of the new Marine enclave and airbase at Chu Lai. In a combined airmobile and amphibious operation (Starlite), the Marines first sealed off the peninsula and then attacked to clear it. After a tough two-day fight with a well-intrenched and concealed enemy, the Marines destroyed the 60th Bn. and badly damaged the 80th. While killing and capturing well over 600 of the enemy, the Marines lost 45 killed and 203 wounded.

b. The US Cavalry 20/

In the fall, the PAVN began a major and ambitious operation (Tay Nguyen) in the Central Highlands. Three of their regiments (32d, 33d, and 66th) in the area were to destroy the Special Forces' CIDG camps at Plei Me, Dak Sut, and Duc Co, overrun the Le Thanh District headquarters, and then seize Pleiku. A brigade of the 1st Cavalry was airlifted from An Khe to support the ARVN forces defending Plei Me.

The enemy failed to capture Plei Me and withdrew in late October. The airmobile brigade was then dispatched farther west to find



Map 3-2. Amphibious and Airmobile Operations, 1965

and fight them. There was a great deal of apprehension among the US military about how the new concept and division would fare against PAVN regulars in the jungle and elephant grass-covered mountains where the advantages of US airmobility and firepower would be restricted somewhat. The early defeat of an "elite" American unit would produce political and psychological shock waves in the RVN and the US.21/

In early November the 3d Brigade of the Cavalry replaced the 1st and the search for the enemy continued. The 1st Bn, 7th Cavalry was designated to search part of the Ia Drang Valley and Chu Pong Mountain (near Cambodia); the unit was at only two-thirds strength - not at all unusual. On 14 November the battalion air assaulted into Landing Zone (LZ) X-Ray. The enemy concentrated his available forces (elements of the 33d and 66th regiments) to destroy the cavalry. The two forces met on a finger of the mountain not far from the LZ. For the next several days enemy attempts to overrun the US battalion were repulsed. US airpower, helicopter gun ships, airmobile artillery, timely reinforcements, and, above all, good leadership and hard close infantry fighting turned the tide. In his book General Westmoreland wrote:

> In fighting as fierce as any ever experienced by American troops, Moore's men with help from the rest of the 3d Brigade beat back first one North Vietnamese assault, then another, over a period of six days, November 14 through 19. B-52 strikes almost every day on and around Chu Pong Mountain marked the first use of the big bombers in direct tactical support of ground troops. As the fighting ebbed and all three enemy regiments retreated across the Cambodian border, they left behind over 1,300 dead. An enemy document captured later admitted heavy losses but rationalized them on the basis that the lessons learned were worth the cost of a hundred thousand men.22/

c. Other Forces and Events in 1965

On 30 March the enemy exploded several hundred pounds of explosives outside the US Embassy (Saigon), killing two Americans and 11 Vietnamese and wounding many others, including Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson.

- In mid June the first B-52 raids were conducted in RVN against a suspected enemy basecamp in War Zone D with good results.23/
- The USN and the Coast Guard, in conjunction with the VNN, set up "Market Time" operations which gradually sealed off the sea infiltration route.
- RVNAF strength grew to almost 700,000; by the end of the year the US had over 184,000 military in RVN and other allies provided over 22,000, mostly Koreans and some Australians.
- PAVN accelerated its buildup and had 26,000 men, including eight regiments in RVN.
- Despite heavy losses, the PLAF continued to grow in all three categories of units.
- The enemy continued to attrite RVNAF units and won most of the big fights against them.

d. Observations

Both sides significantly built up their forces during the year, and in December the friendly-to-enemy troop ratio was about 3.6 to 1. This was well below the traditional 10 to 1 "rule of thumb" ratio, but the lack was partially offset by vastly increased US firepower and mobility. Yet, the enemy had a higher tooth to tail ratio than did the US and RVNAF; a significant part of the latter also had suffered heavy losses in men, morale, and combat efficiency.

The commitment of US ground forces in RVN was a major turning point in the war. Much more so than air and naval forces, ground units provide a tangible "earnest" of national commitment - one that is highly visible to ally, foe, and neutral alike. However, there was no significant hesitation by the enemy, who built up his forces quickly and then actively sought contact with major US units.

There was a high level debate between Nguyen Chi Thanh, a PAVN General, then commanding PLAF forces, and General Giap, who remembered his premature commitments of Viet Minh divisions in 1951 against French artillery and airpower, over how best to fight US forces. The Lao Dong

Party Central Committee suggested a temporary reversion to guerrilla harassing and raiding tactics, while General Thanh and his able supporter, with the nom de plume of Truong Song, argued for a rapid continuation of the General Offensive; they believed that the momentum and morale achieved in 1964 and early 1965 would permit them to crush RVNAF before US forces could intervene in sufficient strength. In turn they were accused of paying too much attention to the mobile main forces and too little to the guerrillas and the regional forces. Eventually Thanh got his way and the big battles with US units took place.24/

Operations Starlight and Silver Bayonet proved that US units and firepower could not easily or cheaply be beaten; they also demonstrated that PAVN and PLAF main forces were brave, tough and tactically skillful. Both sides paid a high price for those lessons and they each claimed "victories"; of course the opponents had different viewpoints, objectives, and definitions of win and lose.

Large-scale and sustained airmobile operations, even in inhospitable terrain, had come of age. By the end of 1965 the PLAF/PAVN appeared to be stalemated, but only by a very narrow margin.

D. ATTRITION: OURS AND THEIRS

1. Why Attrition?

a. The US Version

Attrition is a natural by product of the American Way of War: spend lavishly in money, munitions, materiel, and technology to save lives. How many citizens or governmental and military leaders would or could choose the other side of the coin? US military leaders, raised to command in World War II and Korea, knew and believed in the morale-raising and life-saving value of massive firepower. Even the supposedly inexhaustible and expendible manpower of China was severely attrited by the "meat grinder" battles in Korea.25/

In the early days of the USMAAG in RVN, it was believed that if RVNAF could be gotten out of their "Beau Geste" forts and into the countryside, superior firepower would decimate the enemy if they could be found and made to stand up and fight. At the Honolulu Conference in 1961, LTG Lionel C. McGarr described the tactical situation and presented an estimate of enemy strength. A member of the JCS interrupted and said to McGarr, "Kill them, don't count them."26/

General Westmoreland later encouraged the South Vietnamese to wear the enemy down: "Constant attention should be given to attriting the main force VC units by striking and defeating them at every opportunity."27/ That was a logical extension of the Search and Destroy tactic, which, along with Clearing and Holding operations, was developed to support the earlier Hop Tac scheme (discussed in chapter 2).

By the time US combat units were committed, RVNAF was generally low in morale and combat efficiency. In the latter half of 1965 there was no other way to stop the accelerating disintegration of RVN than for US troops to find, fix, fight, and hopefully finish the enemy's big units. The offensive employment of the Marines (Starlight) and the 1st Cavalry (Silver Bayonet) in spoiling attacks was militarily sound in that critical period.

General Westmoreland stated that, given the geographical and political constraints imposed on the ground war in the RVN, there was no real alternative to attrition if we were to prevent the enemy from achieving his ultimate aim. A purely defensive or static posture in enclaves would enable the enemy to retain the initiative both strategically and tactically; such a posture also would be demoralizing to US troops.28/

b. Achieve the following results in 1966:

The US ground strategy, and its aerial interdiction supplement, were "locked in concrete" at the February 1966 conference in Honolulu, according to Westmoreland. Bill Bundy and John McNaughton drafted instructions for MACV which included the following goals:29/

1) Increase the population in secure areas from 50 percent to 60 percent.

2) Increase the critical roads and railroads open for use to 50 percent from 20 percent.

3) Increase the destruction of VC/PAVN base areas to 40-50 percent from 10-20 percent.

4) Ensure the defense of all military bases, political and population centers and food-producing areas now under government control.

5) Pacify the four selected high-priority areas--increasing the pacified population in those areas by 235,000.

6) Attrite, by year's end, VC/PAVN forces at a rate as high as their capability to put men into the field.

Attrition was the name of the main US game, and "body count" and "truck kills" were the score cards.

2. The Enemy Attrites Too

Western logic would deduce it foolhardy for a nation much inferior to its opponent in manpower and materiel even to attempt to employ attrition as a strategy or tactic. But the DRV/NLF did just that. Why? Their overall strategy, previously discussed, was based on the doctrine of "People's War" which dictates the involvement - one way or the other - of all of the people. Douglas Pike wrote:

> In the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese communists erased entirely the line between military and civilian by ruling out the notion of non-combatant. The Revolutionary War they developed precluded by definition the disinterested bystander; not even children, particularly not even children one might say. People, all people, were made the weapons of war -- that is the meaning of People's War -- and therefore all are expendable, just as any weapon is expendable in war.30/

The enemy employed all arms, political and military, of their struggle forces to attrite their enemy in many fields: in troop and materiel strength, in morale, in will and confidence, in courage and aggressiveness, and in internal and external political support. They attrited not only military people but also those in the civil administration, including school teachers and malaria control teams. They kept track of the mounting casualty tolls published in the US press and the reaction to them.

The sniper, the sapper, the mortar round, and the mine and booby trap not only caused casualties and concern but also created newsprint and television footage. Most of those tools were quite cost effective.

The North Vietnamese Cuu Long (another pen name), writing about the immense value of the guerrillas, said:

> Now guerrillas continue to engage in sabotaging and disrupting activities in order to bind the hand, blind the eyes, and cut off the hands and feet of the enemy. But this war of destruction not only has a tactical value, hindering every action and every operation of the enemy, but also has a strategic value, dealing heavy blows at the enemy's weak points as well as his political and military plots.31/

In 1966 Wilfred Burchett, the Australian (communist) correspondent, interviewed General Nguyen Van Vinh described as the "brilliant" Assistant Chief of Staff of the Vietnam People's Army, and discussed limited war and force ratios:

> On the table General Vinh had a copy of an article on just this subject, which he had written for the VPA theoretical journal. The first point he made was that no matter how many troops the US put into South Vietnam, they would not be able to change the balance of forces in their favor. According to original US estimates, a superiority of 10 or 15 to one in their favor was necessary to win in a guerrilla war. As this was manifestly impossible to achieve they had scaled the ratio down to five to one, but this would also be impossible to achieve. The Liberation Army could be reinforced quickly enough and the Saigon forces destroyed quickly enough to constantly change the relationship of forces in favor of the Liberation Front, even if the USA put in 300,000 or 400,000 or more troops. The massive commitment of US forces since May 1965 had proved this, despite the scale and the speed of the build-up to nearly 250,000 troops. Whatever change in the relationship of forces had taken place, it had been in favor of the Liberation Front.32/

The US military had long been aware that Americans were selected targets for killing. Then Brigadier General William E. DePuy, J3 of MACV,

was told at RVNAF III Corps Headquarters, in May 1965, that, "captured documents proclaim the initiation of a large scale campaign to kill Americans."33/ Later, General Westmoreland told the US Asian Ambassadors at Bagu'o:

> In summary, the enemy's strategy is a clever one designed to conduct a protracted war, inflict unacceptable casualties on our forces, establish a favorable political posture, minimize the risks to his main forces, and maintain the option of going on the military offensive or negotiating from a position of strength by virtue of his covert troop deployments.34/

And then before the US Council of Foreign Relations:

> The enemy sees "victory" in US withdrawal rather than defeat per se. His professed strategy stresses attrition of opposing forces coupled with political/psychological operations to gain population control and disrupt GVN authority.35/

Edward Landsdale, hero of the novel The Ugly American, noted that the enemy did not limit attrition to soldiers:

> The killing in the war was far from being one-sided. In addition to the casualties suffered by our troops and those of our allies, the enemy carried its war of attrition to the civilian population in perhaps the grimmest facet of the whole struggle. Civilians in South Vietnam were the object of liquidation by the enemy. Indeed, a number of the tactical movements of enemy troops units appear to have been made primarily for the purpose of giving the enemy control of an area long enough to seek out civilian residents who were named on enemy lists and to execute them.
>
> Thousands upon thousands of civilians died through this form of premeditated murder. Many, of course, were local officials, including those elected to village and hamlet positions. Many others, though, were so individualistic that they had been as critical of the Government in Saigon as they had of the enemy. The enemy obviously intended to liquidate all potential "class enemies," meaning those who might influence others into disagreement with the dictates of the Politburo once it had won in South Vietnam.

> In this liquidation, the enemy not only followed the precedent of similar liquidation in China, and the Soviet Union, but also the past actions of General Giap in 1946, when he was left in charge of the government while Ho Chi Minh and others were absent in France. Giap used his police forces to liquidate hundreds of nationalist leaders and Trotskyites, significantly and cold-bloodedly even including friends on the lists.36/

3. The Killing Paid Off for Whom?

The fighting intensified in 1966 and 1967 as both sides reinforced and sought to maintain the initiative. Naturally the casualties rose correspondently. See Table 3-1.37/

If those data are even approximately correct, it is quite apparent that the enemy was quickly and disproportionately losing the numbers game, but was he losing the war? His numerical strength kept increasing, year by year, and he rebuilt his units time after time. His determination and ability to fight - when and where he wanted to - was not substantially lacking.

In analyzing how the enemy's broad strategy of "attrition" and the tactic of "selective terrorism" worked in one province in RVN, Jeffrey Race concluded:

> As we say in Long An, only twenty-six individuals were assassinated at the start of the new policy in January 1960, yet this small number, reinforced by a continuing low rate of assassinations afterwards, was sufficient to cripple the government apparatus at the village and hamlet level. Within a comparatively short time, the government's strategic position became hopeless, although the actual translation of the government's political defeat into military defeat took another five years.38/

The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy hosted a colloqium in 1973-74 on "The Military Lessons of the Vietnamese War." A major issue discussed was attrition - ours and theirs. The panel was composed of distinguished men who had extensive experience in and about Vietnam.39/ Some of the more significant points raised concerning the merits and demerits of attrition include:

TABLE 3-1. STATISTICS ON TROOP STRENGTH, INFILTRATION, AND NUMBERS KILLED IN ACTION, 1960-67, COMPILED FROM DEFENSE DATA 36/

		CALENDAR YEAR							
		1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967
1.	U.S. FORCES	800	3,200	11,300	16,300	23,300	208,800[1]	450,300[1]	565,000[1]
2.	U.S. FORCES KILLED IN ACTION (267 TOTAL 1961 THROUGH 1964)						1,369	5,006	9,378
3.	SOUTH VIETNAM'S FORCES (NATIONAL MILITARY FORCES)	274,400	338,200	467,200	525,800	611,700	691,500	735,900	753,000
4.	SOUTH VIETNAMESE FORCES KILLED IN ACTION	2,223	4,004	4,457	5,665	7,457	11,243	9,459	10,880
5.	OTHER FRIENDLY FORCES					500	22,400	52,600	59,000
6.	VIETCONG AND NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES	36,000	63,000	79,000	92,000	170,200	222,800	281,900	303,800[2]
	(NORTH VIETNAMESE REGULARS)					(2,400)	(26,500)	(48,500)	(51,700)
7.	VIETCONG AND NORTH VIETNAMESE KILLED IN ACTION	5,669	12,133	21,158	20,575	16,785	35,436	55,500	88,100
8.	INFILTRATIONS FROM THE NORTH	4,600	6,309	12,900	8,000	12,400	26,000	55,700	[3]

[1] INCLUDES U.S. FORCES IN THAILAND AND IN NAVAL AND COAST GUARD FORCES OPERATING IN VIETNAM AREA.

[2] INCLUDES POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

[3] ESTIMATED AT 84,000; 7,000 PER MONTH

- Ambassador Robert Komer:

> We picked the wrong strategy. Our search-and-destroy strategy* was the natural response of a hugely superior force, but it could not bring the enemy to decisive battle. This strategy of attrition failed because the enemy could control his own losses. He did it in two ways: first, by evading battle--we could always defeat the Viet Cong if we could bring him to fight, but we could rarely bring him to fight unless he wanted to - and second, he could always retreat to sanctuary and use sanctuary as his logistic base. 40/

- Col. Donaldson Frizzell, when discussing our misperceptions of the enemy's will and determination, quoted Theodore Draper:

> We seem to assume that a small power cannot or will not take as much punishment as a large power. But this is precisely where great-power thinking goes wrong. Great powers tend to think of "limited wars" in terms of themselves. They think of the "limit" as what it would be, in relative terms, if they were taking the punishment or in relation to the total force they are capable of using. 41/

- Sir Robert Thompson commented,

> I was very critical of United States strategy during the period 1965-68 because it concentrated primarily on the defeat of the North Vietnamese Army's main forces in the field, that is, those that were inside South Vietnam, and on the disruption of North Vietnam by bombing. Neither of those tactics - and I am doubtful whether they ever could have succeeded at that stage of the war - got anywhere near breaking the North Vietnamese will to resist. They also had another effect. They did not threaten the rear base of the Viet Cong inside South Vietnam at all. The Viet Cong, therefore, through that period, to all intents and purposes had almost a free run and were in a position where they were threatening the rear base of the South Vietnamese. 42/

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* Gen. Westmoreland has stated, correctly, a number of times that "search and destroy" was not a strategy but rather one tactic or operational mode. Yet, it was the keystone of attrition when supported by overwhelming air and ground firepower.

- Concerning a later period, however, Sir Robert came up with a radically different conclusion:

> You don't quite make the judgment that you never got to them to a point where it was hurting. They in fact, got themselves to that point. I think that by the end of the 1972 invasion they were really hurting as far as manpower was concerned in their forces inside South Vietnam. It was one of the reasons they had to negotiate: they were about to lose territory which they had gained, because they could not possibly have held it with what they had left.43/

- Thomas Thayer, who had been with ARPA in Vietnam and then headed the Southeast Asia Analysis Branch for the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Systems Analysis had concluded much earlier that, based on actual and potential "input-output," there was no way the US could win a war of attrition in Vietnam. He noted that:

> It was becoming apparent as early as late 1966 that the U.S. military strategy of attrition was in trouble. The objective of "attriting" the VC/NVA forces at a rate equal to or greater than their ability to infiltrate and recruit new troops was not being achieved. This theme is evident in Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's statements of November 17, 1966, in his draft memorandum for the President: " ... the data suggest that we have no prospects of attriting the enemy force at a rate equal to or greater than his capability to infiltrate and recruit, and this will be true at either the 470,000 U.S. personnel level or 570,000."44/

Professor Francis West took exception to Thayer's sole focus on numbers, stating that it neglected the matter of "will." He posed a quite relevant question: "Has there ever been a nation that has chosen to fight an offensive war until it literally killed itself off?" He answered his own question with "of course not."45/ He failed to mention, however, that the Dang Lao Dong did not consider it an "offensive" war, but rather called it a "patriotic" war in defense of the fatherland. That modification doesn't change the fact that there are limits to human endurance, but it does account for the abnormally high - to us - price in blood and suffering they were willing to pay.

4. The Balance Sheet

Attrition, by use of overwhelming firepower and materiels, was both the natural and logical way of doing a necessary but inherently messy job; the RVNAF, with little choice, became increasingly used to our ways and means. (Don't successful football coachs, business men, and even Secretaries of Defense normally solve difficult problems by doing what has worked best for them in the past?)

The critical differences between the US and DRV leadership, concerning attrition, were the differences in stakes involved, objectives sought, and the will and ability to persevere; the enemy was willing and able to "play with pain" much more so than their opponents.

Another major problem in making attrition work effectively was that the enemy had a large measure of initiative and thus control over both his casualties and ours - at least until after Tet 68. In the previous section Komer cited Thayer's studies on that important point, which was validated by a US Army study which determined that:

> Independently, the Army Combat Operations-Vietnam study, which analyzed a different set of battles in late 1965 and early 1966, found that 46% of the fights began as enemy ambushes and that the enemy starts the fight in 88% of the cases; moreover, it found that 63% of the infantry targets encountered were personnel in trenches or bunkers.46/

(US and RVNAF units had much the same problem as did the French Union forces earlier).

The enemy's subtle and multifaceted political-military strategies and tactics permitted him to turn his lesser but seemingly ubiquitous "attritions" into political and psychological gains in the RVN, the DRV, the US, and in the world at large; conversely his clever propaganda diplomacy turned our much greater "killings" against us.

A protracted, costly, inconclusive and confusing limited war does not mesh well at all with the American psyche. Additionally, the almost exclusive focus of the American media on US units and battles made it

appear that while US personnel were fighting and dying the RVNAF was sitting on the sidelines cheering us on; in truth, despite the fact that MACV strategy concentrated most of RVNAF on pacification duties during those years, they suffered more casualties than did US troops.47/

To pursue a strategy of attrition - especially one which focused on the enemy's main forces - one first had to find and fight him. The essential requirement, then, was for accurate and timely tactical intelligence, but it was too often inadequate in one or both areas. Many techniques were employed, most traditional but a number of them innovative: patrol, ambush, recon in force, raid, cordon and search, "bait and trap," "jitterbug," "checkerboard," "Eagle Flight," etc. Reconnaissance patrols and/or infantry were to locate the enemy, other forces "piled on" to box him in while air and artillery fire "killed." Once the enemy had been shot up badly, or more likely escaped, the infantry moved in to police the battlefield and count weapons and bodies (two then-current articles in Army magazine describe the sequence quite well).48/

In the attempt to gain and maintain the tactical initiative and thus deprive the enemy of his freedom of action, thousands of US and allied units were on almost continuous operations - too often with little or no exact information about who or where the enemy was. Extensive records were maintained on company/battalion operations and days in the field compared with those on security duty or in training. The "wily Cong" - as he was often called - was a genius at fortifying and camouflaging. On those relatively rare occasions when he wanted to attrite US units, he let - or decoyed - them in very close and then opened surprise fire. Usually in the initial bursts of fire one or more US soldiers were killed or wounded. Maneuver would then cease while attempts - often extremely brave - were made to pull the casualties back in order to call in air and artillery. In the jungle an LZ might have to be cleared in order to evacuate the wounded and resupply ammunition. Not infrequently the US unit had been drawn into a U or L-shaped ambush. Extrication was costly and time consuming.

Most of the units found nothing of worth most of the time. But, hot, tired, and frustrated, they became more careless and often suffered

demoralizing casualties from cleverly set mines and booby traps. Who really had the initiative and who was attriting whom? There is general agreement with the JCS statement that:

> "The enemy, by the type action he adopts, has the predominant share in determining enemy attrition rates." Three fourths of the battles are at the enemy's choice of time, place, type and duration. CIA notes that less than one percent of nearly two million Allied small unit operations conducted in the last two years resulted in contact with the enemy and, when ARVN is surveyed, the percentage drops to one tenth of one percent. With his safe havens in Laos and Cambodia and with carefully chosen tactics, the enemy has been able during the last four years to double his combat forces, double the level of infiltration and increase the scale and intensity of the main force war even while bearing heavy casualties.49/

PAVN General Nguyen Van Vinh discussed American troops with Wilfred Burchett;

> ... they began to see that the Americans were not super men. In fact they fell into ambushes more readily than did the Saigon troops; they couldn't move without noise and when they did move, it was a snail's pace, despite their much-vaunted mobility. They also fell when bullets hit them. The Americans also made the great mistake of forcing the pace in the mountain areas, a graveyard for French forces in the past and for the Saigon forces since the Americans arrived.50/

For a number of reasons, including command pressure for quick and positive results, hundreds of US squads, platoons, and even companies were hurt worse than were their opponents. Continual movement, much of it essentially "blind," does not automatically translate into tactical initiative or advantage. Would "1 slow and 4 quicks" have worked better - especially if during the planning (slow) phase the troops were given realistic small unit training?

The "credibility gap" and the seemingly persistent optimism of US officials played a major role in the later death of our strategy of attrition. Some examples:

> Dear Joe,
> We have just concluded an operation which I believe represents THE turning point in the war. This operation has virtually destroyed Military Region IV Headquarters, which used to be the Saigon-Cholon-Gia Dinh Special Committee. This is the Headquarters charged with winning the war in the Saigon area. . . .51/
>
> - Maj. General William E. De Puy
> Letter to Joe Alsop
> 24 January, 1967

> Now we're in a better position to fight a war of attrition than the enemy. But we must have that resolve that I mentioned in my speech. And when the leadership in Hanoi appreciates that we do have that resolve, that we have committed ourselves and we will stay with it as long as necessary, and when the leadership in Hanoi realizes that the Republic of Vietnam is getting stronger politically, economically, and militarily and that North Vietnam is being drained of its vitality by our bombing, by the cost of waging a massive war in the south, then and only then will the leadership in Hanoi sit back and reassess their strategy.
>
> - General Westmoreland, 24 April, 1967 52/

> The cost and difficulties of the war to Hanoi have sharply increased. . . .
>
> - Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, cablegram to Joint Chiefs of Staff headed "Year-End Wrap-Up Cable," January 1, 1968 53/

> I see not a single unfavorable trend.
>
> - Robert W. Komer, Gen. Westmoreland's civilian deputy, quoted by Newsweek, January 1, 1968.54/

> We are making progress. We are pleased with the results that we are getting. We are inflicting greater

losses than we are taking. . . . Overall, we are making progress. . . .

-- President Lyndon B. Johnson, news conference, White House, November 17, 1967 55/

The Press reacts: 56/

The informed leaders and analysts ... have the ... basic assumption: that the North Vietnamese can no longer carry the huge manpower burden . . . . Men of great experience and sound instinct, notably including General William C. Westmoreland. . . .

. . . .Any hunch of General Westmoreland's must be profoundly respected, for no one else has anything approaching comparable experience.

- Joseph Alsop, syndicated column, November 24, 1967

It can no longer be argued that we do not have a plan and a timetable and a grand strategy. . . . The program laid out by General Westmoreland last week is nearly overpowering in the precision of its promises and the almost total absence of qualifications or doubt. The strategy, quite simply, is to "weaken the enemy." ... The plan comes in a procession of astonishing detailed steps. . . . Right now, we are moving along nicely into Phase Three "when the end begins to come into view." ... So we also have a clear purpose... Perhaps ... he is right in his latest judgment that the "enemy's hopes are bankrupt." ... The Westmoreland Plan, in short, is encouraging. ... It relieves some doubts. . . . It points persuasively to a time when the war will wither away.

- Editorial, The Washington Post, November 26, 1967

Thus the stage was well set for the "shock of Tet '68."

US attrition depended heavily on massive firepower - air and ground delivered. The Rules of Engagement (ROE) were strict and constraining - more so than in most wars. Nevertheless, significant numbers of innocent civilians were killed or maimed - many fewer than the enemy and war critics claimed and substantially less than in the terror bombings of

World War II. Yet the facts, the photographs, and the myths hurt America at home and abroad. The fact that the enemy often deliberately fought in his "combat hamlets," and conducted numerous terror shellings of cities was too often ignored or downplayed.57/

How many deaths were the Lao Dong leaders willing to accept and for how long? Robert Komer thought that:

> As far as its effect on the will of the enemy, American leaders might well have paid more attention to a comment made by the enemy's number-one leader in the war, Vo Nguyen Giap. Giap once said: "Every minute, hundreds of thousands of people die all over the world. The life or death of a hundred, a thousand, or tens of thousands of human beings, even if they are our own compatriots, represents really very little."58/

Usually death is not treated that philosophically and matter-of-factly in America. During the Korean stalemate and in Vietnam, it was not uncommon to hear, "He (they) died for what?" The weekly and cumulative casualty figures had a political impact in both wars, and in Vietnam the harsh reality of war was driven home by TV shots of our dead and dying. The people began to sense that the means expended (to include their sons and lovers) were out of proportion with the vague and elusive ends sought. (The much debated effectiveness of the air interdiction program is analyzed in Chapter 6 of this Volume.)

Yet by the end of 1967 the enemy was feeling the effects of attrition more than he let on and more than Systems Analysis "proved". In December of that year Douglas Pike wrote that the enemy was seriously concerned:

> The communist attrition rate was too high, especially in the Viet Cong main force units. The directive indicated that at the present rate, it was simply a matter of time before most of these units would be so decimated as to be militarily ineffective. Therefore, the order was given to assign greater priority to the regional and local guerrilla units.59/

De Puy, Westmoreland, and others weren't too far wrong concerning the damage done to the enemy; their problem was in deriving how and where Ho and Giap would react to that situation.

Yet, when comparing the advantages and disadvantages of the opposing strategies of attrition against the three components of the strategic medium (Time, Space, and the Psyche) it is clear that bulk of the advantages favored the enemy. (See Figure 3-3)

The enemy eventually won the "battle of attrition," but probably by a small margin. But neither side knew that until President Johnson's "abdication speech" on 31 March 1968. It has been argued that what happened from then on only delayed and raised the costs of the end results. (Chapters 4 and 5 analyze the peaks and valleys that followed after '68).

5. What Did the US Army Generals and Colonels Think About the Strategy and Tactics Used in Vietnam?

Douglas Kinnard, in publishing the results of his survey of US generals who had served in Vietnam, commented that, "These replies show a noticeable lack of enthusiasm, to put it mildly, by Westmoreland's generals for his tactics and by implications for his strategy in the war."60/ The extreme pressures, from the President down, for quick results led to inordinate demands for encouraging data. The prime measures for success in attrition were "body count" and "kill ratios." 55 percent of those responding to Kinnard's survey voted that, "Kill ratio" was a misleading device for measuring progress; 61 percent judged that the "body count" was often inflated; one general commented that, "The immensity of false reporting is a blot on the honor of the Army."61/

Two fairly senior, statistically oriented generals, however, believed in and used those and other measures to modify their tactics and to allocate resources such as helicopters, 62/ and also to "grade" their subordinate commanders.63/ Evaluation of measures of progress is covered more fully in Chapter 15, "Keeping Score" of Volume VI.

Peter Braestrup wrote about the cynical newsmen at the "Five O'clock Follies" in Saigon and the "repeated squabbles about "body counts."

OPPOSING ATTRITION STRATEGIES
MAJOR ELEMENTS COMPARED

ELEMENTS OF THE STRATEGIC MEDIUM	US	DRV/NLF
TIME	① CONSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS (4-YEAR PRESIDENTIAL TERM & 2-YEAR MID-TERM ELECTIONS, SHORT MILITARY BUDGET CYCLE) ② POLITICAL PRESSURES: PRESSURE FOR QUICK VICTORY, OTHER GLOBAL COMMITMENTS, 1—YEAR TOUR ③ EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH: EARLIER EXPERIENCE IGNORED ④ IMPATIENT NATURE — LEADERS AND LED ⑤ "COSTS" VISIBLE AND RISING; DIFFICULT TO "SELL"	① TEN OR TWENTY YEARS IS NOTHING: DOCTRINE OF PROTRACTED WAR ADAPTED FROM PRC; LEADERSHIP AND POLICY CONTINUITY ② DEDICATION TO CAUSE AND SINO-SOVIET LOGISTIC SUPPORT PERMITTED LONG WAR ③ WAR AS A "REPEAT PERFORMANCE": STRATEGIES AND COMMANDERS PROVEN IN FIRST INDOCHINA WAR ④ PATIENT NATURE — LEADERS AND LED ⑤ TRUE "COSTS" CONCEALED OR JUSTIFIED BY "HISTORIC AND PATRIOTIC" MISSION
SPACE	① THEATER OF OPERATIONS HALF WAY AROUND WORLD FROM US AND STRANGE TO IT; THEATER ALSO DIVIDED GEOGRAPHICALLY AND ORGANIZATIONALLY ② FEAR OF INVOLVING PRC, USSR (LBJ: "NO WIDER WAR.") MEANS "SECURE REAR" FOR DRV AND LAOTIAN SANCTUARIES, HO CHI MINH TRAIL (OWN "REAR" IN RVN INSECURE) ③ LONG LAND, SEA FLANKS PROHIBIT TOTAL SEALING OFF WITH AVAILABLE MANPOWER ④ TERRAIN, CLIMATE, FLORA: MAJOR HANDICAPS	① THEATER OF OPERATIONS BROADLY DEFINED WITH UNIFIED COMMAND (INDOCHINA REGION, NOT JUST SOUTH VIETNAM), AND FAMILIAR FROM FIRST INDOCHINA WAR ② DIRECT LAND LINK WITH PRC; INDIRECT LAND LINK AND DIRECT SEA LINK WITH USSR ③ GLOBAL OPINION & U.S. POLITICS INCLUDED IN TARGET AREA ("REAR") ④ FAMILIAR WITH OPERATING CONDITIONS
PSYCHE	① ELITISM: UNCLEAR, CHANGING PURPOSE & CAUSE BUT PERSISTENT ATTEMPTS AT "ENGINEERING" OF SUPPORT (CREDIBILITY GAP); "WESTERN" STRATEGIC MIND SET ② DIVIDED "RULING CLASS:" FRICTION BETWEEN JOHNSON, KENNEDY FACTIONS AND "HAWKS AND DOVES" PLUS BETWEEN USG AND GVN ③ UNDECLARED WAR MEANT NO CENSORSHIP OF MEDIA IN OPEN AND VOLATILE SOCIETY ④ NEGLIGIBLE ALLIED AND LESS THIRD WORLD SUPPORT; INFERIOR US GLOBAL PSYOPS ⑤ EMPHASIS ON INDIVIDUAL AND THUS ON LIFE ⑥ RELIANCE ON FIRE POWER AND TECHNOLOGY	① SPECIFIC GOAL WITH MASS SUPPORT: LENINIST-MAOIST "JUST WAR" BY ELITE DIRECTION, WITH SOME XENOPHOBIA AND ANNAMESE HEGEMONISM ② WEI-CH'I (PATIENT, POPULATION-AND-TERRITORY ORIENTED) STRATEGY WITH EMPHASIS ON EARLY CONTROL OF BORDERS; MASSIVE INFILTRATION OF SVN, RVNAF ③ UNDISPUTED LEADERSHIP OF HO WITH WAR-TESTED STRATEGISTS AND COMMANDERS; TIGHTLY ORGANIZED CONTROLLED SOCIETY ④ HIGHLY SKILLED IN GLOBAL DIPLOMACY AND PSYOPS ⑤ WILLINGNESS TO SACRIFICE LABOR AND LIVES FOR SOCIETY AND PARTY ⑥ RELIANCE ON STEALTH, SURPRISE, THE SOLDIER

NOTE: ONLY REPRESENTATIVE ILLUSTRATIVE SAMPLE OF KEY ELEMENTS; BY NO MEANS A COMPREHENSIVE LISTING

SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

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Figure 3-3. Opposing Attrition Strategies

He took his wife to one of those sessions and she dubbed it a "happening."64/ Apparently both the presentors and recipients of those briefings were numbed by the volume and sameness of the numbers.

A Vietnam-experienced lieutenant colonel spoke his mind on paper in a West Point Military History text book:

> But one thing should be made absolutely clear: attrition is not a strategy. It is irrefutable proof of the absence of any strategy. A commander who resorts to attrition admits his failure to conceive of an alternative. He turns from warfare as an art and accepts it on the most non-professional terms imaginable. He uses blood in lieu of brains. Saying that political considerations forced the employment of attrition warfare does not alter the hard truth that the United States was strategically bankrupt in Vietnam.65/

Retired General Bruce Palmer had extensive service in Vietnam, and also served as both Vice Chief and Acting Chief of Staff of the Army. He wrote:

> There were many weaknesses in this US strategy which played into the hands of the enemy. . . .The strategy of attrition, moreover, dictated that large combat forces be deployed in much of SVN. The unlimited mission of defending all of SVN and defeating the enemy wherever he could be brought to battle had a synergistic effect in terms of the demand on US manpower and other resources.66/

Major General DeWitt C. Smith, Commandant of the Army War College, when asked about his views on the attrition strategy, said that it was "a disaster" which was out of character for Americans; "naive and ignorant" because the enemy was tougher and more resourceful than we had judged; "immoral" in taking casualties for attacking and then leaving the same hill time after time; and it was a strategy "stripped of imagination and strategic mobility."67/

In short, attacking a swarm of hornets in a crowded room, with an expensive sledge-hammer appealed no more to many senior officers than it did to most civilians.

6. Any Alternatives to Attrition?

> Thus what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy.
>
> Sun Tzu 68/

There was no lack of criticism, during and since the war, of "Westmoreland's strategy," but:

> In lamenting what came to be known, however erroneously, as the "big-unit war," critics presumably saw some alternative, for the essence of constructive criticism is alternative. Yet to my knowledge nobody ever advanced a viable alternative that conformed to the American policy of confining the war within South Vietnam. It was, after all, the enemy's big units--not the guerrillas--that eventually did the South Vietnamese in.
>
> General Westmoreland 69/

Any valid alternative strategy for Vietnam should have met at least most of the following minimum criteria:

- Be supportive of the grand strategy and policies of the USG (and GVN), and mesh well with the programs of the agencies involved. (Assumes an agreed clear and realistic goal).
- Be compatible with US public mores and aspirations and with the imperatives of the political system.
- Be centered around a positive, vs. negative, goal.
- Be based on in-depth analyses of the nature of the conflict, the enemy, our ally (ies), and the conflict environment. (Included should have been an objective "net assessment" of the strengths and weaknesses - potential vulnerabilities - of all participants, active and supporting).
- Be designed to defeat the enemy's strategy. (Assumes planners knew and understood his strategy).
- Be realistically structured to deal with the synergistic effect of the interaction between and the interdependence of the three types of enemy forces described earlier.

- Be flexible enough to have dealt with inevitable unknowns and changes.
- Be balanced in terms of means required and ends sought.
- Be within the capabilities of US and RVNAF leaders and forces.
- Be compatible with the Principles of War. (Assumes that planners agreed on the key principles and how they applied to the given situation).
- Be realistic by treating Indochina as an integral theater of war.

The above check list admittedly is an unattainable ideal. Maxwell Taylor reflected recently that after sitting with two presidents during the war he was impressed with the fact that all decisions made were based on inadequate information, and they knew it; their choice was to do nothing, or to try to "extrapolate" from an imperfect base. Taylor felt, however, that planning and coordination could and should have been better.70/

7. Some Alternatives

a Enclaves (Before and After Gavin)

The enclaves strategy had an inherent appeal to those involved in exercising maritime power; it was also attractive to the air-power enthusiasts as long as the enclaves provided adequate protection to airbases. Early US and SEATO contingency plans for Indochina included the establishment of coastal enclaves in RVN--US Marines near Da Nang for example. (See Vol. V).

Some planners, especially in Washington, believed that such a strategy would demonstrate US power and resolve, and thus deter the enemy, without getting US ground forces deeply involved in the heavy fighting. Another purpose was to raise military and civilian morale in RVN. (But Ho, Giap, and Thanh would not let the US get away with it).

Ambassador Taylor's concept of active "enclaves" (not his words) on an experimental basis was soon overcome by events and by General Westmoreland's insistence on strategic and tactical flexibility.71/

In 1966 Retired LTG James Gavin wrote an article in Harpers suggesting, among other measures, withdrawal of US ground forces to

enclaves; the article was much discussed in academia and in the press. In his book, General Westmoreland wrote:

> Having espoused the theory, Gavin was stuck with it and for a long time tried to justify it publicly. At my invitation he later visited Vietnam for a first-hand look, but upon his return, he argued illogically that the logistical bases I had by that time established were exactly the enclaves he had been talking about.72/

In fairness, both were partially correct. The US bases, scattered about RVN, were enclaves - or oil spots - but most of them were far from being passive ones.

A number of critics, including Maxwell Taylor, have stated that the huge Marine "beachheads" were actually enclaves of sorts.73/ The Marine concept was more oriented on "clear and hold" operations than on large and distant "search and destroy" sweeps. (The same could be said for the Koreans, the Thais, and the Filipinos). One could label even Khe Sanh as an exposed inland enclave.

Enclaves (or bridgeheads/airheads) are militarily logical and necessary for getting forces into and out of a hostile environment. From mid-1971 until the final withdrawal, US forces gradually pulled back into "enclaves" and were restricted more and more to "dynamic defense" operations. The few residual US ground units did not go to the aid of RVNAF during the dark early days of the 1972 Easter offensive: a dramatic switch from earlier operations.

Enclaves, by whatever name, served a valuable but limited purpose during US involvement, but, by themselves, could not have saved RVNAF and thus the RVN. Coastal enclaves, however, would have facilitated emergency withdrawal of US forces, in extremis.

b Cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail

An early, crude version of the Ho Chi Minh Trail had been employed by the Viet Minh in the First Indochina War to supply and reinforce their units in Central and South Vietnam. The French experience made the US military quite aware of that system. (Vol. I).

President Eisenhower was concerned about the strategic position of Laos as a gateway into Thailand, RVN, and Cambodia. He passed on that concern to the newly-elected John F. Kennedy. The US military, however, was less than enthusiastic about fighting a major conflict in that land-locked arena with primitive communications. (See Vol. III).

The 1954 Geneva Accords, among other things, were supposed to protect the neutrality of both Laos and Cambodia. But in 1959 the DRV reactivated, and started to improve the trail system. In order to provide defense in-depth of their infiltration route they furnished active support to the Pathet Lao forces. President Kennedy hustled Averell Harriman off to "neutralize" Laos, and although he did so on paper, infiltration continued and expanded. The USG attempted to keep at least the facade of the Geneva and Laotian agreements alive throughout most of the war in order to provide some "legal" basis for negotiations; that attempt placed another severe constraint on US military options.

The geo-strategic position of RVN was a highly vulnerable one when faced with a relatively stronger, more unified, and totally determined enemy, and especially so when the Laotian and Cambodian border regions were available to PAVN and PLAF. Even with about 600,000 US and Free World Troops and thousands of aircraft to support RVNAF, the borders could not be "sealed," nor could infiltration be radically disrupted as long as the cross border enemy sanctuaries and LOC were "off limits" to large ground operations.

Early in the war, the US military had done some thinking about establishing an "airhead" on the relatively open Bolovens Plateau in southern Laos, to serve as a strategic blocking position astride the Ho Chi Minh Trail (a larger Dien Bien Phu?). That problem was one of the many map exercises conducted at the Army's Command and General Staff College in 1960.74/ Until late 1964, however, the trail system was not that critical or vulnerable. Before "Market Time" took effect, most of the arms and ammunition were sent by sea. The ex-Viet Minh "regroupees" were infiltrated in small groups and would have been difficult to locate and interdict in the 1959-1964 period.

From early 1965 until the end of the war, however, the trail system became bigger, better, busier and more important; it also became more vulnerable to ground interdiction. Regular PAVN units needed not only more arms and ammunition, but also food in their border bases/sanctuaries; in the delta regions they could buy or impress food from the locals.

General Westmoreland's book contains his early thoughts about cutting that increasingly critical LOC:

> From the first I contemplated eventually moving into Laos to cut and block the infiltration routes of the Ho Chi Minh trail, and in 1966 and 1967 my staff prepared detailed plans for such an operation. When Henry Cabot Lodge returned to Saigon in the summer of 1965 for another tour as American ambassador, he enthusiastically pressed for the move, and his eventual successor, Ellsworth Bunker, also supported it. Yet I recognized that blocking the trail would require at least a corps-size force of three divisions, and I would be unable for a long time to spare that many troops from the critical fight within South Vietnam. When at last, in 1968, our strength had increased sufficiently and the enemy had been depleted enough to make the move possible, President Johnson was so beset by war critics that he would take no step that might possibly be interpreted as broadening the war, which he had publicly announced he would not do.75/

In early 1966 Westmoreland's staff developed several contingency plans for Laos. One featured the Airmobile Cavalry Division establishing an airhead on the Bolovens Plateau and then attacking north and west to reach the Mekong; the 3rd Marine Division was to attack along Route 9 to capture Tchepone, while the 4th US and an ARVN division were to attack west from Pleiku and the A Shau Valley, respectively. The Chief of Staff of the US Army, General Harold K. Johnson strongly supported such a move; after a visit to RVN in March 1965, he also recommended that an international military force be stationed along the DMZ to block infiltration.76/

However, in an August 1966 cable to CINCPAC (information copies to the White House, State Department, Secretary of Defense, JCS, and CIA) which outlines MACV's concept of operations for 1966 and probable

strategy for 1967, no mention is made of the need for or possibility of employing large ground forces in Laos.77/ President Johnson's repeated statements of "We want no wider war" effectively shelved such plans for several years.

General Dwight Beach, Commander, USARPAC, in Hawaii, when commenting on MACV's 1967 campaign plan stated that:

> ... I concur with your position to resist pressures to devote a great share of our energies and resources to trying to stem the flow of men and materiel into SVN from the North. It is virtually impossible to stop or appreciably impede infiltration into SVN with ground forces now available or programmed for the theater, especially in light of the contiguous sanctuaries the enemy now enjoys. Although it would be desirable to stop or measurably impede infiltration, such action is not imperative to our winning a military victory. Moreover, maintaining that long and difficult LOC saps a sizeable measure of the enemy's effort and resources. It has, assuredly, exacted its toll on the fighting capabilities of NVA units. Our air and naval interdiction operations must be continued at the present level and, if possible, they must be expanded. Although not in themselves capable of quelling infiltration, their effects against the enemy and his movement of personnel and equipment to the South are appreciable.78/

Beach's comment on the adverse effect of maintaining a "long and difficult LOC," while true to a degree, is interesting and raises a question. Would not that LOC be more difficult and costly to defend and maintain if it were cut, at least periodically?

Early in 1968, General Westmoreland directed General Bruce Palmer, then Deputy Commander USARV to come up with a new plan - El Paso I. Two US and one ARVN division would attack Tchepone from the east while another US division would link up there from Thailand; a basic assumption was that Thai and Royal Laotion forces would dominate the Bolovens. A weaker variant (El Paso II) would be limited to one reinforced division (four brigades) which would attack from A Shau-Khe Sanh region to take Tchepone.79/

In 1977, General Palmer, in presenting an alternative to the attrition strategy at the Army War College, suggested, in part, that the bulk of US and ROK troops should have been concentrated in the northern part of RVN. Under this concept, a force of about five divisions, including one in reserve, would defend the DMZ area. This could be, for example, two US, two ROK and one ARVN division. To support that force, a major port and base area would be required in the North, as well as major road construction. The drive into Laos would probably have to be undertaken in a later phase after the necessary logistic organization was in place. Three US divisions could do this task later, perhaps being partly replaced by RVN and/or ROK troops.80/ If political realities denied extension of the line into Laos, Palmer suggested that the flank be "refused" to deny access to the A Shau Valley, and that periodic raids be made into the Laotian base areas.

General Wheeler, then CJCS, decided to employ the "shock" of Tet '68 to try to get the President to mobilize and rebuild the depleted US strategic reserves under the guise of reinforcing MACV. In going along with that tactic, Westmoreland hoped to get about half of the 206,000 men, some of whom could be employed to cut the trail system.81/ Unfortunately, in his report on his three-day trip to Vietnam, Wheeler does not mention building up the strategic reserve or of any possible move into Laos.82/ When "Westmoreland's" request was leaked to the press, it had a tremendous adverse effect in the US.

Among civilian critics of our defensive ground strategy in RVN were Norman Hannah, of the US Foreign Service, and Colin Gray, of Hudson Institute. Both argue that we should have cut the Laotian corridor and forced the enemy to fight there or give up. Hannah writes that by confining ourself in "space" we ran out of "time."83/

In retrospect, General Westmoreland believes that not aggressively following up the enemy's military defeats in 1968 was a grave error:

> Yet even with the handicap of graduated response, the war still could have been brought to a favorable end following defeat of the enemy's Tet offensive in

> 1968. The United States had in South Vietnam at that time the finest military force -- though not the largest -- ever assembled. Had President Johnson changed our strategy and taken advantage of the enemy's weakness to enable me to carry out the operations we had planned over the preceding two years in Laos and Cambodia and north of the DMZ, along with intensified bombing and the mining of Haiphong Harbor, the North Vietnamese doubtlessly would have broken. But that was not to be. Press and television had created an aura not of victory but of defeat, which, coupled with the vocal antiwar elements, profoundly influenced timid officials in Washington. It was like two boxers in a ring, one having the other on the ropes, close to a knock-out, when the apparent winner's second inexplicably throws in the towel.84/

There were many apparent military advantages to cutting the trail, but the difficulties would have been immense and the costs high. It is highly doubtful if Gray's two divisions, Westmoreland's one to three, or even Palmer's five or six would have been adequate. (See Figure 3-4 and Map 3-3 for possible gains and losses from such a strategic move).

c. Concentrate on the Enemy's "Rear Bases"

1) Sir Robert Thompson, among others, was a critic of our strategy in 1965-1968, because it did not place sufficient priority and pressure on the enemy's "rear bases." He wrote that:

> In war when two countries, or two groups of countries, face each other there are four main aims leading to defeat or victory. In normal sequence these are:
>
> - defeating the enemy's main forces in the field;
> - disrupting the enemy's rear base;
> - breaking the enemy's will to resist or to attack; and
> - because war is "poltics with bloodshed" achieving the political aims of the war.
>
> The first and second aims are important only in their contribution to the third - breaking the enemy's will - without which the fourth and final aim cannot be achieved. The most important of these aims is therefore the third.85/

Factors	Gains	Losses
1. Political		
a. USA	• "Hawks" would applaud bold move	• Heavy casualties likely • "Doves" would cry "escalation" and wider war
b. RVN	• Would raise morale	
c. World		• Reaction from USSR & PRC? • US invasion of "neutral" Laos • Final destruction of facade of Laos (62) & Geneva (54) Accords
2. Initiative	• US (& RVN) initially	• Then?
3. Objective	• A critical one (decisive)	• leaves PRC, Haiphong and Cambodian LOC open
4. Military	• Initially, an offensive move	• Later, essentially defensive
	• Big fights away from population	• Two long, vulnerable flanks
	• Reduces enemy pressure on RVN	• Ties up large number of troops (to protect N&S flanks in depth and large reserves)
	• Requires major enemy effort to try to reopen and then protect LOC	• Easy for PAVN to infiltrate units between strong points/ Firebases & attack from all sides
	• Requires enemy to mass and thus facilitate air and ground fire-power "attrition"	• Many smaller Khe Sanhs? • Terrain and weather favor enemy's operational mode, draws off troops from other parts of RVN.
	• Mobile tactics possible, to a degree • Permits fortification of positions • Air support available from both RVN and Thailand	• Strategic and even tactical surprise difficult (open and large buildup and infiltration of GVN and RVNAF).
5. LOC	• Cuts major enemy route to RVN	• Lengthens US/RVNAF LOC • Single, poor road (Route 9)
	• Could open Land LOC from Thailand	• Shortens PAVN LOC for c/attacks • PAVN knows area well
6. Terrain		• Mountains and Jungles • Most difficult for Rome Plows
7. Distance (air)*		• Sea to RVN Border, 45 miles; RVN border to Tchepone 25 miles; and to Mekong another 100 miles
8. Weather		• Different Monsoon cycle (effects on air support and resupply)
9. Enemy (assumes Lao Dong's long range goal unchanged) Options		
	• Temporarily revert to Phase II of People's War in RVN?	• Tie down and attrite US (and allied) forces by numerous attacks by fire and sappers, and by ambushes • Threaten and/or attack Hue, Danang, Saigon, etc. to draw off troops and air support. • Activate RVN wide attacks by

Figure 3-4. Possible Gains and Losses Trail Along Route 9

numerous attacks by fire and sappers, and by ambushes
- Threaten and/or attack Hue, Danang, Saigon, etc. to draw off troops and air support.
- Activate RVN wide attacks by PLAF local and regional troops.
- Speed up PAVN "Force Development" and modernization
- Isolate and destroy one or more US units (mini Dien Bien PHU)
- Feints, demonstrations, rushes, and main attacks across DMZ and/or against most vulnerable positions in Laos - from both North and South
- Move LOC to West (if block anchored at Tchepone) or even into Thailand

- To move LOC takes time and effort; terrain more open to West
- Possible reaction from Thailand, less likely from SEATO

* Much longer on ground

Comments

1. Any major attempt to cut Ho Chi Minh Trail should have been evaluated in light of realities and possible enemy counters plus his toughness, determination, resourcefulness, and mode of fighting; any such attack would probably have appeared to be easy at first but would have ended up as a tough and costly slugging match - dictated by the enemy.

2. In early 1971, LAM SON 719 was more failure than success. Three of RVNAF's best divisions, reinforced with Armor and Rangers and provided with massive US air and helicopter support plus protection of their flanks in RVN, could not even reach, let alone hold, Tchepone in strength. Granted that there was no strategic or tactical surprise and that PAVN was bigger and in some ways better then, but so was RVNAF. (That operation analyzed in next chapter).

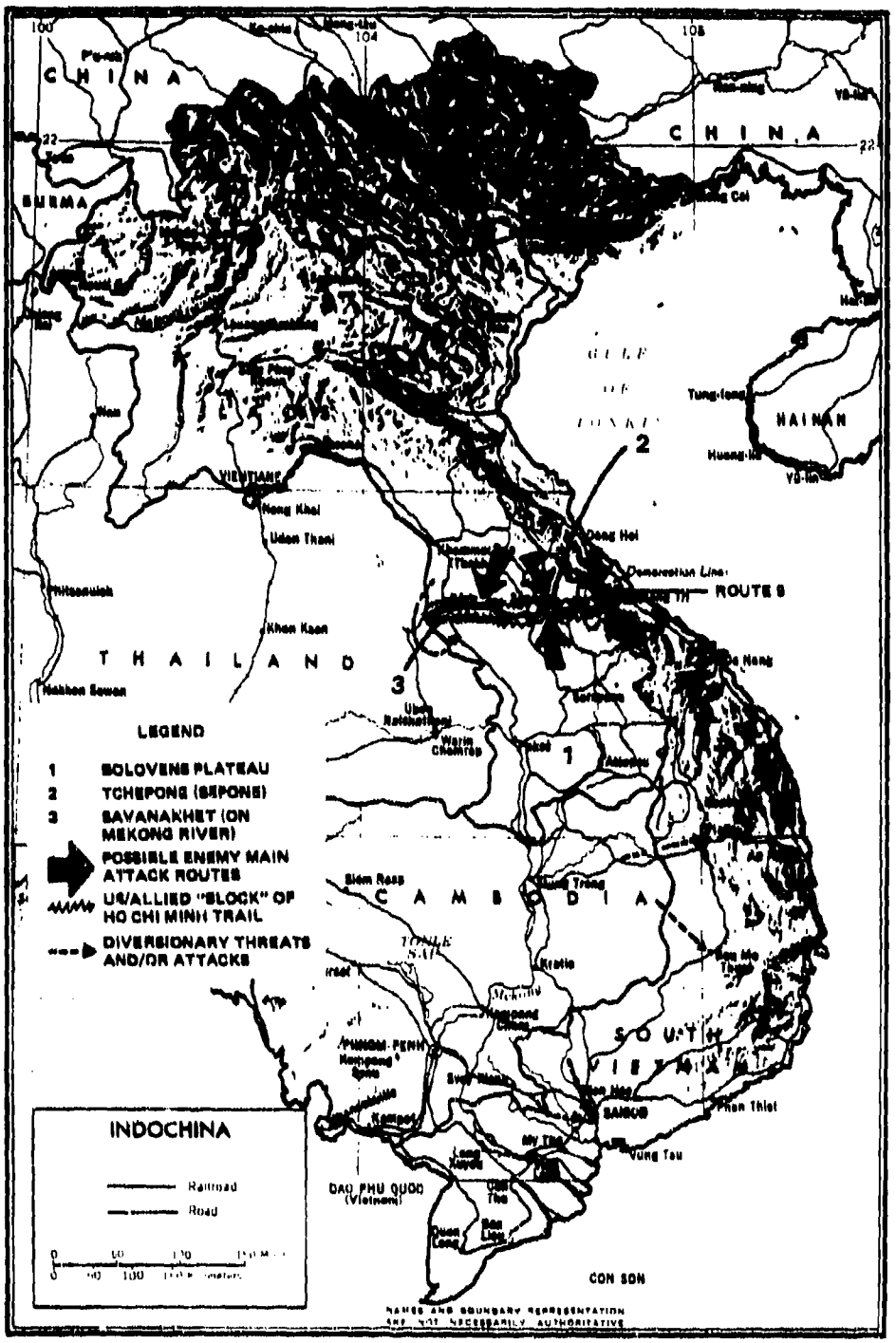
3. The Bolovens variant would have had a number of advantages (such as more defensible terrain for US type operations) but would have been difficult to support; aerial resupply would have strained severely available resources.

4. The Ho Chi Minh Trail System had the reverse value of the Shennandoah Valley in our Civil War; the latter provided the South with a covered approach leading towards vital objectives in the North but away from Confederate ones. The Truong Son (Annamite) chain provided a protected-if difficult in the early years - approach to Hue, DaNang and the Central Plateau, and later even to War-Zones C&D.

5. The trail system was most important to the enemy when large, more modern units required increasing amounts of large caliber ammunition and POL, and especially so when the Cambodian LOC was cut off in 1970.

6. On balance it is likely that fairly large scale and extended raids - varied in time, location and mode - would have been the most productive and least costly tactic. That approach would have tied down fewer friendly troops and would have retained the initiative. It also would have enhanced the possibility of local surprise due to the less massive, more dispersed and shorter preparation period. The enemy would have to guess more about <u>where</u>, <u>when</u>, and <u>how</u>, and thus more of his troops would be tied down in LOC security.

SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis



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SOURCE: BDM Analysis

Map 3-3. Cutting the Ho Chi Minh Trail

He then argued that in the 20th century, the US has concentrated on the first aim at the expense of the second.

> Insufficient attention has been paid to this problem of rear bases, both from the point of view of defense and attack, in the modern context of war short of nuclear war. This aim of disrupting the enemy's rear base while securing one's own is far more important in achieving victory and breaking the enemy's will to resist than the first aim of defeating the enemy's main forces in the field. In insurgency and counter-insurgency it is the primary aim.86/

In the Second Indochina War the enemy had a number of rear bases which varied in size, function and geography. For example:

- The "secure main rear" in the DRV;
- The "fraternal rear" in the PRC and the USSR;
- The sanctuaries in Laos & Cambodia;
- The almost inaccessible main force/logistics bases such as the Do Xa, War Zones C and D, and the U-Minh;
- The more numerous but smaller regional (local) force base areas;
- Liberated areas where GVN's writ was non-existent or tenuous;
- NLF "Combat hamlets";
- Underground cells in other hamlets, villages, towns, cities, and perhaps most importantly within GVN & RVNAF.

Only in the last half of 1972 were all categories of these bases under concurrent, sustained, and effective "attack" by one or more means: political, diplomatic, psychological, economic and military.

A criticism of the attrition or big war strategy was that it focused too much attention and disproportionate resources on the wrong end of the scale. General Westmoreland wondered whether Sir Robert really understood the impact of the enemy's main forces (PLAF & PAVN) on the Regional Forces and Village Militia, because in Malaya there were no large, well-armed enemy units. Sir Robert countered with:

> This is where I think I am possibly misunderstood by many military people, and certainly misunderstood by

> General Westmoreland, when I say "priority" as compared with "major effort." Now, I understand full well what North Vietnamese regiments, battalions, and divisions mean, and that those had to be held and dealt with. That required a major effort, but we still come back to what is your priority policy during this stage. Your priority policy must be to defend or, better still, to improve your own rear bases while trying to attack the enemy's rear bases. My own feeling about the whole situation at that time was that you had reached a state of perpetual motion. It could have gone on forever at that sort of pace, provided you were prepared to keep it up. The whole thing was changed by the Tet offensive, which, after all, was carried out on Hanoi's initiative.88/

In his memoirs and in recent interviews, Westmoreland recalls vividly how he had persuaded RVNAF in 1964 to break down larger ARVN units in Binh Dinh Province into smaller saturation patrols. He also remembered what happened: PLAF regiments came out of the Do Xa base area and chewed up the small units one by one. He later wrote, "It was a lesson to be long remembered. . ." and it was.89/

When US ground troops arrived in RVN, the situation was grim to say the least. Much of RVNAF was dispirited. GVN existed in little more than name, and strong enemy regiments were operational and tested; PLAF had a division (the 9th) not too far from Saigon and PAVN had one in the Central Highlands. The insurgency was flourishing and being reinforced by more and more main force units; but counterinsurgency was dead or very close to it. At that point only big units and big battles could stave off defeat; later the situation changed as did the tactics.

2) The Enemy's System

In preparing a good military strategy to defeat the enemy, one has to understand the interdependence and interrelationship between the three types of enemy forces (main forces, regional troops, and self defense militia or guerrillas), plus how they support and are supported by the political arm of the struggle. (The latter dynamic was covered in broad detail in the previous chapter.) Figure 3-5 portrays the synergistic relationship between the three elements of the military arm; displayed are the sorts of things each type might do before, during and

PHASE	SELF-DEFENSE MILITIA	REGIONAL FORCES	MAIN FORCES
BEFORE THE BATTLE	• PROTECT & SUPPORT THE VCI • GATHER & REPORT SPECIFIC INTELLIGENCE • SEND GOOD YOUNG MEN AS REINFORCEMENTS TO REGIONAL AND MAIN FORCES • ACT AS A "WARNING NET" • PROSELYTE ENEMY TROOPS & FAMILIES • DESTROY ENEMY AGENTS & CADRE (MILITARY & CIVIL) • TILL THE FIELDS, ETC. • INFILTRATE ENEMY UNITS • COLLECT FOOD, TAXES, ETC. FOR OTHER UNITS • MAKE & SET MINES & BOOBY TRAPS ETC. • CUT LOC • HARASS & DELAY ENEMY SWEEPS • DISPERSE, ATTRITE, & TIE DOWN ENEMY MOBILE UNITS • GUIDE, CARE FOR & PROTECT MAIN FORCE RECCE PARTIES, ETC. • HELP "PREPARE THE BATTLEFIELD" - CACHES, ETC. • ORGANIZE & CONTROL CIVILIAN PORTERS	• COOPERATE WITH & SUPPORT MILITIA AND/OR MAIN FORCES • SEND REPLACEMENTS TO MAIN FORCES • PROVIDE CADRE FOR EXPANDED FORCES • HELP BUILD COMBAT HAMLETS & TRAIN MILITIA • BUILD & PROTECT LOCAL BASE AREAS • CONDUCT OPERATIONS TO ATTRITE (PHYSICALLY & MORALLY) DISPERSE TIE DOWN ENEMY FORCES • AS REQUIRED & DIRECTED COME TO AID OF MILITIA • HELP "PREPARE THE BATTLEFIELD" • PROVIDE OUTER DEFENSE RING FOR MAIN FORCE BASES • PLAN, TRAIN, REHEARSE & REST FOR OPERATION	• PLAN, TRAIN, REHEARSE & REST FOR OPERATION • RESUPPLY • BUILD & DEFEND BASE CAMPS & LOGISTICS FACILITIES • 1967 ON: SEND NVN WEAPONS & REPLACEMENTS TO REGIONAL & MILITIA FORCES (REVERSE OF ORIGINAL CONCEPT)* • SUPERVISE & ASSIST IN "PREPARING THE BATTLEFIELD"
THE BATTLE	• GUIDE OTHER FORCES AS REQUIRED • LEAD & PROTECT CIVILIAN PORTERS • CREATE DIVERSIONS • INFLUENCE OR CONTROL THE POPULATION IN NEARBY VILLAGES/HAMLETS	• SERVE AS ELEMENT OF MAIN FORCE, AND/OR • PROVIDE SECURITY FOR MAIN FORCE MOVEMENTS, AND/OR • CONDUCT DIVERSIONARY ATTACKS/ RAIDS AND/OR • AMBUSH & CUT OFF REINFORCEMENTS AND/OR • CONDUCT FIRE/SAPPER ATTACKS ON ENEMY ARTILLERY, AIR BASES, HQ'S, AND/OR • THREATEN ENEMY BASES/UNITS TO PERMIT MAIN FORCE TO AMBUSH	• RAPID MOVEMENT-OFTEN DISPERSED - TO ASSAULT OR AMBUSH POSITION • CONDUCT MAIN ASSAULT OR AMBUSH ACCORDING TO PLAN • DEFEND AGAINST HELICOPTERS & AIRLIFT • QUICK MOP UP OF OBJECTIVE
AFTERWARDS	• HELP EVACUATE CASUALTIES & WEAPONS • CARE FOR WOUNDED & BURY DEAD • CRITIQUE ACTION--LESSONS LEARNED • PREPARE & SUBMIT REPORTS • TILL THE FIELDS, ETC. • ASSIST VCI IN ENHANCING POLITICAL GAIN FROM "VICTORY"	• HELP COVER WITHDRAWAL OF MAIN FORCES & CIVILIAN PORTERS • CONFUSE, DIVIDE & DELAY ENEMY PURSUIT • PROVIDE TEMPORARY REFUGE FOR SOME MAIN FORCE UNITS AND/OR WOUNDED • TURN OVER ANY PRISONERS TO MAIN FORCES • CRITIQUE ACTION - LESSONS LEARNED • PREPARE & SUBMIT REPORTS	• RAPID - OFTEN DISPERSED - WITHDRAWAL • PREPARE TO EVADE, AMBUSH, OR COUNTERATTACK ENEMY PURSUIT FORCES • PREPARE TO DEFEND OR EVACUATE BASE AREA • MOVE PRISONERS TO SAFE AREA • CRITIQUE ACTION - LESSONS LEARNED • PREPARE & SUBMIT REPORTS

* THE REVERSE OF EARLY PHASE OF INSURGENCY WHEN BEST WEAPONS CAPTURED, ETC. SENT TO MAIN FORCES

4841/78W

SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

Figure 3-5a. The Interdependence of and Interrelationship Among the Three Types of Enemy Units

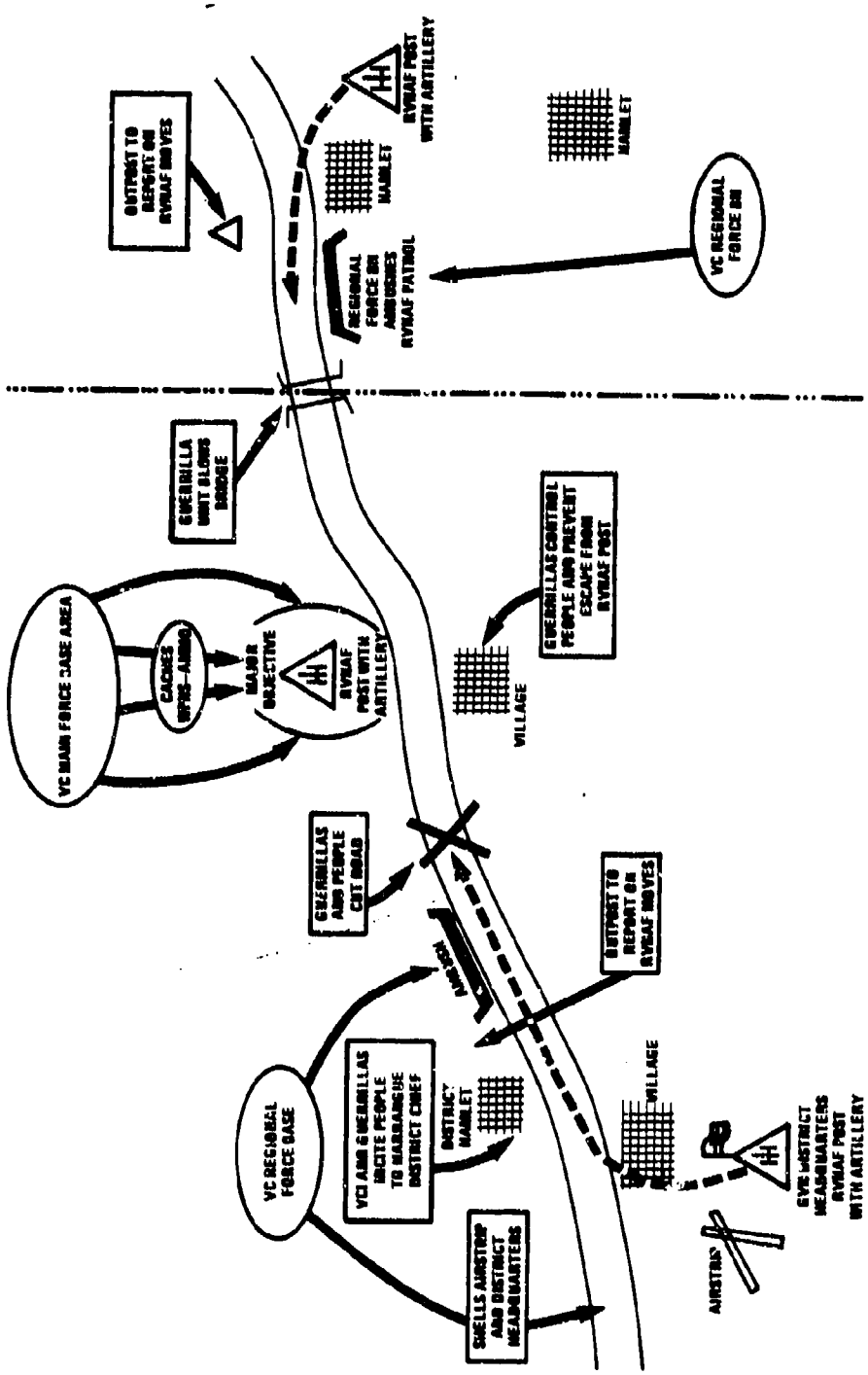


Figure 3-5b. Hypothetical Battle Involving All Three Types of PLAF (VC) Forces

after a hypothetical, but realistic, combat operation. An illustrative sketch is also attached. (All actions presented did not take place in every action, of course, and there were others - not displayed on the figure and sketch - which were employed by the enemy.)

General Giap appeared to believe that his commander in the South, General Thanh, was neglecting and draining the local guerrilla forces to build up his mobile main forces. The "debate" between the two and their supporters - in articles, speeches, etc. - went on for over a year with first Thanh's and finally Giap's view prevailing.90/ In January 1967, Giap gave a speech titled "The Strategic Role of the Self-defense Militia";91/ it was later broadcast over Radio Hanoi for domestic consumption. In that talk Giap reviewed - in detail - and extolled the pivotal role of the militia in the force triad, in both Vietnams; in the DRV "rear" they carried out air defense, civil defense, downed pilot capture, and counterinfiltration and invasion missions. Several of the key points he stressed were:

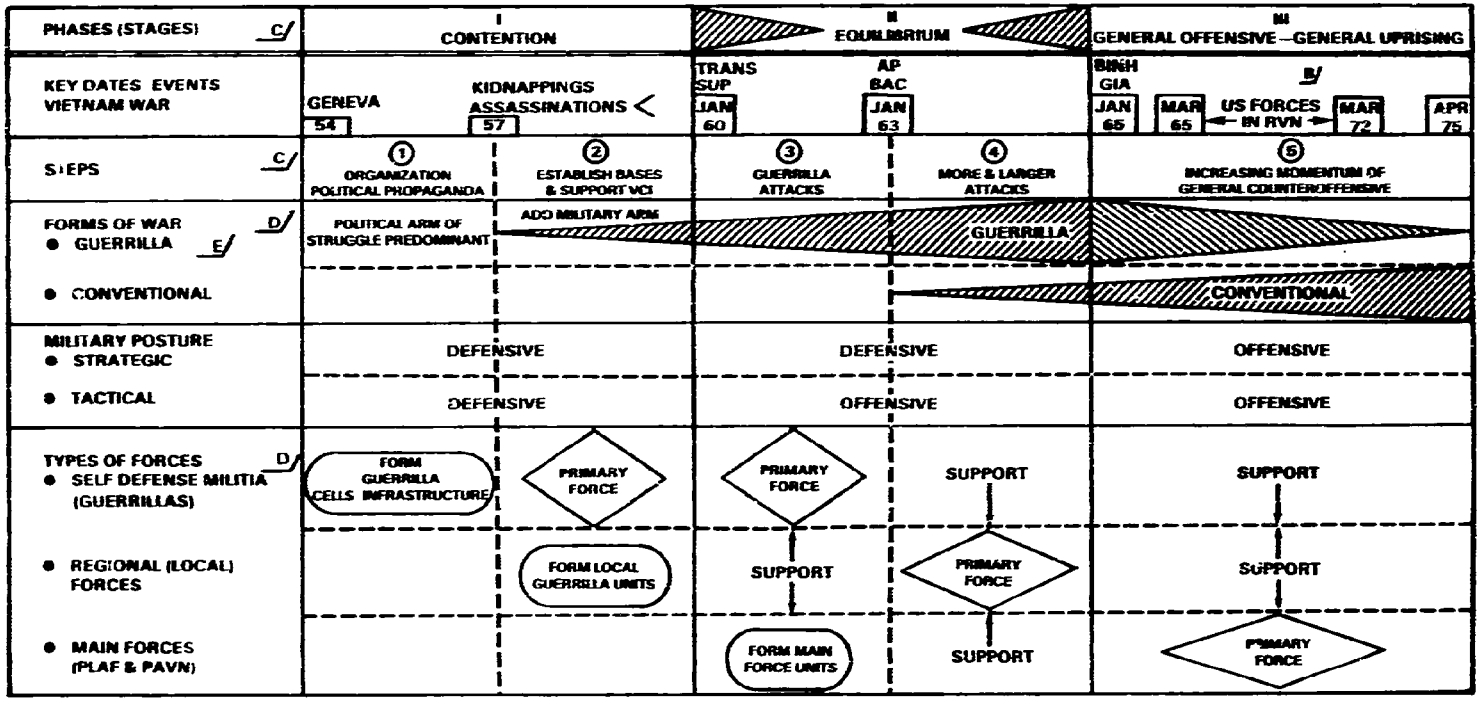
> Self-defense units and combat self-defense units were the first form of the revolutionary armed forces in our country. . [in 1930 & 1931] 92/
>
> The self-defense and militia forces and local units performed an essential role in waging guerrilla warfare in the areas behind enemy lines and protecting our large rear area during the protracted resistance war against the French imperialists. . . 93/
>
> The self-defense militia and guerrilla forces and local units are essential forces in the waging of a guerrilla war. Their strategic role is closely related to the strategic position of guerrilla warfare. . . 94/
>
> Self-defense militia units are the people's government's essential, basic-level instrument of authority. Born of the people and embracing elite elements of the people, essentially the basic worker-peasant masses, self-defense militia and guerrilla forces as well as main-force units and regional units, who are children or brothers of laboring people and who are enlightened and educated by the party, not only have a high sense of patriotism but also are firmly class conscious. . .95/

> The self-defense militia forces are an efficient cooperating combat force and an inexhaustible force supplementing the regular and local forces.
>
> So far as preparations for combat are concerned, the self-defense militia force, owing to its thorough knowledge of the local situation and roads, supplied the regular force with reliable guides and with accurate documents on local topography and the position of the enemy. The self-defense militia force also satisfactorily fulfilled the task of eliminating traitors and cruel agents and nailing down the victory after each great operation. Being an armed force in direct contact with the base, the self-defense force actively defended the people's lives and property, safeguarded manpower and wealth for the resistance, and created favorable conditions for the building and development of a large concentration of regular and local forces.96/

The military side of People's War (protracted struggle) was based on a complementary mix of two forms of warfare: guerrilla and conventional (mobile). The militia were the essential element of the former and the main forces of the latter, while the regional forces operated in both dimensions. Even in Phase III (General Offensive - General Uprising), guerrilla warfare played an important part in the concept in both rural and urban areas. (Figure 3-6 ties together the phases, stages, forms of war and the forces used.)

Apparently the major conceptual difference between Sir Robert Thompson and General Westmoreland centers on which end of the Guerrilla-Conventional scale to place the "priority" as distinguished from the "major effort." As mentioned previously, Westmoreland admitted that US Army had ". . . failed to pay sufficient attention to a combination of guerrillas, local forces and invading regular troops."97/

MACV decided that US intelligence resources, firepower, technology, materiel, and experience could be best employed to attrite and defeat the main forces while GVN and most of RVNAF should concentrate on eliminating the guerrillas and VCI. The theory was that without the threat of the big units the guerrillas would become easier prey for the GVN's military and police forces. Thompson argued that the US priority on the



SOURCE

BDM RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS (ALSO SEE NOTES OPPOSITE)

4541/7BW

NOTES

A GENERAL THEORETICAL DOCTRINE; IN PRACTICE VARIES BY TIME, PLACE, CIRCUMSTANCES AND PERSONALITIES

B US FORCES IN RVN CAUSED MAJOR CHANGES IN STRATEGY, TACTICS AND TIMING

C STAGES AND STEPS BASED ON INDOCHINA REFUGEE MONOGRAPH, STRATEGY & TACTICS, PP. 3-4 (MODIFIED)

D TYPES OF WAR AND FORCES BASED ON VARIOUS WRITINGS OF HO AND GIAP; INTERPRETATIONS BASED ON ANALYSIS

E THEORETICALLY, GUERRILLA WARFARE PLAYS A MAJOR BUT CHANGING ROLE IN ALL THREE PHASES; EVIDENCE EXAMINED TO DATE OBSCURES ITS PLACE IN THE FINAL OFFENSIVE OF 1975

Figure 3-6. Ho-Giap's People's War: Phases, Steps, Forms and Forces

main force war did not diminish the enemy's primary "rear base" among the people of RVN, which, despite heavy casualties, grew steadily until after Tet 68, and which, in turn, threatened both the GVN and US "rear bases" in country.98/ There is truth and bias on both sides, but the weight of the evidence examined appears to favor Sir Robert's thesis. Perhaps General Thanh's neglect of the guerrillas did more to impede their growth than did the combined actions of the US, GVN, and RVNAF.

For many reasons the American Way of War was most appropriate when exercised away from populated areas where it did the least damage to the people, their crops, and their homes. But the big frontier battles of 1966 and 1967 also played into the enemy's hands. Those fights were close to their supplies and sanctuaries, and in terrain more suitable to them than to US units. They also drew attention and resources away from pacification and pre-"Vietnamization." Although paying an excessive price in blood - in Western terms - the enemy's attrition strategy was paying increasingly large dividends for them in the United States.

A myth still exists which claims that "guerrillas" do not worry about control of territory*. For example, Kissinger writes:

> A guerrilla war differs from traditional military operations because its key prize is not control of territory but control of the population. This depends in part on psychologial criteria, especially a sense of security. No positive program of counterinsurgency can succeed unless the population feels safe from terror or reprisal. Guerrillas rarely seek to hold real estate.99/

The truth is that they do seek to hold (and expand) territory, but they do it differently from conventional armies. Both Indochina wars have been called "Wars without fronts." Again false. There were many, constantly shifting fronts and the villagers knew where theirs was, even if they often wouldn't say so. The "bases," described earlier, are

---

* In reality guerrillas comprise only one finger of one arm of People's War, or "struggle".

precious and essential to their doctrine and existence. Anyone who has attacked a well-defended combat hamlet or base camp will testify to that reality. If greatly outnumbered or surprised, the enemy might hide in tunnels or withdraw temporarily, but he would come back again and again. That is why Diem wanted "Strategic Hamlets" and his successors "New Life Hamlets," etc. Taking the same hamlet, hill, or base camp time after time - and suffering casualties, often from mines and booby traps - frustrated US soldiers and eventually the public. Less critical terrain in "liberated areas" was dominated or contested by fluid, economy of force guerrilla tactics, (again note the wei-ch'i strategy discussed in Appendix 1.) Mao's maxim of one against ten (strategically) and ten against one (tactically) was not used merely for propaganda or morale-raising purposes: rather it is central to the interrelationship between guerrilla and conventional warfare in a People's struggle. Guerrillas by multiple surprise strikes (and threats) disperse and tie down enemy forces while attriting them both physically and morally. In time, those actions create the opportunity for the main forces to concentrate superior strength at the time and place of their choice. The big battles - "won or lost" -then force the defenders to reconcentrate mobile units and thus protect less territory and fewer people. As Liddell Hart put the paradox,

> Under the new conditions of warfare, the cumulative effect of partial success, or even mere threat, at a number of points may be greater than the effect of complete success at one point.
>
> And for any real value it needs to be explained that the concentration of strength against weakness depends on the dispersion of your opponent's strength, which in turn is produced by a distribution of your own that gives the appearance, and partial effect of dispersion. Your dispersion, his dispersion, your concentration - such is the sequence, and each is a sequel. True concentration is the fruit of calculated dispersion.100/

That viewpoint calls into question the US and RVNAF tendency to equate "victory" or "defeat" with relative casualties.

Possibly a better understanding of the enemy's doctrine, strategy, and tactics would have resulted in a better US - and thus RVNAF - strategy earlier. The French "sweeps" and "mopping up" exercises generally paid the same price and had the same luck as did their US counterpart, "Search and Destroy." The NLF/PLAF even used the same old Viet Minh "countersweep tactics" against them.

Under the annual MACV Combined Campaign Plan (CCP), US division, brigade, or even battalion commanders had a great deal of latitude in what they did and how they did it; unfortunately most were in command only for six months to a year. Then-Major General Frederick Weyand, who brought the US 25th Infantry Division from Hawaii, was one who "went to school" on the enemy and apparently developed a good feel for the true nature of the conflict. Two-thirds of his division was located in Hau Nghia, a small province carved out by Diem to help cover the western and northern approaches to Saigon; it had the Cambodian Parrot's Beak on the west, War Zone C to the north, and the Iron Triangle to the east. The understrength and overstretched 25th ARVN Division was ineffective and dispirited. In an article General Weyand wrote:

> ...the conventional tactics of hitting enemy bases and denying him his lines of communication and supply and access routes were successful only to a limited degree. Prolonged discussions with the province chief made it clear that the fine work of destroying base areas, hard-core units, and lines of communication was having no measurable effect on the local civilians, and was not especially helpful to that offical in carrying out his mission of Revolutionary Development. Most of the province's hamlets remained under the firm control of local VC elements who continued to collect taxes, impress laborers and porters, assassinate government sympathizers.
>
> The Division responded by arranging for more effective long-term security for the people in the hamlets and for gearing operations toward the province chief's requirements.

> A joint operations and intelligence coordination center was established with the province chief at his capital at Bao Trai, and three of five available infantry battalions were deployed over areas selected by him.
>
> Throughout June each battalion provided an umbrella of security over an area of 25 square miles around each hamlet. In conjunction with local ARVN units, National Police, local officials, and elements of the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups, these battalions patrolled extensively, carried out daily search-and-clear operations, set multiple ambushes to restrict VC movement at night, ran medical and civic action programs in areas controlled by the enemy, and quickly established rapport with the civilians. Daily operations with units of the ARVN 25th Division became the order of the day.101/

General Weyand's perception of the problem and concept for attacking it, albeit imperfect, were closer to those of Sir Robert than they were to those of General Westmoreland. Later, regrettably, under different pressures and commanders, the US 25th Div. entered more fully into the "numbers game" and the "big battles."102/ The tactical approach taken by the 9th US Division is detailed in the DA study, Sharpening the Combat Edge.103/

d. Variations on the Theme

The ideal would have been to possess a sufficient number of high-quality forces to keep constant pressure on all parts of the enemy organization and system throughout RVN and in other key areas of Indochina. Since that ideal was totally unrealistic, choices had to be made and priorities established. In contrast to MACV's concentration on the visible and immediate threat of the enemy's big units, other strategists, military and civilian proposed a stronger focus on the closer-in protection of people and resources (primarily food) and thus on locating and destroying the local VCI and guerrillas; the enemy main forces and their bases could not be ignored but they were to be accorded second priority attention. There were strong advantages and disadvantages to the proposed emphasis. Some examples are cited below:

1) Marine CAPs

The US Marine Combined Action Program (CAP) was one which drew mixed reviews. The Marines, based on their esprit, self-confidence and experience in the so-called "banana wars," believed they were the ideal force to defeat the insurgency in Vietnam. One Marine major wrote in early 1962;

> No force in the world today is better equipped and organized for counter-guerrilla operations than the US Marine Corps. Some foreign armies have fought guerrillas well and hard in the past few years. None of them can match the Marine Corps' potential once it is fully matured by a sound and intensive training program.104/

That quote is the lead paragraph of an article in a special issue on Guerrilla Warfare of the Marine Corps Gazette; President Kennedy read and praised the issue.105/ It appears as if the Corps received the "counterinsurgency message" a bit faster than did the other services. In 1940 they had published a "small wars manual."

> A former III MAF staff officer in 1965 and, later, a battalion and combined action group commander, Colonel John E. Greenwood, cautioned that the relationship between Marine Corps counterinsurgency theory and the earlier Marine experience in the Caribbean can be overdrawn. Colonel Greenwood remarked that during the Kennedy era "guerrilla warfare expertise" was one of the "popular 'in' topics," and the "hundreds of Marine officers," including himself, "attended Army schools and studied the doctrine developed and articulated by the British and by the U.S. Army." He made the point that for officers of his generation, as opposed to the senior commanders such as General Walt, "our insights in war of this kind came from this nearly contemporary effort, not from Marine Corps experience 30 years previous."106/

(During the early part of the war some senior Army officers claimed that the Army also had a lot of experience in guerrilla warfare, pointing to "Swamp Fox" Marion in the Revolution, John Mosby and others in our Civil

War, plus field experience against the American Indians and Aguinaldo in the Philippines. But veterans of those campaigns were no longer with us, and those with more recent and relevant experiences--against the Huks for example - were too often prophets without honor.)

Once in Vietnam in force, the Marines started civic action and pacification programs with characteristic gusto. That drive worried at least two senior RVNAF generals who discussed their lack of enthusiasm for those activities with the MACV J3, then BG. William DePuy.107/

The initial Marine enclaves were practically surrounded by Vietnamese hamlets, so they were automatically in the pacification business whether they wanted to be or not. LTG Lewis Walt, long-time commander of the III MAF, was enthusiastic about the CAP concept and gave it full support; he also "unequivocally" gave full credit for the idea to Capt. John J. Mullen, who recalled a similar scheme employed by the British in Malaya.108/

In his official report on the war, General Westmoreland approved and praised the CAP concept with these words:

> In the I Corps, the U.S. Marines employed Combined Action Platoons, consisting of 15 U.S. Marines and 34 Vietnamese Popular Forces soldiers. The Marines lived with their Popular Forces compatriots in the hamlet or village which they were assigned to secure. While adding considerable fighting strength, the Marines trained their counterparts in military matters and instituted many civic action projects. Providing both combat and logistic support, the Marines did much to establish mutual respect between themselves and the Vietnamese. I encouraged the expansion of this highly successful program, and by the end of June 1968, 82 Combined Action Platoons were functioning in the zone of the I Corps.109/

But, in his memiors he remarked that:

> Although I disseminated information on the platoons and their success to other commands, which were free to adopt the idea as local conditions might dictate, I

> simply had not enough numbers to put a squad of Americans in every village and hamlet; that would have been fragmenting resources and exposing them to defeat in detail.110/

2) A Compromise

Army Commanders did not rush to emulate the Marines, so COMUSMACV later initiated a compromise program:

> Another experiment was to attach a battalion of Vietnamese field police to an American division. Of marked success with the Regional and Popular Forces were training teams composed of an ARVN officer, an American officer, and three other American soldiers, all combat veterans, that lived with the small militia units for a month or more, then moved on to another unit. It was an adaptation of the Combined Action Platoons used by the US Marines but it made less demand on American manpower and was without permanent attachment to a Vietnamese hamlet.111/

Although helpful in upgrading the militia, that innovation probably was not as effective as the CAP program, as it did not involve the training team as intimately or as long with the people of the hamlet as did the Marine program; a month was not long enough. Admittedly the program was costly in people, but if our primary military mission in Vietnam was to help the RVNAF stand on its own feet, more resources could have been found among the more than 550,000 US troops in Vietnam; far too many were tied up in support activities in the numerous large base camps and headquarters.

3) Possible Modifications to CAP or MTT

By 1968, the Army alone had enough officers and senior NCO's involved in advisory duties to man the officer/SNCO billets in seven divisions.112/ A large number of those were tied up in (over) supervision, administration, and the "numbers game."113/ There were several ways in which the concept could have been expanded in addition to fielding extra teams. For example:

- If the Army Mobile Training Teams stay was too brief in each hamlet, possibly the Marines stayed too long. The Hoc Tap, or

spreading oil slick principle, could have been tried, again, with teams moving outward from the center as permitted by the security situation.

- As security improved, the teams could be cut in half; i.e., an Army fire team per hamlet.
- There was no need for an officer with each team if and when good NCO's were available; admittedly they were scarce towards the end. One combat-experienced officer could supervise four to six teams, spending several days and nights with each in turn.

The CAP program is analyzed in more depth in Chapter 5, "Pacification and Vietnamization," Volume V, and in Chapter 14, "Civil Affairs," Book 2, Volume VI.

4) The "McNamara Line"

By mid-1966, the lack of positive response from Hanoi to our "signals" and "carrots and sticks," plus the data and analyses coming to him from Systems Analysis, led Secretary McNamara to start doubting if attrition by air and ground was working; he also began to believe that the air war over the DRV was too expensive and counter productive politically. He thus was open to face-saving and cost-effective innovations that would stop or severely hinder infiltration without bombing in the North.114/

The heavy PAVN build up in Northern I Corps concerned General Westmoreland very much and he wanted to provide security against major attacks and infiltration without tying up a large number of (non-available) troops in a static defense of the DMZ. He chose to build several strong points which would be backed up by mobile reserves. Westmoreland recalls that:

> Work was beginning on the strongpoint obstacle system when I went to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines in mid-September 1966 to confer with a representative of the Defense Department, Lieutenant General Alfred D. Starbird, who informed me that scientists had sold Secretary McNamara on a plan to create an electronic barrier to enemy movement running below the DMZ from

> the sea to the Laotian border and thence across the panhandle to Thailand. It was a noble idea: use advanced technology to spare the troops an onerous defensive task. It was also highly theoretical, but I got the impression that some of the people promoting it, if not McNamara himself, saw it as a cure for infiltration that would justify stopping the bombing of North Vietnam.115/

The idea of the barrier concept came from the fertile brain of Professor Roger Fischer of Harvard Law School 116/ who, it seems, had become a "penpal" of John McNaughton, the ASD/ISA, who had strategic ideas of his own.

When work was started to clear the linear barrier belt, the enemy moved up artillery, which made that job exceedingly dangerous. The original concept was quietly shelved by General Westmoreland, who stated,

> While foregoing the idea of a wide swath cleared by bulldozers the whole length of the DMZ, General Walt and I settled for clearings in the vicinity of the strongpoints and intermittent barriers of wire, mines, and sensors. The sensors would provide early warning of the enemy's approach and the wire and mines encourage him to move along corridors of our choosing; but as I had originally contemplated, the final defense rested on planes, artillery, and mobile ground reserves.117/

A former Marine officer was much more blunt than was COMUSMACV:

> The only way to describe the barrier is to recognize it as just one more "happening" in the Defense Department's Alice in Wonderland approach to insurgency. The principal staff officer on the III Marine Amphibious Force who was called upon to breathe life into the barrier nightmare remarked to me, "They must be smoking hashish. All the barrier will do is cause needless casualties and waste time and money." The officer in question is a real professional. He resented the prostitution of his talents to prepare a plan in support of an action without determining - or being allowed to consider -if what may be gained from the action is likely to justify its cost in money and

> effort. He also resented the fact that no attempt was made to think through the strategy in connection with its development and use.
>
> "Construction" of the barrier proceeds like a WPA project, but with a difference. At each step the Marines who were required to plow the 500-meter-wide strip have been shot at by North Vietnamese gunners like clay pigeons in a shooting gallery. War is a chancy business at best, but the barrier is a ridiculous example of how our policy makers grasp at straws about how to move in Vietnam. Dissent, or even discussion, based on the realities of the barrier idea was not permitted.118/

Except for more sophisticated and expensive equipment, the concept was similar to the "Maurice Line" the French erected between Algeria and Tunisia and the one the East Germans built to keep their people from escaping to the West. The problem lay in the fact that the terrain and situation were quite different; sometimes those differences were not fully appreciated in the Harvard Yard or on the E Ring, 3d Floor, of the Pentagon.

Secretary McNamara made a cardinal error when at a press conference he announced grandiose plans for the barrier; the reporters soon named it the "McNamara Line" while its actual code name was Project Mason or operation DYE MARKER. However, many of the sensors destined for the never-started western portion of the line were later put to good use around Khe Sanh.119/ Thus died, silently and unmourned, another costly attempt to substitute money, technology, materiel and--most unfortunately--lives for a sound and coherent strategy.

A full (45-page) description, with maps, of the barrier plan is contained in the Appendix to Vol III of the still-classified, MACV Command History for 1967.

e. The Demographic Frontier Strategy

In July 1967 John McNaughton, ASD/ISA, was killed in a commercial airline crash. His place was taken by Paul C. Warnke, then the

General Counsel of DOD. By that time, Warnke had become increasingly disenchanted with our strategy in Vietnam, and he was a formidable opponent for the uniformed military. His colleague, Townsend Hoopes, wrote:

> Warnke possessed a strong, lucid mind, bold in conception, rigorously disciplined in argument. He was tough, but always personally engaging, discriminating, and fair. Above all, he brought to stale interagency arguments on Vietnam the precious gift of candor, including a refreshing readiness to assert the increasingly obvious truth that the Emperor's policy had no clothes on.120/

In the wake of the Tet '68 "shock," and the Wheeler/Westmoreland request for 206,000 more troops, the USG began an intensive reevaluation of US policies and strategies for Vietnam. ISA drafted a memorandum on the subject for the Secretary of Defense. It was no doubt influenced by an earlier Systems Analysis (SA) paper on "Alternative Strategies," which "painted a bleak picture of American failure in Vietnam," especially with regard to search-and-destroy operations.121/ That report arrived at the conclusion that "the enemy's current offensive appears to have killed the Pacification program once and for all."122/ They were not alone in that erroneous judgment, for even General Wheeler was pessimistic then. (In December 1965 Hoopes, then McNaughton's deputy, had suggested a similar, but more limited strategy than the one ISA deployed).123/

The ISA memorandum recommended that COMUSMACV be directed to develop an alternate strategy that would be less ambitious, less costly in blood, and which would concentrate on population/vital resource security. The paper then presented what was obviously their preferred alternative - a "demographic strategy of population security." The basic concept was that:

> Those forces currently in or near the heavily populated areas along the coast should remain in place. Those forces currently bordering on the demographic

> frontier should continue to operate from those positions, not on long search-and-destroy missions, but in support of the frontier. Eight to 10 battalions from the DMZ areas would be redeployed and become strategic research [sic-reserve] in I Corps; six battalions from the interior of II Corps would be redeployed to Dinh Binh province as a strategic reserve for defense of provincial capitals in the highlands. As security is restored in the previously neglected populated areas of coastal Viet Nam, additional U.S. battalions would move forward to the demographic frontier....
>
> Based just beyond the populated areas, the forces on the demographic frontiers would conduct spoiling raids, long range reconnaissance patrols and, when appropriate targets are located, search-and-destroy operations into the enemy's zone of movement in the unpopulated areas between the demographic and the political frontiers. They would be available as a quick reaction force to support RVNAF when it was attacked within the populated areas. Where RVNAF patrolling in the populated areas is inadequate, U.S. forces would be in a position to assist.124/

Eight advantages but no disadvantages were listed for that strategy. (Several of the "advantages" listed - such as the assumed improvement in RVNAF - appear to be more wishful than rational). When the ISA alternative strategy was presented in the Secretary of Defense's office on 1 March 1968, General Wheeler was "appalled" at the apparent repudiation of US military policy, and he also pointed out what he believed to be two "fatal flaws" in the concept:125/

- More fighting in and near the population would create more civilian casualties.
- "... a posture of static defense" would permit the enemy to mass near the cities.

The next day Warnke wrote to the Secretary of Defense a rebuttal of Wheeler's "fatal flaws."126/ He stated that:

- Tet showed that the enemy can and would fight in the cities when it suited him; civilian casualties actually might be reduced if US and RVNAF forces intercepted the enemy before he got into the cities.

- A static defense was not contemplated since the concept called for mobile operations near the "demographic" frontier; the MACV emphasis on defending the geographic frontiers had permitted the enemy to mass behind major US forces and near to the population.

Wheeler dashed off a backchannel message to Westmoreland asking that he state the objectives for the requested reinforcements and what specific dangers they would preempt. The response was very optimistic about defeating the enemy everywhere in RVN with the added forces, and stated that the highest priority was to protect Saigon and provincial capitals; the JCS took exception to the latter and stated that the first imperative was to break the enemy's offensive.127/

The key to the demographic strategy would have been to close down most of the border CIDG bases which tied up other forces for defense and rescue; their prospect of seriously impeding infiltration was debatable. For political and psychological reasons, the concept required that the inland provincial capitals be protected. It is likely, however, that over time those capitals would have been isolated by the enemy and that air resupply would have been required in staggering amounts. In effect, they might have become multiple Khe Sanh's with the added burden of tens of thousands of civilians requiring protection and support.

The bulk of US and some RVNAF forces would have been targeted on the enemy's "zone of movement" between his sanctuaries/bases and the populated area. If he wanted to fight the "big battles" and also support the regional and local guerrillas, he would have to lengthen his LOC while those of the US/RVNAF would be shorter. Of course, the enemy probably would have extended his LOC farther into RVN as he later did when US forces were being phased out.

On balance, such a strategy would have been closer to Sir Robert Thompson's concept of priorities than to General Westmoreland's. Yet it would have meant the eventual loss of the Montagnards, and most of the strategic central plateau; it also would have resulted in lack of strategic depth in central and northern RVN. An in-place cease-fire and

withdrawal of US forces might have left RVNAF in a very vulnerable position and the PRG would have the territory required to set up a "legitimate" rival to GVN in country - a long-term goal of theirs.

Under heavy enemy pressure in March 1975, President Thieu tried to implement a similar strategy, with disastrous results. Whether such a strategy would have worked earlier must remain a matter of conjecture.

US and other military officers get their backs up - often justifiably so - when forced to counter military concepts pushed by "arm chair or ivory-towered civilian strategists." The 300 or so professionals in OASD/ISA, however, were half military.128/ Nevertheless the key positions were, and are, held by civilian appointees. While supporting the need for tight civilian control of the military on the policy level, a number of senior officers, such as MG De Witt Smith, have objected to "inexpert meddling" in technical and professional matters; Smith also noted that McNaughton was "arrogant ... and patronizing."129/ Maxwell Taylor early took issue with all of the "help" received from the "Whiz Kids" in ISA and Systems Analysis.130/ The White House and the State Department also had their military strategists. Whom was the President to believe?

The ISA strategy was quietly shelved because President Johnson did not want to precipitate an open (or leaked) fight between his senior military and civilian advisors. (Yet Neil Sheehan and Hedrick Smith did publish an embarrassingly accurate account of the in-house "debate" on forces and strategy in the N.Y. Times of March 10, 1968). The final recommendation, again, was to try "a little more of the same,"131/ but the President was wavering; no one really knew how much so until his climactic speech of 31 March 1968.

A remarkably similar strategy was proposed in a student essay at the US Army War College in mid January 1968. Then Lt. Col. (now Maj. General) Richard L. Prillaman suggested that the first priority of US and RVN effort be concentrated on a "Development Zone" (heavily populated areas), next on a "Buffer Zone", and lastly on the sparsely populated "Risk

Zone." His thesis was that we did not possess sufficient troops and other resources in country to protect everything all of the time, and that our then current priorities were wrong.132/ He was dead right.

f. "Abe's Strategy": Clear and Hold

In mid-1968 General Creighton N. Abrams moved up to become COMUSMACV. A myth soon took hold that he had changed the US strategy from "search and destroy" to one of "clear and hold." (Actually neither was a strategy, but they were merely terms contrived to dramatize different operational modes). In reality, heavy fighting continued through the latter half of 1968 and a good part of 1969, including the much criticized shoot-out at Hamburger Hill.

The extremely heavy losses suffered by the enemy in 1968 and 1969 caused the DRV to revise their tactics, but not their long-range goals. Main force units were pulled back to remote bases and sanctuaries to rebuild, reequip and retrain. They kept a degree of initiative with cost-effective sapper and mortar/rocket attacks as well as with periodic assaults on isolated fire bases. That environment permitted US and Allied forces to breakdown into smaller units also.

Robert Komer, then Deputy for CORDS, states unequivocably that:

> I was there when General Abrams took over, and remained as his deputy. There was no change in strategy whatsoever. In fact, he said he didn't intend to make any changes unless he saw that some were necessary. The myth of a change in strategy is a figment of media imagination; it didn't really change till we began withdrawing.133/

As US forces withdrew in ever larger numbers, the emphasis on both Vietnamization and Pacification increased (See Volume V); and, as discussed in a previous section, the remaining US units gradually pulled back to the proximity of their bases (or enclaves), and assumed a "dynamic defense" posture.134/ Those were radical changes in ground strategies and tactics.

g. Going for the Jugular - or at least a Major Artery

Some military officers who believe that MACV was forced into an attrition strategy by political and geographic constraints contend that we could have exploited our air and sea mobility better by hitting at the DRV's "jugular": the Haiphong - Hanoi axis. General Taylor agreed that such a move would have been the "school solution" at Leavenworth: destroy their rear base first and worry about the jungles later. But, based on US objectives, fear of countermoves by the PRC and the USSR, plus the demands of other more important US commitments, such a strategy was proscribed.135/

As an element of his alternate strategic proposal, General Bruce Palmer would have at least threatened, on a sustained basis, an amphibious assault on the flanks and rear of the PAVN forces.136/ To retain credibility, however, that threat would have to have been exercised realistically from time to time. Short, sharp amphibious raids on the DRV would probably have produced some, but not decisive, military and psychological benefits. But it is also probable that the domestic and international political costs would have been very high.

Because of their tight control and the organization of their people and militia, a sustained ground operation in the DRV would have been exceedingly costly in US men and materiel. The Lao Dong leadership most likely would have dispersed into their old jungle haunts or even to the PRC if necessary. They could afford the time to attrite our forces and wait for political pressures to force a withdrawal, and then claim a great "victory." General Giap, when lauding the merits of the DRV's self-defense militia, wrote:

> Preparing ourselves for opposing a limited war is an important task of all our party, people, and army. By satisfactorily opposing the enemy's war of destruction, we can create a favorable position from which to defeat all adventurous acts of the U.S. aggressors, including a situation in which they dare to use their infantry to attack the North. We must, therefore, closely coordinate the immediate fighting task with the task of making preparations for protracted combat,

> which is entrusted to the armed forces in general and to the self-defense militia force in particular. While concentrating leadership on opposing the enemy's war of destruction, all localities must work out plans for organizing defense and fighting against the enemy on the ground in accordance with the policy and plans of their superiors. Local troops and self-defense militia must be prepared in all fields and be ready to collaborate with regular units to defeat enemy troops on the mainland from the outset. A plan must be worked out for developing these preparatory tasks, and for determining which tasks must be fulfilled immediately and which tasks must be carried out only after careful preparations, so that we can correctly enforce the policy of coordinating economic and military aspects and combat and production.137/

In his book Nguyen Cao Ky laments the fact that the US never agreed to permit or support his "march to the north." He wanted to organize guerrilla bases in selected portions of the DRV to undermine the control of the Lao Dong Party.138/ The extremely tight surveillance and control exercised by the Party probably would have made such a venture very risky and of dubious value, however. Possibly the most likely "targets" for developing a guerrilla base would have been among the residual Roman Catholics and those mountain tribes which had cooperated with the French against the Viet Minh. It is probable, however, that the Rolling Thunder air strikes on the DRV created more of a hostile than a receptive climate for such a venture. Besides, in repeated public statements the USG announced that there would be no threat to the Party or to the government of the DRV.

Some US unconventional warfare planners hoped to conduct a series of deep airmobile raids (similar to the one on Son Tay) to demonstrate the vulnerability of the DRV to surprise strikes. Such raids, if well planned and led, could have provided significant political, psychological, and to a lesser extent military benefits for the US and RVN; they would not have been as morally "repugnant" as were the widespread and more imprecise bombings.139/ They certainly would have created major political and military problems for the enemy, and would have been the US' equivalent

of sapper attacks. A suitable target, for example, would have been the electric generating plant on a huge dam, which was off limits to the bombers because of the probability of creating a major flood. Although not a strategy, per se, the concept had merit and is worth a separate, detailed feasibility study.140/

h. Other Options and Mixes

None of the strategies (or sub-strategies) discussed in this section were intended to stand alone, but rather were one side of the US strategic quadrangle which was composed of:

- The efforts to assist the GVN and RVNAF towards eventual self-sufficiency; this included, of course, the various Pacification programs.
- The ground strategy, which was confined to the RVN for the most part, but which was supplemented by the air interdiction efforts in southern DRV and eastern Laos.
- The air campaign over the DRV, and to a lesser degree, the one over the rest of Laos.
- The quest for meaningful negotiations.

The ground strategies have been highlighted in this chapter as the others are covered elsehwere in the study. A coherent grand strategy would have required that all four of those strategic legs be carefully orchestrated in both planning and execution. It didn't work that way until too late in the game.

An interesting gambit was proposed by the USAF during the post-Tet deliberations on strategies by the Clifford Task Force. Hoopes, then Under Secretary of the Air Force, wrote later:

> The Air Staff forwarded three alternatives: (1) an intensified bombing campaign in the North, including attacks on the dock area of Haiphong, on railroad equipment within the Chinese Buffer Zone, and on the dike system that controlled irrigation for NVN agriculture; (2) a greater effort against the truck routes and supply trails in the southern part of North Vietnam (the narrow area called the panhandle) to be generated by shifting about half the daily sorties away from the

> Hanoi-Haiphong area; and (3) a campaign designed to substitute tactical airpower for a large portion of the search-and-destroy operations currently conducted by ground forces, thus permitting the ground troops to concentrate on a perimeter defense of the heavily populated areas.
>
> The Air Staff strongly preferred Alternative 1, but Brown and I continued to feel that, while there was little assurance such a campaign could either force NVN to the conference table, or even significantly reduce its war effort, it was a course embodying excessive risks of confrontation with Russia. Alternative 2 was statistically promising (it became the basis for the President's later decision to eliminate all bombing above the 20th parallel), but it too lacked decisiveness. Alternative 3 was pressed on the staff largely at my insistence, and the analysis seemed to show that tactical airpower could provide a potent "left jab" to keep the enemy in the South off balance while the U.S.-ARVN ground forces adopted a modified enclave strategy, featuring enough aggressive reconnaissance to identify and break up developing attacks, but designed primarily to protect the people of Vietnam and, by population and control measures, to force exposure of the VC political cadres. It was strategy aimed not at winning a military victory, but at providing a strong negotiating posture. Harold Brown forwarded the Air Staff papers together with a memorandum representing his supplementary views and my own. He and I were in full agreement.141/

(Alternative 3 is intriguing because its argument discloses how military logic and analyses can be, and were, engineered to support the political objectives of the protagonists as the US withdrawal was accelerated, 1970-1972, airpower in fact was substituted for ground troops.)

i. The Alternatives Weighed

None of the alternatives to attrition, discussed in this section, was totally without at least a modicum of merit, but possibly the least worthy was the theoretical concept for the "McNamara Line." Yet the major point to be made here is that no substantive alternative was considered seriously until after Tet 68'. Strategy and tactics for the ground war, with few exceptions, were the province of MACV; for better or for worse, the JCS remained as minor supporting actors in the drama. (See

Section H, Chapter 11, Book 2 of this volume). How any of those options would have unfolded must remain as yet another interesting "what if", as must the potential enemy counters; besides, by March 1968, the USG had shelved any idea of "winning the war." A final point: sound alternative strategies could and should have been studied objectively much earlier.

E. AMERICANIZATION OF THE WAR: RVNAF GETS A BREATHER

1. At the Expense of RVNAF

The effects of the huge and pervasive US presence in RVN on the government, society, economy, armed forces, etc. of that developing and struggling country were covered in Volume II.142/ The intent of this brief section, then, is to isolate only several key factors which helped magnify the "shock of Tet '68."

The tremendous expenses demanded by the US Ways of Life and War drew off funds that might and should have been devoted to an earlier upgrading of RVNAF; that constraint was magnified by President Johnson's burning desire to build his Great Society concurrently with the war and without increasing taxes. As early as December 1965, General Harold K. Johnson was concerned about that problem:

> Inevitably, the growing U.S. commitment is absorbing support capability originally designated and provided to the ARVN. We must be especially sensitive to providing the same measure of support for ARVN as we do to other third-country forces. I can not make a judgment on the time when ARVN morale and determination might deflate sharply as a result of a feeling of second class status; however, there is a very real danger in this condition arising and we must continue to follow the philosophy of providing too much rather than too little to the ARVN. The time has passed when we achieve success by promising a matching capability in some future time frame for the ARVN.143/

His fears were well grounded. For several critical years RVNAF units - and especially the RF/PF who suffered the most casualties - were out-gunned by the enemy's AK47's and RPG's. General Westmoreland wrote:

> President Johnson's officials in the Department of Defense failed to share his enthusiasm. Secretary McNamara--and later Secretary Clifford--never fully approved my goal of self-contained ARVN forces. Acting for Clifford as his deputy, Paul Nitze vetoed the engineer and logistical troops and their equipment that were essential if the ARVN was to be able to support itself, and delivery of M-16 rifles and other new equipment continued to be slow. I discerned that the cost-conscious McNamara and his civilian aides never fully trusted the Vietnamese to do the job that I counted on them doing. They appeared to believe they could eventually convince the North Vietnamese to pull out, whereupon the ARVN with only minor strengthening could stand up to the Viet Cong.144/

The bulk of RVNAF was at least theoretically assigned to the Pacification role for which they were generally ill-suited in training and outlook. Ex-ARVN Col. Hoang Ngoc Lung made the following observation:

> Generally speaking, the commitment of divisional units to the support of rural development, though it increased the capabilities and resources available for the effort, resulted in a decrease in the fighting competence and ability of the units. Furthermore, as time went by, these units slowly acquired the complacency of stationary forces more accustomed to area defense than to offensive operations. It was easier to introduce an infantry unit into an area than to remove it. The people, accustomed to the presence of regular units, felt their confidence shaken when these units were withdrawn because they lacked faith in the RF and PF. Morale among the RF and PF also suffered when regular units departed. They knew that their security had been diminished and that the VC were likely to exploit this weakness.
>
> But the most important weakness in the pacification strategy was, up to this point, not even recognized. This was the fact that no concerted action was being taken to destroy the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI), that complex, widespread apparatus that provided essential support to the military arm of the Viet Cong and directed the entire insurgency effort.145/

General Bruce Palmer faulted the "over-Americanization" of the war with some pertinent comments:

> This massive US effort had to be discouraging and disconcerting to our SVN allies, many of whom were not adverse to letting "Uncle Sam" do it. We should not overlook Free World forces - 2 2/3 Div. 1966, 3 Div. by 1967, mostly ROK, engrossed in US operations.
>
> - We paid relatively less attention to our number one military job which was to develop SVN armed forces who could successfully pacify and defend their own country. This was particularly true of the US Army where there was no separate US Army MAAG dedicated solely to that mission. We demonstrated that US troops could defeat the best that the Viet Cong and NVA had to offer, but this was not our basic objective.146/

(Note: USMAAG-V had been absorbed by, and the spaces scattered about, HQ MACV even before US ground combat units entered RVN).

RVNAF was not prepared properly nor in time for growth equal to - let alone ahead of - the enemy's "force development," which was inherent in their three-phase and three-force strategy. General Cao Van Vien, the long time chairman of the RVNAF JGS wrote that:

> Just as during the previous period (1954-1963), [sic] the RVNAF were not expanded and developed in a proper and timely manner to counter North Vietnam's stepped up war efforts and assume the primary combat role. Instead, they found themselves performing a secondary role in their own war.147/

2. The US Role

MACV's insistence that US units fight most of the "big battles" created or magnified significant political and psychological problems such as:

- The rising US casualty tolls, which became a major issue in the US among "Doves," "Hawks," and even Middle Americans,
- The press, the public, and even many US soldiers believed that the US was doing most of the fighting and dying while the RVNAF

were only "play acting" a peacetime garrison role. (Although this perception was largely unfair and untrue, after 1967 it was a natural and predictable one).

- GVN felt no real need or incentive to take the risk of declaring a national emergency and total mobilization until after Tet '68. (That omission rankled a large number of Americans in and out of uniform).
- Too many senior RVNAF and GVN officials practiced political intrigue and personal graft, much of it duly reported in the US press.

The US intervention on the ground did provide a shield and time for the recuperation and rebuilding of RVNAF. But the attention riveted on, and the resources consumed in, the "big war" diverted both precious commodities from the primary MACV task. Only when General Abrams was assigned as Deputy COMUSMACV in June 1967, with the principal mission of upgrading RVNAF (including the RF/PF), was the proper priority reestablished.

The organization of CORDS, under Robert Komer in the same period, also was a big step in restoring a balanced US perspective. Unfortunately, by that time a large segment of the US public was implacably opposed to the war and the US approach to it, as was an increasing proportion of the USG.

3. An Interesting Speculation

Perhaps the Lao Dong leaders were inadvertently beguiled by the "inept performance" of most RVNAF units. They appeared to believe that by drawing out to the frontiers and bypassing most US units in Tet '68, they could at least partially demolish the "demoralized" RVNAF. If so, they were dead wrong.

F. NO TIT FOR TET

The early, but tenuous, US policy of "tit for tat" retaliation for major enemy attacks on US bases and people was shelved when the Rolling Thunder operations were inaugurated. The widespread, more dangerous, and

psychologically decisive enemy attacks during Tet 1968 discouraged even many Hawks in Washington. The US and RVNAF forces in country, however, did their work quite well. This section examines primarily the military rationale for and results of the Tet offensive and the Battle of Khe Sanh. (The psychological and political impact of those turning points are covered in other parts of the study, especially Vols. II, III and V).

1. A One-Shot Spasm?

Douglas Pike, among others, insists that the 1968 Tet attacks were merely the dramatic highpoints, or the 2d phase, of the enemy's 1967-1968 Winter-Spring offensive.148/ Subsequent enemy attacks and directives tend to bear out that judgment. It was not, as originally claimed by others, a one-shot, last-gasp gamble like the Battle of the Bulge; Richard Nixon, Walt Rostow, and Westmoreland were quoted as using such words as "last ditch," "desperate," and "go for broke."149/

2. Some Questions

Among the more relevant questions raised by that spectacular offensive are the following: what did the enemy expect to gain, what were the reasons for the US/GVN and enemy intelligence failures, was the "siege" of Khe Sanh a diversion for the attacks on the cities or vice versa, was the VCI deliberately sacrificed by the Lao Dong leadership, why was the bulk of the PAVN held back, what was the impact on GVN and RVNAF, what relationship (if any) did the North Korean seizure of the Pueblo have to the offensive, and why were the US military leaders in Washington more "gloomy" than those in Vietnam?

3. The Enemy Debates

The sustained "debate" over strategy and tactics between PAVN Generals Nguyen Chi Thanh and Vo Nguyen Giap, discussed in an earlier chapter of this volume, was terminated when the former died in mid-1967. (Some sources say that he was killed by a B-52 raid and others that he died of a heart attack; the cause of his death is immaterial to this analysis.)

There also were disagreements within the Central Committee in Hanoi; there appeared to be two factions*: 150/

- One, headed by Defense Mininster Giap, apparently held out for a protracted war culminating in a military victory in order to preclude another negotiated partial settlement such as the one at Geneva in 1954.
- The other faction, led by Le Duan, the 1st Secretary of the Dang Lao Dong, favored a short intense campaign followed by negotiations from a strong position; attacks on the cities would be necessary to assist the political warfare arm in generating the "general uprising."

Although the concept chosen was a compromise between the two viewpoints it is generally agreed that Giap's hand was quite evident in the detailed and daring plan of operations. 151/

4. The Decision

Why did the Lao Dong decide on such a radical shift in strategy? General Westmoreland wrote:

> The North Vietnamese in mid-1967 were in a position of weakness. After only little more than a year of fighting relatively sizeable numbers of American troops, Communist losses were mounting drastically, with nothing tangible to show for it. General Giap, the Minister of Defense, and others in the Hanoi leadership decided they had to devise a new strategy. The only senior official with firsthand knowledge of how disastrous it was to engage in conventional warfare against American firepower, the only senior official who might have argued against the new strategy, was beneath the earth: General Thanh. 152/

Actually, as discussed previously, Thanh was more conventionally oriented than was Giap.

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* Even if this interpretation was true any such factions were neither rigid in composition nor immune to persuasion or compromise; strenuous debate over major changes in policy was central to their dialectic process.

Just a week before Tet, RVNAF captured a high level enemy political commissar by the name of Nam Dong. He gave his captors four major reasons for the change in strategy:

- US forces were much stronger than French forces. In the First Indochina War, the Dien Bien Phu victory by the Viet Minh had sufficed to bring about the Geneva Accords. In the present war, the communists entertained no hopes of achieving a similar victory, given the military might and firepower of the United States.
- North Vietnam's strategy of "enveloping the cities with the rural areas," which had been successful during the First Indochina War, proved no longer effective in the face of combined US-RVN efforts. That obsolescent strategy not only failed to bring about a decisive victory, it also retrogressed the war to Mao Tse Tung's first strategic phase of guerrilla warfare.
- If protracted warfare was to continue on its present course, North Vietnam would surely incur increasing losses. In the long run, Hanoi feared that aggravating attrition in manpower and material resources might eventually cause the communist regime in the North to collapse.
- It was, therefore, about time for big and decisive actions in the South. In Hanoi's view, a general military offensive coupled with a popular uprising had all the chances to succeed because the communists would enjoy "two strategic opportunities and one tactical advantage."153/

(The strategic opportunities were the coming general election in the US and the growing domestic and international opposition to the US role in the war. The tactical opportunity was to be gained by the multiple surprise attacks at Tet directly into the key cities).

5. Giap Spells it Out

In his series of papers collectively titled Big Victory: Great Tasks, published by Nhan Dan in Hanoi in September 1967, Giap set forth the "party line" for the coming offensives. US and many RVNAF officials tended to treat it as merely another propaganda exhortation to raise morale. But in it he wrote about:

> The fact that the American imperialists have been forced to fight a protracted war is a big defeat for them. The more protracted the war is, the more fierce will be the basic contradictions and weaknesses of the aggressive war of the US imperialists in South Viet-

Nam--contradictions and weaknesses that will lead to increasingly bigger defeats.154/

On the southern battlefield the LAF's method of attacking cities is being developed. With the support of the people's political forces, small units of the LAF have succeeded in winning resounding victories and destroying a substantial part of the enemy's viability. In particular, the attacks launched by the LAF in the heart of Saigon, Hue, and other cities have supported the struggle movement of the urban compatriots, frightened the foe, and filled the hearts of our compatriots throughout the country with elation. The attacks on the cities have demonstrated the marvelous courage, skill, and flexibility of the LAF.155/

(His concluding statement):

Under President Ho's banner calling for "determination to defeat the U.S. aggressors," let all our army and people take advantage of victories to move forward. The Vietnamese people are determined to defeat completely more than 1 million U.S., puppet, and satellite troops. The U.S. imperialists' neocolonialist war of aggression will certainly be defeated. The people's war of the heroic Vietnamese people will certainly win complete victory."156/

6. The Enemy's Aim

Douglas Pike, writing in Saigon in December 1967, was not certain then that the enemy had made a firm decision on how to continue the "struggle."

It should be understood, however, that there is no ideological reason from the communist standpoint not to negotiate. If one assumes, as does the author, that the objective of the communists in Vietnam is unification of Vietnam under the communist banner, there is no reason per se why such a goal could not be pursued at the conference table. It appears that as of this writing the leadership is in truth undecided as to what its policy should be, i.e., Whether it should seek a short-term improved military situation and at the optimum moment go to the conference table, or whether it should continue for the foreseeable future to refuse all negotiations.157/

Later Pike determined that the Lao Dong Politburo had approved the Campaign Plan in July 1967. What did they expect to achieve?

> It would be the decisive campaign of the war. Not that combat would be ended at the campaign's conclusion, June 30, 1968, but that by then a point of no return would be passed. Inexorably and irreversibly the war would begin to work itself out to inevitable victory; months of hard fighting might remain beyond this date, but the outcome no longer would be in doubt.158/

In attempting to achieve that aim the enemy carried out all three phases of the 1967-68 plan and conducted two more in the Winter-Spring of 1968-69. In doing so they paid an extremely heavy price in blood and talent and lost their mystique and political clout in the RVN, but more than offset those losses with their "victory" in the US.

7. Intelligence Failure?

An impressive amount of documents and prisoner interrogations concerning the new strategy were available to US and GVN intelligence officers but none of them really divined the magnitude, tactics, and exact timing of the attacks. In his book, Westmoreland discloses the post-Tet views of his J-2:

> As General Davidson put it to me later: "Even had I known exactly what was to take place, it was so preposterous that I probably would have been unable to sell it to anybody. Why would the enemy give away his major advantage, which was his ability to be elusive and avoid heavy casualties?" He was no doubt right. When I had asked Jack Seaman, commander of the II Field Force, in the summer of 1966 to prepare a war game based on the worst possible contingency in the region around Saigon, his staff had come up with almost exactly what did happen in 1968, but even though the appraisal alerted us to the possibility, we deemed it at the time unlikely.159/

Ex-ARVN Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, in his Monograph, The General Offensives of 1968-69, devoted an entire chapter to what was known then and why they were still surprised. Several of the telling points he made

were: 160/

- The poorly coordinated intelligence within and between GVN and RVNAF agencies and to a lesser extent with MACV.
- RVNAF intelligence officers were misled by Giap's defense of protracted war cited above; they thus believed that the "General Offensive - General Uprising" was still several years in the future.
- Their intelligence people were trained by the US to make their analyses based on enemy "capabilities" and not his "intentions."
- Both GVN and US intelligence was too "subjective" and tended to conform to the mind sets of the senior commanders. (MACV and RVNAF attention was locked in on the threats to Hue, Da Nang, and especially to Khe Sanh; the first phase of the enemy's offensive had worked).

However, LTG Fred Weyand, then Commander of II Field Force, began to have serious reservations in early January, about the concentration of US forces near the borders and persuaded General Westmoreland, who also began to have doubts, to cancel planned preemptive attacks in War Zones C&D and to move more US troops closer to Saigon. 161/

- In reality many of the enemy units were already well behind the US troops who were supposed to "block or preempt" them. For several weeks prior to the major attacks, enemy supplies and troops from War Zone C were filtering past both sides of the US base at Dau Tieng in the Michelin Plantation. They mortared and rocketed the base by day and night to keep the US troops there from interferring; actually only rear area troops were left there, as the 3d Bde, 25th US Division was committed deep in the War Zone. 162/
- Nevertheless, the last of the JGS General Reserves, two airborne battalions, were scheduled to fly up to I Corps. Luckily, at Tet they were still waiting air transport at Tan Son Nhut. 163/ 50% of the ARVN troops were on leave (or absent) and President Thieu flew to My Tho. Those were the fruits of surprise.

- There were precedents in Vietnamese history and legend for surprise attacks at Tet. The most famous was the one made by the Emperor Nguyen Hue (Quang Trung) against the Chinese in Hanoi in 1789; for his men he set the traditional celebration ahead, as did Ho for the North Vietnamese in 1968. A more recent example was the PLAF attacks on the eve of Tet on an ARVN Regimental Headquarters at Trang Sup in January 1960. Tet 1968, incidentally, ushered in the Year of the Monkey.164/
- The enemy had a number of intelligence failures too, the primary one being the serious misreading of the mood of the South Vietnamese soldiers and people: there were no mass defections and nothing even remotely resembling a "General Uprising."

8. Giap's Military Scheme

In his Big Victory: Great Task, (pp. 62-75), Giap instructed his readers on the "fighting methods" being employed and perfected in RVN. Pike squeezed out the rhetoric and bombast in presenting the core of Giap's methods:

> The first was called the "independent fighting method" (doc lap cach danh), the mounting of dozens of daily small-scale actions, no single one being important, but cumulatively raising the enemy's anxiety level and destroying his self-confidence. High casualties can be taken, and attacks need not be entirely victorious, if they pin down the enemy and reduce his initiatives.
>
> The second was the occasional small block-buster which General Giap terms, "coordinated fighting method" (hoc dong cach danh) which is the sporadic medium-sized attack against a relatively important target. This attack must be perfectly planned and flawlessly executed. The enemy not only is defeated, he is chagrined and comes to regard his enemy with awe.
>
> Then, at some point in the campaign -- and this is a matter of a commander's intuition -- the two methods are combined -- military activity escalates and intensifies -- into a "comprehensive offensive."

> Finally comes the psychological capper, what might be called the Dien Bien Phu gambit -- an attack on some psychologically important target which, as it falls, breaks the enemy's will to resist.165/

Was Khe Sanh to have been Giap's second Dien Bien Phu, or was it the major gambit in "preparing the battlefield" for the country-wide attacks on cities and towns? That issue will be addressed in a later section of this chapter.

9. The VCI and Local Forces Lead and Die 166/

Most of the initial Tet assaults in the cities were spearheaded by local forces, led and supported by a major portion of the VCI. Secret guerrillas and cadre who had been underground for years surfaced and were sacrificed. That approach made sense in several respects:

- The locals best knew the geography and people.
- The VCI were essential to instigate and control the planned General Uprising.
- Premature forward deployment of the large main force Units (PLAF and PAVN) could have tipped off the US and GVN intelligence agencies as to scope and nature of the attacks.

The main forces had a number of key tasks to perform by:

- Drawing major US and RVNAF forces towards the frontiers and away from the cities.
- Adding to the deception picture.
- Tying down, or blocking, reinforcements for the cities.
- Preparing to exploit initial successes in the cities. (Main force units played a major role in the sustained battles in and near Hue).
- Maintaining pressure on the DMZ and Khe Sanh (6 PAVN Divisions).
- Attacking US airfields and headquarters.
- Preparing for the 2d and subsequent "waves" of attacks.

a. PAVN Held Back - Why?

In the preceding subparagraph a number of important tasks for the main forces, to include PAVN, were listed. Yet there has been

speculation that the Lao Dong leadership knowingly sacrificed the VCI and local guerrillas in order to ensure the Party's eventual monolithic control in the South. Several views on the subject:

Sir Robert Thompson:

> Certainly one can sum up that offensive by saying that militarily it was a dreadful defeat for them, but psychologically it was an extraordinary victory. Certainly it destroyed the Viet Cong militarily-that is, the Viet Cong regular forces and the Viet Cong regional forces, which the North Vietnamese had the good sense to put into the front of the offensive, and it was the Viet Cong who took most of the casualties. In other words, the Viet Cong were no longer a possible regional rival to the NVA in South Vietnam. Exactly the same sort of thing happened to the Khmer Communists in Cambodia.167/

Professor William S. Turley:

> The differences on implementation of the General Offensive and Uprising corresponded roughly to the earlier division between "high-risk" and "low-risk" approaches to reunification. Giap clearly did not wish to throw his precious PAVN into a frontal assault on the cities for which COSVN, in his estimation, had not laid adequate groundwork. The final plan therefore was reduced both as to means and expectations. In the view of cadres in the South who had to execute it, it was Thanh's death that made possible the reduction and only Ho Chi Minh's personal intercession that saved the plan from evisceration.168/

General Westmoreland:

> It is difficult to believe that the enemy would have sacrificed these experienced and hard-core cadres if he had not expected to succeed. There is also some evidence, which has more recently become available, that the enemy tried seriously to seize the border areas and particularly the northern two provinces with the massive forces of about six divisions which he committed there...
>
> On the other side of the argument, however, is the fact that large North Vietnamese formations were not used initially in the attack in the III Crops area, particularly the North Vietnamese 7th Division, which

> was held out of the early decision stage of the battle. These may have been exploitation forces which were not committed because of the failure of the initial assaults. Indeed, in Hue the enemy reinforced his initial success. In Saigon and elsewhere there was really inadequate success to reinforce.169

In a recent conversation - Westmoreland was asked about his views on the possibility of deliberate sacrifice of the VCI. He found the thought intriguing, but stated that he had no positive information to either support or refute it.170/

In view of General Giap's sustained and stout defense of the need for strong guerrilla forces working closely with the other political military arms in all phases of a People's War, it is unlikely that the Machiavellian Theory will ever prove to be the correct one. Giap could have accepted the slaughter on moral but not on doctrinal grounds.

b. But Why Loc Ninh?

> On 29 October 1967 the Viet Cong 273d Regiment, 9th Division, attacked the town of Loc Ninh, near the Cambodian border in Binh Long Province. The area was defended by three CIDG companies, a Regional Force company, and a Popular Force platoon. As the fight developed over the next several days, ARVN units and the 1st Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division reinforced the position. By the time the enemy broke off the battle on 8 November, he had sustained severe casualties: over 850 killed at a cost of 50 dead among the defenders.171/

Those were heavy one-sided loses, but to what purposes? Allied intelligence generally viewed the battle as a political ploy to distract attention from the inauguration of President Thieu.172/ In reality it was a key element of the enemy's Winter-Spring campaign - along with Phuoc Long, Dak To, Khe Sanh, etc. - to draw RVNAF and especially US forces away from the cities and out to the borders, and:

> The attack on Loc Ninh, it was later known, was also intended to provide Communist forces with an opportunity to experiment with street fighting tactics on the one hand, and to test the RVNAF reactions and

> use of firepower to relieve embattled cities and populous centers on the other.173/

US and RVNAF forces learned, or relearned, city-fighting tactics on-the-job. Superior allied mobility and firepower got the job done, but "destroyed Ben Tre to save it." The impact was decidely felt in Washington.

c. The Results

The countervailing local and international pressures created by that dramatic, imaginative, but very costly offensive have been reported in other parts of this study. Yet the most significant phenomena highlighted by the "shock of Tet" was that radically and rudely changed perceptions can turn a severe military defeat into a pivotal psychological and political victory. (That theme will be addressed in Chapter 4 of Vol. VI).

The emotional impact of that surprise on senior military leaders, who by training and experience should have been better insulated, was critical. As Westmoreland later wrote:

> When General Wheeler arrived, I found him a tired man, seemingly near the point of exhaustion. He and his traveling companion, my old friend, Bill DePuy, at the time a special assistant to the Joint Chiefs on counterinsurgency, mirrored the gloom that pervaded official circles in Washington, a reflection of the doomsday reporting by press and television. The newspapers, General Wheeler recalled later, had given him the impression that the Tet offensive was "the worst calamity since Bull Run."174/

When "negotiations" started the enemy held the high cards; the US wanted out of the game. The magnificant fighting by US and most RVNAF forces counted for little.

G. NO KUDOS FOR KHE SANH

> No single battlefield event in Vietnam elicited more public disparagement of my conduct of the Vietnam war than did my decision in early 1968 to stand and fight at Khe Sanh. The decision to hold onto that

> previously obscure little plateau in the rugged northwestern corner of South Vietnam was to my mind militarily sound and strategically rewarding, yet many who viewed it from a distance deemed it misguided and tragic. The decision generated one of the more caustic public attacks I encountered: a letter to the editor of the Washington Post on March 22, 1968, from the distinguished Harvard University historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.
>
> General Westmoreland 175/

1. Why Khe Sanh? 176/

a. The Place

The plateau north of the village of Khe Sanh met the strategic criteria and capabilities of both Generals Giap and Westmoreland for their Winter-Spring campaigns of 1967-68. What came to be called Khe Sanh Combat Base (KSCB) was close to the Laotian border and in the eastern portion of the Annamite Mountain chain. It was so located as to permit interdiction of both Route #9 and the Rao Quan River corridor which ran from northwest to southeast.

b. Giap

There were a number of factors which made Khe Sanh an attractive place to fight the Americans. Among them:

- Historically General Giap's main move was preceded by one or more thrusts to distract, deceive, disperse, tie down and attrite the enemy's mobile forces. (e.g., the attack into Laos in 1953 that set the stage for Dien Bien Phu).
- He had already decided, in 1966, to establish his main strategic center of gravity in the North--the Tri-Thien-Hue (TTH) Front. 177/
- A major battle at Khe Sanh would draw attention and forces (to include airpower) away from the populated areas for his Phase II (Tet '68), and also would take some pressure off of the PLAF guerrillas and regional forces.

- His lines of communications (LOC) were short and well established, and bases and sanctuaries close at hand; conversely the US LOC would be extended and their far northern logistics structure was then inadequate to support large reinforcements.
- It would be better to fight the US in the RVN than in the DRV (Giap had publically given a warning of such a possibility).178/
- The terrain (mountains and jungles) was more suitable to PAVN capabilities and methods than to the US; for one thing his artillery could be hidden and protected, as at Dien Bien Phu.
- The weather (South East Monsoon crachins) would restrict, to varying degrees, US airmobility and firepower.
- He would have the initiative as to where, when, and generally how the battle would be fought.
- Khe Sanh was relatively easy to isolate and thus would become a static position, an easy target for his artillery, rockets, and mortars, and even lopsided "attrition" was in his favor.
- Previous US reactions at Con Thien, Loc Ninh, Dak To, etc. made it almost certain that his opponent would pick up his gauntlet.
- If sufficient US forces were committed to the defense at that remote place, he could by-pass it and concentrate other major forces of the TTH Front to threaten Quang Tri, Hue and Da Nang.
- If the base were weakly defended and/or if his Phase II offensive diverted sufficient attention and resources to other areas, he would have the option to win a major psychological, political, and military victory at Khe Sanh.

c. Westmoreland

Khe Sanh also had many advantages from the MACV point of view, such as:

- The large enemy build-up in and near the DMZ was considered the most dangerous threat to the RVN; it was believed that the enemy planned to seize the northern two provinces - Quang Tri and Thua Thien.

- KSCB could "block" major infiltration through the Rao Quan River Valley and more so along Highway 9, at least near the base.
- Enemy forces tied up there could not be employed in the more populated area.
- Since the area was sparsely populated, full use could be made of US aerial and artillery fire power, and the primary US ground strategy was still one of attrition.
- The terrain would permit effective use of the sensors not used in the so called "McNamara Line;" it also was more defensible and easier to resupply than was Dien Bien Phu.
- Although growing, US ground forces, logistics, and helicopter support were considered inadequate to conduct a mobile defense of the north (more on this later); the approaching southeast Monsoon also would inhibit airmobility.
- The air strip on KSCB could be upgraded into an all-weather one.
- KSCB could provide a launch pad and rescue buoy for small Special Operations Group (SOG) raids into Laos, and for foot patrols well beyond the base.
- It also could support the Special Forces CIDG camp a short distance to the southwest at Lang Vei.
- If US strategy were to change, KSCB would provide a good support base for a drive to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail (it was used for just such a purpose in Lam Son 719 in the spring of 1971).
- The distance involved was neither so great nor the terrain too difficult to prohibit a ground attack to relieve the base if necessary. (But one would have been slow and probably costly in the bad weather).
- Contemporary evidence indicated that the PAVN intended to attack and seize the base; MACV philosophy then was that if the enemy wanted anything or anyplace important in RVN it should be denied him. (Thus the presumed enemy strategy would be frustrated or defeated).179/

- There was supreme confidence at HQ's MACV and 7th US Air Force that if properly planned and controlled, US firepower--especially aerial delivered--could decimate any attack on any major US base.

2. Some Problems

a. Control of the Air (covered in detail in "Command and Control," Chapter 11, Book 2, Vol. VI).

- The US plan was predicated on all-weather, around-the-clock, aerial fire support. But who was to coordinate and control the multiple air assets? The USN and the USMC had long and stoutly opposed operational control of their aircraft by MACV and especially by USAF headquarters. Fundamental roles, missions, doctrines, and funds were at stake.
- In late 1967 President Johnson was worried about Khe Sanh. General William W. Momyer, then commander of 7th US Air Force and Deputy Commander, MACV for Air, later wrote:

> By this time President Johnson had taken a personal interest in the buildup of enemy forces around Khe Sanh and was concerned about our ability to hold the base. Obviously, he had Dien Bien Phu on his mind and the political consequences the French suffered from the military defeat. During his Christmas visit to Cam Ranh Bay, the President brought up the question of defending Khe Sanh, and I reassured him that with the massive use of airpower, the base could be defended.180/

- Momyer flew up to inspect Khe Sanh with Major General Norman J. Anderson, who commanded the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW). The Marines had drawn a circle around Khe Sanh, about 3,000 meters or so, and said they would provide close air support within that circle; USN and USAF planes, to include B-52's, could bomb outside of it. Momyer came back to Saigon and told Westmoreland that the whole set up was a "blue print for disaster;" 181/ without centralized control of the air, "Khe Sanh could well be lost."182/

- The President's concern for Khe Sanh naturally permeated and energyzed the White House Staff and thus also Generals Wheeler and Westmoreland. Momyer's report added fuel to the pressure. There had been a debate at MACV, in late 1967, as to whether to hold Khe Sanh or not. Westmoreland's decision to stay was based on the premise that all available air assets would be closely orchestrated and used where and when needed. The Marine plan was unacceptable.
- Centralized control of airpower, especially for the big battles near the DMZ, was the one issue over which General Westmoreland had been prepared to resign.183/ Admiral Sharp surprised the Navy and Marines and supported Westmoreland on the issue. So Momyer became the "single manager" for air. Once the decision was made, the other services cooperated quite well with 7th Air Force. Khe Sanh was kept supplied by air and was supported by over five times the explosive power dropped on Hiroshima. (Yet the crisis at Khe Sanh was over before single managership was in full operation on or about April 1.)

b. Concern in Washington Mounts

- The shock generated in much of the US and the USG by the surprise Tet offensive magnified the fears in the government for the safety of Khe Sanh. Don Oberdorfer wrote a graphic decription of the mood in the White House:

> Westmoreland was saying this was act two of a three-act play and while much of Washington had come to doubt most everything else the general said, it believed him in this. The greatest worry was the fate of the Marines at Khe Sanh. Before Tet, Lyndon Johnson had insisted on a formal paper from the Joint Chiefs, "signed in blood," as he put it, that Khe Sanh could be held. The Commander in Chief was haunted by the vision of a military debacle for which he would be held responsible. He kept telling Wheeler to ask Westmoreland if more troops and support were needed. "I don't want anybody coming back and saying if we had this and that we would not have suffered so many losses," the President confided to visitors. On instructions from

> Washington, Westmoreland began making special daily reports on the situation at Khe Sanh, some of them including such minute detail as the condition of the airstrip and the supply of lubricating oil. Largely because of Khe Sanh, Westmoreland was sleeping every night just outside the Combat Operations Center at his headquarters, a practice he continued until late March.184/

- In his book, Colonel Dave Palmer adds a distinctive military touch to that scene:

> "The President and [Presidential advisor Walt] Rostow were mentally in the trenches with the boys." And when the commander in chief mans the barricades, his entire entourage gets mental mud on their boots. It is hard to keep an eye on the big picture while hunkering in a bunker.185/

- General Taylor recently confirmed that he had been very concerned about Khe Sanh and that it had "Dien Bien Phu written all over it," especially to those who didn't understand military matters. (He also admitted that the end result was much better than he anticipated). Taylor convinced the President to get the JCS to put their support for Westmoreland's decision in writing and that General Wheeler's "head was on the block."186/
- Even today General Westmoreland is still upset by the obvious lack of faith among the key leaders in Washington. He said that he got a call from Washington about noon every day, during the crisis. Once in exasperation he told Wheeler to tell the President that he accepted "full responsibility" for the safety of Khe Sanh and that the President should "relax."187/ No record has been uncovered to determine if or how that message was relayed, but perhaps Westmoreland's plea triggered the following response:

> "As a personal matter," General Wheeler added at the end of a cable dealing with Khe Sanh on February 4, "you should know that all of us, including the Commander-in-Chief, repose complete confidence in your

> judgment, your capacity of careful and prudent planning, and your ability to cope with the enemy in all circumstance. I say this to you because I do not want you to be misled and upset by untrue news media comments."188/

- That sort of pressure from, and uncertainty in one's Commander-in-Chief could not help but upset the field commander and his staff as well as those beneath him. Major General George Keegan, then the 7th Air Force's chief intelligence officer, reported the following comment from Westmoreland to Momyer:

> The situation came on a Sunday morning when Westmoreland turned to my boss, General William Momyer, and said, "Spike, Khe Sanh has become a symbol. It is of no importance to me, but it has become of great psychological importance to the United States. It is related solely to the Dien Bien Phu syndrome and the target is the soft underbelly of the United States. Spike, if I lose Khe Sanh, I am going to hold the United States Air Force responsible."189/

3. Was Khe Sanh To Be Giap's 2d Dien Bien Phu?

a. The Problem

The answer to that question cannot yet and may never be answered with total certainty. Yet there exists considerable evidence, both direct and deduced, to support both sides of the argument.

b. A comparison between Khe Sanh and Dien Bien Phu

(See Figure 3-7 and Maps 3-4 and 3-5). Although there were a number of surface similarities between the two situations, there were many more differences. The major ones were:

- The relative firepower differential between the defenders and attackers, especially aerial delivered.
- The demonstrated differences in the ability to resupply and reinforce the two defensive forces.
- The early fall of key outposts at Dien Bien Phu while their counterparts at Khe Sanh were held.
- The overall balance of power between the antagonists.

FACTORS	DIEN BIEN PHU	KHE SANH
PURPOSE	BLOCK MAJOR INVASION OF LAOS, ATTRITE VIET MINH	BLOCK MAJOR MOVEMENTS THROUGH WESTERN DMZ, ROUTE 9; ATTRITE PAVN.
AIR DISTANCES FROM	HANOI: 170 MILES	DONG HA (HELOS): 35 MI. DA NANG (AIRCRAFT): 90 MI. FIRE BASE ROCK PILE: 12 MI.
TERRAIN	FAVORS VIET MINH	FAVORS PAVN
ENEMY LOC	LONG, DIFFICULT	SHORT
TROOPS		
DEFENDERS	13,000 (HIGHEST)	6,000
ATTACKERS	50,000 (5 DIVISIONS)	20,000 (2 + DIVISIONS, 2 OTHER DIVISIONS CLOSE BY)
KEY OUTPOSTS	FELL EARLY (SEE MAP 3-5)	HELD TO END
PATROLLING	EVENTUALLY NONE POSSIBLE	CLOSE-IN ONLY (500 M.)
FORTIFICATIONS	FAIR	GENERALLY WEAK
ARTILLERY	RECOILLESS RIFLES, ASSORTED MORTARS	
DEFENDERS	24 105mm. HOW., 4 155mm. HOW.	12 105mm. HOW., 6 155mm. HOW. 24 175mm. GUNS (ROCKPILE, Cp. CARROLL)
ATTACKERS	75mm. HOW., 105mm. HOW. KATYUSHA ROCKETS	100mm, 122mm., 130mm., 152mm. GUNS AND HOW.; 122mm. AND 140mm. ROCKETS
AVG DAILY INCOMING H.E.	2,000+ ROUNDS	150 (MARCH, 1968)
ARMOR		
DEFENDERS	10 LIGHT TANKS	5 MED. TANKS
ATTACKERS	NONE	A FEW LIGHT TANKS (PT 76)
ENEMY AAA	HVY MACHINE GUNS; 37mm. AA CANNON	SAME BUT FEWER
AIRFIELD	UNUSABLE EARLY	USABLE BUT DANGEROUS
TAC. AIR*		
NO. OF A/C AVAILABLE	LESS THAN 200 PLANES ON DAILY BASIS	2,000 PLANES 3,300 HELO.
DAILY SORTIES	40 COMBAT MISSIONS (HIGH)	346 (INCL. B-52)
TOTAL BOMBS	N/A	110,000 TONS.
AERIAL RESUPPLY	100 TONS (PARADROP)	161 TONS DAILY AVG (BY PARADROP, (LAPES**, GPES*** AIRLANDED)
CASUALTIES*		
DEFENDERS	KIA & MIA: 2,700 WIA: +4,400 (B.FALL) POW: +7,000 = 14,100	205 KIA; 1,668 WIA (816 MINOR)
ATTACKERS	7,900 KIA + 15,000 WIA = 22.9K (B.FALL) 45,000 (O.FALLACI, 1976)	10-15,000 (EST.); 1,602 (COUNT); 10,000 (USUAL EST.)
LENGTH OF SEIGE	55 DAYS (VIET MINH) 57 DAYS (B. FALL)	77 DAYS (MACV) 100 DAYS (DRV)
RESULT	FELL 8 MAY 1954	HELD, RELIEVED 8 APRIL 1968; DISMANTLED 23 JUNE 1968.

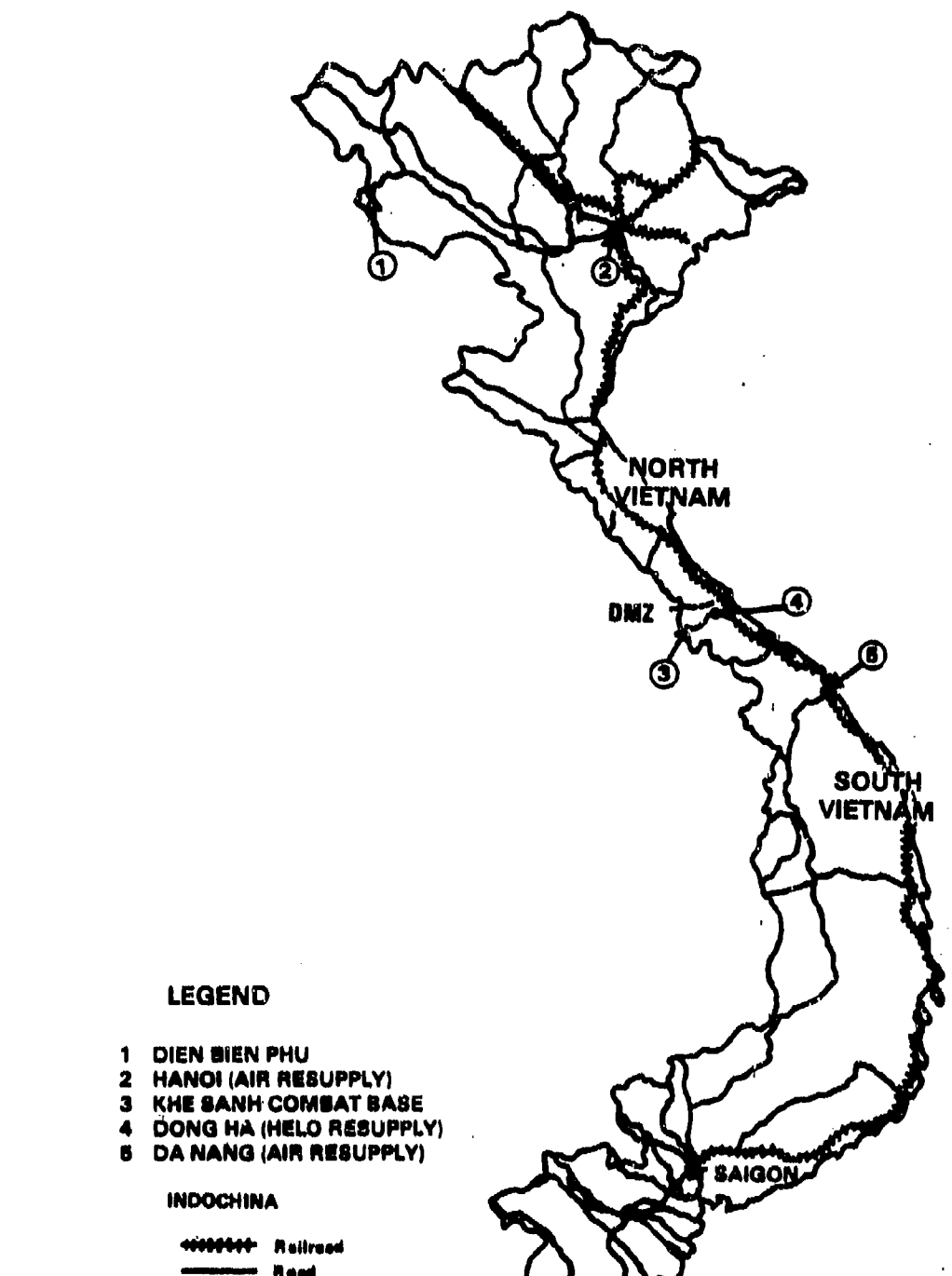
* A MULTI-SOURCE COMPILATION INDICATIVE RATHER THAN DEFINITIVE

** LAPES: LOW ALTITUDE PARACHUTE EXTRACTION SYSTEM

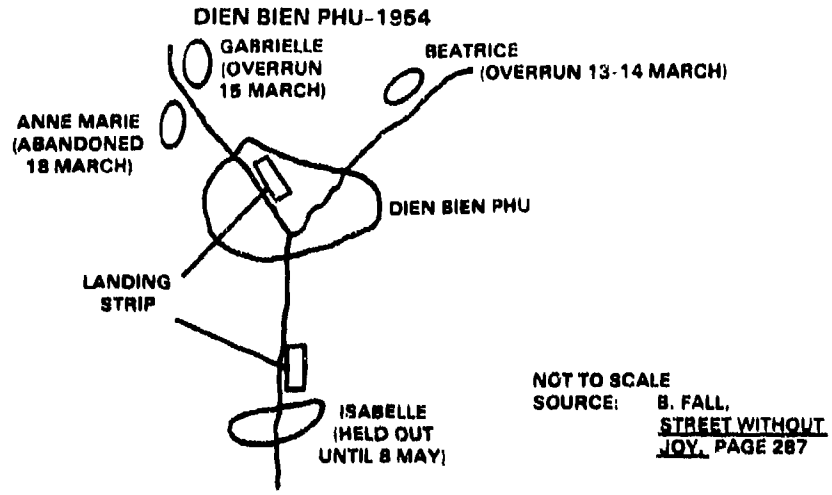
*** GPES: GROUND PROXIMITY EXTRACTION SYSTEM

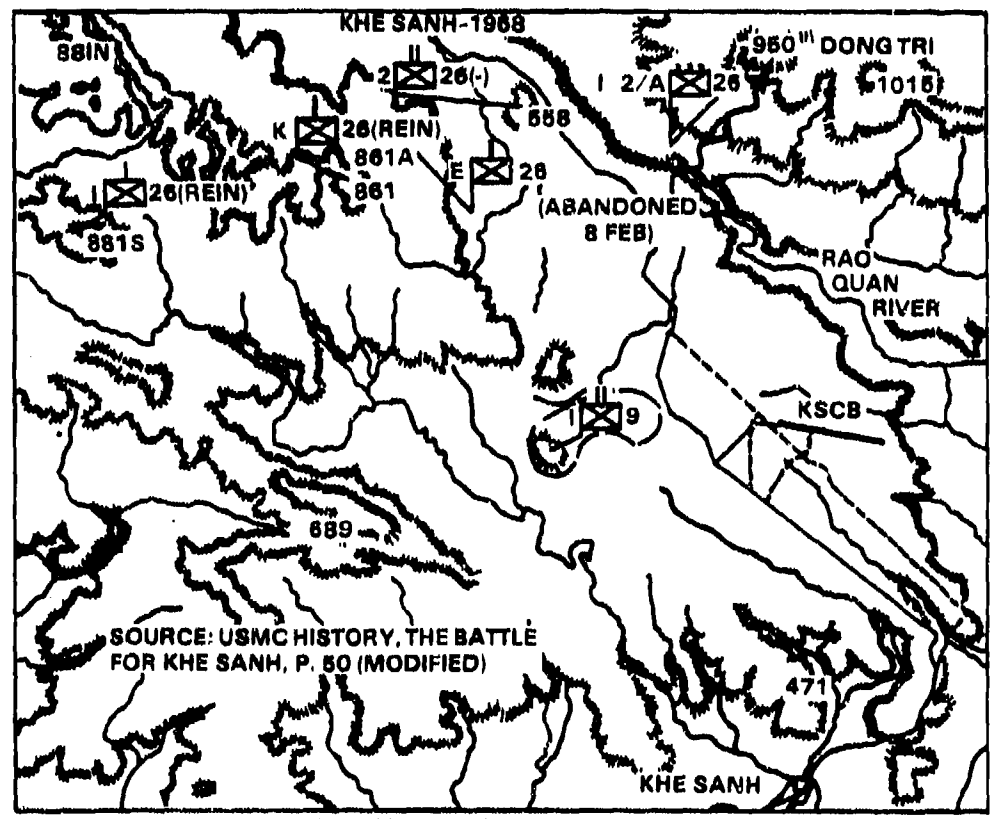
SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

Figure 3-7. Dien Bien Phu and Khe Sanh: Compared and Contrasted



Map 3-4. Aerial Resupply for Dien Bien Phu and Khe Sanh





4541/78W

LOCATION OF OUTPOSTS AT KHE SANH

Map 3-5. Outposts: Dien Bien Phu - 1954, Khe Sanh - 1968

- The relative importance of the two places in Giap's respective campaign plans.

c. But!

- Even the astute and experienced Australian correspondent Denis Warner wrote about a visit he made to Khe Sanh almost 14 years after visiting Dien Bien Phu:

> Yet, as at Dien Bien Phu, to fight or not to fight were options that the North Vietnamese alone possessed. Despite all my resistence to the Dien Bien Phu analogy, the similarities proclaimed themselves from every green enemy-held hill overlooking the camp and every inadequately prepared trench and bunker. Because its water supply was outside the main camp area, Khe Sanh was, in one important way, in an even worse position than Dien Bien Phu.190/

- Peter Braestrup, in his monumental Big Story, devotes a long chapter to how the US press representatives jumped on the Dien Bien Phu bandwagon and magnified and distorted the "agony" of Khe Sanh.191/ We have previously noted the atmosphere this one-sided and dramatic reporting helped create in Washington.
- As the fever mounted, General Westmoreland tasked his staff historian, Col. Reamer Argo, to prepare a study comparing the two situations. Westmoreland didn't like, at all, the pessimistic tone of the report:

> Argo's presentation nevertheless stunned my staff. Deliberately getting the attention of all, I said it was good that we had heard the worst. "But we are not, repeat not," I said in firm voice, "going to be defeated at Khe Sanh. I will tolerate no talking or even thinking to the contrary." With that I strode deliberately from the room.192/

- But it wasn't just the news reports which had excited President Johnson. In his memoirs he wrote:

> More than a week before the enemy's offensive began Westmoreland sent us a detailed estimate of enemy intentions. He said the Communists were displaying "a very unusual sense of urgency" in planning what they called "this decisive campaign." Viet Cong headquarters was promising its followers "final victory." Westmoreland reported that the threat in northern I Corps was the most serious of the war. He also noted new intensity in enemy activity in other areas, especially in III Corps, where Saigon is located. He thought that the North Vietnamese saw a similarity between the allied base at Khe Sanh and the base at Dien Bien Phu, where the French had suffered a disastrous defeat in 1954. Westmoreland anticipated that the enemy would make "a major effort for a short period of time in order to gain exploitable victories for political purposes." He had uncovered evidence that the North Vietnamese planned a multibattalion attack on the city of Hue. He also had information that the cities of Quang Tri and Danang were likely targets.193/

- Ex ARVN Colonel Lung reported that:

> Our national leaders, who were impressed and influenced by rousing public and press speculations on the possibility of a second Dien Bien Phu battle, evidently accepted this possibility, especially when no intelligence agency produced anything to disprove it. Influenced in their turn by the near conviction of the national leaders, our South Vietnamese intelligence agencies came up with estimates that went along similar lines, avoiding those they thought would contradict their superiors.194/

- Guenter Lewy noted that, "The President's concern was increased even more when he learned that General Westmoreland had established a study group to consider the employment of tactical nuclear weapons at Khe Sanh."195/ (Westmoreland's rationale for considering the use of small nuclear weapons is contained on p. 338 of his memoirs). The President did not want to be forced into deciding on nuclear weapons.
- Because of the threat of the seven enemy divisions to northern I corps and especially to Khe Sanh, MACV sent reinforcements from

II and III corps; the Americal Division, two thirds of the 1st Cavalry Div., the ROK Marine Brigade, a brigade of the 101st Airborne Div., plus made contingency plans for flying up the rest of that division. "Yet, General Cushman and his staff appeared complacent, seemingly reluctant to use the Army forces I had put at their disposal."196/ Soon to follow was a MACV Forward Headquarters under Westmoreland's Deputy, General Abrams.197/ In March it became the Provisional Corps, Vietnam, and yet later XXIV Corps.

d. Giap's Intentions Evaluated 198/

Since it is not very likely that Giap and his fellow politburo members will soon provide an open, candid, and complete picture of their plans for 1968, we must deduce a probable intent from what the North Vietnamese said about Khe Sanh, and from what PAVN did and did not do there.

1) Giap and others said:

In February 1969 the Italian writer Oriana Fallaci interviewed Giap in Hanoi. She reported:

> O.F.: So are you saying, General, that the war will not be resolved in Paris, that it can only be resolved militarily, never diplomatically, that the Dien Bien Phu of the Americans must still come and will come?
>
> V.N.G.: Dien Bien Phu, Madame, Dien Bien Phu ... Look, it's not always true that history repeats itself. But this time it will repeat itself. And just as we beat the French militarily, we will beat the Americans militarily. Yes, Madame, their Dien Bien Phu is still to come, And it will come. The Americans will definitely lose the war at the moment when their military strength reaches its height, and the great machine they've put together no longer succeeds in moving. We'll beat them, that is, at the moment when they have the most men, the most weapons, the most hope of winning. Because all that wealth, that strength, will become a millstone around their necks. It's inevitable.

O.F.: Am I mistaken, General, or did you already try a second Dien Bien Phu at Khe Sanh?

V.N.G.: Oh, no. Khe Sanh didn't try to be, nor could it have been, a Dien Bien Phu. Khe Sanh wasn't that important to us. Or it was only to the extent that it was important to the Americans--in fact at Khe Sanh their prestige was at stake. Because just look at the usual paradox that you always find with the Americans: as long as they stayed in Khe Sanh to defend their prestige, they said Khe Sanh was important. When they abandoned Khe Sanh, they said Khe Sanh had never been important. Besides, don't you think we won at Khe Sanh? I say yes and ...199/

- Based on his analysis of enemy statements and writings, Patrick McGarvey wrote:

The anonymous but authoritative author of one of the least bombastic commentaries to emerge so far (Document 12), which was broadcast from Hanoi on Febraury 11 and appeared in the North Vietnamese Army Daily the same day, made two main points. First, the massive Communist ground-force build-up near Khe Sanh was a diversion for the raids on the cities, and the primary targets of the Tet Offensive were the Saigon government's apparatus and the pacification program. Surprise and deception were the key elements of the Communist's strategy. "The Americans were surprised strategically," the author wrote, "surprised as to the time and the place where they were attacked." "The U.S. aggressors expected attacks on the northern Khe Sanh area, as predicted by U.S. generals, but they did not expect attacks on almost every city and important base--the areas the U.S.-puppet troops firmly believe they absolutely control." The author did not imply that attacks would not occur at Khe Sanh or other DMZ bases; he boasted, rather, that they would attack when the time was ripe.200/

- Douglas Pike in his December 1967 analysis of the Lao Dong Central Committee Resolution 12 noted that of the four significant points made in the document one ominously pointed towards:

Continued or even increased emphasis would be placed by the PAVN on the big-unit war along the 17th parallel with the hope that a large-scale battle, similar to Dien Bien Phu, could be fought and won, after which steps might be taken toward the establishment of a political settlement of the war.201/

- In his draft study, Professor Turley noted that:

The only mention in Hanoi of the Dien Bien Phu analogy, aside from a taunting comment on the fall of Lang Vei, was in reference to the preoccupation of the western press and President Lyndon Johnson with it.202/

2) What PAVN Did:

- Let Giap be seen in the vicinity of Khe Sanh.203/ (Apparently Westmoreland, in late January 1968 believed that his primary antagonist might be directing the fight there).204/
- Deploy two plus divisions to the area; one of them was the elite 304th of Dien Bien Phu fame.
- Conduct a close ground reconnaissance of KSCB by a regimental commander and his staff. (Five out of six of them were killed).
- Increase the pressure around the base in the month preceding the Tet offensive.
- Isolate the base from a quick and cheap ground link up.
- Preposition large stocks of supplies in the area and dig in and hide their mortars and artillery.
- Shoot at resupply aircraft and helicopters.
- Shell and attack several of the key outposts (none fell but a small one was evacuated).
- Use light tanks to help capture the CIDG coup at Lang Vei.
- Attack and force the evacuation of Khe Sanh village.
- Dig some approach trenches and a few tunnels.
- Have a plan that called for the main attack from the east supported by diversions elsewhere.
- Regularly shell KSCB (average 150 rounds per day in March).

- Probe the base and then attack the 37th ARVN Ranger Bn. at the east end of the runway with a 400-man battalion of the 304th Div. (The Marines believe that the reserve battalions of the PAVN regiment were destroyed by heavy air and artillery fire before they reached the jump-off position).205/
- Send 29th PAVN Regt., 325C Div., with two Bn's., to fight at Hue in February. (325C was the second PAVN Division at Khe Sanh)

3) What PAVN Did Not Do:

- Interfere with the external water source for KSCB.
- Attack the base and/or its outposts in conjunction with the opening of the Tet offensive.
- Make an all-out effort to capture the critical outposts, not even Hill 950 which was defended by only a reinforced platoon.
- Concentrate and employ the maximum force available to Giap (e.g., 320th Div., only 20 Km. away).
- Set up a dense antiair defense system, especially in line with the runways.
- Shoot the maximum possible artillery and mortars at the base even though their supply line was shorter and better established than in 1954. (The maximum rounds fired at the base was about 1,300 and that was a little more than half of the daily average fired at Dien Bien Phu).206/
- Exploit the blowing up of the main ammunition dump on KSCB.
- Tunnel into the main base or even under the defensive wire. (Terrain too difficult?).
- Completely surround KSCB with trenches and artillery.
- Conduct sustained mass assaults on the base.
- Attack on the night of 12-13 March, the anniversary of the start of the Viet Minh assault on Dien Bien Phu.

4) Post Tet Assessments

- At an improvised press conference in the damaged lobby of the US embassy in Saigon on 1 February, 1968,

> Westmoreland said the attacks on populated areas throughout the country were "very deceitfully" calculated to create maximum consternation in Vietnam, and expressed the view that they were "diversionary" to the main enemy effort still to come at Khe Sanh and in the northern part of the country. "The enemy exposed himself by virtue of his strategy and he suffered great casualties..."
>
> Oberdorfer 207/

- At the MACV, 3 February Current Indicators Intelligence Branch (CIIB) meeting it was noted that the PAVN had yet to commit a number of his main forces, and that the enemy still retained the capability of conducting major offensives against the Khe Sanh/Cam Lo/Con Thien area.208/
- In their mid February 1968, hasty review of intelligence data and estimates, the US intelligence community admitted that they had not predicted the scope and manner of the Tet offensive, but had warned of attacks against US bases in the North--Khe Sanh led the list. But by then Adm. Sharp, CINCPAC, began to wonder if the enemy build up at Khe Sanh might be just a diversion to draw troops from around Saigon.209/
- On 3 March Col. Argo finished his analysis of the previously mentioned comparison between Dien Bien Phu and Khe Sanh. In it he included the sieges of Mantua and Genoa. His conclusions (paraphrased) were: if Khe Sanh maintained a static defensive posture the enemy could concentrate enough force to overrun the base despite our firepower, and that the best chance to upset the enemy operations and employ our firepower was to conduct offensive operations by forces outside the base.210/

- And on 12 March:

> Saigon (UPI)--Fourteen years ago this week, in a large valley in Southeast Asia, some 11,000 French Union troops waited, anxiously but confidently.
>
> For weeks they had been waiting in their bunkers and foxholes, in the same way as some 5,000 U.S. Marines now wait in a battered brown valley outpost a few hundred miles to the south ...
>
> Those who do not understand history, it is said, may be condemned to repeat it.
>
> But not wanting to repeat it, the American military command has compared Khe Sanh and Dien Bien Phu and, citing several significant differences, had declared Khe Sanh to be eminently defendable.
>
> No one comparing the situation at Khe Sanh and that at Dien Bien Phu 14 years ago, however, can fail to note certain important similarities.211/

(Actually, about that time, the 26th Marine Regt. had noticed that major enemy units--later identified as the 325C Division--had started to withdraw from around K.S.C.B.).212/

5) A Judgment

Although the evidence examined is inconclusive, it tends to bear out the thesis that Giap did not intend to make Khe Sanh his climactic Dien Bien Phu No. 2. Yet the US obsession with the analogy served his Phase I purpose well by dispersing and distracting US attention and forces away from the cities. The comparative effort exerted, vs. available resources at Khe Sanh was not comparable to the extreme concentration of Giap's main force units at Dien Bien Phu. If he could have captured it without exorbitant losses, so much the better, but he couldn't. As it was he paid a heavy price, but as McGarvey put it:

> His is not an army that sends coffins north: it is by the traffic in homebound American coffins that Giap measures his success.213/

- Some well-placed senior Marines did not see the relationship to Dien Bien Phu. In his report on the period, BG. E. H. Simmons, Director of Marine Corps History and Museums, wrote that: "In no

way was Khe Sanh another Dien Bien Phu. The Marines had never thought that it would be." That view was supported by MG. R. Tompkins, who had commanded the 3rd Marine Division during the "seige."214/

6) Dissenting Votes

Two Americans with extensive experience in Viet Nam apparently still believe otherwise.

> By mid-March it was apparent that the enemy was giving up at Khe Sanh, his attempted repeat of Dien Bien Phu an abject failure. The North Vietnamese began to pull back into Laos.
>
> General Westmoreland, 1976 215/

> Key to the entire campaign was to be the psychological backbreaking Second Wave. Since it never occurred we are not certain, even to this day, where it was to have been fought. Perhaps Hue, or possibly Saigon was the target. More likely the Second Wave -- America's Dien Bien Phu -- was to have been the U.S. Marine Base deep in the Vietnam Highlands, Khe Sanh.
>
> Douglas Pike, 1978 216/

e. The Results of The Khe Sanh Battle

It is difficult to construct a totally accurate and objective "scorecard" on the pluses and minuses of Khe Sanh since the enemy hasn't been as generous or boastful as he was after his final 1975 victory; 217/ that fact alone may or may not be significant. However, Figure 3-8a 218/ presents a rough basis for evaluating the more significant gains and losses which resulted from the stand at Khe Sanh. (Figure 3-8b outlines some of the tactical and technical innovations that were either designed for, or perfected at, the defense of Khe Sanh). Like many famous battles, especially in a complex political-military conflict such as Vietnam, there exists sufficient weight on both sides of the scale to permit each antagonist to claim victory by his own standards, and so it came to pass after the battle at Khe Sanh.

FACTORS	PLUS	MINUS
1. POLITICAL		• CREATED ADDITIONAL PRESSURES ON L.B.J. • HELPED WIDEN SPLIT IN USG BETWEEN HAWKS AND CLOSET DOVES, ESP. BETWEEN MILITARY AND CIVILIANS • CREATED WHITE HOUSE SIEGE MENTALITY • PROVIDED MORE FUEL FOR ANTIWAR GROUPS, NEWS MEDIA • HELPED LEAD TO PREMATURE, NONPRODUCTIVE NEGOTIATIONS • REINFORCED GLOBAL US IMAGE OF GOLIATH TRAPPED BY DAVID
2. PSYCHOLOGICAL	• GOOD FOR USAF, USMC MORALE • US "VICTORY" CLAIMED	• ADDED TO SENSE OF FRUSTRATION IN US AFTER TET '68, PUEBLO INCIDENT • MEDIA HELPED CREATE DEEP, SINCERE US CONCERN OVER MARINES' "AGONY" • FED "DIEN BIEN PHU" SYNDROME • US CASUALTIES IN PRINT, ON TV • GOOD PROPAGANDA FOR ENEMY • LATER ABANDONING KHE SANH HURT HOMEFRONT MORALE (DRV CLAIMED IT "FELL") • PAVN "VICTORY" CLAIMED
3. MILITARY	• IDEAL FOR ATTRITION BY AIR, ARTILLERY • TIED UP MOST OF 2 ENEMY DIVISIONS FOR MOST OF THE TIME • BLOCKED, FOR A SHORT DISTANCE DIRECT USE OF ROUTE 9, RAO QUAN RIVER VALLEY • FORCED DECISION ON ISSUE OF SINGLE MANAGER FOR AIR (TOO LATE FOR MAIN BATTLE) • FORCED UNIFIED US INTELLI-	• DREW US ATTENTION, RESOURCES FROM ENEMY MAIN EFFORT • TIED DOWN 6,500 US, ARVN TROOPS • 2 BN'S OF 325C PAVN DIV. SLIPPED AWAY TO FIGHT AT HUE • DID NOT SERIOUSLY IMPEDE ENEMY ACCESS TO A SHAU VALLEY, QUANG TRI, HUE, DA NANG • DID (COULD?) NOT FUNCTION AS LONG-RANGE PATROL BASE DURING "SIEGE" (SOG PATROLS STAYED IN FOB-3 IN KSCB) • TIED UP SIGNIFICANT US TAC. AIR, B-52s, AIR RESUPPLY CAPABILITIES

SOURCE: BDM Research a

Figure 3-8a. US Scorecard

- TIME
- BLOCKED, FOR A SHORT DISTANCE DIRECT USE OF ROUTE 9, RAO QUAN RIVER VALLEY
- FORCED DECISION ON ISSUE OF SINGLE MANAGER FOR AIR (TOO LATE FOR MAIN BATTLE)
- FORCED UNIFIED US INTELLIGENCE EFFORT (TEMPORARILY)
- HEAVY ENEMY CASUALTIES (EST. 10,000; YET 304 PAVN DIV. ATTACKED MARINES AT DONG HA IN MAY)
- DAMAGED OR DESTROYED FRONT HQ.
- CONSUMED ENEMY AMMO, SUPPLIES THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN USED ELSEWHERE
- RELATIVELY LIGHT US CASUALTIES (205 KIA AND 1668 WIA)
- PROVIDED BASE FOR LATER ATTACKS INTO A SHAU VALLEY BASE AREA
- HELPED "FORCE" CHANGE IN GIAP'S STRATEGY
- HELPED "FORCE" REVIEW OF US STRATEGY (UNINTENDED)
- PROVIDED COMBAT TEST OF MANY TACTICAL, TECHNICAL INNOVATIONS (SEE FIGURE 3-8B)

- 2 BN'S OF 325C PAVN DIV. SHIFTED AWAY TO FIGHT AT HUE
- DID NOT SERIOUSLY IMPEDE ENEMY ACCESS TO A SHAU VALLEY, QUANG TRI, HUE, DA NANG
- DID (COULD?) NOT FUNCTION AS LONG-RANGE PATROL BASE DURING "SIEGE" (SOG PATROLS STAYED IN FOB-3 IN KSCB)
- TIED UP SIGNIFICANT US TAC. AIR, B-52s, AIR RESUPPLY CAPABILITIES
- VERY COSTLY (PLANES, FUEL, BOMBS, AMMO, ETC.)
- GOOD TARGET FOR PAVN ARTILLERY, MORTARS
- CLOSE TO ENEMY LOC, SANCTUARIES (HE RETAINED INITIATIVE OF WHETHER TO REINFORCE OR WITHDRAW)
- NOT ABLE TO SAVE LANG VEI
- CREATED MORE DISTRUST OF US MILITARY LEADERS IN USG, MEDIA, ETC.

STILL DEBATABLE

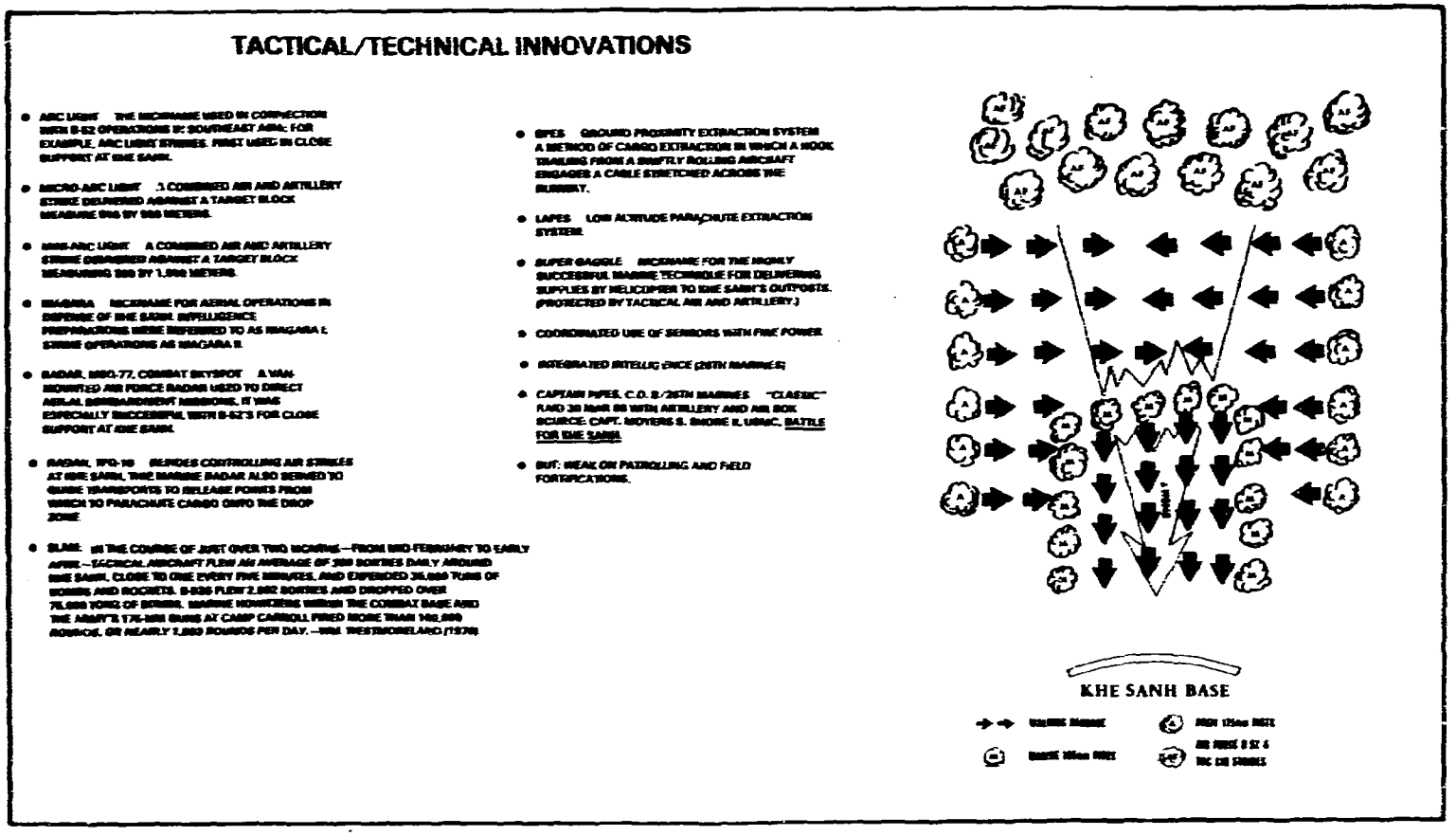
- WHO "TIED DOWN" WHOM?
- WHO SELECTED AND "PREPARED" THE BATTLEFIELD?
- WHOSE STRATEGY WORKED? BOTH?

NOT DEBATABLE

THE VALOR OF YOUNG MARINES AT KSCB, ESP. THOSE AT OUTPOSTS!

SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

3-8a. US Scorecard for Khe Sanh



4541/79W

SOURCE: MG David E. Ott, Field Artillery, 1954-1973 and BDM Research

Figure 3-8b. Some Tactical and Technical Innovations Used/Refined at Khe Sanh

f. Any Alternatives to Khe Sanh?

- In his memoirs General Westmoreland argues "No!"219/ In that judgment he was supported by Marine Historian Simmons who wrote:

> Critics of the decision to defend Khe Sanh presuppose that there was an acceptable alternative to defending Khe Sanh. The only alternative was to withdraw. But what kind of withdrawal could have been executed? The men could have been evacuated by air, probably in neat fashion, with little or no loss. But what about the tons and tons of equipment and supplies? They would have had to go overland and Route No. 9 was closed and would not reopen until the monsoon season ended.
>
> In the last analysis, Khe Sanh was defended because it was the only logical thing to do. We were there, in a prepared position and in considerable strength. A well-fought battle would do the enemy a lot more damage than he could hope to inflict on us.220/

- In February 1969 General Abrams, in discussing Tet and Khe Sanh with correspondent and ex-Marine officer Peter Braestrup, said that if the enemy had moved a full division to Hue "we would still be fighting there at Hue."221/
- General Tompkins stated that he was initially reluctant to move anything into Khe Sanh, nor was he anxious to reinforce on 13 December. But later he conceded that it was better to fight those PAVN units at Khe Sanh than at Quang Tri, Hue, or the Hai Van Pass.222/

BUT

- The enemy did select and "prepare" the battlefield. He also retained the initiative of whether to fight them or not, and also how long and hard to fight.
- Figure 3-9 (and Map 3-6) displays the rationale most often used to justify the decision to defend and reinforce Khe Sanh with plausible counters to each major reason given.223/ Analysis of the argumentation, pro and con, indicates the strong possibility

4841/78W

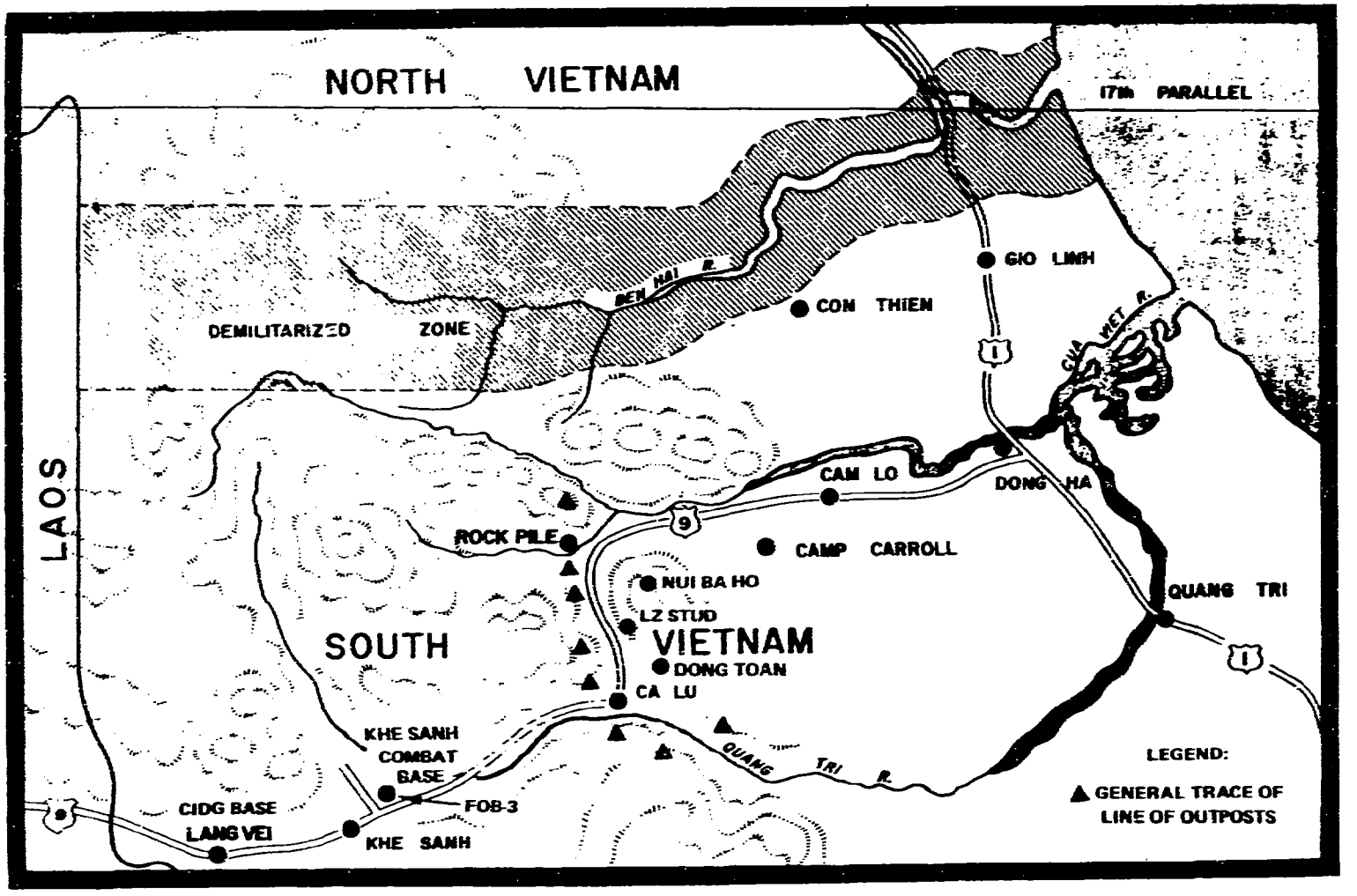
TO DEFEND KHE SANH OR NOT

	REASONS	COUNTERS
1.	USE AS PATROL BASE	
	• IMPEDE ENEMY OPERATIONS/INFILTRATION	• FOR MOST OF SIEGE, PATROLS LIMITED TO 500 METERS
	• SOG BASE TO HARASS HO CHI MINH TRAIL	• SOG PATROLS STAYED IN FOB-3 DURING SIEGE
2.	USE OF AIR STRIP FOR RECCE	• HAZARDOUS, SO LIMITED TO RESUPPLY, EVACUATION, C^3, AND EMERGENCY USES
3.	BLOCK HIGHWAY 9, RAO QUAN VALLEY, AND ACCESS TO A SHAU	• ONLY CLOSE-IN BLOCKS: ENEMY BY-PASSED KSCB • ENEMY HAD BUILT AND USED OTHER ACCESS ROADS TO A SHAU
4.	JUMP OFF POINT TO:	
	• CUT/HARASS HO CHI MINH TRAIL	• DID USE IN 1971 AFTER REOCCUPYING AND REBUILDING AIRSTRIP, BUT NOT POLITICALLY "IN CARDS" IN 1968 (ELECTION YEAR)
	• A SHAU VALLEY BASES	• WAS USED IN APRIL 68, BUT MAIN EFFORT CAME FROM HUE-PHU BAI AREA
5.	SUPPORT SPECIAL FORCES CIDG CAMP AT LANG VEI	• DESPITE ARTILLERY SUPPORT, COULD NOT PREVENT CAPTURE IN FEBRUARY 68 • WITH MASSIVE ENEMY BUILDUP IN AREA, CAMP NO LONGER SERVED VALID PURPOSE AND BECAME A LIABILITY • COULD HAVE SERVED A DECEPTIVE PURPOSE AND THEN EVACUATED ALONG WITH KSCB
6.	TIE DOWN AND ATTRITE 2+ ENEMY DIVISIONS	• SERVED PURPOSE TO AN EXTENT, BUT DID SO AT A PLACE CHOSEN AND PREPARED BY ENEMY AND CLOSE TO HIS ARTILLERY, SUPPLY LINES, AND CACHES. • ENEMY COULD DISENGAGE AT HIS WILL; DURING FEBRUARY SENT 29th REGT., WITH 2 BNS, OF 325C DIV. TO HUE. • STUDIES SHOW THAT THROUGH 1968 ENEMY HAD CONTROL OVER HIS CASUALTY RATE AND OURS TOO! • ENEMY DIVISIONS AND GUNS COMMITTED AGAINST KSCB WOULD HAVE HAD LITTLE TIME TO PREPOSITION SUPPLIES AND "PREPARE THE BATTLEFIELD" NEAR CITIES. (PAVN NOT THAT FLEXIBLE OR FAST IN CHANGING SITUATION UNTIL YEARS LATER; SUPPLY PROBLEMS ALSO CONSTRAINED ALL ATTACKS).
7.	KEEP FIGHTING OUT OF POPULATED AREAS	• DURING TET, FOUGHT IN CITIES ANYWAY • KSCB HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON THE BUILD UP OF ENEMY FORCES AT QUANG TRI, HUE, AND DA NANG • THERE WERE OTHER SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS BETWEEN THE FRONTIER AND THE COASTAL PLANE WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN DEFENDED (SEE MAP 3-6) • A TIGHTER DEFENSE CLOSER TO, BUT WEST OF, POPULATED AREAS COULD HAVE HINDERED ENEMY BUILD UP MORE AND REACTED EVEN QUICKER TO HIS TET ASSAULTS
8.	PREFERRED MOBILE DEFENSE PRECLUDED BY SHORTAGE OF:	
	• US TROOPS	• WHEN A DEFENDER IS SHORT ON TROOPS, IT IS NORMALLY

Figure 3-9. Alternative to Defending K

		OF ENEMY FORCES AT QUANG TRI, HUE, AND DA NANG
		• THERE WERE OTHER SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS BETWEEN THE FRONTIER AND THE COASTAL PLAINE WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN DEFENDED (SEE MAP 3-6)
		• A TIGHTER DEFENSE CLOSER TO, BUT WEST OF, POPULATED AREAS COULD HAVE HINDERED ENEMY BUILD UP MORE AND REACTED EVEN QUICKER TO HIS TET ASSAULTS
8.	PREFERRED MOBILE DEFENSE PRECLUDED BY SHORTAGE OF:	
	• US TROOPS	• WHEN A DEFENDER IS SHORT ON TROOPS, IT IS NORMALLY BEST TO SHORTEN AND CONSOLIDATE THE DEFENSE AND CREATE MORE RESERVES INSTEAD OF PIECEMEALING UNITS IN ISOLATED AND HAZARDOUS LOCATIONS.
	• HELICOPTERS	• IT WAS ADMITTED THAT EXTENSIVE AIRMOBILE OPERATIONS WERE NOT PRACTICAL DURING THE MONSOON SEASON ANYWAY; YET THOUSANDS OF EXTENDED HELO SORTIES SUPPORTED KSCB AND ITS OUTPOSTS
	• LOGISTICS AND	• OVER 14,000 T. AIRLIFTED IN KSCB AND 1000 T/DAY STOCKPILED FOR RELIEF OPERATION; A SHORTER AND MORE SECURE LOC WOULD HAVE CONSERVED FUEL AND SUPPLIES.
	• BAD WEATHER; MONSOON/CRACHIN (THEREFORE, KSCB WOULD PREVENT THE ENEMY FROM TAKING ADVANTAGE OF CRACHIN BY INFILTRATING TROOPS AND SUPPLIES CLOSER TO POPULATION).	• EVEN IN CLEAR WEATHER, AN ISOLATED KSCB HAD A LIMITED CAPABILITY TO PREVENT INFILTRATION; IN BAD WEATHER IT TIED UP RESOURCES THAT COULD HAVE BEEN USED BETTER ELSEWHERE.
9.	DEFENSES ALREADY PREPARED AT KSCB (DECEMBER '67)	• INITIALLY ONLY DEFENSIVE POSITIONS FOR ONE BN; INADEQUATE FORTIFICATION CRITIQUED BY BRAESTRUP ET AL - MOST ONLY PROOF AGAINST 82MM MORTARS; EASIER TO SUPPLY FORTIFICATION MATERIELS FURTHER TO EAST.
10.	NO SUITABLE ALTERNATIVE POSITION	• THERE WAS A MORE THAN ADEQUATE DEFENSIVE AREA 17 OR SO AIR KM TO EAST; ROCK PILE - NUI BA DEN - LZ STUD - DONG TOAN - QUANG TRI RIVER THAT WAS USED LATER BY RVNAF AND US TROOPS (SEE MAP 3-6)
		• STRONG OUTPOST POSITIONS AVAILABLE TO WEST OF HIGHWAY 9
		• WOULD HAVE "TIED IN" WITH AND PROTECTED FLANK OF US/RVNAF TROOPS ALREADY IN AREA
		• WOULD PERMIT THE 5 EXCELLENT INFANTRY BATTALIONS AND 5 ARTILLERY BATTERIES TO BE EMPLOYED ON THAT LINE AND /OR IN A RESERVE ROLE.
11.	LAND EVACUATION IMPOSSIBLE AND AIR EVACUATION DIFFICULT AND HAZARDOUS	• TRUE, BUT QUITE FEASIBLE WITH GOOD DECEPTION, EVACUATION, AND FIRE SUPPORT PLANS.
	• OK FOR MEN AND LIGHT WEAPONS/EQUIPMENT	• TO US, MEN MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN EQUIPMENT FOR POLITICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MILITARY REASONS.
	• NOT FOR HEAVY EQUIPMENT (TANKS, ETC.) AND SUPPLIES (ARTILLERY, AMMO, ETC.).	• MOST EQUIPMENT COULD BE EVACUATED BY AIR AND REPLACED BY DUMMY/DEFECTIVE WEAPONS, ETC. FOR DECEPTION; MOST AMMUNITION COULD BE EXPENDED IN DECEPTIVE/SPOILING ATTACKS (TOWARDS OUTPOSTS AND/OR FEINT TOWARDS LANG VEI) AND REST BLOWN AT LAST MINUTE; TANKS COULD BE EMPLOYED IN DECEPTIVE OPS, REMOVABLE EQUIPMENT EVACUATED AND THEN BLOWN OR BOOBY TRAPPED, AND THE WHOLE OPERATION COVERED BY A MAXIMUM "NIAGARA" EFFORT.
12.	EVACUATION WOULD COOPERATE WITH THE ENEMY'S STRATEGY	• ON THE CONTRARY, THE PREVIOUS SECTIONS TEND TO CONFIRM THE THESIS THAT GIAP WANTED AND PREPARED FOR US TO STAY AND FIGHT AT KHE SANH.
		• AT THAT STAGE OF THE WAR ANY SUDDEN, BOLD, AND WELL EXECUTED SHIFT THREW THE ENEMY OFF BALANCE AND FRUSTRATED HIS AIMS; IT TOOK TIME AND EFFORT TO PLAN AND PREPARE FOR A NEW AND UNEXPECTED BATTLE.

to Defending Khe Sanh (See Map 3-6, following)



NOTE: 17 Km. by Air From Khe Sanh to LZ Stud

Map 3-6. Alternative Positions to Khe Sanh

that a feasible and less hazardous (militarily and above all politically) alternative was available, if the decision to relocate had been made in time and the planning and execution was sound. (Time permitting, other alternatives could have been examined).

- The keys to a successful evacuation would have been timing, planning and execution; plus of course the enemy countermeasures. Timing would not only have been dependent on the weather, but also on deceiving the enemy; e.g., hold and feint long enough to make him commit supplies and forces but not long enough to let him build up overwhelming strength. In the past, large-scale evacuations have been successful when they have been aided by imaginative and well-conducted deception plans: e.g., Gallipoli in World War I and several isolated French airheads in Indochina. (It goes without saying that disaster is the natural outcome of a hasty, ill-prepared, and poorly-led exodus).
- Tactically, the Battle of Khe Sanh was coordinated and fought very well indeed; exceptions were the costly ambushes sprung on several patrols and small units. It appears that for both political and military reasons, all of that effort, expense, fire power and bravery could have been expended to better purpose elsewhere.

H. FOLLOW-ON OPERATIONS 224/

Three other major operations conducted in 1968 will be examined briefly because they are examples* of the US military forces in Vietnam at or near their best, and this in spite of the disruptive effects of annual rotation, six-month command tours, and the growing antiwar clamor in the

* Scores of other battles or operations could have been chosen - these are merely illustrative.

US. (The "Shock of Tet" was not included as a major constraint since US forces, and to a lesser extent RVNAF, were not long thrown off balance by the surprise attacks but rather were galvanized by the challenge - an ironic contrast to the general consternation in Washington).

1. The Relief of Khe Sanh: Operations Pegasus/Lam Son

- In March 1968, as the enemy pressure around Khe Sanh slackened and the weather improved, the 26th Marines started conducting longer range patrols and increasingly stronger probes of the enemy, which included Capt. Pipes' "classic raid." It was gratifying to their commanders to see the esprit and offensive vigor displayed by the young Marines who had been confined for the most part to a static, "sitting duck" defense for 77 days. The ARVN 37th Ranger Bn. also dealt their "brothers from the north" a severe blow or two.
- The "relief" operation kicked off from the LZ Stud and Ca Lu area on 1 April. The interservice and international task force was under the operational control of Major General John J. Tolson, who commanded the 1st Air Cavalry Division; the US Marines included their 1st and 26th Regiments and some engineers under General Tolson, while the RVNAF contributed on Airborne Task Force of three Bn's.
- The 1st Marines had the mission of opening Route 9 and protecting the engineer work parties as well as LZ Stud. The 1st Cav. Division conducted a series of airmobile operations on the flanks to establish a series of fire and operating bases. The ARVN airborne, initially in reserve, conducted an airmobile landing at LZ Snake, North-West of Khe Sanh and then attacked astride Highway 9 towards Lang Vei. Despite generally poor flying weather, air support was adequate.
- There were several stiff and many minor fights during the operation, but generally the enemy was confused and tried to escape to his sanctuaries. Official "link up" with KSCB took place at 0800

on the 8th of April; it was a happy but quite low-key event for those who supposedly were held in "agony" for so long; the Marines called it a "break out."

- On 11 April Route 9 was declared open. The Marine, Army, and Navy engineers had done a "herculean" job in rebuilding 14 km of road, replacing nine bridges and constructing 17 by-passes. They were complimented by General Westmoreland.225/
- The Marines gained further revenge when on Easter Sunday the 3rd Bn, 26th Marines finally was given a charge to capture the obnoxious PAVN rocket base at Hill 881 N.
- The operation was officially declared over on the 15th. More than a thousand enemy had been killed during Pegasus; but the US troops were needed for another important operation.
- In his Vietnam study, LTG Willard Pearson summed up the operation by writing that:

> The rapid and successful conclusion of Operations Pegasus can be laid first to detailed planning and preparation. Second, the enemy was either unable to, or did not know how to, react against airmobile maneuvering of large numbers of combat troops and supporting artillery around and behind enemy positions. Third, an unprecedented degree of bomber and fighter air support was provided to the ground forces, and this combat power punched the enemy along the front line and throughout the positions to his rear.226/

To that accolade from an experienced and tough-minded commander should be added due praise for the harmonious and productive interservice and allied cooperation.

2. The A Shau Revisited: Operation Delaware/Lam Son

- There had been no major allied ground units in the A Shau Valley since the enemy overran the Special Forces Camp there in 1966. The bases there were quite important since they were close to sanctuaries in Laos and also had good access routes to Hue and Da Nang; the A Shau was the staging area for the Tet attacks on those cities.

- The attack into the A Shau was a multi-division US/RVN operation in April/May 1968 controlled by LTG William B. Rosson, who then commanded XXIV Corps. The US furnished the major portions of the 1st Air Cavalry and 101st Airborne Divisions while RVNAF supplied an Airborne Task Force and a Regiment of their 1st Division; by then the latter had fully recovered from its near disintegration during the Buddhist struggles in the mid-sixties and had distinguished itself in and near Hue during the Tet offensive.
- The operation, which lasted from 19 April to 17 May, was designed to preempt the second wave of attacks in the Hue area. Although there was heavy fighting in Thua Thien Province in the latter part of May, the capture or destruction of large quantities of supplies, ammunition and weapons--which included several PT-76 tanks and 120 mm artillery guns--must have constrained the scope and severity of the enemy attacks.
- General Rosson wrote that the operation was:

> ...one of the most audacious, skillfully executed and successful combat undertakings of the Vietnam war...it is significant that from its inception DELAWARE was a combined effort entailing association of the 1st Cavalry Division and the 3d ARVN Regiment, 1st ARVN Division, on the one hand, and the 101st Airborne Division and the 3d ARVN Airborne Task Force on the other. The outstanding results achieved through teamwork on the part of these combined forces reflect great credit on their leadership, professionalism, and unsurpassed fighting zeal.227/

- COMUSMACV praised the combined ARVN-US long-range reconnaisance patrols, which not only located numerous enemy targets and directed effective fire on them, but also sprang some very effective ambushes.228/
- The Allies continued to conduct periodic operations and raids in the A Shau through the summer of 1971, but PAVN kept rebuilding and restocking. The Valley was again a springboard for major enemy offensives in 1972 and 1975.

3. Protecting Saigon: Toan Thang (Complete Victory)

- Both the GVN and the US were determined to eliminate the continuing enemy threat to Saigon. After the first wave of the Tet offense, the enemy did not pull all the way back to his border bases and sanctuaries; many of his units remained concealed within a night's march--or sampan ride--from the capital. From the air the terrain looks relatively open and easy to search. Yet there were hundreds of hiding places for a clever and patient foe.
- An extremely heavy concentration of US and RVNAF units (79 battalions) was assembled to protect and clean up the Capital Military District (CMD), which basically consisted of Saigon and Gia Dinh Province. For the most part the operation consisted of small unit patrols, ambushes and cordons, but the cumulative results were impressive.
- The second, much weaker, phase of the Tet offensive opened on 4 May; it included destructive attacks on 21 US airfields/ heliports. Despite the density of allied troops in the area and prior warning, the enemy was again able to penetrate Saigon; of the elements of eight PLAF Regiments and three separate Bn's committed, only 13 battalions actually got into the city. The first surge of that phase was over by 12 May and the enemy lost about 3,000 men.229/ The enemy made yet another surge in late May and gained a degree of surprise.
- Learning from his errors in the first Tet wave, the enemy adopted new tactics. One variation was most difficult and costly to counter. Ex ARVN Col. Lung wrote that:

> ...apparently to avoid great losses, enemy forces broke down into small elements and penetrated densely populated areas from which they initiated attacks. This was a marked departure from Phase I during which the enemy launched direct attacks against definite objectives and incurred heavy losses in the process. The lessons of Phase I were apparently well learned.

> By adhering to populated areas and moving from one place to another in case they could not hold on to any particular place, enemy forces had hoped to reduce the effectiveness of our tanks, artillery and tactical air. The effect of this tactic brought about extensive physical damage and casualties to the population, which induced their grievances and helped enemy propaganda.230/

(Characteristically, the enemy had attempted to exploit, with some success in Saigon/Cholon, the shortcomings of the US Way of War--by then also firmly RVNAF's).

On balance, Westmoreland was pleased:

> On the last day of May, Operation TOAN THANG (Complete Victory), the largest operation of the war, came to an end. Employing 42 U.S. and 37 Vietnamese maneuver battalions, the operation extended over 60 [54] days. Although unspectacular, consisting primarily of small search operations during the day and ambushes at night, TOAN THANG was nevertheless highly effective, killing 7,600 members of the enemy's local forces, guerrillas, and infrastructure. [The majority coming during the 2nd wave attacks].231/

- Above and beyond its more obvious military successes and failures, that operation demonstrated that, at last, the partially uncovered VCI and local guerrillas (militia) were vulnerable. It was the beginning of a long down-hill slide for the "People's War" in RVN; the NLF and PLAF were nearly invisible during the 1972 Easter Offensive. GVN and RVNAF were on the way up while the US ground forces were at their peak. The key leaders in Saigon sensed that the "struggle" was going badly for the enemy, but in Washington the majority had mentally and emotionally thrown in the towel; Tet and Khe Sanh provided their evidence and incentive.

I. THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE?

1. A Proposition

A principal theme of this chapter has been that US strategy, and increasingly tactics, have been even more centered on attrition, by whatever name. Money, science, technology, materiel, and overwhelming firepower have become the predominant elements in our way of war. In several ways, that is a sound approach: those are the things that we have plenty of (or did), and which we usually excel in making and using. Above all, they can save the lives of our soldiers; or to paraphrase George Patton, "make the other SOB die for his country."

Our conduct of the ground war in Vietnam arrived at the logical destination of our march down the attrition road. And the Battle of Khe Sanh was probably the epitome of that strategic and tactical bent; that is why it has been both blessed and cursed.

2. Some Problems

- That way of war is getting even more expensive and fuel hungry, and is increasingly unsubtle and heavy-handed. It has forged tools which the Commander in Chief has been hesitant to pay for and fearful of using.
- Nations still threaten or embark on war only to gain extremely important political objectives. The military arm is employed to help gain those ends. As the war in Vietnam dragged on, the political aims shifted over time and increasingly diverged from the military ways and means employed. At best, the dialogue between the politicians and the soldiers was imperfect and fuzzy.
- The decision to reinforce and hold Khe Sanh was taken in Saigon. The results of that decision placed heavy and unnecessary pressure on a president already overburdened by doubts and criticism. He worried (perhaps unduly) about Americans getting overrun out there. Just the thought of having to make a decision whether or not to use nuclear weapons was abhorrent to him. (Such weapons,

of course, are the logical and ultimate extension of attrition). To this day Maxwell Taylor is not certain whether it was worth all the agony.232/

- By our standards we had won a great military "victory" at Khe Sanh, but it was a political boomerang. It helped exacerbate and expose a wide gap between ends and means.
- Yet, the well planned, coordinated use of massive firepower at Khe Sanh is considered the shining standard of the future by a number of military men. For example, the current doctrinal guide for the US Army is based on attriting Warsaw Pact forces in Central Europe; the primary duty of company commanders is to "service targets." (Currently, the doctrine and manual are undergoing serious review; the outcome is very important but as yet unclear.)

3. Khe Sanh and the Future

A variety of views:

> Khe Sanh will stand in history, I am convinced, as a classic example of how to defeat a numerically superior besieging force by coordinated application of firepower.
>
> General Westmoreland 233/

> Some look at Khe Sanh as a symbol of how we fought that war, which is unfortunate. We were out there simply to kill North Vietnamese and do nothing else. We used our infantry as bait. We used technology to kill them. It is the exact opposite of what one would expect of our infantry.
>
> Professor Francis West 234/

> When the records are available the absurdity of Khe Sanh will rate a book by itself.
>
> Sir Robert Thompson 235/

> President Johnson hailed Khe Sanh as a decisive victory. The Chief Executive, in awarding the Presidential Unit Citation to the 26th Marines, paid tribute

to the "most overwhelming, intelligent, and effective use of air power in the history of warfare" and saluted the "endurance--and the artillery--of the Marines at Khe Sanh."

USAF History 236/

A senior Army general called Khe Sanh "probably the first major ground action won entirely or almost entirely by airpower," and it was without question a signal triumph for the high competence and courage of professional airmen from all branches of U.S. military aviation--indeed the one decisive victory for airpower in the Vietnam War. But by no means did it redeem the Westmoreland strategy. What it did was to retrieve a serious blunder by the skillfully improvised and determined application of airpower under the urgent stress of imminent defeat. And it involved, of course, its own distortions. For the relief of tiny Khe Sanh had required a greater bomb tonnage than had been dropped on any other single target in the history of warfare, including the atomic drop on Hiroshima. David Douglas Duncan called it "defense through deluge" and complained that only America could afford such a "bankruptcy of tactics."

Ex Under Secretary of Air Force,
T. Hoopes 237/

(This was written three years before Linebackers 1 and 2).

...My sense of history leads me to expect another trend that may be seen as a corollary of the first: The increasing complexity of international politics and the unique flexibility offered by airpower will entice us again toward parcelling our air forces for the winning of battles rather than unifying and focusing them for the winning of wars. Aware that our every move in a combat theater today sends ripples around the world, we are reluctant to act decisively. We prefer to make smaller decisions, win battles, and hope that the enemy will lose heart. And our airpower will permit us to win most battles. But that way leads to a series of Khe Sanhs and eventually in a free society to war-weariness and dissent. As an alternative to this approach, airpower offers the possibility of an early LINEBACKER II campaign (with the enforcing threat of subsequent LINEBACKERs, a threat that was conspicuously

> missing in 1975). Airpower can be strategically decisive if its application is intense, continuous, and focused on the enemy's vital systems.
>
> General Momyer 238/

- Perhaps an astute and articulate critic of the war put Khe Sanh, and the American Way of War in proper perspective.

> Another point of great interest is Khe Sanh and whether this represents a model of the sort of thing that could be done in the future. Khe Sanh, in one way, was a unique situation, and, therefore, does not prove very much about the possibilities for conducting the Vietnam War better. It was a case where we finally found a target for the kind of effort which we are most capable of executing. So far as Vietnam itself is concerned, it was a very special case. But there is a wider lesson, it seems to me, from the Khe Sanh sort of situation: There is such a thing as the American way of war, and it is not really all that bad. But it requires the appropriate target. So when we look at the future, at the kinds of situations that will be amenable to the kinds of military force that we, organizationally and temperamentally, are capable of brilliantly marshaling and deploying, that is the kind of lesson that begins to emerge.
>
> Professor Earl Ravenal 239/

4. A Final Thought

Many things were done quite well at Khe Sanh, and most of them bravely carried out. There are tactics and techniques used there that will be useful in the future, but the overall model itself should be critically examined. It is not likely that the "appropriate target" for and the opportunity to use 100,000 tons of bombs and 150,000 artillery shells will be found often . And what if Khe Sanh had fallen? The potential military gains were not commensurate with the political and psychological risks run. Not since Pearl Harbor and the fall of Bataan has the US been able to gain political victories out of military defeats. In Vietnam the unsolved problem was just the reverse.

J. ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

For a number of cogent reasons this is the longest and most detailed chapter of this volume. Yet, because of the vast scope and complexity of the issues examined, it would indeed be premature and presumptuous to assert that the analysis produced complete and final answers. Indeed a number of the questions raised demand a series of objective, deep and continuing studies by the US military and the other arms of the USG responsible for national security. Events over the past few years have demonstrated that once popular cliches such as "Never Again" and "No More Vietnams" are neither clear nor useful guides for those planning for and guiding the foreign and military policies of the US. (See Volumes III and VIII of this study.) Although preceding and following eras of that protracted and costly conflict (or political-military "struggle") perhaps are of equal importance in evaluating US performance, it was the period of the "Big War", from 1965 through 1968, that had the most significant impact on how it would end; this is because of the cumulative impact on the US public and on their government.

There is little doubt that only the introduction of large US ground forces in 1965 prevented the destruction of RVNAF and the fall of the republic itself. In staving off disaster US troops generally performed magnificently, bravely, and well above the expectation of many keen observers. (But we also lost more small fights than we like to admit.) Such knowledgedable professionals as S.L.A. Marshall and Maxwell Taylor have commented that the US units which were sent to Vietnam were probably the best prepared and most professional of any initially committed to battle in this century, and for that matter of any army in our two hundred-plus-year history. Why and how morale, discipline, esprit and combat effectiveness eroded over time are covered in Volume VII, The Soldier.

The "Big War" was a direct clash of opposing aims, wills, and strategies: the modernized Eastern (Lao Dong) approach to strategy vs. the US version of the Western (MACV). There was also a vast gap between definitions and perceptions of "victory" and "defeat." For those years there was a steady buildup (escalation if you will) of forces and increasingly heavy

casualties on both sides. One antagonist was willing and able to pay the price of double-edged attrition and the other eventually was not, primarily because of the relative goals, stakes, and the nature of the societies involved.

Political and geographic constraints and the mania for statistics in a "frontless war" had a significant influence on the decision to fight a ground war of attrition; yet US military experience, doctrine, and way of war also had to impact on that decision. A military organization, like any other, tends to do what it knows and does best. The pressure and desire for quick and positive results led to an overconcentration on the enemy main forces. The VCI and local guerrillas were hard to find, except on their terms. In such cases the casualty ratios were often either undramatic or in their favor - the sniper, the booby trap, the mine and the small hit-and-run ambush were their effective means of creating physical and psychological attrition.

The ground strategy for Vietnam was made in and conducted from Hq MACV. The JCS have been termed "bystanders" and conduits, yet they traditionally and loyally supported the field commander. That passive posture weakened the interface between political and military thinking.240/

During that era, US goals shifted but the strategy remained quite constant, while the reverse was true on "the other side of the hill." But throughout, the enemy was able to turn multiple military "defeats" into political "victories". That crucial but immensely intricate phenomenon is very important and little understood; it is certainly worthy of a separate in-depth study.

K. INSIGHTS

During the twentieth century the US strategic approach had been increasingly based on materiel and technological superiority, while that of the enemy in Vietnam, due to both necessity and philosophy, was more subtle and sophisticated; the enemy's approach was more appropriate for the nature and environment of the conflict in Indochina.

US strategy was disjointed geographically, organizationally and functionally while that of the enemy was unified and coherent.

The American Ways of Life and War are very expensive and "heavy handed," and had profound and pervasive impact on the government, economy, society and armed forces of South Vietnam; all of those national elements became more or less tied to our ways without having the leadership, experience, and means to carry them through to success. (Our success with the South Koreans was in many ways irrelevant, but helped to lead us astray).

A primary intent of both sides, in the conflict, was to attrite the other for political and psychological as well as for military purposes; despite disproportionate losses, attrition was more suited to and successful for the Lao Dong leadership than it was for the US.

Attrition took time, resources, and patience and thus led to a costly protracted war which was increasingly difficult to understand, explain and "sell" to the US news media and the public; serious study of alternative strategies came too late.

In late 1967, the public overoptimism of key US military and civil leaders played a major role in establishing a collective mind-set ripe for the surprise and shock of Tet '68; and, once again the US had badly underestimated the intent, capabilities and ingenuity of the enemy.

The enemy's 1967-68 Winter-Spring offensives exposed the "rear base" of the NLF to exploitation while, ironically, crumbling the already fragile US "rear."

Khe Sanh well suited the geographic and military predilections of the opposing strategists, but fear for the safety of its garrison distracted US attention from the enemy's build up for the Tet Offensive and then compounded the consternation in the US when it was unleashed.

Assuming that attrition was the best, or only, ground strategy open to the US, the decision to fight at Khe Sanh had <u>some</u> military logic, but even so there were other options that contained fewer political, psychological and military risks.

The US could not afford to lose even one major battle (e.g., Khe Sanh) while the enemy could (and did) lose many, persevere, and eventually prevail.

The enemy's strategic deception and dispersion plan (his Phase I) was aided and abetted by his study of predictable US methods and habits; conversely, US knowledge of his approach to strategy was more superficial and subjective.

On the whole, US military units carried out their difficult and often frustrating tasks quite well during the period. In executing the given strategy, the majority of the commanders and their staffs displayed flexibility, dedication and overall professionalism. Unfortunately, too many of the young soldiers and junior leaders carried out their duties with more determination and bravery than tactical skill--not their fault.

During the Tet offensives, RVNAF gained confidence and started to "come of age"; with US aid and support they reversed the previous moral and physical ascendency of PLAF and gradually gained at least a rough equivalence with PAVN.

The strategic dialogue between the military and civilian leaders of the USG, which was incomplete and generally mutually unsatisfactory, was brought to a head by the cumulative effects of attrition, Tet '68, Khe Sanh, the Pueblo incident, and by the untimely and poorly reasoned and presented request for 206,000 more troops.

Despite suffering extremely heavy losses during the Tet/Khe Sanh offensive, the enemy entered the fight-talk phase in a stronger position than did the US.

L. LESSONS

Current US strategy, doctrine and tactics still are based primarily on attrition; since such an approach did not work well against a smaller and militarily weaker opponent, it should be highly suspect against a larger and in many ways stronger antagonist.

The US approach to military strategy is basically a direct and unsubtle one which is heavily biased towards the materiel and technological end of the scale and slights the psychological and political elements; a serious, comprehensive and continuing reappraisal of the bases for future US political-military strategy is overdue.

The US Way of War is extremely expensive and getting more so each year; all US services need to rethink a rational balance between high, mid and low-cost equipment and forces (e.g., for the Army the proper employment of reinforced light infantry for the defense and seizure of urban areas and of light air-portable armor).

The US, partially because of its strategic bent and way of war, is too often unable to gain desired political ends from the employment of even massive US military power; there still exists an artificial and inhibiting barrier between the two.

The US (like other modern western-style democracies) is ill-suited to sustain a large-scale, costly, inconclusive and protracted limited war, especially against a determined, tough and clever opponent who is capable of exploiting our internal and international vulnerabilities or contradictions. (This lesson became obvious in the last year or so of the Korean War, but its import faded over time.)

ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

- When the tactics are wrong and the strategy is wrong, the war will be quickly lost;
- When the tactics are right but the strategy is wrong, battles may be won, but the war will be lost;
- When the tactics are wrong but the strategy is right, battles may be lost, but the war will be won;
- When both the tactics and strategy are right, the war will be won quickly.

Old Vietnamese Saying

APPENDIX
EAST-WEST STRATEGIC INTERACTION IN VIETNAM: THE RELEVANCE OF CHESS AND WEI -CHI

> Thus there are two forms of encirclement by the enemy forces and two forms of encirclement by our own--rather like a game of wei chi. Campaigns and battles fought by the two sides resemble the capturing of each other's pieces, and the establishment of enemy strongholds (such as Taiyuan) and our guerrilla base areas (such as the Wutai Mountains) resembles moves to dominate spaces on the board. If the game of wei chi is extended to include the world, there is yet a third form of encirclement as between us and the enemy.
>
> - Mao Tse-tung, "On Protracted War," Selected Military Writings (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1963), p. 221.

The purpose of this appendix is to present a brief introduction to one cross-cultural aspect of the Vietnam war. This will be done by a summary comparison of two games of strategy: the Western game of chess and the Eastern game of wei-ch'i (or go). That there was an important cross-cultural aspect of the Vietnam war is clear from the identity of the antagonists. The enemy were not simply communists but Vietnamese communists, which meant that (like Koreans and Japanese) they were deeply influenced by Chinese civilization, however tenaciously they might resist Chinese military conquest or political domination. On our side, the "American way of war" was at work - a major phenomenon recognized as a distinctive variant of Western military ways. This clash of military cultures still awaits its historian, but some tentative treatment is appropriate to this study.

The historians of chess suggest that it began in ancient Persia or India as a training device for military officers, and then evolved into a parlor game. In any case the game reflects some aspects of the national and international realities of the Western world. The two forces are, at the outset, lined up in their respective territories; there is a strong implication of national boundaries and international conflict. On each

side, the pieces reflect a high degree of inequality within the society: there are more peasants (pawns) than there are officers, the higher clergy (bishops) stand close to royalty, and the king's power is severely circumscribed. Note also that action at a distance is a major characteristic (queen, bishop, castle, knight): this resembles artillery, airpower, and command of the seas. The object of the game is to checkmate the king, i.e., to threaten him with capture. The evolution of chess in modern times has led analysts to divide the game into beginning, middle, and ending phases. In the first phase, standard doctrine calls for rapid gaining of control of the center of the board. The middle game typically involves the deployment of officers, their attrition, defensive measures by the king (castling), and the use of main forces and reserves (queen, pawns). The end game is the encirclement and near-capture (checkmate) of the king.

Wei-chi is quite different. The board is much bigger: whereas chess is played on sixty-four squares, the wei-ch'i game is played on a board of 361 intersections (between 19x19 squares). "The number of stone allotted to each player (181 to Black, 180 to White) for a 19x19 size of board is such that - for practical purposes - neither side will ever be lacking men."1/ A continental dimension of territory is suggested. The two players are furnished with white and black "stones" or "men" which are all alike: there is no reflection of status differences and differing military prowess. At the start of the game, the board is empty; the players by turns place their men. They may place them wherever they want, as the whole board "belongs" to both sides. There is no initial line up and no front line. Taken together with the continental hugeness of the board and the uniformity of pieces, it is easy to interpret these game features as reflecting internal war in a very large country with an essentially homogenous (agrarian) population. Domination of the country (and thus the people) is the object, scored on a point system. It follows that a few points can make a victory, but clearly there are degrees of victory and domination in this internal war.

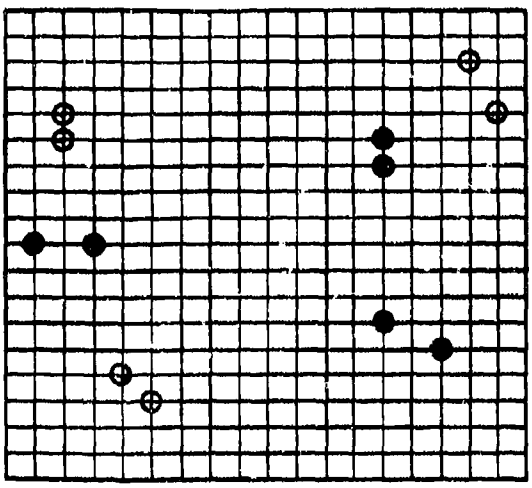
Whereas in chess the early game has a clear, localized object of quick struggle in the center of the board, in wei-chi the first phase is a long,

slow or protracted struggle for advantageous positions which are secure against envelopment; the corners, borders, and sides are most important. This phase blends without sharp transition into the general struggle for domination by means of multiple envelopment. As the "men" remain on the intersections on which they are placed (unless and until captured), there is no movement. The placement of men with a view to building strong positions puts a premium on foresight and on the over-all integration of one's actions. (See Figure 1.)

Wei-chi also puts a premium on the threat and use of surprise by the large number of moves possible, the "leopard spot" dispersion on the large board, and by the circumstance that unplayed pieces are invisible on the board. The effect is very much that of a "war without fronts."

Chess, with fewer pieces on a smaller board, keeps all uncaptured forces on visible display. Furthermore each piece is limited to one kind of movement (except for the queen, which has two). In Vietnam the location and movement of US and RVNAF units were generally known to the enemy; he also knew that most ground maneuvers were constrained by the range of light artillery.

There is some evidence to show that wei-chi concepts were used by the victorious side in the Chinese civil war; in any case, such concepts help to explain much of it in retrospect.2/ No one has yet done for the Indochina wars what Boorman has done to interpret the Chinese civil war in wei-chi terms, but there is a prima facie case to be made for the view that Vietnamese familiarity with wei-chi gave Hanoi an unrecognized intellectual headstart. Strategic encirclement from within and without was the ultimate object of Hanoi's early placement: the Viet Minh staybehinds were left in place in SVN while the Ho Chi Minh Trail was built at the edge of the "board," as were coastal bases. Also in the late fifties the noose was quietly laid around Saigon by the assassination of the chiefs and other officials in the districts surrounding Saigon. Taken together, these moves constituted an encirclement within an encirclement. In 1965 the growing strength of the National Liberation Front was reaching decisive levels. Rejecting neutralization and defeat, Washington had no option but the



EARLY DEPLOYMENT: WEI-CH'I

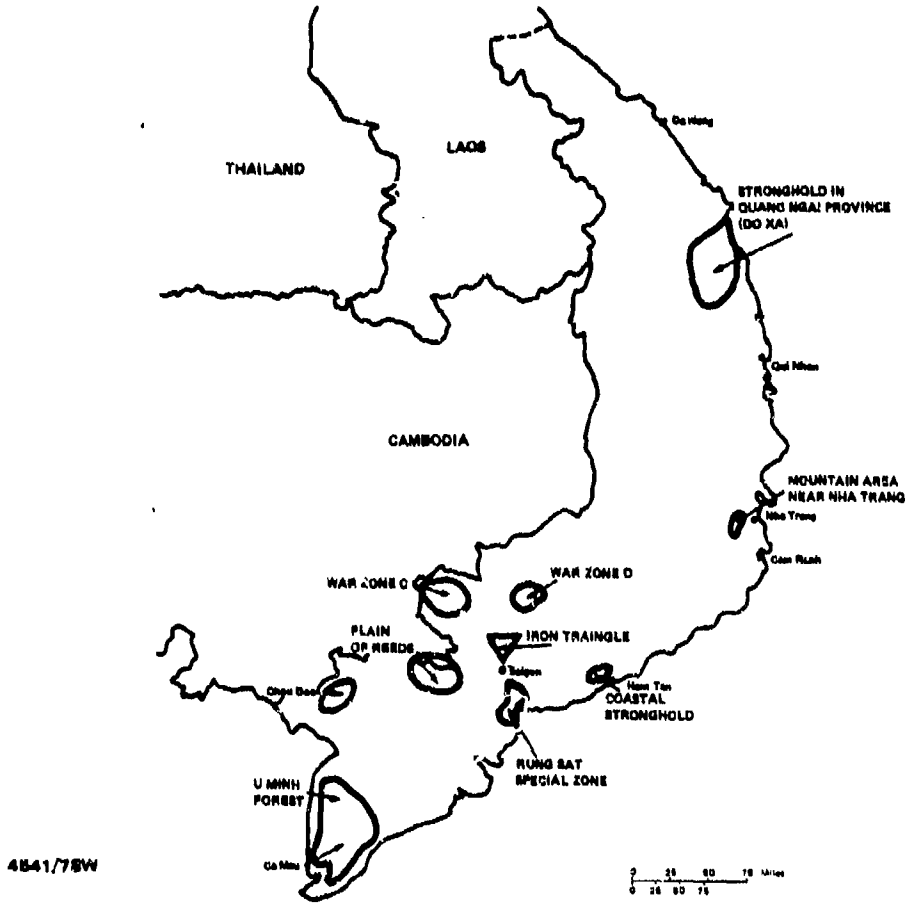


Figure 1. Early Deployment: Viet Minh Strongholds in RVN, 1954-1959

introduction of substantial US ground forces. Even in retrospect some American analysts such as Douglas Pike consider the communists had won the war in early 1965. This, be it noted, without a major invasion, the complete destruction of the RVNAF, or the capture of Saigon.*

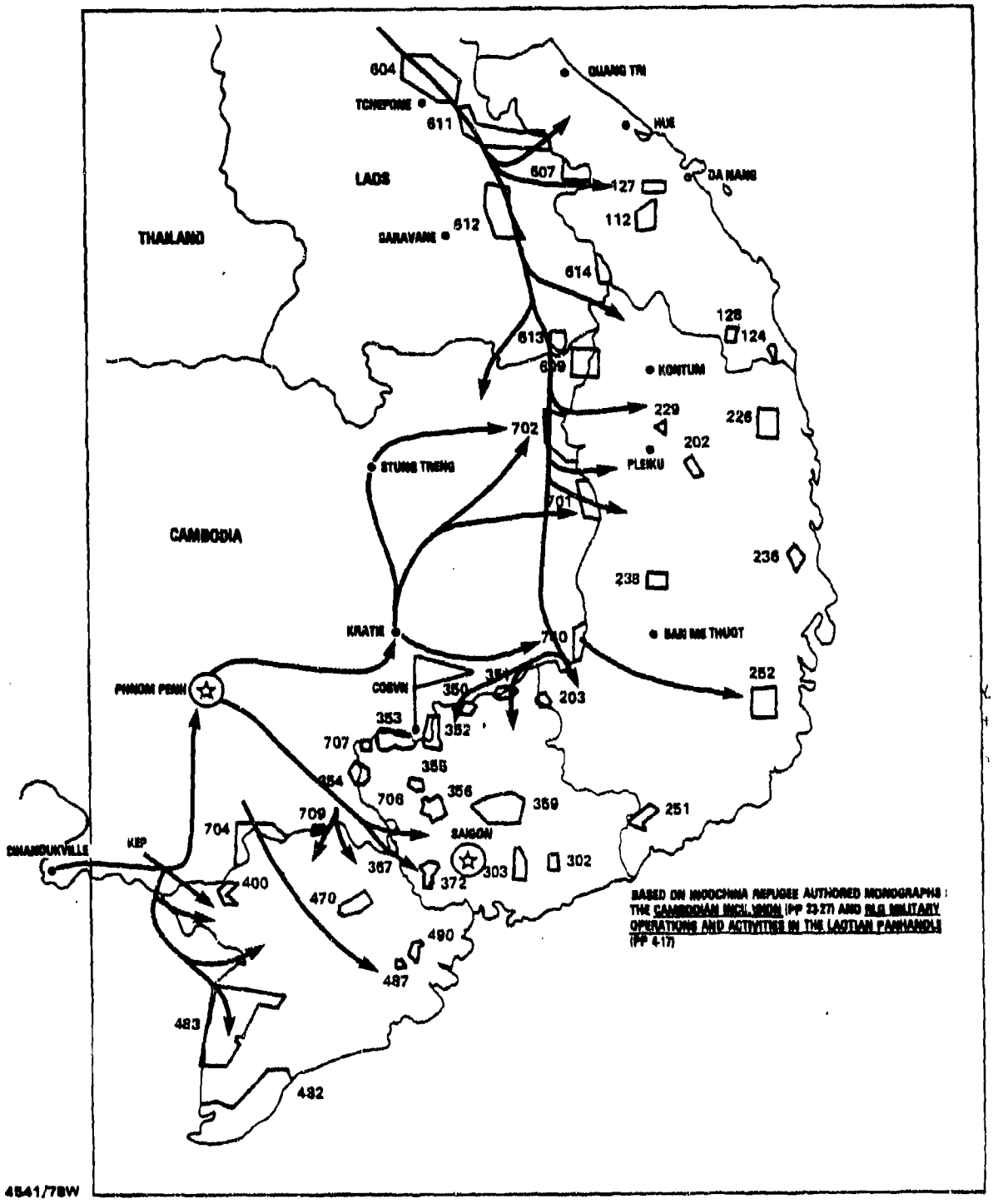
With the introduction of US ground forces and the bombing campaign against the North in 1965, the picture certainly changed, but earlier placements did not lose their value. The Ho Chi Minh Trail was in place and continued to operate; in South Vietnam many base areas existed and survived repeated attack (see Map 1).

Simultaneously with the fighting on the Vietnam front, two other fronts (pieces) were placed and activated: international public opinion and the American home front. These three fronts supported each other so effectively that the Tet offensive in 1968 completed the "encirclement" of President Johnson and his removal from the wei-chi board. It is a traditional wei-chi tactic to attack and surround objectives from both within and without. Although a foolhardy move in Western terms, the 1968 Tet offensive achieved surprise and produced a psychological shock leading to the bombing halt and the unproductive Paris negotiations; counterproductively (for the Lao Dong Party) it also prompted the GVN to institute mobilization.

The next US administration emphasized Vietnamization and eventually heavy bombing with a view to US extrication. Hanoi, on the other hand, emphasized continuous build-up from the border in the wei-chi manner:

> As an initial step, NVA forces labored long and hard during the first few months of the year to forge their border enclaves in South Vietnam into a fortress "third Vietnam" where they could rest and refit themselves without interference. Over 30,000 civilians and top managerial cadres were sent south to populate this thin wedge of real estate; logisticians began building a fully paved highway down its center from the demilitarized zone to a base camp just north of Saigon; and port facilities at the small town of Dong Ha just below the DMZ, which they had captured in 1972, were rapidly expanded. Within twelve months, over twenty percent of

* PAVN forces, however, were moving into the border regions.



Map 1. The Enemy Base Area System and Additional Lines of Communication, January 1970

> the war materiel destined for Communist units on the front line was flowing through Dong Ha, and NVA road networks, both inside the "third Vietnam" and through Laos and Cambodia, had been so effectively streamlined, reinforcements could move from bases in North Vietnam to the Saigon area in less than twenty-five days, one-third of the previous travel time.3/

In addition to this, penetration of the RVNAF and the GVN continued - a practice consistent with the wei-ch'i intermingling of forces on shared territory. The final offensive and drive on Saigon, then, fully capitalized on the long, slow encirclement and disintegration of the victim.

One final thought: perhaps even the much-maligned thousands of isolated little and very vulnerable "beau geste" forts all over SVN probably made more sense to the Vietnamese on both sides than they did to Americans. Once withdrawn or captured permanently, those forts indicated that the tenuous writ of the GVN no longer ran over its territory and people; that of the enemy stood visibly consolidated. Although costly in manpower and other resources, they probably had political, psychological and military virtues foreign to Western (US) thinking. This tentative observation has yet to be fully and objectively analyzed. Caveat: As mentioned in the text of this chapter, one should not try to make too much of comparing cultural board games, but there are broad insights which one might gain from such an intellectual exercise.

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12. This section and the two that follow are based on BDM research and analysis, which are heavily based on the Pentagon Papers (including Department of Defense, US-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967 in 12 vols.) and interviews and/or papers and memoirs of key participants such as President Johnson, Amb. Taylor, Amb. U. Alexis Johnson, General Westmoreland, etc. The articulation of US strategic options in this section is strictly that of the BDM analysts, however, and their interpretation of the sources listed.

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14. Memo to Strategic Studies Institute, Army War College, August 1979.

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22. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 157.

23. Ibid, p. 137; Report on the War, p. 109.

24. Patrick J. McGarvey, Visions of Victory (Stanford: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1969), pp. 7-12.

25. Edward Crankshaw, ed. Khrushchev Remembers (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970). p. 482.

26. LG Lionel McGarr interview, Center for Military History, November 16, 1970, p. 16.

27. Westmoreland Papers, ICMH, Box 17, "History Back-up," (May 10 1965-June 30, 1965). Memorandum for the Record, July 2, 1965.

28. Westmoreland interview, BDM, August 29, 1979.

29. Army War College, Memo titled "1966 program to Increase the Effectiveness of Military Operations and Anticipated Results Thereof," drafted by William Bundy and John McNaughton, February 8, 1966 according to Westmoreland. Copies given to student and faculty attending "Vietnam Elective," spring, 1977.

30. D. Pike, "Tet Offensive..."

31. Cuu Long, "Cuu Long on New Developments in the Guerrilla War in South Vietnam," published in Quam Doi Nhan (Hanoi) November 1966, and reprinted in McGarvey, Visions of Victory, p. 105.

32. Wilfred G. Burchette, Vietnam North (NY: International Publishers, 2nd ed. 1967), p. 132.

33. William DePuy Papers at Military History Institute (Carlisle), MAC J3, Memorandum for the Record, May 21, 1965.

34. Westmoreland, supra note 6; Westmoreland Papers, supra note 28.

35. Westmoreland speech, "Over-view of the War" to US Council of Foreign Relations, April 24, 1967; Papers, supra note 28.

36. Lansdale in Thompson and Frizzell, pp. 77, 78.

37. US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam 4th Rev. ed., (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1968), p. 297.

38. Jeffrey Race, War Comes to Long An (Berkeley: University of California, 1972), p. 149.

39. Results of colloquium in Thompson and Frizzell.

40. Komer, in Thompson and Frizzell, p. 76.

41. Frizzell on Draper, in Thompson and Frizzell, pp. 73-76.

42. Sir Robert Thompson, Ibid., p. 99.

43. Ibid., p. 84.

44. Thomas Thayer, Ibid., p. 86.

45. Professor Francis West, Ibid., p. 93.

46. ARCOV (Army Concept for Vietnam) study cited in "A Systems Analysis View of the Vietnam War: 1965-1972", in Viet Cong-North Vietnam Operations, Vol. 3, p. 8, CMH document.

47. Background, supra note 36.

48. D. F. Pratt, SFC, "Search and Destroy", Army, February 1966, pp. 59-61; Boyd T. Bashore, LTC, "The Name of the Game is 'Search and Destroy'," Army, February 1967, pp. 56-59.

49. Congressional Record, Vol. 118, No. 76 (May 10, 1972), p. E4978, quoted in Thompson and Frizzell, p. 92.

50. Burchett, p. 139.

51. Letter from General DePuy to Joe Alsop, January 24, 1967, in DePuy Papers at Military History Institute.

52. Partial answer to a reporter's question after Westmoreland's speech at Associated Press luncheon in N.Y., April 24, 1967, cited in Westmoreland Papers, supra note 28.

53. Clyde E. Pettit, The Experts (Secausus, N.J.: Lyle Stuart, 1975), p. 347.

54. Ibid., p. 347.

55. Ibid., p. 340.

56. Guenter Lewy, America in Vietnam (NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), see chapter 11 and appendix 1.

57. Peter Braestrup, Big Story (Colorado: Westview Press, 1977).

58. Thompson and Frizzell, p. 77.

59. Douglas Pike, The Vietnam War: View from the Other Side (Saigon: US Information Service, December 1967).

60. Douglas Kinnard, The War Managers (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1977), p. 45.

61. Ibid., pp. 44, 45; and also see Army War College Professionalism study.

62. LTG Julian J. Ewell and MG Ira A. Hunt, Jr., Sharpening the Combat Edge, Vietnam Studies Series (Washington, D. C.: Department of the Army, 1974), pp. 227-8.

63. Told to Col. T. Ware by former members of the 9th Infantry Division.

64. Braestrup, p. 17, and his talk at US Army War College, May 21, 1977.

65. Lt. Col. Dave Richard Palmer, Readings in Current Military History (West Point: Department of Military Art and Engineering, 1969), p. 94. Many other critics thinking along these lines could be cited, such as Townsend Hoopes, formerly Under Secretary of the Air Force, and Brian Jenkins of the RAND Corp.

66. General (Ret.) Bruce Palmer, remarks made at Vietnam Elective course, Army War College, May 31, 1977, pp. 15, 16.

67. BDM interview with MG DeWitt Smith, Cmdt. of Army War College, August 7, 1979.

68. Sun Tzu, p. 77.

69. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 148.

70. Taylor interview.

71. Ibid.

72. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 129.

73. Interview with LTG Don Cowles (ret.), BDM, October 1979.

74. Blovens Plateau Map Exercise at Command and General Staff College, 1959-60, Maj. T. Ware, student.

75. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 148.

76. Ibid., pp. 127, 271-72.

77. Westmoreland cable to CINCPAC (NR 29797), 260242Z, dated August 66, Subject: "Concept of Military Operations in SVN."

78. Comments of General Dwight Beach on MACV's 1967 Campaign Plan in Sen. Mike Gravel, Ed., Pentagon Papers, Vol. IV (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) p. 407.

79. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 272.

80. General B. Palmer Speech, Army War College, 31 May, 1977, pp. 22-23.

81. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 354 f. and BDM interviews, 17 and 29 August, 1979.

82. Report of Chairman, JCS (General Earle G. Wheeler) on the situation in Vietnam, February 27, 1968. Reported in George W. Johnson, ed., Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions, Vol. II, (Pine Plains, N.Y.: Coleman Enterprizes, 1979) p. 501f.

83. Norman Hannah, "Vietnam: Now we Know," National Review, June 11, 1976; Colin S. Gray, "Looking Back on a Lost Opportunity," National Review (May 12, 1978).

84. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 410.

85. Sir Robert Thompson, "Military Victory: Political Defeat - the Failure of U.S. Strategy in Vietnam," International Defense Review, Vol. 7, No. 6 (December 1974), p. 727. General Weyand, formerly COMUSMACV and Army Chief of Staff, would probably agree with the importance of breaking the enemy's will to resist. He stated:

> I've concluded that the fatal flaw in our strategy was in failing to threaten the survival of the enemy and his system. As a matter of fact, Hanoi found early on that there were a number of simple actions, any one of which would result in the easing of the military offensive pressure against them.

Letter from Fred C. Weyand General, USA (Ret) to The BDM Corporation (Mr. Edward E. Mayer), on June 21, 1979.

86. Thompson, "Military Victory," p. 728.

87. Westmoreland BDM interviews, 17 and 29 August, 1979.

88. Sir Robert Thompson, "Rear Bases and Sanctuaries," in Thompson and Frizzell, p. 100.

89. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 100.

90. McGarvey, Visions of Victory, pp. 7-23.

91. Ibid., document no. 8, pp. 168-198.

92. Ibid., p. 170.

93. Ibid., p. 171.

94. Ibid., p. 172.

95. Ibid., p. 173.

96. Ibid., p. 174.

97. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 414.

98. Sir Robert Thompson, supra note 85, p. 728.

99. Henry Kissinger, "The Vietnam Negotiations," Foreign Affairs (January, 1969), p. 212.

100. B. H. Liddell Hart, Strategy, pp. 346f.

101. MG. General Frederick G. Weyand, "Winning the People in Hau Nghia Province," Army, Vol. 17 (Jan. 1967), p. 53.

102. According to Then-LTC Col. T. Ware, Bn, Task Force, and Brigade C.O. in 25th Division, February 1967 - February 1968.

103. Ewell and Hunt in the DA study Sharpening the Combat Edge.

104. Maj. Michael Spark, "Guerrillas, Small Wars, and Marines," Marine Corps Gazette (January 1962), p. 50.

105. Related by Col. J. Angus MacDonald, USMC (Ret) who, as a Major in 1962, was a member of the Policy Analysis Division, Headquarters, USMC and maintained direct contact with the editor of the Marine Corps Gazette, LTC Thomas Greene. Colonel Greene managed to have a Kennedy aide place the special issue of the Gazette on the president's reading table. President Kennedy scanned or read the magazine and complimented the Gazette on the particular issue.

106. US Marines, supra note 19, p. 133.

107. William E. DePuy Papers, MACV J-3, memorandum for record 24 July, 1965, subject: Conversation with Generals Thang and Phong, 23 July, 1965; papers at M.H.I., Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

108. US Marines, p. 134. LTG Krulak, CGFMFPAC 1964-68, was also a strong supporter of the CAP program. In an oral history interview, General Krulak stated that he constantly reaffirmed to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that we were aiming at the wrong target and instead should address our attention "to the protection of the people." He considered the CAP program to be very important. LTG Victor H. Krulak, Oral History Collection, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, US Marine Corps, 22 June 1970, Series V. p. 1.

109. Report on the War, p. 231f.

110. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 166.

111. Ibid., p. 216.

112. General Bruce Palmer's remarks to AWC Vietnam Elective course, 31 May, 1977, p. 14.

113. Interviews with Cols. Nels Parson, C. K. Nulsen and T. Ware at BDM. There was "fat to trim" all over RVN except in the combat companies.

114. Gravel, Pentagon Papers Vol. IV, pp. 107-112,

115. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 200.

116. Gravel, Pentagon Papers, Vol. IV, pp. 112f.

117. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 200.

118. William Corson, The Betrayal (New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 1968), p. 78. Other Marines reflected similar criticism of the McNamara Line. MG Tompkins, who commanded the 3rd Marine Division in 1967-68 in the DMZ area considered the concept to be "crazy." He described it as "...a bete noire that influenced almost everything we did and they wouldn't let us off the hook." Another Marine guard who was G-3 of III MAF and then for two years was Director of the MACV Joint Operations Center, considered the barrier plan to be "absolutely impractical." He noted that III MAF was unequivocally opposed to the plan because, among other things, it would require 18 engineer battalions on a sustained basis to build and maintain access roads, and it would tie down troops for every yard of wire, minefields, etc. Oral History Collection, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, US Marine Corps. MG Rathvon McC Tompkins, USMC (Ret) interviewed 13 April 1973, p. 13 of Transcript, and LTG John R. Chaisson, USMC (Ret) Collection of Chaisson debriefs, speeches, etc., p. 38 of Transcript. General Chaisson died 6 weeks after retiring from active duty before his scheduled oral history debriefing.

119. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, pp. 200 and 340.

120. Townsend Hoopes, The Limits of Intervention, (NY: D. McKay Co., 1969) p. 54.

121. Gravel, Pentagon Papers, Vo. IV, p. 557.

122. Ibid., p. 556.

123. T. Hoopes, pp. 45f.

124. Gravel, Pentagon Papers, Vol. IV, p. 565.

125. Ibid., p. 568.

126. Ibid., pp. 568f.

127. Ibid., pp. 569-72.

128. Hoopes, p. 33

129. BDM interview with M.G. DeWitt Smith, 7 August, 1979.

130. Taylor, Swords and Plowshares, (N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 1972) p. 253.

131. Gravel, Pentagon Papers, Vol. IV, pp. 585-88.

132. Richard L. Prillaman, "A Heuristic Concept for Vietnam," student essay at US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pa., January 17, 1968.

133. Thompson and Frizzell, p. 79.

134. Col. T. Ware, C.O. 2nd Brigade, 101st Abn. Div., 1971 and 1972. Then - BG John R. Chaisson, USMC, debriefed at FMFPAC Headquarters in May 1968 after having served as Director, MACV COC, supra note 118. Chaisson reported that General Abrams felt the critical areas in RVN were I CTZ and Saigon.

135. Taylor interview 11 July, 1979.

136. General Bruce Palmer AWC paper, 31 May, 1977, p. 23.

137. General Vo Nguyen Giap on the Strategic Role of the Self-Defense Militia, in McGarvey, Visions of Victory, p. 195.

138. Nguyen Cao Ky, Twenty Years and Twenty Days, (N.Y.: Stein and Day, 1976) passim.

139. Discussions with BG. (Ret.) Donald D. Blackburn, at the BDM Corporation, November 1979. General Blackburn was the Special Assistant for Counter-insurgency and Special Activities in DOD and was one of the principal planners for the Son Tay raid.

140. T. Hoopes, pp. 82-83.

141. Ibid., pp. 176f.

142. Other relevant sources include the Indochina Refugee Authored Monographs by former officers of RVNAF for the US Army Center of Military History, especially those entitled The South Vietnamese Society, RVNAF, and Leadership, (McLean, Va.: General Research Corp.).

143. General Harold K. Johnson, Random Thoughts to be Sorted out Later, 29 December 1965, papers at MHI, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.

144. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 235. Ambassador Colby was also a staunch supporter of arming the Vietnamese. He referred to handing out 500,000 rifles to the people in the villages as "...the touchstone of pacification." Remarks by Ambassador William Colby at the BDM Senior Review Panel meeting on this study, 13 February 1979.

145. Col. Hoang Ngoc Lung, Strategy and Tactics, pp. 39-40.

146. General Bruce Palmer's paper, AWC, pp. 14f.

147. General Cao Van Vien and LTG Dong Van Khuyen, Reflections on the Vietnam War, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph, 1978, p. 78.

148. Douglas Pike, "The Tet Offensive and the Escalation of the Vietnam War, 1965-1968: View from Hanoi," p. 22; also see Cornelius D. Sullivan, "Winter-Spring Offensive," in: The Vietnam War: Its Conduct and Higher Direction (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center for Strategic Studies, November 1968), p. 96; and Professor William S. Turley, The People's Army of Vietnam in War, Peace, and Politics, pp. 290-92 (manuscript of a forthcoming book).

149. Don Oberdorfer. Tet! (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 175, 186 and Thomas Powers, The Man Who Kept the Secrets, Richard Helms and the CIA (New York, N.Y.: A. A. Knopf, 1979), p. 190.

150. Cornelius D. Sullivan, op. cit., pp. 95f.

151. Ibid., p. 100; D. Pike, "Tet Offensive," pp. 21-22; and Robert J. O'Neill, The Strategy of General Giap since 1964 (Canberra, Australia: Australian National University Press, 1969), p. 19.

152. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 311.

153. Col. Hoang Ngoc Lung, General Offensives 1968-1969, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph (McLean, Va.: General Research Corp., June 27, 1978), pp. 21f.

154. General Giap, Big Victory: Great Task (New York, N.Y.: Praeger, 1968), p. 37.

155. Ibid., pp. 64f.

156. Ibid.

157. D. Pike, The Vietnam War: View from the Other Side, p. 24.

158. D. Pike, "The Tet Offensive," p. 22.

159. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 321.

160. Col. Lung as cited in note 152, pp. 32-45. Col. Lung was aided by the files and suggestions of retired US LTG William E. Potts, who had been a MACV J-2.

161. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 318 and Oberdorfer, Tet!, pp. 155f.

162. Comments of then LTC Thomas Ware, who was Deputy Brigade Commander and in charge of the defense of Dau Tieng from December 1967 to mid-February 1968.

163. Col. Lung, Supra note 152, pp. 42f.

164. D. Oberdorfer, Tet! pp. 88f.

165. D. Pike, "The Tet Offensive," supra note 147, p. 19.

166. Prepared from a synthesis of the multiple sources already cited.

167. Sir Robert Thompson in Thompson and Frizzell, pp. 100f.

168. William S. Turley, The People's Army of Vietnam in War, Peace, and Politics (unpublished book manuscript), p. 294. Professor Turley kindly made a copy of his manuscript available to the BDM study team.

169. Report on the War, p. 161.

170. Follow-on to BDM interview with Gen. Westmoreland, 17 Aug. 1979.

171. Report on the War, p. 155.

172. Col. H. N. Lung, supra note 152, p. 42.

173. Ioid., p. 27.

174. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 354.

175. Ibid, p. 335.

176. This section is based on the study and analysis of most of the sources cited in the chapter. The MACV rationale is well documented, although most of it is ex post facto. The strategic reasoning of Giap is based more on secondary sources balanced, to the degree possible, by his writings, doctrine, and historic patterns and preferences.

177. Patrick McGarvey, p. 42.

178. McGarvey, p. 195, reproducing "General Vo Nguyen Giap on the Strategic Role of the Self-Defense Militia."

179. General Westmoreland's foreword to Capt. Moyers Shore II, USMC, The Battle for Khe Sanh (Washington, D.C.: USMC, 1969) p. vii.

180. William W. Momyer, General, USAF (Ret.), Air Power in Three Wars (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1978) p. 307.

181. BDM interview with General Momyer, Oct. 11. 1979.

182. Momyer, Air Power, p. 309.

183. Westmoreland interview at BDM, 29 August 1979.

184. D. Oberdorfer, p. 189.

185. D. Palmer, Summons of the Trumpet (San Rafael, Ca.: Presidio Press, 1978), p. 170.

186. Interview with General Maxwell D. Taylor, 11 July 1979.

187. Westmoreland interview, 29 August 1979, tape 4, side 1.

188. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 336.

189. MG George Keegan in Thompson and Frizzell, p. 137.

190. Denis Warner, Certain Victory: How Hanoi Won (Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, 1978), p. 149. In a telephone conversation on 8 February 1980 with a member of the BDM study team, MG Rathvon Tompkins, who then commanded the 3rd Marine Division and was responsible for Khe Sanh, remarked that the greatest mystery of Khe Sanh was why the enemy didn't take the water point. That source of water was about 500 meters outside the perimeter. When the generator broke down, a patrol was dispatched to repair it. Yet the PAVN never seized the water point or poisoned it. The logistic burden of having to fly in water in addition to food, ammunition, and all other supplies would have added significantly to the problems of the Marines.

191. Peter Braestrup, Ch. 8, pp. 256-334.

192. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 338.

193. Lyndon B. Johnson, The Vantage Point (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), p. 381; see also Report on the War, p. 163.

194. Col. Lung, supra note 152, p. 42.

195. G. Lewy, America in Vietnam, supra note 56, 128.

196. Westmoreland, Soldier, p. 342.

197. Ibid., p. 345; see also the Report on the War, pp. 172f. The Marines greeted the formation of MACV (Forward) with "shock and astonishment." CG III MAF had not been apprised of that development beforehand. Instead, an Army officer from the MACV staff presented a briefing to the CG and staff of III MAF at DaNang and said, "The (forward) echelon of MACV Headquarters will arrive PhuBai within 48 hours. General Abrams will represent MACV at the forward headquarters." That was the first that General Cushman (CG III MAF) knew about it. MG Tompkins, CG 3rd Mar Div, stated, "I thought it was the most unpardonable thing that Saigon did." Tompkins, Marine Oral History, p. 82.

198. Unless individually cited, the evaluation in this section is the result of the BDM research of multiple sources and analysis.

199. Oriana Fallaci, Interviews with History (New York, N.Y.: Liveright, 1976), pp. 85f.

200. McGarvey, Visions of Victory, p. 53.

201. D. Pike, The Vietnam War: View from the Other Side, supra note 59, pp. 6f.

202. Wm. S. Turley, supra note 167, p. 297.

203. LTC Wm. O. Staudenmaier, USA, "Vietnam, Mao, and Clausewitz," Parameters, Journal of the Army War College, 1977, p. 11.

204. "Giap Hand Seen in Red's DMZ Buildup," Washington Post, 24 January 1968, p. A-11.

205. USMC History Museums Division, The Battle for Khe Sanh, supra note 179, pp. 126f.

206. Bernard C. Nalty, Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, USAF, 1973), p. 108; USMC History Div., Battle for the Sanh, pp. 121f.; P. Braestrup, Big Story, p. 263.

207. D. Oberdorfer, p. 51.

208. Westmoreland papers at OCMH: Summary of CIIB meeting, 3 February 1968.

209. "The Intelligence Background of the Current Communist Offensive," 15 February 1968; message Sharp to Westmoreland in the latter's History File, 1-31 March 1968, at CMH.

210. DF, dated 3 March 1968, Subject: "Analysis of the Khe Sanh Situation in Light of Previous Sieges," by Col. Argo, in Westmoreland files at CMH.

211. P. Braestrup, Big Story, p. 285.

212. Battle for Khe Sanh, p. 126.

213. McGarvey, Visions of Victory, p. 45.

214. The Marines in Vietnam: 1954-1973 (1974), p. 104; oral history transcript of MG R. Tompkins at USMC History and Museums Div., Washington, D.C.

215. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 347.

216. D. Pike, "The Tet Offensive," p. 25.

217. Senior General Van Tien Dung, Great Spring Victory, Trans. John Spragus, Jr. (N.Y.: Monthly Review Press, 1977).

218. BDM research and analysis based on multiple official and unofficial sources.

219. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, pp. 336f.

220. BG. Edwin H. Simmons, The Marines in Vietnam: 1954-1973 (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Div., USMC, 1974), p. 96.

221. P. Braestrup, Big Story, Supra note 57, p. 267.

222. MG Rathvon McC. Tompkins, USMC (Ret.) oral history.

223. The rationale for defending Khe Sanh is primarily based on reasons advanced by General Westmoreland in his A Soldier Reports; General William E. Momyer, Air Power in Three Wars, Supra note 180; BG E. H. Simmons, USMC (Ret.), The Marines in Vietnam: 1954-1973; LTG Willard Pearson, The War in the Northern Provinces 1966-1968, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: Department of Army, 1975); USAF Historical Division, Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh, Supra note 206. The counterargumentation is primarily based on personal knowledge of the weather, terrain, and combat environment, as well as extensive additional research and analysis by members of the BDM study team.

224. Unless data, quotes, etc. are cited specifically, this section is based on a synthesis of BDM research and analysis of multiple sources.

225. The War in the Northern Provinces, p. 88.

226. Ibid, p. 88.

227. Ibid., p. 92.

228. Report on the War, p. 187.

229. Col. Hoang Ngoc Lung, General Offensives 1968-1969, Supra note 152, p. 98.

230. Ibid., p. 104.

231. Report on the War, p. 188.

232. Maxwell Taylor interview, 11 July 1979.

233. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 336.

234. Prof. Francis West in Thompson and Frizzell, p. 83.

235. Sir Robt. Thompson, No Exit from Vietnam (N.Y.: David NcKay Co., 1969), p. 142.

236. USAF Historical Office, Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh, p. 103.

237. T. Hoopes, p. 214.

238. Momyer, Air Power in Three Wars, p. 214.

239. Earl Ravenal in Thompson and Frizzell, p. 265.

240. Interview with Maxwell Taylor, 11 July 1979; General Bruce Palmer paper at AWC; D. Kinnard, The War Managers (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1977), pp. 34f, 40. Also see Chapter II, "Command and Control," of Volume VI, Book 2.

CHAPTER 4

THE US PHASES OUT (1969-1972)

> No matter what difficulties and hardships lie ahead, our people are sure of total victory. The US imperialists will certainly have to quit. Our Fatherland will certainly be reunified. Our fellow-countrymen in the South and in the North will certainly be re-united under the same roof. We, a small nation, will have earned the signal honour of defeating, through heroic struggle, two big imperialisms--the French and the American--and of making a worthy contribution to the world national liberation movement.
>
> Ho Chi Minh's Testament 1/
> 10 May 1969

> In speaking of the consequences of a precipitate withdrawal, I mentioned that our allies would lose confidence in America. Far more dangerous, we would lose confidence in ourselves. . . inevitable remorse and divisive recrimination would sear our spirit as a people. . . . I have chosen a plan for peace. I believe it will succeed. . . . Let historians not record that when America was the most powerful nation in the world we passed on the other side of the road. . . . Let us. . . be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that. . . .2/
>
> President Richard M. Nixon,
> Address to the Nation, White House,
> November 3, 1969

A. INTRODUCTION

The period under examination was a very active one for all participants in the conflict, and the activities spread across the political-military spectrum. Although heavy fighting continued through the first half of 1969 (e.g., the US suffered more casualties in 1969 than in 1967) both major antagonists were developing significant changes in strategy. The Tet and follow-on offensives had a sobering effect on both camps. The

Fight-Talk phase was inaugurated by President Johnson's speech of 31 March 1968, but with radically different goals and expectations by the participants. The militarily weaker side held most of the trumps and was more than willing to "talk", for years if necessary, as their "repayment" for the cessation of bombing over most of the DRV.

The new US administration entered office in January 1969, with a "Secret Plan" to end the war and to gain a "peace with honor." It took the full first term of that administration to bring about a cease fire that was at least minimally agreeable to the US and the DRV; the GVN was pressured into accepting it, and the NLF well might have had uneasy premonitions.

In the interim there was considerable fighting on a large and small scale. After the enemy's Winter-Spring campaign of 1968-69 had spent its force, both major opponents deployed their new dual strategies: the US placed its hopes on Vietnamization and Pacification, counter-balanced by the withdrawal of US units, and the DRV kept the war alive and bleeding with sapper and mortar/rocket attacks while rebuilding, expanding, and modernizing main force units.

There also occurred the secret bombing of, and then the "incursion" into, Cambodia, the large scale raid into Laos (Lam Son 719), the DRV's massive Easter offensive, Linebackers I and II and the mining of the DRV's ports, and finally belated serious talks in Paris.

The majority of the major issues raised during those four years were addressed in other parts of the study, especially in Volume II (South Vietnam), Volume III (Post-Tet US politics and key USG decisions), and Volume V (Pacification and Vietnamization, US withdrawal, and Negotiations). Two major military issues remained to be analyzed in this chapter:

- The change of strategies; our and theirs, why and how?
- Fight-Talk: our way vs theirs (with emphasis on the military side of the equation)

B. THE TRANSITION PERIOD

1. Changing Presidents

The Tet Offensive and the shocked reaction to it in the US helped Lyndon B. Johnson in making up his mind against running for a second term. Although major decisions in February and March placed a "cap" on US involvement in Vietnam, the President's speech on 31 March will probably be considered as our "high water mark" in that war; from that point on it was basically just a matter of when and how we disengaged.

Richard M. Nixon, the new Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief, was well aware that his options were limited, as was the time available to resolve that sticky dilemma. Additionally, he and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, desired to refocus US grand strategy priorities and resources on a global scale. But first they had to defuse the time-bomb of Vietnam. As during the Eisenhower era, the National Security Council (NSC) was moved back to center stage, although most of the major decisions were shaped by Kissinger and contemplated in solitude by Nixon. The NSC's first major project was outlined in NSSM#1, dated 1 February 1969, which asked a number of searching questions about the negotiating environment, the enemy, RVNAF, pacification, the political scene in RVN, and about the US military operations. The responses to NSSM#1 by State, OSD, JCS, CIA and MACV provided the White House with mixed judgments as a basis for a new strategy.3/

2. Changing Commanders

About six months prior to the inauguration of the new Commander-in-Chief, the two field commanders also were changed. Admiral John S. McCain relieved Adm. Sharp as CINCPAC and General Creighton W. Abrams replaced Gen. Westmoreland as COMUSMACV; Sharp's was a mandatory retirement while Westmoreland was appointed as the Chief of Staff of the Army.

3. The Enemy Was Hurting

Despite the enemy's proclamation of "glorious victories" throughout RVN (those claims had some valid basis, especially in the realms of psychology and politics), his soldiers and cadre had suffered staggering

losses. They had set the pace and scope of the fighting and thus offered themselves up to attrition. For example:

> The enemy's employment of economy of forces tactics since the fall of 1968 and intelligence evidence reflect the enemy's concern about his 1968 level of losses, which if continued another year would mean nearly 100 per cent yearly attrition of his fulltime fighters and nearly total North-Vietnamization of local fighting forces in South Vietnam. He is judged unlikely to undertake the heavy losses of a major offensive unless he believes he could thereby achieve a breakthrough in Allied will power in Vietnam or Paris. Yet, without a VC/NVA offensive on the scale of Tet 1968, the JCS believe "it will be exceedingly difficult in 1969 for allied forces to attrite the enemy at 1968 levels." Response to NSSM#1 4/

John Paul Vann, then Deputy for CORDS in the Delta Regional Assistance Command, wrote that the level of loyalty of the VC (PLAF) soldier was lower than that of the RVNAF troops, and also that the enemy's desertion rate in the Delta continued to rise in mid 1969.5/

Maj Gen W. R. Peers, then commanding I Field Force, wrote:

> In late 1965 and throughout most of 1966 the NVA soldier was a well trained, well led, well armed and highly motivated professional. He willingly endured the hardships of infiltration and rigors of combat to "liberate the South". NVA success created an aura of invincibility that hangs over us yet.
>
> Throughout 1967 and 1968 we have seen the tables turn. The enemy has suffered heavy losses in men and weapons. Hardship, sickness, continual exposure to Allied firepower and lack of food and medicine have caused NVA morale and fighting spirit to plummet. Newly infiltrated cadre lack training and experience which has resulted in a lack of confidence of the individual soldier in his leaders.6/

The three phases of Giap's Winter-Spring offensive cost him almost half of his available force in RVN, the PLAF was decimated beyond

effective rebuilding, and he had little militarily to counterbalance the losses.

The enemy's evaluation of the problem, primarily based on captured documents and prisoner interrogations, is discussed in section C.

4. GVN and RVNAF Bounce Back 7/

Although perhaps not as disciplined and austere as his northern brother, the average South Vietnamese was tough and resilient. After quickly recovering from the surprise and scare of the Tet offensive, it appears that the resulting indignation turned large numbers of the previous "fence sitters" against the NLF and the PLAF. But that did not mean that they automatically became pro-GVN.

GVN, however, did discover that it finally had a mandate to lower the draft age and declare a general mobilization. Volunteers flocked to the colors, even many of the so called Saigon "cowboys."

> The popular response to mobilization was unprecedented, and it overwhelmed the RVNAF processing and training capabilities. By September, 240,000 draftees had beaten the deadline by volunteering or reporting to draft centers ahead of time; among them, 161,000 were volunteers who enlisted in combat arms or service branches of their choice. Most remarkable was the fact that about half of that manpower consisted of urban youths, again an unprecedented record. The surge of volunteers and draftees was such that basic training had to be reduced from 12 to 8 weeks. 8/

The fear that the "vacuum" in the countryside, created by the withdrawal of RVNAF units and RD cadres to the cities and towns, would be filled by the enemy was not fulfilled. For one thing, the VCI and the PLAF were too hurt and busy to do so.

Not only was there no "general uprising", but the enemy also lost much of his aura of invincibility. Only three months after Tet 68, the People's Self Defense Force (PSDF) was finally established; eventually it numbered several millions, armed with hundreds of thousands of small arms. In theory, doctrine, and practice that bold step was a major defeat for the enemy.

GVN also felt secure enough to return a degree of self government to the villages, and to launch (in 1970) the very successful Land to the Tiller (LTTT) program.

After sitting on the Pacification sidelines for several years while "Big Brother" did most of the man's work, RVNAF units--even at half strength--fought hard and generally quite well. With numerous exceptions, usually due to weak leadership, the confidence and esprit of RVNAF, including the oft-maligned RF/PF,grew steadily over the next four years. (That apparent about face raises a question: did the foundation for such a reversal exist earlier, in 1966 for example?)

But, as Douglas Pike and others put it, "Washington's response snatched defeat from the jaws of victory."9/

5. Reassessment at MACV 10/

The turmoil and doubts in Washington were felt in Saigon. Not only was MACV's ground strategy being seriously questioned, but also basic questions concerning the mission and objectives of the US military in RVN were raised. If, as claimed, the US and RVN had just won a smashing victory, why the request for 206,000 more troops? Just what were they supposed to do, and to what purpose?

On the 12th of March 1968, Gen. Westmoreland asked his Chief of Staff, then Maj Gen. Walter ("Dutch") Kerwin a revealing question: "What is my mission?" The response: "To assist the Government of Vietnam and its armed forces to defeat externally-directed and supported communist subversion and aggression and attain an independent non-Communist Society in South Vietnam so it can function in a secure environment."11/ (That was quite an order, and probably more suited to the US Country Team as a whole. Nor was the mission statement contained in any one document. The above response was hammered out by Gen Kerwin and the MACV staff.)12/

Shortly after he assumed command of MACV, Gen. Abrams set up a study team in J5 led by then LTC Donald Marshall. Its purpose was to look ahead and examine MACV's mission and objectives; it was titled the Long Range Planning Group Study and became known by the inevitable acronym of LORAPL.

Gen. Andrew Goodpaster, the Deputy COMUSMACV, requested in early September 1968, that the J5 (then MG Richard Shaeffer, USAF) provide an officer to work up some preliminary data on missions and objectives. The officer selected was the newly arrived J-52, Col. J. Angus MacDonald, USMC who headed the US/SEATO Plans Division of J5.

> . . .I was directed to meet with General Goodpaster the following morning and was informed that he would ask. "How do we achieve our military objectives in Vietnam if the truce talks fail?" Having been alerted to his question, I had done some research the night before, and therefore replied that we had no military objectives in Vietnam; rather we had the annual combined campaign plan which was written by a different crew each year (due to the one-year tour) and which did not identify military objectives in the normally accepted sense--that we would not know it even if we did accomplish one or more of the objectives that we should have identified. 13/

The result of Col. MacDonald's research, field trips throughout RVN, and discussions with senior US commanders and staff officers was a paper titled "Military Objectives Study" dated 16 October 1968. Among other items, this study concluded that MACV lacked and sorely needed a "Long Range Strategic Objectives Plan;" such a plan would provide a basis for developing a combined strategic objectives plan with RVNAF's JGS. Gen Goodpaster and then Gen Abrams were convinced of the need for such a plan for MACV; it was a "first." Previously, planning had been done on a yearly basis and usually by a new set of officers. The resulting annual Combined Campaign Plan (CCP) apparently was honored more in the breach than in compliance by both US and RVNAF officers. 14/ LTC (now Maj Gen) Richard Prillaman, who drafted the first CCP (Haystack) recently commented that,

> Coordination and cooperation with RVNAF was pretty good once the basic concepts had been developed, but the concepts reflected in the campaign plan were strictly U.S. This had no practical adverse effect because in 1965, RVNAF had little to offer, either in resources or ideas.

> The principal alternative strategy was the one which was actually adopted, even though it was never expressed or officially approved, i.e., confront the enemy wherever he appears in force, and if he doesn't appear go looking for him. The strategy rejected was the one expressed in the campaign plan. The campaign plan was never formally rejected of course; it was periodically updated as a staff exercise. That the campaign plan was not adhered to was a result of operational decisions that were not consistent with the plan rather than a rejection of the plan itself. 15/

From the establishment of MACV in 1962, that headquarters lacked the capability (or mandate) to perform realistic forward planning. Gen. Richard Stilwell, who was an early J3, noted that MACV was not staffed for such planning in 1965 but sorely needed it. 16/. As mentioned, the one year tour of most staff officers further defeated continuity.

Thus MACV long range planning came into being too late to influence significantly active US conduct of the ground war, but it was timely enough to help tie together the concurrent Vietnamization, Pacification and US withdrawal programs. Marshall's planning team was sufficiently prescient in Dec 1968 to foresee the near inevitability of US withdrawal from RVN. 17/

C. TWO NEW STRATEGIES

1. Hanoi's Strategy

Although most sources, including this study, often refer to "Giap's Strategy," they do so incorrectly. As "hero of Dien Bien Phu" and Defense Minister, Giap had a large voice in strategic decisions, yet he was the only active military man on the Lao Dong Central Committee. As discussed in previous chapters of this volume, major changes in strategy were preceded by a somewhat lengthy period of study and debate, open and closed. The final decision taken by the Central Committee usually was a compromise of major opposing views.

a. An Overview

Even while the winter-spring campaigns of 67-68 and 68-69 were unfolding, a change of strategy was being considered. It was recognized, early, that there would be no "General Uprising" and that RVNAF was not disintegrating but rather was fighting better than ever. Thus, the Alliance of National and Democratic Peace Forces, established in January 1968 as a "coalition government" to replace GVN, 18/ had no capitol and no one to govern.

Despite beliefs and statements on both "sides of the hill" that the Tet offensive was a one-shot gamble to "compress twenty years of struggle into one day," the bulk of the available evidence points towards the view that the enemy had not broken completely with his protracted warfare doctrine. For example, on the evening after the Tet offensive kicked off, Current and Military Affairs Committees met at COSVN to conduct a preliminary assessment. In their paper they stressed that among other shortcomings,

> It is imperative to be fully aware of the fact that the general offensive and general uprising, which are directed against an enemy with an army of more than 1,200,000 stubborn, reactionary, and well-equipped soldiers, is a prolonged strategic offensive that includes many military campaigns and local uprisings to break off all enemy counterattacks and that it is an extremely fierce struggle.
>
> Only when we succeed in destroying the entire puppet army and government, neutralizing the actual political and military support of the Americans, and wiping out a large portion of the U.S. and satellite forces, thus depriving them of all war facilities and crushing their attempted invasion, can we drive them to total defeat and achieve final victory. At present, the victories that we gained at the outset show that we are now powerful and the enemy is on the decline. Our fierce attacks are bringing him closer to the threat of bitter defeat. Consequently, we are fully able to successfully achieve our plan. Howevever, while preparing and implementing this plan, we have been guilty of many errors and shortcomings, as mentioned above. We cannot yet, therefore, achieve total victory in a short period. 19/

That admonition was repeated several times later in even more blunt terms. A number of PLAF's rank and file felt deceived by pre-battle rhetoric, many gave up hope, and some deserted the cause.

The DRV's ready acceptance of President Johnson's 31 March 1968 invitation to talk, which had been sweetened by the partial bombing halt, fit into their earlier decision to force the US into a "fight-talk" environment. McGarvey reasoned that,

> If we bear in mind the fact that the Tet Offensive was planned as early as the summer of 1967, the December 29, 1967, statement of North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh, to the effect that Hanoi "will" begin negotiations, takes on an added dimension. Hanoi apparently hoped to draw the United States to the conference table in early January, and as the sessions were getting under way, present the world with the dramatic Tet assault--a Dien Bien Phu of sorts, which would place the United States in the weakest possible bargaining position. Hanoi seems convinced that President Johnson's March 31 decision to reduce the extent of American bombing and open negotiations resulted primarily from their Tet Offensive.20/

But by no means had the enemy given up his long-range goal or the desire for a climactic battlefield victory. A document captured in early 1969 stated, "The Paris place talks cannot bring about any results until we achieve a big military victory."21/

In Feb 1969 Giap admitted to Oriana Fallaci that he had already lost a half million men, and also said,

> Actually the Americans are still strong, who can deny it? It will still take much effort on our part to beat them completely. The military problem. . .now I speak as a soldier. . .yes, the Americans are strong, their weapons are strong. But that won't do them any good because the war in Vietnam is not only a military war, and so military strength and military strategy are not enough either to win it or understand it. . . (and) . . .Oh, this isn't a war that you resolve in a few years. In a war against the United States, you need time, time . . . The Americans will be defeated in time, by getting tired. And in order to tire them, we

> have to go on, to last. . . for a long time. That's what we've always done. 22/

Yet the huge losses in 1968 and early 1969 took a toll in enemy morale and increasingly resulted in desertions/defections and fewer recruits.23/ Those facts required a major change in policy.

> For the first time since Giap's article, COSVN admitted the need to preserve forces when it issued Directive No. 55 in April 1969. The directive stressed in effect: "Never again, and under no circumstances are we going to risk our entire military force for just an offensive. On the contrary, we should endeavor to preserve our military potential for future campaigns "24/

The enemy floated a comprehensive 10 point peace proposal in May 1969, which demanded total and unconditional withdrawal of US troops and the establishment of a coalition government in RVN.25/

The political-diplomatic aim of the struggle was strengthened when on 10 June 1969 the establishment of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) of South Vietnam was announced. If and when the GVN agreed to accept the NLF into the Paris talks, the PRG would face them as an "equal."26/

b. COSVN Resolutions Nos. 9 and 14

The enemy's new strategic approach was spelled out in great detail (along with a fairly objective critique of his past shortcomings) in COSVN Resolution No. 9, issued in July 1969. The policy guidelines issued through that pivotal document established the general nature and direction of the war for the next six and final years. Of course the policy was made in Hanoi, but the resolution also contained the usual COSVN local window dressing.27/

The military arm of the strategy was supported by two legs: the rebuilding, modernization, and retraining of major PAVN units for large scale "conventional" war; and as Douglas Pike calls it, "Super Guerrilla" warfare. The latter was intended as an economy of force measure to keep the military struggle in the South alive and in the newspapers as well as to continue the attrition of their enemies.

Directions for implementation of and indoctrination for this reversion to a lower scale of warfare for PLAF units (then increasingly filled by PAVN troops) was contained in COSVN Resolution No. 14/DKCT. It also gave the rationale for breaking down main and local force units into dispersed companies. Main force units were encouraged to form themselves into elite sapper formations. (This step "backwards" was not at all popular with many NLF cadre and PLAF troops.) The leadership's counter was:

> This new organizational trend, the COSVN leadership maintained, had several advantages. First, by scattering combat forces, the threat of destruction by firepower, especially B-52 bombings that big force concentrations usually faced, and losses would be greatly reduced. Second, the dispersion of units went along with a dispersion of supplies, which would make it easier to supply and support small units than big concentrated units. Third, the breaking down of major units also allowed the selection of combat-experienced troops to form new sapper units.28/

Besides helping PLAF to a degree, PAVN had the task of preparing for the next round of major battles. Prof. Turley noted that:

> In 1969, a number of independent units in region 5 were pulled together to form new divisions (raising the total from 2 to 5) which in turn were grouped into an army (quan doan), and a large staff headquarters with many specialized branches was assembled. Tanks, improved anti-tank weapons and light antiaircraft missiles began to be made available far below Route 9 where they had appeared in 1968. Generals and colonels returned to the North for refresher courses, and battalion and company officers attended special classes-in-place to study new weapons and command techniques. Training and command structures throughout the PAVN were modified to improve capabilities for regimental and divisional maneuver.29/

The overall intent was to expand and refine both the "coordinated" and the "independent" methods of fighting in order to provide maximum support to the political, diplomatic, and negotiating offensives.

For the strategy to be successful, the "great rear area" of the DRV had to be protected from US bombers. Both Generals Dung and Giap had to argue, forcefully, that the bombing halt/negotiations trade-off was not a "sell out" of the South but rather an essential prerequisite for final victory; their views prevailed.30/

2. Washington's Strategy

It is generally agreed by those who were well informed militarily that prior to Tet '68 and the seige of Khe Sanh, the US ground strategy in RVN was conceived at and conducted by MACV. Before that "turning point," neither the President, the Secretary of Defense, the JCS, nor CINCPAC interferred to a significant degree.31/ (Several senior Marine officers outside of the operational chain of command were often openly critical of "attrition," "search and destroy," etc.; e.g., LTG "Brute" Krulak, former commander of FMFPAC, called the fight for Khe Sanh "A wild blow in the air.")32/

Starting in 1968, however, Washington started to tighten the reins on MACV. Then the new US administration quickly seized and held control of all political, diplomatic, and military strategies. For both better and worse, Washington was at long last firmly in the saddle. The major decisions were concentrated in a powerful "troika": President Nixon, Secretary of Defense Laird, and National Security Advisor Kissinger. (See Volumes III and V).

As stated previously, the new US strategy was based on Vietnamization, Pacification, US troop withdrawal (and reduction of casualties), and negotiations; all required time to flower. The enemy was under no pressure, in 1969, to negotiate quickly or seriously, and the US administration believed that it lacked the mandate, under then-current conditions, to resume the bombing of the DRV. The reduction in US troops and casualties was designed to cool the antiwar fever and thus buy time for the other three elements of the strategy to mature.

Ho Chi Minh didn't like the US strategy at all:

> Nixon is carrying out a scheme for "de-Americanization" of the war in an attempt to use puppet troops to fight the South Vietnamese people.
>
> At the Paris Conference, the US imperialists have stubbornly put forward extremely absurd demands, and refused to discuss seriously the reasonable and logical 10-point overall solution advocated by the National Front for Liberation and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Viet Nam.
>
> Nixon plans to withdraw 25,000 US troops in an attempt to appease American and world public opinion. This is a trick.33/

"De-Americanization" was the original term used by the US but Secretary Laird, who had a penchant for catchy, politically loaded words, coined and sold "Vietnamization."

None of the four legs of the US strategy was new. Abrams, as DEPCOMUSMACV, was charged in mid-1967 with upgrading RVNAF; Komer's CORDS organization started to get pacification on its feet at the same time; in late 1967 Westmoreland had mentioned the possibility of withdrawing some US troops in about two years; and the Paris talks had been initiated by the Johnson Administration. What was new was the pace, timing, intensity and interrelationship of implementation of the components of the strategy.

The new "secret" decision-making process in the USG obviously created a number of difficult problems for the JCS and especially for MACV. An eyewitness account of what it was like for the primary implementers follows:

> The MACV staff had prepared contingency plans for a number of probable circumstances, such as troop withdrawals, that would be necessary if the Paris Peace Talks were successful and hostilities were terminated, however, there was no long range planning by the staff for redeployment of forces under continued conditions of hostilities with no change in the command's original mission. Analysis of the President's announcements clearly highlighted his intent to draw-down U.S. force levels in South Vietnam at a fairly steep rate if he was to show the American public substantial progress with his Vietnamization Program by the 1972 election year.

> Unfortunately, the field command, MACV, had to continue to fight the campaign plan with no advance knowledge of when the President would announce the next withdrawal nor the amount of troops involved nor the period of time available to MACV for execution of the President's decision. Prior to the development of a long range redeployment plan, MACV was forced into a reactive and hasty planning mode. The command had no prior warning of a presidential announcement on troop withdrawals. At most COMUSMACV was advised less than 24 hours before the announcement was to be made.34/

During a visit to RVN in late 1970, Secretary Laird informed General Abrams that he was going to have his Pentagon staff prepare the long range withdrawal plan. Abrams convinced him, however, that MACV should and could do the job better since they would have to carry it out--possibly under enemy pressure. A small planning group was set up under Colonel Edward F. Astarita, whose plan was approved by Abrams in March 71. On the way to present that plan to Laird, Astarita briefed CINCPAC and the JCS; they had not even been aware of the planning effort.35/ (That secretive and exclusive approach to making and implementing grand strategy stretches the concept of civilian control of the military close to the workable limit.)

On balance, however, that strategy achieved its minimum aims of getting the US POW's home and of buying a so called "decent interval." Some concentrated, heavy, and accurate bombing in 1972 helped the process.

D. FIGHT-TALK: OUR WAY AND THEIRS (ISSUE #2)

1. The Name of the Game

The communists usually reverse the term and call it "Talk-Fight." However, since the "talk" side of the equation was analyzed in Chapter 7, Vol. V, this section is focused on the "fight" componen .

In 1969, both major antagonists realized that neither the political nor military situations were ripe for serious negotiations, unless one side or the other was willing to concede defeat of its major

long-range goals for the RVN. Since neither side felt that weak the fighting would continue with low and high points for another four years. For different reasons, both opponents needed time to forge a meaningful political-military bargaining counter.

The fight-talk stratagem is by its nature much more difficult for an open, liberal, Western democracy to pursue than it is for a tough-minded, closed, and brutal totalitarian regime. At the cost of much frustration, treasure, and blood, the US discovered that fact during the protracted negotiations for a cease-fire in Korea. In the intervening 16 years or so, no adequate response had been thought out and agreed within the USG. Again the advantage lay with the antagonist who possessed continuity of leadership, policy, and strategy over the one who periodically changed all three.

2. The Lao Dong Approach

a. Their Viewpoint

The DRV's revised strategy required considerable time, and thus again a protraction of the war, in order to: gain additional international sympathy and support; further attrite US will and internal support for the war; wear down RVNAF, the Self Defense Corps and GVN Cadre; obtain and absorb great quantities of modern equipment and supplies from its allies; refurbish the "great rear base" in the north; rebuild and retrain PAVN; salvage and rebuild the VCI; and to expand significantly its LOC to the base areas in and near the RVN. That time was to be bought with protracted "carrot and stick" negotiations and the cost-effective "sapper guerrilla" war in the South.

Giap (VNG) to Oriana Fallaci (O.F.), in Hanoi, February 1969:

> O.F.: General, here we do nothing but talk about peace but it seems that nobody really wants it. So how long will these Paris peace talks last?
>
> V.N.G.: A long time! Especially if the United States doesn't give up its position. A long time. All the more since we won't give up ours, we're not in a hurry, we have patience. Because while the delegations are discussing, we go on with the war. We love peace but

> not peace at any price, not peace by compromise. Peace for us can only mean total victory, the total departure of the Americans. Any compromise would be a threat of slavery. And we prefer death to slavery.36/

Ho Chi Minh ended his last New Year's (Tet) Greetings, in the Spring of 1969, with a poem:

> Last year we won brilliant successes.
> This year still greater victories will surely be ours
> on the front.
> For the sake of Independence and Freedom,
> Let us fight till the Americans quit and the
> puppets topple.
> Forward! Fighters and compatriots,
> North and South reunited, can it be a happier spring? 37/

The Lao Dong leaders said, and appeared to believe, that the "abdication" of President Johnson, the bombing halt, the virtual pleas for negotiations, and the replacement of Gen. Westmoreland added up to a major victory, and more than compensated for their heavy losses during the Tet and follow-on offensives. For example:

> It appears that they did believe that Johnson had made a major gesture on the troop issue, which was the announcement on March 22 that Westmoreland was being relieved of command. In Hanoi, they spoke of the purging ("limogeage" in French) of Westmoreland and likened it to the "purging" of General De Saussure after the failure of Operation Junction City in 1967. In his March 31 speech, Johnson indicated that a small increment of men would continue to be sent to South Vietnam. His words, therefore, implied nothing so far as troop withdrawals were concerned. But Westmoreland was the architect of the American ground effort in South Vietnam and his departure signaled to the North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front South Vietnamese that a major change in policy was in the works.38/

b. Super Guerrillas in Action

As the number of major actions tapered off in late 1969 the gap was filled by increased sapper/mortar/rocket attacks and by an increased use of mines and booby traps. The latter two had a serious

effect on morale and the speed and freedom of movement. A former ARVN colonel claimed that mines and booby traps caused the bulk of the ARVN losses in vehicles and people.39/ A US Veterans Group noted that the Vietnam war resulted in ". . . the highest rate of amputations and paralysis of any conflict in history."40/

An Army medical study on Vietnam noted that the percentage of these wounded ". . . from fragments (including mines and booby traps) rose from 49.6 percent in 1966 to 80 percent in 1970." 41/ and that:

> While the distribution between high velocity and fragment wounds in Vietnam approximated that of World War II and Korea, the incidence of mine and boobytrap wounds was more than triple that in the other two wars. These injuries, often multiple, always devastating, pose the most formidable threat to life and the greatest challenge to the surgeon. The helicopter contributed to survivability by delivering to hospitals greater numbers of more seriously wounded than in any war to date. These casualties included many with wounds that in past wars proved fatal before the casualty could be evacuated to a treatment facility. Despite these two factors, the survival rate remained high.42/

The enemy had perfected tactics and techniques which fully exploited those cheap, effective, and greatly feared weapons. They were never really countered.

An example of an embarrassing and costly sapper attack was the surprise assault on Fire Base Mary Ann in May 1971. Gen. Westmoreland, while Army Chief of Staff, was very upset by that psychological and military defeat.

> In another case involving an incident in Vietnam I was also compelled to get personally involved. That was in the spring of 1971 after approximately 50 enemy overran a fire-support base named Mary Ann, manned by more than 250 men of the Americal Division, resulting in 30 Americans killed and 82 wounded. It was a clear case of dereliction of duty--of soldiers becoming lax in their defense and officers failing to take corrective action.43/

The MACV Inspector General who was directed by Gen. Abrams to reinvestigate the cause of that disaster commented that although the VC had planned the attack for a long time, the major reasons for their success were: complacency, dereliction, permissiveness, and lack of aggressive supervision by the chain of command. Riflemen and machine gunners didn't have ammunition and the quad-50 machine gun and mortars were not manned. He dryly noted that there were worse such disasters than Mary Ann.44/

c. Time as a Factor

Although in many ways time favored the enemy, it worked against them in other ways. Both Pacification and Vietnamization made great, if uneven, strides during the period. Despite many shortcomings, such as in leadership and combined operations, RVNAF was outdistancing PLAF and was approaching equality with PAVN in some respects.

To an unknown degree, part of the relative calm in the country side apparently was due to a conscious decision taken by the enemy. David Elliott in his study of that period wrote:

> A captured NLF directive (COSVN Resolution 10) containing high level strategic guidance for 1971 offered unmistakable evidence that the military lull had, in fact, been ordered from above. Explaining the rationale for a consolidation of forces strategy that would emphasize political rather than military activity, the directive said that the aim was "to consolidate the power of our army and people, thoroughly exploit the enemy's vulnerabilities and weakness, and deal the most effective blows to the enemy." The directive warned that, "any unit which at any time acts against this rule or does not effectively apply it will reduce its power and suffer failures." "This," it noted "has happened in the past."45/

The fact that Nixon and Kissinger were trying to trump Hanoi with their Russian and Chinese "cards" argued against delaying for too long.

d. Preparing for Easter

If one agrees with the not unreasonable conclusion that a primary purpose of the enemy's Tet Offensives was to change the status quo

in their favor, then the long prepared and very costly Easter offensive may be viewed in the same light. It was a major element, or high point, in their grand strategy, but was not the whole of it by any means.

Douglas Pike concluded that:

> The fourth and final period, the talk-fight period, ran from 1968 to the end of the war in the spring of 1975. It was a complex mix of armed and political struggle and involved these actions:
>
> - Renewed military activity in the South on a selective basis. Protracted conflict, after several years of disuse, again was expounded to cadres: victory would come if the enemy could be outlasted, outwaited, outendured. The southern buildup would continue.
>
> - Seeking of external support and aid from socialist and other nations and encouraging antiwar movements in the United States and around the world.
>
> - Staging military offensives in Vietnam geared to US politics. All three major campaigns of the war were in advance of U.S. presidential elections: the Tet offensive in the Spring of 1968, the Easter offensive in the spring of 1972, and (as originally planned) the offensive of spring 1976.
>
> - And, most importantly, maneuvering in Paris at the talks. 46/

"Giap sold his campaign plan to the Politiburo," 47/ probably over the strong objections of Truong Chinh and his "Neorevolutionary" cohorts. In another work Pike wrote:

> In DRV and NLF doctrinal thinking it is important to distinguish between negotiations as a grand strategy and negotiations as a tactic. As a strategy, the negotiator assumes much if not all of the burden of the struggle; that he can do so is questioned by the opponents of the doctrine. As a tactic, negotiations become simply a device to facilitate some other strategy, presumably military, and as such are not opposed doctrinally by anyone. Thus Regular Force and Neorevolutionary Guerrilla War strategy advocates rule

> out neither tactical negotiations nor nonmilitary efforts in general. Indeed, it is fundamental to all Politburo thinking that the armed struggle and the political struggle must be pursued simultaneously. The quarrel comes over the relative degree of emphasis each is to get, the allocation of resources, or the correct decision to be made in those specific instances (which are frequent) where the interests of one must be served ahead of the interests of the other. General Giap would maintain that while diplomacy abroad and political overtures in the South might make certain limited contributions to his cause, the burden of the struggle must remain military. Truong Chinh and the Neorevolutionary advocates see somewhat greater utility in the conference table than does General Giap, and they suggest a more or less orchestrated effort between guerrilla war and diplomacy politics. But in the final analysis, they would agree with General Giap that victory must be decided in the field, not at the bargaining table or in the political arena in the South. The Negotiated Settlement group would focus the struggle on the nonmilitary, arguing that the military contribution should be almost an attendant holding operation: hold in the field while time runs out for the enemy. 48/

The DRV not only had to replace the severe losses suffered by PAVN in 1968 and 69, but also had to expand their forces for the even greater effort demanded by Giap's new offensive. Thus they:

(1) Initiated a major drive for "volunteer" enlistments in late 1969, and in 1971 "draft teams" scooped up most of the available and useable manpower. 49/

(2) Obtained a huge amount and variety of modern military equipment and munitions, especially from the USSR. In a welcoming speech for Nikolai Podgorny and his entourage on October 5, 1971, Le Duan said:

> Dear Comrades and Friends,
>
> The current visit of the Soviet Party and Government Delegation is a very important event, marking a new, very splendid development of the relations between the parties and peoples of our two countries. Through your visit the Vietnamese people will see ever more clearly

> the warm feelings, the whole-hearted support and assistance of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Government and people to the revolutionary cause of the people of Viet-Nam. We firmly believe that your current visit will have far reaching repercussions, strongly encouraging our compatriots and combatants across the country to advance to new, yet greater victories, and will further embellish the fraternal love between the peoples of our two countries.
>
> Long live the great friendship and militant solidarity between the parties and peoples of Viet-Nam and the Soviet Union!
>
> Long live the great Soviet Union!
>
> The Vietnamese people will surely triumph!
>
> The Indochinese peoples will surely triumph!
>
> U.S. imperialism will certainly fail! 50/

(In the spring of 1971, Le Duan was in the USSR for an extended period, and quite likely arranged for the needed arms.) 51/

In a speech on December 17, 1971, Truong Chinh, a loyal "team player" despite his earlier strong opposition to Giap's plan, alerted the North Vietnamese to the coming offensive:

> . . .The U.S. imperialists' adjustments of their global strategy, through various phases, continue to aim at ruling the world by force, while proving that the U.S. imperialists are increasingly passive and weak and that the socialist system and the world people's revolutionary movement are increasingly stronger and are driving the Americans from an offensive posture into a defensive posture. As a result, the U.S. imperialists' global strategy is studded with increasingly acute contradictions between requirements and capabilities. The U.S. imperialists are not strong as one believes. One should not assess their forces too highly.
>
> Concerning the military struggle, our people and our people's armed forces must annihilate as much of the U.S.-puppets' potential as possible, especially their mobile strategic forces, while smashing their rural pacification plan, dooming their policies of scraping

> up human and material resources in order to Vietnamize the war, destroying, decimating or disintegrating the enemy's territorial forces, expanding the liberated areas and firmly maintaining and developing our people's resistance bases.
>
> The Northern armed forces and people must always sharpen their vigilance, properly organize the people's air defense task, be ready to fight and to fight well and be resolved to smash all U.S. military adventures and violations of the DRV's sovereignty and security. 52/

As usual, the DRV started to "prepare the battlefield" with a huge "logistics offensive." (US intelligence and the press became aware that something big was building up as early as Nov. 1971). 53/ Henry Kissinger noted that, "Throughout the second half of 1971 Hanoi's public statements had turned ominous. . . . [and] starting on January 4, 1972 General Abrams warned of an imminent offensive." 54/

> [The DRV next closed the internal political loop] The National Assembly met from March 20 to 25, 1972. Pham Van Dong and Nguyen Con in their political and economic reports made the first public references to the meeting of the Central Committee's 20th Plenum. Nguyen Duy Trinh's foreign affairs report emphasized the "sovereignty" of the DRV's foreign policy and the importance that diplomatic maneuvering has in its political-military planning. Giap's defense report, which was not broadcast or printed, may have hinted at the invasion which got underway a week later. 55/

(Between the strategic decision and actual offensive there was major fighting to be done in Cambodia (70') and in Laos (71'); those campaigns will be analyzed briefly in a subsequent section.)

3. Washington's Approach

Because of his unique talents and contacts, Henry Kissinger had been involved, unofficially, in the USG's search for fruitful negotiations long before he became the National Security Adviser. His article on "The Viet Nam Negotiations" (Foreign Affairs, January 1969) outlined his views on how the US should try to achieve at least its minimum objectives

in the "fight-talk" arena. His (partial) views on why our earlier military-political-diplomatic efforts had failed were:

> The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had another advantage which they used skillfully. American "victories" were empty unless they laid the basis for an eventual withdrawal. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, fighting in their own country, needed merely to keep in being forces sufficiently strong to dominate the population after the United States tired of the war. We fought a military war; our opponents fought a political one. We sought physical attrition; our opponents aimed for our psychological exhaustion. In the process, we lost sight of one of the cardinal maxims of guerrilla war: the guerrilla wins if he does not lose . The conventional army loses if it does not win. The North Vietnamese used their main forces the way a bullfighter uses his cape--to keep us lunging in areas of marginal political importance.
>
> The strategy of attrition failed to reduce the guerrillas and was in difficulty even with respect to the North Vietnamese main forces. . . .
>
> All this caused our military operations to have little relationship to our declared political objectives. Progress in establishing a political base was excruciatingly slow; our diplomacy and our strategy were conducted in isolation from each other. President Johnson had announced repeatedly that we would be ready to negotiate, unconditionally, at any moment, anywhere. This, in effect, left the timing of negotiations to the other side. But short of a complete collapse of the opponent, our military deployment was not well designed to support negotiations. For purposes of negotiating, we would have been better off with 100 percent control over 60 percent of the country than with 60 percent control of 100 percent of the country. 56/
>
> [His concept:]
>
> To be sure, Hanoi cannot be asked to leave the NLF to the mercy of Saigon. While a coalition government is undesirable, a mixed commission to develop and supervise a political process to reintegrate the country--including free elections--could be useful. And there must be an international presence to enforce good faith. Similarly, we cannot be expected to rely on

> Hanoi's word that the removal of its forces and pressures from South Viet Nam is permanent. An international force would be required to supervise access routes. It should be reinforced by an electronic barrier to check movements.
>
> A negotiating procedure and a definition of objectives cannot guarantee a settlement, of course. If Hanoi proves intransigent and the war goes on, we should seek to achieve as many of our objectives as possible unilaterally. We should adopt a strategy which reduces casualties and concentrates on protecting the population. We should continue to strengthen the Vietnamese army to permit a gradual withdrawal of some American forces, and we should encourage Saigon to broaden its base so that it is stronger for the political contest with the communists which sooner or later it must undertake. 57/

As stated earlier in this chapter neither President Nixon nor Kissinger was overly impressed with the advice he received from the JCS or the field commanders. Nixon had even a lower view of the "clowns at Langley" (CIA) and the "State Department jerks." 58/ And Westmoreland wrote that "[Secretary of Defense Melvin] Laird appeared to distrust the Joint Chiefs, seemingly unable to accept, as a consumate politician himself, that we were apolitical." 59/ In turn, Kissinger noted that Westmoreland was "ignored by the policy makers. He was almost never consulted about the war he had conducted with gallantry, if not always ultimate success." 60/ Thus three strong willed, intelligent amateur strategists firmly seized the military helm.

They fully realized, however, that their military options were few and their time for maneuver limited by: a narrow political victory, a restive belligerent Congress, a hostile press, the potent antiwar movement, a faltering economy, a generally weak ally, and an apparently intransigent enemy. Before he had spent one full day as President, Nixon received another forceful impetus for reducing US casualties and ending the war:

> I slept only about four hours my first night in the White House, and was up at 6:45 a.m. While I was shaving, I remembered the hidden safe that Johnson had shown me during our visit in November. When I opened

> it, the safe looked empty. Then I saw a thin folder on the top shelf. It contained the daily Vietnam Situation Report from the intelligence services for the previous day, Johnson's last day in office.
>
> I quickly read through it. The last page contained the latest casualty figures. During the week ending January 18, 185 Americans had been killed and 1,237 wounded. From January 1, 1968 to January 18, 1969, 14,958 men had been killed and 95,798 had been wounded. I closed the folder and put it back in the safe and left it there until the war was over, a constant reminder of its tragic cost. 61/

By nature and hard experience Nixon was both aggressive and hesitant. His long and often raw contacts with communists had convinced him that they respected strength and scorned softness. Charles MacDonald noted his ambivalent approach:

> In regard to military action in South Vietnam, President Nixon wanted to increase pressure on the enemy. He nevertheless denied a request from the Joint Chiefs to permit American patrolling in Cambodia and to revoke the restrictions that President Johnson had imposed on ground operations, bombing, and artillery fire in the DMZ. 62/

The President and Secretary Laird both insisted on a "progressive withdrawal of American troops no matter what progress or lack of it developed in the negotiations in Paris," and a drastic reduction in US casualties which together ". . . could dampen public opposition to the war and thereby gain time to find a diplomatic solution." 63/ But aggressive commanders and proud units were a bit difficult to turn around. MacDonald wrote,

> Disappointed at the lack of progress toward a settlement of the war and spurred by a highly publicized American attack on an objective that came to be called "Hamburger Hill," anti-war forces again became demonstrative. In response, the president in a televised address on 14 May declared that the United States was not seeking to impose "a purely military solution on the battlefield" and that the United States would

> accept any government (although not explicitly stated, not necessarily non-communist) resulting from "free choice of the South Vietnamese people themselves." 64/

("Hamburger Hill" was actually Ap Bia Mountain in the A Shau Valley. Units of the 101st Airborne Div. conducted a costly ten-day battle to seize it, in early May 1969 and then abandoned it. Whether the fight was tactically necessary or not at that stage of the war, is beyond the scope of this paper, but it certainly was not consistent with the new President's policy).

There was no lack of both problems and opportunities other than Vietnam for the new administration to address. A sample: the war between Pakistan and India over what is now Bangladesh; Allende in Chile; the North Korean downing of a US intelligence plane; concern over Soviet Naval forces in and near Cuba; the growing power and threat of the USSR's nuclear and conventional forces; the deterioration of the US and NATO forces in Central Europe; the desire for detente with the USSR and a counterbalancing opening to China; the strategic arms limitation talks (SALT); congressional pressure for unilateral US force reductions in Europe and then for Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR); and the festering and periodically erupting open wound in the Middle East. The latter was the primary concern and private domain of Secretary of State William Rogers--at least until Kissinger wrapped up Vietnam, Russia and China. 65/

Since he was widely respected as a military intellectual and had served well Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson, General Andrew Goodpaster was recalled from Vietnam to serve on the President-elect's transition staff and to assist in the reorganization and the revitalization of the National Security Council (NSC). Former President Eisenhower assisted Goodpaster in resisting the continuation of the State Department-dominated Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG); that suited Kissinger, Laird, and Nixon quite well for different reasons. 66/ They all gained power and leverage at the expense of the State Department.

Their memoirs clearly show that both Nixon and Kissinger enjoyed their new roles as "military strategists" quite well. Nixon was a great admirer of Patton and viewed the movie a number of times. At one point he

came up with a scheme to concentrate all the tanks in Vietnam and commit them against a decisive objective! That concept was never formally examined.

Both were better suited to Grand Strategy than they were to operations and tactics. Within a year they developed a report to the Congress, "US Foreign Policy for the 1970's: a New Strategy for Peace." For the US general purpose forces, they conceived more realistic, but perhaps still optimistic, objectives and force structure goals:

> We finally decided on a strategy which represented a significant modification of the doctrine that characterized the 1960's.
>
> The stated basis of our conventional posture in the 1960's was the so-called "2-1/2 war" principle. According to it, U.S. forces would be maintained for a three month conventional forward defense of NATO, a defense of Korea or Southeast Asia against a full-scale Chinese attack, and a minor contingency -- all simultaneously. These force levels were never reached.
>
> In the effort to harmonize doctrine and capability, we chose what is best described as the "1-1/2 war" strategy. Under it we will maintain in peacetime general purpose forces adequate for simultaneously meeting a major Communist attack in either Europe or Asia, assisting allies against non-Chinese threats in Asia, and contending with a contingency elsewhere. 67/

(With respect to soldiers, however, there is no such thing as a "1/2 war" to those fighting it.)

Based on the cost and the trauma of the Vietnam conflict, they came up with an approach to People's War that resembled that of President Eisenhower:

> . . . we cannot expect U.S. military forces to cope with the entire spectrum of threats facing allies or potential allies throughout the world. This is particularly true of subversion and guerrilla warfare, or "wars of national liberation." Experience has shown that the best means of dealing with insurgencies is to preempt them through economic development and social

> reform and to control them with police, paramilitary and military action by the threatened government.
>
> We may be able to supplement local efforts with economic and miltary assistance. However, a direct combat role for U.S. general purpose forces arises primarily when insurgency has shaded into external aggression or when there is an overt conventional attack. In such cases, we shall weigh our interests and our commitments, and we shall consider the efforts of our allies, in determining our response. 68/

Because the US response to overt attack, outside of such vital areas as European or Northeast Asia, was expected to be limited to naval and air forces, that strategic option was soon dubbed the "Blue Water and Blue Sky Strategy." The long range implications for the RVN were clear as the US had already started withdrawing US ground forces.

After considerable reflection, Kissinger put his pencil square on the real military choices open to a commander-in-chief:

> Perhaps the most difficult lesson for a national leader to learn is that with respect to the use of military force, his basic choice is to act or to refrain from acting. He will not be able to take away the moral curse of using force by employing it halfheartedly or incompetently. There are no rewards for exhibiting one's doubts in vacillation; statesmen get no prizes for failing with restraint. Once committed they must prevail. If they are not prepared to prevail, they should not commit their nation's power. Neither the successive administrations nor the critics ever fully understood this during the Vietnam war. And therein lay the seeds of many of its tragedies. 69/

(A subsequent section will address that astute observation as it applied to the Cambodian, Laotian and Linebacker Operations.)

It didn't take long for the "chiefs" in Washington or Saigon to realize where the new locus of power rested. Some didn't like the new manner and direction (such as a number in the State Dept., OASD/ISA, and even in the NSC staff), and so "leaks" surfaced anew; apparently many of

those same people, however, were relieved when they didn't have to recommend or make the tough choices. Concerning the concept to hit the enemy bases in Cambodia, Kissinger wrote:

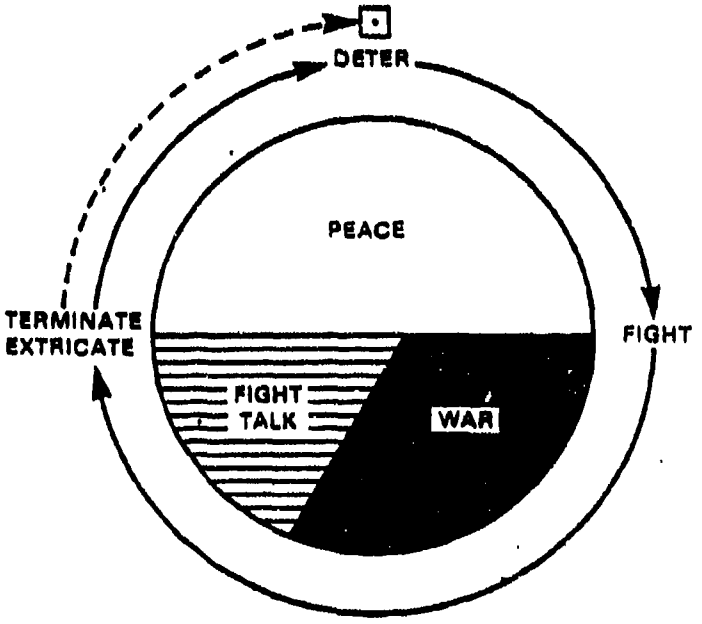
> I strongly encouraged the concept of a dry-season offensive in 1971, in the face of the essential indifference of the departments, who were battening down against domestic storms. There were never any complaints about bureaucratic prerogatives when the White House assumed responsibility for Vietnam planning; the departments were only too eager to saddle the White House with the onus for the inevitable domestic uproar. I thought it my duty as security adviser not to await disasters passively or simply to gamble on the most favorable hypothesis. Hanoi's resupply effort was running at twice the rate of the previous year. A campaign to weaken Hanoi's capacity to launch attacks for as long as possible would give us a margin of safety. Faced with the prospect of yearly spoiling offensives, Hanoi might prefer to negotiate. 70/

But how to get out with honor of a "war which we knew neither of how to win nor how to conclude?" 71/

4. The War and Peace Cycle in Saigon

Figure 4-1 depicts a simplified model of the war and peace cycle. By 1971, deterrence had failed several times (as it would again in 1972 and 1975) and fighting, from the USG's viewpoint, was a severely constrained and rapidly evaporating option. In order to gain even minimum objectives during the fight-talk phase the RVNAF had to be prepared, physically and psychologically, to pick up the slack.

Luckily, during that critical period when the USG, under intensive political pressure, was spiking its guns, one by one, the key interrelationships in Saigon were never better. Ambassador Bunker, General Abrams, President Thieu and General Cao Van Vien worked together in close harmony. 72/ They understood, quite clearly, that the Lao Dong leadership had not budged one iota from their goal of taking full control of the RVN and were building and modernizing the PAVN as rapidly as possible. In his memoirs, Kissinger sympathized with the unique and extremely difficult tasks thrust on COMUSMACV.



US SCORECARD

	PLUS	MINUS
DETER	X	• DIDN'T DETER NLF IN 1960 • DIDN'T DETER PAVN IN 1965 AND 1972 • DIDN'T DETER PAVN IN 1975
FIGHT	• GENERALLY FOUGHT WELL AND WON MOST BATTLES	• DIDN'T ACHIEVE OUR PRIMARY POLITICAL GOALS
TERMINATE *EXTRICATE	• US POW'S RETURNED AND US TROOPS WITHDRAWN	• BALANCE OF POWER IN INDOCHINA SHIFTED TO DRV

*ALTHOUGH MANY DEFENSIVE WARS ARE FOUGHT TO RESTORE THE STATUS QUO ANTE, THE TERMINATION OF THE CONFLICT NORMALY RESULTS IN A DIFFERENT EQUILIBRIUM.

4841/78W

SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

Figure 4-1. The Cycle of War and Peace

> For four years General Abrams had performed, with dignity, one of the most thankless jobs ever assigned to an American general. He took over a force of 540,000 men in 1968 but was immediately shackled by mounting restrictions. He was continually given assignments that made no military sense. Starting in the middle of 1969, he was asked to dismantle his command at an ever-accelerating rate while maintaining the security of South Vietnam and putting the South Vietnamese forces into a position from which they could undertake their own defense. He succeeded to a remarkable degree. By the time Hanoi struck in 1972, more of the countryside than ever before was under Saigon's control; most of the South Vietnamese units had vastly improved. Still, deep down, General Abrams knew that he was engaged in a holding action in a battle for which even a small strategic reserve of American ground forces would almost surely have been decisive. For three years his command had been turned into a withdrawal headquarters.73/

The GVN also realized early that time was fast running out as far as sustained US military and political support was concerned.

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It was impossible for them to maintain the status quo, let alone expand their capabilities, without US financial and material support; it also was quite difficult to break the pattern of psychological dependence, and as events unfolded they actually never did so.

After the final thrust into the A Shau Valley in early 1969 (and the Battle of Hamburger Hill), the US ground operations became increasingly defensive in scope and object; the major exceptions were the Cambodian Incursion (1970) and the operations in Northern I Corps to support Lamson

719 (1971). On August 15, 1969, MACV was under new marching orders. Over the objections of the Joint Chiefs, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird insisted on a revised statement of the objectives of US military forces, one less bellicose than that prepared by the Joint Chiefs in 1966 but never formally approved and one that would bring the military mission into line with the president's speech of May 14. The statement stressed assisting the South Vietnamese military forces "to take over an increasing share of combat operations" and specified that the goal of military operations was to defeat the enemy's effort "to deny self-determination" to the South Vietnamese people.75/

Kissinger noted that, in effect, those instructions were not authorized by the commander-in-chief:

> As it turned out, the President at the last moment changed his mind and countermanded the new instructions. But Laird had already issued them, and they stood. I do not know whether the changed orders--which were quickly leaked--made any practical difference. Given our commitment to withdrawal, they reflected our capabilities, whatever our intentions.76/

Neither the US Embassy nor MACV fought to have those instructions revoked, because they meshed well with the Bunker-Abrams view of the new US role in the war.

As discussed in Chapter 3 on the subject of alternative strategies, General Abrams placed emphasis on "clear and hold" operations over those labeled "search and destroy". The former mode not only fit in well with his own concept for that period, the battlefield realities and his new mission, but it also spiked (temporarily) one of the big guns of the anti-war critics.

As the US withdrawal got underway, apparently there was only one major tactical dispute between Chief of Staff Westmoreland and his successor as COMUSMACV:

> My only disagreements with the way Abe ran the war after my departure were what I deemed an undue preoccupation with the safety of Saigon and a lack of sensitivity to the enemy's capabilities in the two northern

> provinces. Where I had left defense of Saigon primarily to the South Vietnamese, he ringed it with American troops, presumably because of the high visibility even a minor incident in the capital commanded in the American press. When time came for the first American troop withdrawals in July 1969, Abe wanted the first pull-out to be the 3d Marine Division from the northern provinces, the region of South Vietnam that I considered to be the most vulnerable. After I protested to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and White House adviser Henry Kissinger, Abe reconsidered and named the 9th Infantry Division from the Mekong Delta instead.77/

MACV planners had trouble in trying to make realistic adjustments to the sudden and generally unpredictable announcements from Washington of further US withdrawals. As the US forces declined in numbers and capabilities and the PAVN grew in both it became most difficult, if not impossible, to fill the gap. RVNAF could not be expanded and improved rapidly across the entire spectrum; this was particularly true in aviation (fixed and rotary wing) and in other highly technical and English language-dependent fields. MACV, therefore, had to adjust, repeatedly, the remaining US troop list to ensure that RVNAF's major capability shortfalls were covered as well as possible: e.g., X number of US tactical air squadrons and helicopter companies, etc. were retained in country as long as possible. COMUSMACV also decided to retain US logistics self-sufficiency and a small combat element to protect US soldiers and installations in case of extreme emergency; the latter increasingly came "under fire" from the civilians of the USG.78/

In the early stages of Vietnamization, neither MACV nor the key USG leaders considered total withdrawal of US forces. A so-called residual force of 50,000 to 60,000 men was included in the planning. That force, which did not include provision for a US MAAG, was intended to cover some of the relative capability gaps and to serve as a blue chip for negotiating a cease-fire and especially for the return of US POW's; the latter increasingly became a major USG reason for continuing US combat operations in Southeast Asia.79/

General Abrams and key members of his staff were well aware, even before Vietnamization was "invented," that time was not our ally and that MACV, to include CORDS, would be hard pressed to meet the goals established for the crucial Pacification programs. They also knew that continued heavy US casualties would further reduce the time available. Guenter Lewy, one of the more balanced and thorough critics of US policies for and actions in Vietnam wrote,

> The new MACV plan also outlined a new strategy which has been variously described as the "area security" concept or as the "one-war" approach, blending combat operations and pacification. As stated summarily in the MACV Strategic Objectives Plan, approved by Abrams in the spring of 1969: "The key strategic thrust is to provide meaningful, continuing security for the Vietnamese people in expanding areas of increasingly effective civil authority." In the past, the new plan stated, high priority had been assigned to the destruction of VC/NVA main forces in South Vietnam. Progress had been measured by the number of enemy killed. "It is important that the command move away from the overemphasized and often irrelevant 'body count' preoccupation"; instead, the indicator of success should be the attainment of security for the population. "In order to provide security for the population our operations must succeed in neutralizing the VCI !Viet Cong infrastructure1 and separating the enemy from the population. The enemy Main Forces and NVA are blind without the VCI. They cannot obtain intelligence, cannot obtain food, cannot prepare the battlefield, and cannot move 'unseen.'".80/

As noted earlier, it took time and effort to implement fully such a concept--partially due to enemy initiatives and partially due to the habits and instincts of some US unit commanders.

In 1971, while trying to estimate just how much time remained to achieve US objectives, MACV withdrawal planners plotted on a graph (numbers over time) the historical record of the previous USG decisions on troop cuts; they arrived at the conclusion that by October 1972 only the residual force would be left. That estimate, which turned out to be quite accurate, meant that the Vietnamization schedule had to be further accelerated. Yet

with one major exception there appeared to be no sense of urgency in the rest of the MACV staff; it took the personal intervention of General Abrams to convince them that the final US withdrawal just might happen on "their watch." Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, however, had perceived that fact earlier than most and had drastically reduced, or eliminated, long range programs and concentrated attention and resources on those projects which had a reasonable chance of reaching maturity within a six-month period from any given starting date.81/

US forces in RVN, although fast shrinking in numbers, were still an essential element in the US "fight-talk" strategy. Figure 4-2 depicts the dual-track US approach. Kissinger was in charge of the diplomatic negotiations track, which was an inherently slow and closed one; in addition Nixon generally had little faith in it, especially when dealing with intransigents such as the North Vietnamese.82/

Laird masterminded the Vietnamization/Pacification track, which was open, moved faster, and was responsive to unilateral US political decisions; on balance Nixon favored Laird's track although he strongly believed in the use of powerful force (US air and naval and RVNAF ground) to influence negotiations.

The MACV planners were caught in the middle: Secretary Laird was in the direct chain of command, while Security Advisor Kissinger often pressed his viewpoints through backchannel messages to the US Embassy, thus bypassing the need to coordinate with either the Department of State or Defense. At least one of those planners concluded that although the latter's methods were irregular and often frustrating, Kissinger at least was trying to use the residual US forces as a negotiations lever; Laird apparently was bent on reducing US forces as fast as possible for domestic political reasons, almost regardless of what was going on in Paris or on the battlefield.83/ USG's leadership "troika" too seldom pulled the strategic sleigh in unison.

In contrast to the previous secretary, however, Laird did give his full support to the Vietnamization process. As General Goodpaster noted:

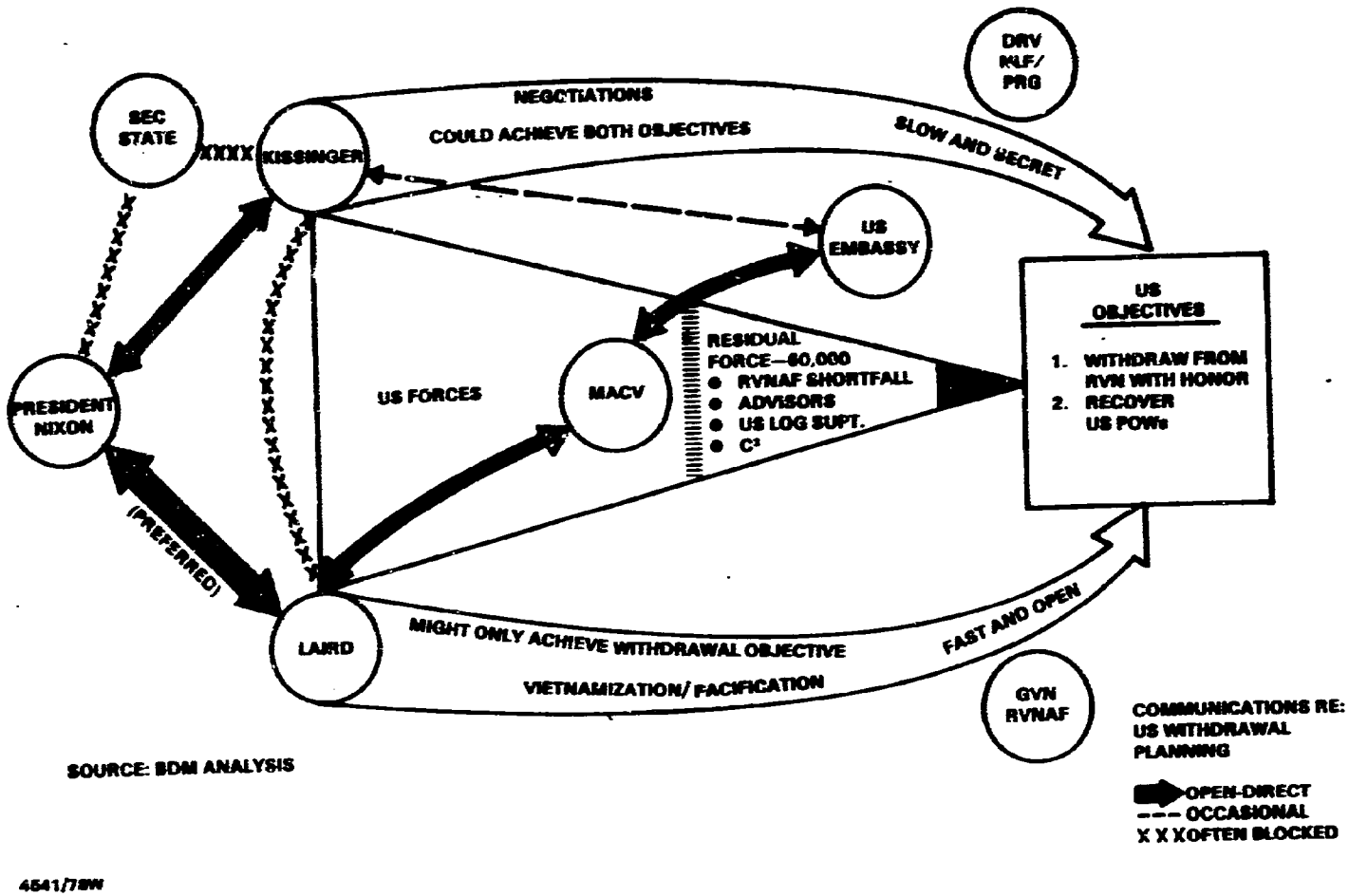


Figure 4-2. The US Dual Track (Fight-Talk) Scheme

> Now, after the new administration came in, Secretary Laird came out, and he was pushing the idea of Vietnamization. We had called it de-Americanization, but he called it Vietnamization. And here he brought up something that caused immediate concern on our part. He said that we had been making much too slow progress in turning the war over to the South Vietnamese that it was the policy of the United States to get out and to leave the job to the South Vietnamese. We told him that that was not the policy that we had received. That the policy was to equip the South Vietnamese to deal with the attacks from the Vietcong--i.e., the South Vietnamese insurgents -- but at no time had there been a plan to equip them to deal alone with the North Vietnamese. He told us there had been a change in policy, and we told him that this was indeed a major change, because we would then have to equip more units, we would have to equip them to a higher level and train them, going far beyond what had been directed or committed so far. And we told him that in fact even the policy we had on paper had not been fully implemented because the materiels to equip the South Vietnamese simply had not been provided us -- that the people in the Pentagon had constantly chiseled on this. Well, I'll say one thing, he did make good on that. Our government began to provide what was needed to equip the South Vietnamese to do the job. We were also called on to prepare a plan for reduction in the American forces, though the plans were always for a partial reduction only, since at that time our planning was based on leaving a residual force. And I still feel that if we had allowed a residual force of 20 or 30,000 which could have been handled entirely with volunteers--to remain there, we could have sustained this thing indefinitely.84/

(Perhaps, but both time and the political tide ran out too fast.)

There also were solid military reasons for a rather rapid withdrawal of US Forces. The US military was in bad shape around the world, especially when viewed against the vast and sustained USSR buildup in both nuclear and conventional forces; the human, financial and materiel costs of Vietnam were paid generally at the expense of the rest of the US forces. All four US services wanted to modernize before the USSR's lead in weaponry became insurmountable. Secretary Laird fully supported a major modernization program and believed that the faster the US withdrew from Vietnam the

more likely he could get the necessary funds from Congress.85/ Logic and the evidence examined suggest that the services didn't resist that view.

As analyzed in Volume VII, The Soldier, it became increasingly apparent that morale, discipline and combat effectiveness of the US forces in Vietnam had begun to deteriorate sometime in 1969. Savage and Gabriel in Crisis In Command no doubt painted an overly bleak and exaggerated picture but the situation was bad and getting worse; naturally not all of the problems (racial, drug, generational, etc.) were directly and wholly related to Vietnam, but the overall impact was potentially more serious there.

The predictable end of the draft meant that the armed forces would be significantly reduced in size. Where to cut: Korea, Europe, the Strategic Reserves, or Vietnam?

As the US forces in Vietnam were reduced, especially in ground combat units, they became increasingly vulnerable to enemy initiatives and more dependent on RVNAF for both general and local security. Could they hold up under severe pressure? Would they be dependable if they were led to believe the US was leaving them to face alone a stronger PAVN? 86/

Antiwar critics aside, the preceding discussion - which is more illustrative than comprehensive - indicates the extreme difficulty US strategists encountered in trying to get political mileage from US forces in the front half of the fight-talk equation. "Fixed deadlines and automatic withdrawals did not aid a political solution; they dissipated our negotiating assets." 87/

MACV had two primary resources to fill the gaps created by US and allied withdrawal: US airpower and RVNAF, but there were problems with both elements. General Abrams called airpower his "flexible faucet of firepower," and as PAVN became more modernized they also became more vulnerable to air attacks. But airpower is expensive and Secretary Laird wanted to use the monies elsewhere, so he decided to cut back on air sorties too. Abrams, as usual with Bunker's support, wrote a strong rebuttal assessment, which. . .

> supported Wheeler's recommendation of a ninety-day moratorium on withdrawals. And it seriously challenged Laird's proposed reduction in tactical air operations and B-52 sorties. Abrams stressed that our withdrawals forced him to use the South Vietnamese forces in a static defense role. The B-52s thus became his sole strategic reserve. On April 15 I sent the President a memorandum arguing that since Vietnamization gains were "fragile" and allied forces were "stretched nearly to the limit of their capabilities," sharp cutbacks in air operations implied by the defense budget had disturbing implications. I recommended that the President order a study of what air operations were required to support Vietnamization. Such an order was issued on April 17. It put an end to reductions during the immediate crisis, but the cutbacks in air operations were to resume -- almost imperceptibly -- in the fall, forcing us to send substantial reinforcements when the enemy offensive broke in 1972. 88/

A large portion of RVNAF was tied down in territorial/population security missions and were either unavailable or unsuitable for large-scale mobile war. The dynamic situation in I Corps highlights the dilemma. In March the US had about six division equivalents plus the ROK Marine Brigade (or 58 maneuver battalions) in the corps area while RVNAF had only 34. 89/ There was no feasible way for the GVN to fill the void that was later created, and they were left facing an even larger and stronger PAVN close to its own supplies and sanctuaries. Not only did RVNAF lack sufficient leaders and skilled technicians to build adequate substitutes for US forces, but they also had problems of a different order as noted by Gen. Cao Van Vien.

> . . .Since the ultimate goal of Vietnamization was never clarified by any formal agreement, there was no long-range or medium-range plans developed by US for the RVNAF. Yearly plans for this process seemed to be predicated on US domestic politics and the program of peace talks more than true war requirements. As a result our equipment modernization always lagged behind the enemy. Had it not been for the sudden turn of the peace talks in late 1972, the Enhance Plus program might never have materialized. Vietnamization remained an unfinished process and was defeated by the Paris Agreements. 90/

(The organization of a new ARVN division, the 3d (Ben Hai), to protect the DMZ area was the subject of a long debate with MACV and it did not start getting formed until the latter half of 1971; as it was, the battalions were taken from the 1st and 2d Divisions and several were even former regional force, (RF) units. The Corps' 20th Tank Regiment was organized in that same period, but about 60% of its "new" M48A3 tanks had "serious deficiencies"; in addition, repair parts and technical manuals were missing.) 91/

Gen. Vien made several other points worth serious consideration:

> The policy of "talk and fight" was not a technique used only by the Communist; it was also adapted by the RVN and the U.S. However, on our side this technique did not seem as effective because of the U.S. unilateral troop withdrawal and de-escalation and the fact that the RVNAF were not strong enough to provide adequate bargaining power during peace talks.
>
> By using the expression "Vietnamization" to explain its new policy to the U.S. Congress and public, the U.S. government had unwittingly disregarded the sacrifices of the South Vietnamese people and armed forces and negated the cause of freedom and survival for which they had been fighting. Therefore, President Thieu and the GVN never used this term. It was also regrettable that the GVN did not develop a comprehensive plan at that critical turning point of the war to adjust to this new U.S. program. 92/

In 1971 Australian Brigadier F. P. Serong pinpointed South Vietnam's central dilemma:

> Without the assurance of United States intervention against a Korea-type assault by North Vietnam, South Vietnam would require the continuing mobilization of a million and a half men. On the other hand, if she maintains such an armed force, her economic and political disruption is certain, so removing even the need for an invasion. The Saigon leaders, who can do their

> arithmetic well as the next man, and who dwell a lot closer to the local facts of life, see this quite clearly. They see only two possible solutions. One is the retention of an American trip-wire force in the Korean style without the impediment of a stated intention not to use it. The other would be operations by South Vietnam against North Vietnam on a scale sufficient to preclude the wound-licking and build-up process. In its political judgment, Saigon knows that to ensure a viable program of national development, it must get down to a force of only half a million in no greater time than would be required to demobilize smoothly and to absorb the veterans without creating unemployment. But in its military judgment, Saigon also knows that such a move would leave it defenseless if it has no American guarantees. 93/

The reasons for, and effect of, failing to resolve that dilemma are analyzed in Chapter 5, as is the horrendous impact on the RVN of the in-place cease-fire.

E. MORE BATTLES AND LEADERS

1. Purpose and Focus

The purpose of this section is to isolate and analyze some of the key factors, both positive and negative, which significantly influenced the major campaigns that took place during the period under examination. Except in passing, the battles fought in 1969 will not be covered since, in effect, they were the last bloody acts in closing out both outdated strategies. The focus of these analyses, again, is centered on how the fighting alternately helped and impeded the various negotiators.

Chapter 7, "Negotiations," of Volume V documents the fact that neither Nixon nor Kissinger had any delusions about, or a strategy for, "winning" the war. They used American and South Vietnamese military power in order to permit an unhindered US withdrawal, get US prisoners of war released, and negotiate the best terms possible (in their judgments) for the conclusion of the conflict in Southeast Asia.

2. Cambodia

a. Need for the Campaign

Quite early in the Nixon administration, the President and Kissinger were made aware of the growing danger presented by the PAVN/PLAF bases and LOC in Cambodia. The proximity of major sanctuaries to Saigon was akin to a poised dagger threatening the heart of their strategy, which was Vietnamization, Pacification and US withdrawal. They were determined to destroy or at least blunt that dagger.

b. Authority

In their memoirs, and elsewhere, both Nixon and Kissinger claimed that the US had the tacit agreement of Norodom Sihanouk to bomb the enemy bases in the uninhabited border areas; despite his reputation of being a " mercurial play boy," Sihanouk was a realist and had no illusions about either the immediate or the long term aims of the Lao Dong leaders. Partially in response to the mini-Tet enemy offensive and increased US casualties in early 1969, Nixon made his first major military decision or "turning point"--to bomb the border bases in Cambodia. In order to protect Sihanouk's outward status as a leading regional neutralist, the B-52 raids were kept secret. The umbrella code name was Menu. 94/ Kissinger's memoirs contain a great deal of additional information about the rationale for and the results of the bombing; he notes that neither Sihanouk nor the North Vietnamese complained about the raids. 95/ How could the latter complain without admitting that PAVN was in the South and that they and the PLAF were violating Cambodian neutrality? In his book, Sideshow, William Shawcross gives a different and bitter interpretation of what Sihanouk meant when he talked to Chester Bowles. The Shawcross theme was picked up and expanded by David Frost in his recent TV interview of Kissinger. 96/

Two months before Menu operations were initiated and in response to a request from a US Army Colonel whom he had never met, Sihanouk made several interesting comments:

> I must admit that I do not at all see the interest of SEATO or of other regional alliances in this part of

> the globe. The powers grouped in these organizations are without doubt all opposed to communism, but with more or less prudence and more or less firmness. . . .
>
> The very probable withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam is likely to encourage the continental Asian countries, up until now clearly anticommunist and favorable to the free world, to try to come to an understanding with the socialist countries of Vietnam and China. This may not be the case, naturally, for the islands and the archipelagoes which are easy to defend.
>
> I do not believe that any of our South Asian countries count on the United Nations, whose weakness has often been demonstrated. And those like Cambodia, who know that their welfare lies in the balance of exterior pressures, will probably look not unfavorably upon the United States remaining present in this area where the governments and the peoples want it even militarily, after its withdrawal from Vietnam where truly the majority no longer want it. A total withdrawal of the United States from Asia would without doubt mean a "Chinese" Asia sooner or later. If the United States were to remain in our area, it should understand that a country's best weapon against communism is a social nationalism practiced by stable and popular government.
>
> I thank you for your good wishes for my country and myself. And I wish that when peace has returned and relations between our two countries are re-established (the only condition is that your administration agrees to recognize our present frontiers as 45 countries already have, including all America's allies), you will be able to come with your family and visit Cambodia, where you will receive the very best welcome. 97/

Although he made some rather prescient observations, Sihanouk didn't mention--or possibly foresee--the at least temporary preeminence of the USSR in Indochina at the expense of the Chinese.

c. Public Response

When the secret, and thus dual-reported, bombings were eventually (and inevitably, in an open society) leaked to the press, the US Congress naturally became quite upset and the "credibility gap" wound was reopened with vengeance. In August 1973 Senator Stuart Symington asked the

Department of Defense for a "Simple, Concise account" 98/ of what actually took place in Cambodia and Laos and why. DOD responded with a 32-page unclassified document in only one month and one day! The paper noted that:

> A basic characteristic of these air operations was that they were conducted in and over countries whose political leaders were either unwilling or unable to acknowledge publicly such activity. At the time, these same political leaders had either requested the operations or had knowledge of and acquiesced in them. The Cambodian bombing during Prince Sihanouk's regime, as well as the subsequent U.S./ ARVN ground operations into Cambodia were directed toward denying the enemy sanctuaries, protecting American lives and providing a tactical environment which would permit the safe withdrawal of U.S. combat forces under President Nixon's withdrawal plan. 99/

DOD also reported that MACV Studies and Observation Group (SOG) conducted a series of US/Vietnamese ground reconnaissance patrols in both countries:

- The Laotian patrols called Shining Brass and later Prairie Fire were started in Sept 1965.
- The patrols in Cambodia (Daniel Boone/Salem House) were authorized in May 1967.
- By the time active US participation ceased in April 1972, a total of 3,683 operations had been conducted. 100/

(Shawcross wrote that a Daniel Boone team led by Cpt Bill Orthman, was sent into Cambodia to pick up any communist "survivors" of an early Menu Breakfast raid, but the team was ambushed and "slaughtered"; a follow up team reportedly "refused" a similar order.) 101/

d. Sihanouk Falls

Despite the Menu air strikes and the Daniel Boone/Salem House patrols, PAVN continued to expand in size and power in their Cambodian bases; direct supply through the port of Sihanoukville was an invaluable asset to them. Nixon, who had already started "talking" to the USSR and the PRC, wanted to put some more pressure on the DRV: "In view of

this enemy activity I felt that we had to think about initiatives we could undertake to show the enemy that we were still serious about our commitment in Vietnam." 102/ The surprise overthrow of Sihanouk by General Lon Nol et al. presented the USG with both problems and prospects. After the Cambodian Army (FANK) closed Sihanoukville to the North Vietnamese, the Khmer Rouge and PAVN started a major offensive with the overthrow of Lon Nol's regime as one objective.

e. Bolstering Lon Nol

The USG at first limited its aid to providing, belatedly, some small arms to the rapidly growing but very raw FANK. It soon became apparent that FANK would collapse and Phnom Penh fall if much stronger assistance wasn't available; if so, the entire US strategy for getting out of Vietnam, with honor, would be in serious jeopardy. The President was not going to permit that to happen if a reasonable course of action was open.

> I began to consider letting the ARVN go into the Parrot's Beak and sending a mixed force of American and South Vietnamese troops into the Fishhook. Giving the South Vietnamese an operation of their own would be a major boost to their morale as well as provide a practical demonstration of the success of Vietnamization. It would also be a good diversionary cover for the more important and more difficult Fishhook operation.
>
> I never had any illusions about the shattering effect a decision to go into Cambodia would have on public opinion at home. I knew that opinions among my major foreign policy advisers were deeply divided over the issue of widening the war, and I recognized that it could mean personal and political catastrophy for me and my administration. 103/

After making the bold decision to "go", against the advice of his secretaries of State and Defense, Nixon wanted to "knock them all out so that they can't be used against us again. Ever." 104/ (Apparently he had not been told that key PAVN bases were seldom "knocked out- forever.")

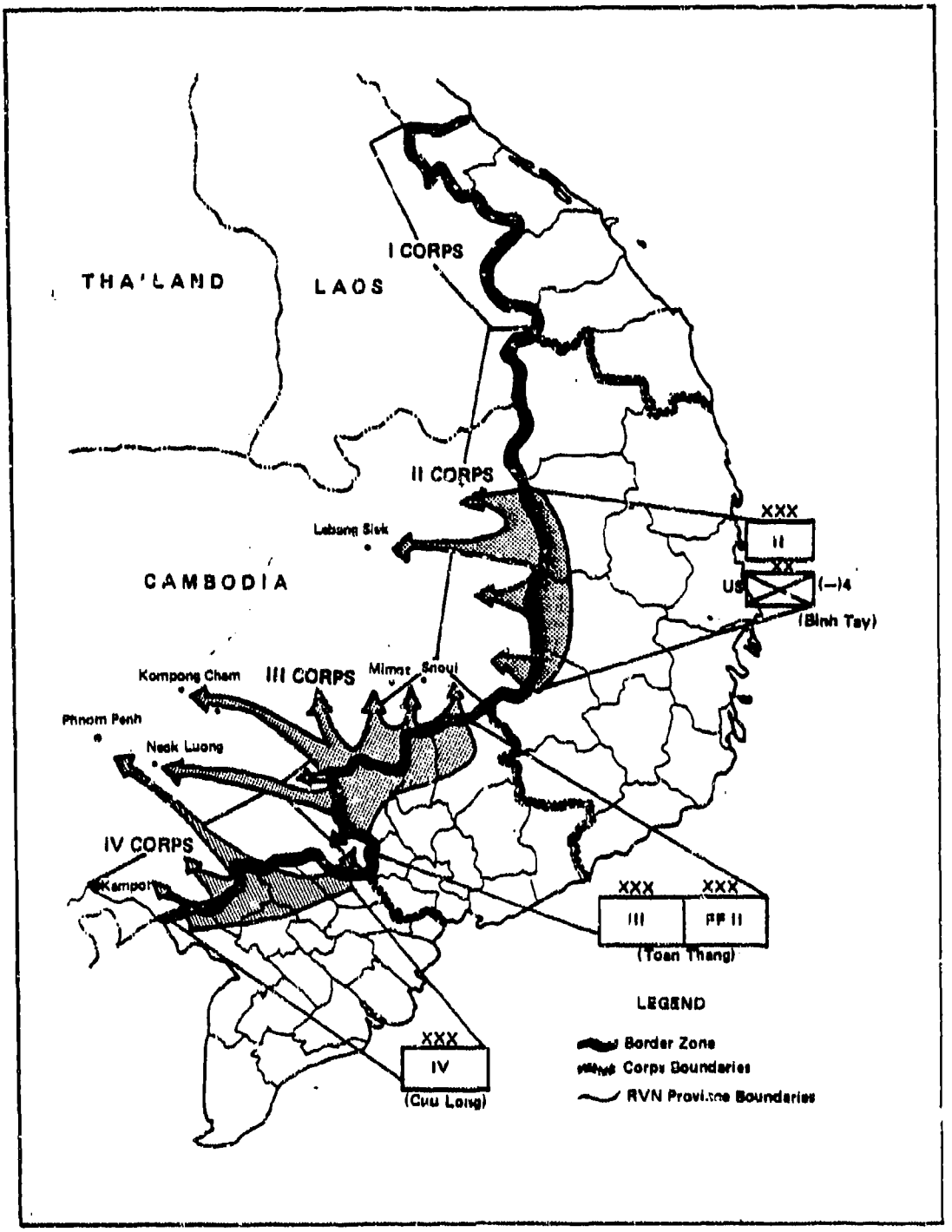
Lon Nol, Kissinger, Bunker and Abrams were all pleased with the President's decision, as was Westmoreland, who wrote:

> Following [the] overthrow of Prince Sihanouk in March 1970 and emergence of the Lon Nol government in Cambodia, it was Henry Kissinger who raised the possibility of at last invading Cambodia to attack North Vietnamese sanctuaries. In the absence of General Wheeler as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Admiral Moorer as the next senior member, I was the Acting Chairman. I recommended that the ARVN go in with American support from within South Vietnam. When Kissinger asked about using American combat troops, I said that obviously would enhance the chance of success, but I deemed it a policy decision that I was not sure the President was prepared to make.
>
> A few days later, on May 1, when the President met with Secretary Laird and the Joint Chiefs in the Pentagon operations center, Nixon had made up his mind. He was ebullient. He was, he said again and again, going to "clean out the sanctuaries." You had to electrify people with bold decisions, he said. "Bold decisions make history," he exclaimed, "like Teddy Roosevelt charging up San Juan Hill, a small event but dramatic, and people took notice." 105/

After being frustrated and hurt by the so called "privileged sanctuaries" for years, the US military and RVNAF leaders were eager to have a go at them.

f. The Campaign

The operation initially went off reasonably well and nearly as planned (See Map 4-1), but not surprisingly, the elusive Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), the Southern nerve center, avoided being bagged once again; the 14-16 April 1970 ARVN operation in the "Angel's Wing" base area could have alerted COSVN, and the one-day delay in the combined US-RVNAF attack could have given them a head start, and of course, there were always enemy agents in JGS and elsewhere. Regardless of the reasons for COSVN's escape, the President received another "black eye" from the news media and his many other critics.



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SOURCE: BG Tron Dinh Tho, ARVN, The Cambodian Incursion, p. 52

Map 4-1. Major Areas of Operation for the Combined Incursion

MG Ennis Whitehead, then a brigade commander in the US 25th Div, wrote the following observations about that operation:

CAMBODIAN OPERATIONS, MAY 1970

The 25th Division was instructed to conduct two brigade-sized operations in Cambodia to destroy the North Vietnamese base camps infrastructure and supplies in that area. The NVA and VC had been using the border area in Cambodia next to the 25th Division area of operations for many years without interference. My initial mission was, with six battalions, (1) to conduct an encirclement operation around the COSVN near headquarters area which had just moved into the area, and (2) to search for and destroy all base camps and Vietnamese, VC and NVA units in the area. We jumped off in a classic mechanized-airmobile assault. Two mech battalions and one cav squadron rapidly crossed the border and set up a picket line encirclement around about two-thirds of the suspected area of COSVN headquarters. At the same time, we inserted three infantry battalions by air assault on the other flanks of the encirclement. By noon on the first day of operations, we had a link-up between all our battalions. We then began to close the perimeter inward using the mechanized units as an anvil and began flushing with the infantry through the wooded areas. The operation had been preceded by a very large B-52 attack about 6 hours before on the COSVN headquarters area, and we were slowed somewhat by the bomb craters. Although we captured some COSVN support personnel, the NVA headquarters had been forewarned and moved out of the area about 12 hours before our attack. As an opsec issue, I tried to trace back how this information could have gotten out. We did not transmit anything over the air concerning our operations; we did not pass any of the information back through Vietnamese hands, everyone was briefed verbally and we used secure radio for coodinating. I was unable to find any evidence within the brigade that we had compromised the plan. However, the VC did know what was going to happen and their key people moved out. Despite the escape of headquarters personnel they did abandon many of their supporting elements to their fate. Then we captured a large number of support personnel and, uncovered large caches of supplies. US forces had a great advantage in Cambodia that they did not experience in Vietnam. Because we were up against support personnel, there were no mines

> or boobytraps. The VC had no cohesive defense nor was he aggressive. 106/

Later after COSVN and PAVN recovered from the shock, they became more clever and aggressive and punished some of the ARVN units which remained in Cambodia.

g. Impact on the US

Although Nixon had anticipated a severe domestic reaction to the "incursion," the breadth and depth of it, and above all the Kent State tragedy, unnerved him. He described those days as "among the darkest of my presidency." 107/ Kissinger, who also was stunned by the resignation of three of his assistants and by violent attacks on him by academic colleagues, notes the effects of the pressure on his chief:

> The military impact might have been even greater had we not withdrawn our forces arbitrarily in two months. The enormous uproar at home was profoundly unnerving.
>
> Soon after his April 30 speech, Nixon started pressing for token, and then for substantial, withdrawals from the sanctuaries. The June 30 deadline began as an improvised and very approximate Nixon projection for Congressional leaders of how long the effort would last; it was soon made sacrosanct. At another Congressional briefing he suddenly introduced a limit of thirty kilometers for US penetrations (which was translated inexplicably by the Pentagon to mean twenty-one miles). The President was coming dangerously close to the perennial error of our military policy in Vietnam: acting sufficiently strongly to evoke storms of protest but then by hesitation depriving our actions of decisive impact. The limitations of time and geography placed on our forces' operations helped only marginally to calm the Congress and the media but certainly kept us from obtaining the operations' full benefit. The base areas by then extended over hundreds of square miles; hidden caches could not be discovered except by systematic searches; it then took some time to remove what was found. The time limit did not permit a thorough search. And the geographical restraints simplified the enemy's planning: He simply withdrew his forces and some of his caches to areas declared safe by us. I doubt if we would have attracted much more public hostility by extending our stay for the two or

> three additional months that a careful search needed. It might have prevented the Communists' maintaining some base areas from which they eventually prevailed in Cambodia itself. But the inhibitions, though regrettable for full success, did not prevent us from achieving our main goals. The attack on the sanctuaries made our withdrawal from Vietnam easier; it saved lives; even after the sanctuaries were partly reoccupied by the Communists they had been deprived of stockpiles for a sustained offensive. 108/

Kissinger failed to mention the oncoming rainy season and the impact of the Cooper-Church Amendment, "the first restrictive vote ever cast on a President in wartime." 109/

h. The Military Results

> The Cambodian Incursion of 1970 inflicted severe losses on the enemy, both in human life and in war materiel. His base areas and storage-points along the Cambodian border were practically paralyzed. It was the estimate of the JGS, supported by HQ MACV, that it would take the enemy a minimum of 6 to 9 months to reorganize his logistic installations and partially restock them. 110/

RVNAF was given the opportunity to conduct large-scale and sustained mobile operations with all the attendant problems of command and control, fire support, logistics, personnel replacements, etc. (The reported amounts of weapons, ammunition and food captured or destroyed are cited by Nixon in his memoirs, p. 457, and in Kissinger's pp. 506-507.) After a visit to Vietnam, Sir Robert Thompson reported to Kissinger that he estimated the US had gained up to a two year respite. 111/ A former South Vietnamese officer estimated that the enemy lost over 11,000 killed by ground units, while 2,328 were captured or "rallied." 112/

Without question, PAVN was seriously hurt and their plans disrupted. A high level rallier reported that the enemy planned to seize Kompong Chom and Svay Rieng by May 1 and Phnom Penh by the 3rd, and then to conduct a "high point" assault against Saigon comparable to Tet 68. 113/

Whether the above was true or not, it was two years before PAVN launched its all-out assault on Loc Ninh and An Loc. Lon Nol and FANK

lasted until 1975 - with considerable US material and air support of course - and Sihanoukville was denied the enemy for another five years.

President Nixon, after checking with Bunker and Abrams, stated that the operation was the most successful of the war, and also noted that the North Vietnamese were at least temporarily more forthcoming in the Paris talks; therefore he concluded that:

> Because of the success of the Cambodian operation, I felt that now, for the first time, we could consider agreeing to a cease-fire in place in South Vietnam without first requiring that the North Vietnamese agree to withdraw their forces. As long as the Communist troops in South Vietnam could not depend on the Cambodian sanctuaries for supplies, ammunition, and reinforcements, I felt that the ARVN forces, which had been greatly improved and strengthened by more than a year of Vietnamization, would soon be able to defend themselves and their country. 114/

i. Were the Military Gains Worth the Political Losses?

1) A South Vietnamese View 115/

> To the Republic of Vietnam, the Cambodian Incursion was a most welcomed opportunity. In addition to the military victories achieved in Cambodia, the situation throughout South Vietnam improved markedly as a result of the incursion. Subsequently, during 1970 and 1971 the RVNAF were able to hold the initiative on all the battlegrounds in South Vietnam; they gained in self-confidence, and the confidence of the South Vietnamese population in the RVNAF grew. Most encouraging as well was from that time forward, in its struggle against the communists, the RVN had another partner.

but

> Despite its spectacular results, and the great contribution it made to the allied war effort, it must be recognized that the Cambodian Incursion proved, in the long run, to pose little more than a temporary disruption of North Vietnam's march toward domination of all of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. In spite of very large losses, the enemy had succeeded in taking control of all of Cambodia's northeastern provinces, and because of his pressure, about one-fourth of Cambodia

was no longer under the control of Phnom Penh. More importantly, the bulk of NVA forces in Cambodia, which was estimated at about 40,000 men, was still intact and free to roam about in this part of Cambodia.

2) A Cambodian View 116/

As far as the FANK Command was concerned, however, and within the framework of its war efforts against the NVA/VC forces, the destruction or even occupation of that part of Cambodia which was under enemy control, if only done temporarily, did not end the problem for FANK. For, while these temporary effects were sought by the US command, in view of their absolute necessity for Vietnamization to succeed, their repercussions fell with all their weight onto the FANK which were from the beginning not sufficiently prepared to confront an enemy of this size. To avoid massive bombings by US and RVN forces, the enemy fell back deeper and deeper inside the Cambodian territory. These bombings and attacks by friendly forces also caused the complete evacuation of these areas by the civilian population, into which moved the enemy immediately. The result of all this was that a sizeable part of the Cambodian territory was lost to the enemy. . . .

In addition, we have also to consider the psychological impact created by this operation which marked the last episode of the presence of US combat troops in South Vietnam. The publicity with which the US disengagement was made largely benefited the enemy, who took advantage of it to sap the morale of the civilian population and troops alike in Cambodia, as well as in South Vietnam. As a result, there was a certain lowering in morale on our side; during the same period, the other side, encouraged by ever increasing support and assistance, became more aggressive and began to prepare for its eventual and final victory.

k. Results For the United States

Without question the Cambodian operation assisted the US in getting on with its Vietnamization, Pacification and withdrawal programs, and helped to reduce US casualties (as did a more conservative type of operation).

But the operation refueled, at least temporarily, the antiwar fervor and no doubt helped create a political and psychological climate

within and without the USG which further limited the President's options. The US Congress felt the need to reassert its role forcefully in both foreign affairs and military policy. The Cooper-Church Amendment was merely the first of a number of restrictive acts which culminated in the 1973 War Powers Act. The "Secret" bombings in Cambodia, with their dual bookkeeping system, established a physical and moral precedent for the later unauthorized bombings approved by General John Lavelle. The leaks by dissenters in the USG led first to wiretaps and finally to Watergate; the furor over Cambodia played a major role in that drama which practically paralyzed a President and his successor.

On balance, it was probably too late in the game for such militarily sensible and bold (later hesitant) moves. But rationality by then was almost irrelevant.

3. Laos and Lam Son 719

a. Need for the Campaign

In late 1970 Kissinger examined the prospects for Vietnam over the next two years. After receiving input from the various USG agencies he made an analysis. Some of his conclusions were that: 117/

- The DRV was not seriously considering Nixon's proposal of Oct. 7, 1970 which offered for the first time an inplace cease fire, a bombing halt for all of Indochina, and also hinted at a unilateral and total US withdrawal. (Even most of the antiwar press, to include the NY Times, praised those proposals.)
- PAVN would require most of 1971 to rebuild and enlarge its supply system for the expected major offensive in 1972.
- By 1972 the RVNAF's battalion deficit "would be anywhere from eight to 35 battalions depending on what happened in Laos and Cambodia; the real deficit was actually much larger because a great majority of the RVN's ground forces were tied down in local security missions.

> The Communist strategy would depend on a combination of guerrilla and regular (called main-force) units that whipsawed the defenders. If we concentrated on guerrillas, the enemy's main-force units would occupy large

> parts of South Vietnam. If we dealt with the main-force units, the guerrillas would make gains in the countryside. Wherever the nexus between guerrilla and main-force units could be broken, enabling Saigon to concentrate on one or the other, Saigon gained the upper hand fairly rapidly. After the Cambodian operation the war virtually ended in the southern half of South Vietnam until well into 1972, and even then never regained full force. 118/

Kissinger's observation about the war in the Southern half of RVN is questionable as will be discussed in the next section.

He correctly concluded, however, that if Vietnamization were to succeed, Laos and Cambodia had to be prevented from falling, and the enemy's dry season logistics build up in 1971 had to be slowed down or better yet interrupted. Kissinger pushed hard for a dry season offensive because, "Faced with the prospect of yearly offensives, Hanoi might prefer to negotiate. [Cambodia was his first choice] The advantage of the Cambodian operation was that it was almost certain to succeed." 119/

Secretary Laird had been upset over the "apparent snub of the Pentagon in our decision-making process [for the Cambodian incursion]" 120/ So "In November 1970 the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, asked for a plan for a South Vietnamese raid on [the Ho Chi Minh trail]" 121/

Of course, Kissinger still preferred to deal directly with Saigon, so with Nixon's. . .

> approval I sent Al Haig and a team of NSC staff members to Vietnam to study the prospects. Haig returned with the report that Bunker, Abrams, and Thieu thought a dry-season offensive imperative. However, they recommended a much more daring concept than mine. They proposed to deal with the enemy's logistics buildup in one fell swoop by cutting the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos near the Demilitarized Zone. 122/

The remainder of this section will address the plan for the execution of, the enemy reaction to, and results of Lam Son 719.

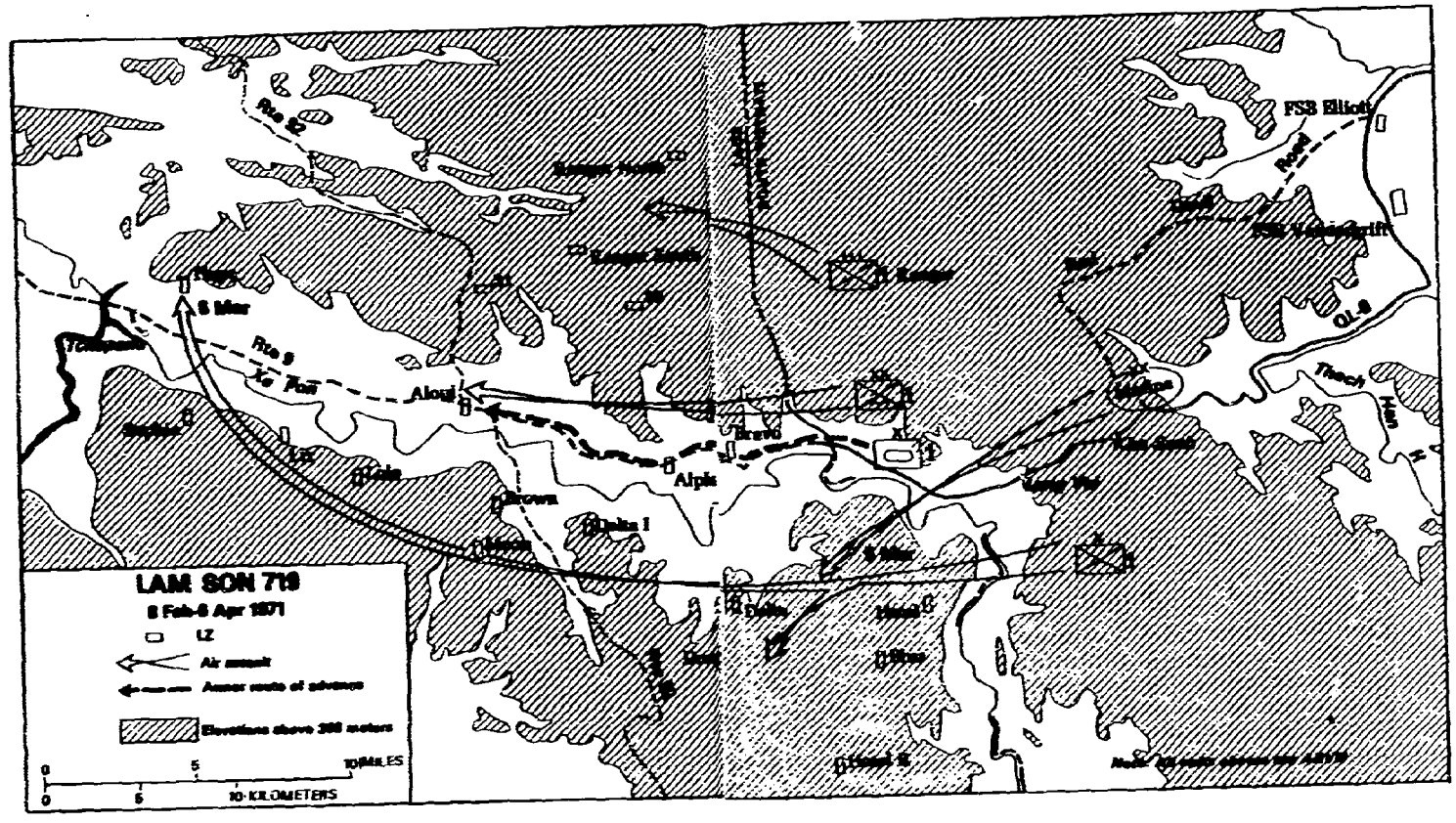
b. The Plan

(See Map 4-2). The major question addressed is; was MACV's plan realistic/workable in light of both RVNAF and PAVN capabilities, the probability of gaining surprise, the weather and terrain, and the US support available and permissible?

President Thieu committed what were probably, in sum, his best troops to the operation: the 1st and Airborne Divisions, most of the Marine Division, a Ranger Group, and the 1st Armor Brigade. Yet the 1st ARVN Corps had never conducted such a large-scale mobile operation and the Marines had never been employed as a division. Additionally, for the first time in ten years, RVNAF units would have to fight without US advisors. And finally, the terrain along the Route 9 axis was extremely difficult and the weather only marginal, at best, for effective air support.

Because of the desire for secret planning, especially for RVNAF, LTG Sidney B. Berry, who played a most active role in the operation, recently noted that:

> Such a high degree of security surrounded initial planning and subsequent operations that planning was poor, at best. The concept of operations, plan and subsequent details of the operation were reviewed and approved by "the highest levels" of both governments. That approval severely inhibited the freedom of decision of the battlefield commanders. US and RVNAF intelligence determined fairly accurately what was in the battle area before the operation began but seriously underestimated the force, speed, and violence with which the DRV could and did react to Lam Son 719. The USAF seriously overestimated the degree to which it could "isolate the battlefield" and prevent movement of enemy forces into the battle area.
>
> Planning was rushed, handicapped by security restrictions, and conducted separately and in isolation by Vietnamese and Americans. There was no unity of command. By any objective standard, planning and coordination for Lam Son 719 were, at the Corps Commanders' level, of unacceptably low quality. As usual, the saving grace occurred at the level of the implementing commanders, principally between the commanders and staffs of the 101st Airborne Division and Vietnamese



4541/78W

SOURCE: Gen. Donn Starry, Mounted Combat in Vietnam, pp. 188-89

Map 4-2. Lam Son 719, 8 February - 6 April 1971

division commanders and staffs, particularly the 1st ARVN division. 123/

Maj. Gen. Rathvon Thompkins, USMC (Ret) who commanded the reinforced 3d Marine Division along the DMZ at Khe Sanh in 1967-68, provided the following comments about allied operations in Laos:

> And had there been no political considerations that prevented US operations (ground) in Laos in conjunction with US operations in Vietnam, it would have been a stupid move. What happened to Lt.Gen. Lam and his I Corps in [1971] would have happened to any US task force on the same mission in the same area to a greater or lesser degree. Another thing: this business of "cutting" the Ho Chi Minh trail is not realistic - there are no "choke points" within our reach which can deny traffic to the south if we control them. Study the map and you will find that conventional highways or roads do not exist on a N-S axis. And US forces have a logistic tail that is cumbersome and vulnerable. Any significant force -I am talking about 3-5 Divisions - dependent solely on aerial supply, etc. would exceed US capabilities with no assurance that our operations would be more then a temporary irritant to the NVA. The risks to our forces would be considerable. 124/

In his memoirs, Gen. Westmoreland said that:

> With the closing of Sihanoukville to supply ships, with the bombing of supply depots, and with American and South Vietnamese naval patrols still sealing the coast, the North Vietnamese had to depend for supplies almost exclusively on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Raiding the trail with ground troops was obviously the next step, so obvious that when it began in February of the following year (1971) the North Vietnamese were well prepared to oppose it. 125/

In one of DA's Vietnam studies, Gen. Donn A. Starry wrote:

> Lam Son 719 demonstrated what can happen when a large operation is insufficiently coordinated: conflicting orders were issued, the limited amount of armor was misused, unit leadership broke down, and the strength of the enemy was either overlooked or disregarded. That the North Vietnamese knew of the attack beforehand was evident in their placement of artillery, mortars,

> and antiaircraft weapons in the area of operations chosen by the South Vietnamese. Enemy troop buildups north of the Demilitarized Zone was noted as well as an increase in the movement of supplies along the trails. 126/

General William W. Momyer, USAF (Ret) believed that the air support and control arrangements were inherently faulty, and that XXIV US Corps seriously underestimated the vulnerability of helicopters in the Laotian environment:

> The entire air assault and continued air operations should have been under a single commander 7th Air Force. The vulnerability of the helicopters, difficulties of support, and the need for thorough integration of all aspects of air operations demanded such a structure. In all previous wars, an airborne assault had been under the direction of an air commander until the troops were on the ground, and even then a single air commander provided the detailed air support (firepower and logistical) for that ground commander. A helicopter assault is still an airborne operation. To make it succeed demands a continuous stream of fighter cover taking the place of artillery. To deliver such firepower, there must be the ability to shoot and bomb regardless of the weapons used by the enemy. Helicopters were not able to cope with the firepower the North Vietnamese brought to bear against the landing zones. 127/

Momyer's comparison of airmobile and airborne operations is an interesting and very debatable one, especially to officers who have conducted both kinds. Even if such a "debate" were conducted between TRADOC and USAF's Tactical Air Command, it is highly probable that nothing would come of it, since it would reopen sensitive roles and missions issues.

Ex ARVN Maj. Gen. Nguyen Duy Hinh observed,

> Lam Son 719 did not come as a surprise for the enemy as intended. This was a profound disappointment for our side. We had tried to keep the planning and preparation process as leak-proof as possible, even at the expense of carefully preparing our units for the challenge. But the enemy had correctly anticipated our

> possible action five months in advance. To counter it, he had activated a Corps level control headquarters, Front 708, as early as in October 1970 to exercise control over the 304th, 308th and 320th Divisions. The battleground had also been carefully prepared. To the dismay of ARVN units, they found that regardless of their direction of advance in the area of operation, they encountered well-organized defense positions. Enemy artillery was also pre-registered to every hill-top susceptible of becoming a landing zone for our helicopters. In addition, enemy prisoners testified that a substantial part of supply caches had been removed to other areas. What we had hoped to be a surprise turned out to be something the enemy had planned for as a contingency every since the Cambodian incursion was terminated. On the contrary, the surprise, in some areas, was ours, We did not expect to meet head on with T-54 tanks and 130mm guns in the jungles of Laos. Neither did we suspect that Route No. 9 would be such a problem, heavily mined and riddled with fire ambushes. We had no idea that the enemy had developed to such an extent his defense of our area of operation. 128/

Despite the great efforts made to protect the secrecy of the operation, it is obvious that surprise was not achieved in any true sense. Conversely, the close-hold nature of the planning contributed, in no small degree, to its faulty execution. Although intelligence on initial enemy strengths and locations apparently was adequate, it was very poor on the speed, power and mode of the enemy's response. The plan itself, while outwardly simple, was too complex for Gen Lam, his staff and subordinate and support commanders, expecially in view of the terrain, weather and enemy capabilities. Finally, ". . .there was the questionable wisdom in selecting a single road axis for the major effort of the offensive. Hemmed in by dense jungle and rough mountainous terrain, this type of road did not lend itself readily to heavy logistic [and armor] activity." 129/

c. Execution of the Plan

If the plan was faulty, the execution of it was much worse. As Gen. Tompkins noted, such an operation would have been difficult (he said impossible) and quite costly for US units to execute; there were too few RVNAF leaders, staffs or support elements at that stage of their

development, who could have executed such a mission with acceptable losses. (It is highly probable that the personal dynamism and solid professionalism of Lt. Gen's Do Cao Tri and Ngo Quang Thuong could have accomplished much more, at less cost, than did Lt. Gen Huong Lam, who was deficient in both essential leadership qualities; but it is still doubtful if the overly ambitious objectives for Lam Son 719 could have been achieved under the extant circumstances.) 130/

Every source examined in researching for this section cites as a major weakness the faulty command and control arrangements and practices as one of the major reasons for the lack of relative success and the high losses suffered during the campaign. Serious disconnects existed both between and within US and especially RVNAF units. Gen. Berry's observations on the subject are particularly relevant because he was closely involved in the planning and execution of the operation at the working level.

> There was never true unity of command of Lam Son 719, not even effective coordination of the land battle between Commander, I Corps, ARVN, and Commander, XXIV US Corps. The two commanders and their staffs were never collocated, nor was there a true joint operations center. Nor was the Air Force effort integrated into command and control arrangements as effectively as it could or should have been.
>
> De facto coordination of command and control was exercised from ARVN I Corps forward or tactical headquarters located in a fortified base camp about one kilometer from Khe Sanh where the ADC (O), 101st Airborne Division had a forward headquarters located. Early in the operation, CG, I Corps, ARVN, took up residence at his headquarters near Khe Sanh. From there he commanded all ground units and operations and directed the overall operation. ADC (O), 101st Abn Div commanded all the US helicopters supporting the operation and acted as de facto deputy to CG, I Corps ARVN, airmobile operations and helicopter operations.
>
> He resided first at Khe Sanh and later at the I Corps (ARVN) forward headquarters. The US Army brigadier general who commanded XXIV Corps (US) Artillery soon took up residence at I Corps (ARVN) forward CP and as

> representative and expeditor for CG, XXIV (US) Corps. His operation received little direct guidance from the XXIV Corps Commander. For a brief period and as result of request of ADC (O), 101st Abn Div, a USAF brigadier general was in brief, sporadic residence at forward headquarters of I Corps (ARVN), but he contributed little to the operation, CG, 101st Abn Div with OPCON 1st Bde, 5th ID (m), was responsible for security operations in Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces. His operations were generally conducted separately and distinctly from the Lam Son 719 operation.
>
> Not only was de jure unity of command totally lacking and coordination ineffective between the ARVN and US Corps Commanders, but the ARVN Corps Commander lacked effective command of all participating Vietnamese units. The Marine Division responded only to orders from Saigon but not always. The Airborne Division responded to JGS orders in Saigon. The Armor Brigade commander appeared to turn off his radios and respond to no one else's orders. The Ranger Group was so battered from the beginning that it quickly became ineffective. Only the 1st Inf Div, ARVN, responded to its corps commander's orders, and it conducted the lion's share of the operation. The only Vietnamese subordinate commander who would talk with the Corps Commander was CG, 1st Inf Div (ARVN). By default, the ADC (O), 101st Abn Div and his aviation commanders became the principal channel of communications and coordination between the [I] Corps Commander and his subordinate Vietnamese commanders. This occurred because of the key role of American helicopters in the entire operation. 131/

The ad hoc, and belated, US Command arrangements established at Khe Sanh probably prevented even greater losses among the RVNAF units.

d. RVNAF Command and Control

Several illustrative examples should suffice to indicate how the RVNAF command and control operated in action:

> The airborne infantrymen refused to stay with the cavalry and continued east down the road. The armor brigade commander was informed of the situation but sent no reinforcements or recovery vehicles to clear the crossing. Troopers of the 11th continued to fight alone, and after three hours succeeded in moving two of the abandoned tanks out of the way. The cavalry then

crossed, leaving seventeen disabled vehicles to the west of the stream. The North Vietnamese immediately manned the abandoned vehicles, which they used as machine gun positions until tactical air strikes destroyed them on 25 March. What had begun as an orderly withdrawal was rapidly becoming a rout. . . .

The withdrawal of the 1st Armor Brigade is perhaps the most graphic example of the poor coordination between major commands throughout Lam Son 719. When the brigade left Route 9, less than 5 kilometers from Vietnam via road, it was forced to make two river crossings because its commander was not told that the road had been cleared. It was this lack of coordination at the highest levels, and the apparent lack of concern for the armored forces, that contributed to the poor performance of armor. 132/

and:

As for the Marine Division, it was the first time it had participated in an operation as a division. Accustomed to operating separately at brigade level, and in view of the traditional autonomy of its brigades, the division seemed to have problems of command and control. The 147th Marine Brigade did not succeed in clearing the enemy pressure around FSB Delta despite continuous efforts for several days. Then the division made its own decision to withdraw from FSB Hotel and its positions on the Co Roc promontory, apparently to avoid facing a difficult battle. This action clearly reflected the autonomy enjoyed by the division commander, Lieutenant General Le Nguyen Khang, who did not consider himself under the control of the I Corps commander but still made tactical decisions that affected the latter's conduct of the operation. Despite this, Marine units fought extremely well during sustained combat under heavy enemy pressure. Regardless of losses, they always retained unit integrity and cohesiveness. . . .

As to ARVN armor units, their employment in LAM SON 719 was perhaps one of the very few occasions of any large concentration during the war. The 1st Armor Brigade was committed initially with only two squadrons; this total was later increased to four in addition to two troops of M-41 light tanks redeployed from MR-2. These reinforcements were introduced to offset some losses but still the deployment of all these armored forces on a short stretch of narrow jungle road not even 20

> kilometers in length and affording no room for maneuver represented perhaps one of the unwisest moves on the part of the tactical commanders involved. 133/

(In his study of the operation, Gen. Hinh noted that both the Commanders of I ARVN and XXIV US Corps were Armor officers) 134/

Every objective analysis of the operation noted that the absence of US Advisors in Laos had a seriously detrimental effect on the RVNAF's performance; they had been both "glue and catalyst," especially with respect to air, helicopter, and long range artillery support. Without them, the language barrier was a serious hardship; because of that all but a few of the firebases were given English names.

Westmoreland noted the problem:

> It was then that weaknesses in South Vietnamese preparations for the operation became evident. Command arrangements at the top were unsound, and the plan had been developed too quickly for adequate provision for close coordination between the ARVN troops and their American support. Long accustomed to working with American advisers, subordinate ARVN commanders had difficulty without them in arranging fire support and resupply. The senior American adviser and the overall ARVN commander were functioning from different bases. Several senior ARVN commanders folded, prompting President Thieu to intervene and start issuing orders himself as far down as regiments, in many cases without General Abrams' knowledge. 135/

Nguyen Van Thieu commented that:

> Air support was no problem at all. We did not worry if, occasionally, air support was lacking: we fought with our artillery. What went wrong is this: in the first three days of the operation, the Americans lost a lot of helicopter pilots. So they hesitated, thereafter, to fly missions promptly and frequently enough. This became a big problem for the SVN troops.

(It is questionable if Thieu's tactical commanders and their troops would have agreed that "Air support was no problem.")

> We could not evacuate our dead and our wounded. Not only our morale suffered, but also the progress of the operation. . . .we could only push as far west as the (med-) evacuation helos would fly. 136/

(It should be noted, in fairness, that VNAF med-evac helicopters were seldom used in poor weather or during heavy fighting.) 137/

Another problem for the South Vietnamese was that downed aircraft crewman received first priority from all available US air assets. For example when the critical FSB 31 was under heavy artillery, infantry and tank attack on 25 February 71, "The (US) FAC aircraft left its position to rescue the US pilot, interrupting air support for Fire Support Base 31. . . It is possible that had the FAC remained on station above the battle that US airpower could have been employed to hold the fire-base." 138/ (What might have happened is a matter of conjecture, but the base fell and the ARVN lost 155 in killed and missing plus 6-105mm howitzers.)

e. The Enemy

As discussed earlier, the enemy was not only alerted and prepared for the attack, but he also had devised special tactics to counter both airmobile and fire support base operations. For example:

> One enemy tactic that proved most difficult to counter was the North Vietnamese Army technique of employing 10- to 12-man combat teams--on or near every piece of critical terrain--protected by bunkers and trenches. These small teams, armed with one or two machine guns and 82mm mortar and one or two rocket launchers, attacked allied aircraft and infantry on virtually every landing zone, pick up zone, and friendly troop position within the range of their weapons.
>
> The enemy also used their "hugging" tactic which had proven effective in earlier encounters. Using this tactic, North Vietnamese Army forces sometimes moved to within 10 to 20 meters of friendly units manning perimeters and securing positions. Friendly forces were often reluctant to bring supporting fires close enough to their own positions to harm the enemy and, consequently, the close-in enemy could direct a heavy volume of short-range small arms, antiaircraft weapons, and rocket launcher fire against helicopters flying in and

> out of friendly positions. On occasion, helicopters were fired at and hit by North Vietnamese Army riflemen lying on and back inside of barb wire barriers surrounding a friendly position.
>
> Because of the ever-present enemy threat, every airmobile operation in LAMSON 719--even single ship resupply and medical evacuation missions--had to be planned and conducted as a complete combat operation. This entailed a separate fire plan, allocation of escorting armed helicopters, and contingency plans for securing and recovering downed crews and aircraft. 139/

Another enemy tactic which increased helicopter gunship losses was to employ artillery and tanks singly or in small groups (almost always well camouflaged). RVNAF (and before them US) commanders overused and misused helicopters because of their availability, responsiveness and unique low-slow characteristics. Against such targets artillery and/or tactical air was more suitable, and "as the battle progressed it became evident that, because of their great confidence in Air Cavalry, the Vietnamese units tended to employ [even] the Air Cavalry in the close fire support rather than in the reconnaissance role." 140/

The enemy used tactics similar to those employed against French armor-airborne thrusts into their base areas. In spite of strategic and tactical warning of the move, they did not attempt to meet the armor drive head on but slowed it with obstacles and harrassing actions. The attack of the 1st Armor Brigade to Aloui, about half way to Tchepone, was deceptively easy; once the initial force of the drive was spent, the enemy then easily infiltrated between the spread out fire bases and started attacking the flanks and rear of the ARVN column. They also invested and assaulted a number of the key isolated FSB's. They thus seized and held the overall initiative and placed the RVNAF commanders and troops on the physical and psychological defensive. In addition they took advantage of the warning time to remove a large portion of their caches to the West of Tchepone. Bernard Fall describes similar defensive-offensive type operations employed against the French: for example, the "Hell of Hoa Binh", as Fall called it, illustrates the Viet Minh's technique quite well. 141/

No one should have been surprised by the magnitude and ferocity of the PAVN counterattack. With Sihanoukville closed, he not only had to keep the Ho Chi Minh Trail System open but also had to extend and expand it or concede defeat. The enemy employed 12 (confirmed and 3 probable) infantry and at least one armor and one artillery regiment in addition to his 10 to 20,000 service and defense troops in the area. 142/

They attacked from North, South and West and even moved into the RVN to hit some US units and bases. It is safe to assume that if RVNAF had not retreated ahead of the planned schedule PAVN would have committed even more units. Their intent was not just to defeat the large raid but rather "The enemy apparently wanted to catch the entire ARVN force in his trap. In the manner of a hunter, he set about to kill his prey by 'locking its head and gripping its tail.' This was his strategy of annihilation for which he had coined this metaphorical phase." 143/. If it hadn't been for excellent fighting by a number of RVNAF battalions and a supreme effort by the USAF and Army helicopters, PAVN might have come close to achieving its aim.

f. The Results

1) Good

It was estimated that over 19,000 enemy were killed by both RVNAF and US forces. In addition, a substantial amount of weapons, ammunition, equipment and supplies were captured, destroyed, or consumed during the operation. (The stocks were well below those neutralized during the Cambodian Incursion, however). Portions of the trail system were interdicted for a period and a number of cuts made in the fuel pipelines. 144/

Any major PAVN move against northern RVN was precluded for the remainder of the year if one had been planned. (Research for this section has not uncovered such a plan.)

The Lao Dong leadership had to wonder: first Cambodia and then Laos - what next? Possibly the initial attacks during the 1972 Easter offensive would have been stronger if several PAVN divisions had not been held in reserve in the DRV during the critical early attacks.

2) Bad

RVNAF displayed serious shortcomings in senior leadership, command and control, and in mobile operations and logistics. (Unfortunately many of those same commanders and faults were still there on 30 March 1972.)

US and especially RVNAF personnel and equipment losses were very heavy; the US could ill afford them politically nor the RVN psychologically. I Corps losses amounted to about 45% of those committed to the active phase in Laos -- extremely heavy losses for any army in any battle. 145/ (Although the enemy probably suffered at least twice as many casualties, his leaders and system could better absorb them.)

Both the claims for Vietnamization and the prestige and pride of RVNAF received a heavy blow internationally and in the RVN due to lurid news stories and pictures of ARVN soldiers hanging on to the skids of helicopters. (It should be noted that in the most widely circulated photo the ARVN soldier still had his weapon!)

No really serious and lasting damage was done to the enemy's supply caches and system. The price paid might well have been too high.

3) Pro and Con

Kissinger, who initially was enthusiastic about MACV's "bold plan," began to have second thoughts, especially as the operation bogged down around Aloui: "The operation, conceived in doubt and assailed by skepticism, proceeded in confusion" 146/ He later wrote: "It clearly did not realize all our hopes; nor did it fail completely. . .The Campaigns of 1970 and 1971, in my view saved us in 1972"147/ He also faulted MACV ("the redeployment headquarters") planning and said that it "operated by rote."148/

President Nixon's evaluation was positive, on balance:

> The net result was a military success but a psychological defeat, both in South Vietnam, where morale was shaken by media reports of the retreat, and in America, where suspicions about the possibility of escalation had been aroused and where news pictures

undercut confidence in the success of Vietnamization and the prospect of ending the war.

Sir Robert Thompson wrote to Kissinger from Vietnam shortly after Lam Son ended. He praised its military success and stated that the major factor in the war was now the question of South Vietnamese psychology and confidence. Thanks to Lam Son there was no Communist offensive in 1971 despite the largest influx of material in the history of the war. American and South Vietnamese casualties were reduced, and Vietnamization continued at a steady pace.

I still agree with Kissinger's assessment of Lam Son at the end of March 1971 when he said, "If I had known before it started that it was going to come out exactly the way it did, I would still have gone ahead with it."149/

Gen. Berry's reflections were less sanguinary:

End results? Inconclusive. Only temporary interruption of communist supplies along Ho Chi Minh Trail. Probably a political and psychological loss to RVN-US forces. News media portrayed operation as fiasco and Vietnamese soldiers as incompetent cowards. Large RVN military material losses and many human casualties were suffered. Although heavy losses were inflicted on DRV forces, they probably gained in confidence as end result. The excellent 1st Inf Div (ARVN) took heaviest casualties of all, particularly among leaders. These losses probably adversely affected the division through the final debacle in 1975.

On balance, the operation probably was ill-conceived from the beginning and the net result was disadvantageous to RVN-US. There was no finite objective, no chance of "winning", and no measurable objective except the temporary objective of "interdicting", "interrupting", "disrupting". The transitory potential advantage was not worth the risks and the costs.150/

General Nguyen Duy Hinh's evaluation was a sober and prescient one:

The immediate results of LAM SON 719 were impressive indeed. However, the far-reaching impact of this operation only materialized a long time afterwards as the situation in both South Vietnam and Cambodia began to improve. But the repercussions of this imperfect

> exploit seemed to indicate that the long-term struggle of South Vietnam needed to be forged by sharper tactical skills and guided by an appropriate and more effective strategic leadership. This was perhaps the greatest lesson that we could derive from LAM SON 719. 151/

(Unfortunately the much needed "sharper tactical skills" and "more effective strategic leadership" were still scarce in 1972 and totally absent in 1975.)

g. Any Alternatives?

Kissinger thought so, possibly in retrospect:

> When I saw Westmoreland on February 23, his assessment was bleak. He did not think that the forces assigned to the Laos operation were adequate; he himself had considered that four American divisions would be needed to seize and hold Tchepone; the South Vietnamese had allotted less than two to the operation. Nor did he consider a frontal assault the best way to interrupt the trail system. He recommended hit-and-run raids by air-mobile units out of Khe Sanh to cut the trails at various points. This would throw the Communist supply system into a maximum of turmoil and achieve our objectives at much less risk. Even allowing for a natural bias against his successors, Westmoreland's comments made a great deal of sense to me.
>
> They did not make sense to Laird and Moorer, who argued that Westmoreland had failed to object while the plan was under consideration. They were convinced Abrams would resent being second-guessed by his predecessor. They insisted on the hallowed principle of the autonomy of the field commander. 152/

(As noted earlier, RVNAF committed much more than two divisions to the operation. Even four US divisions probably would have had a difficult -- and costly -- time in seizing and holding Tchepone and especially its long and vulnerable land LOC on Route #9.)

Sir Robert Thompson favored small foot patrols infiltrating into Laos at various places and times to ambush the enemy's supply efforts - he called it the "long-range penetration technique." In that concept he was seconded by USAF's Gen. George Keegan. 153/

Dave Palmer takes no issue with the operational plan but states that "The cross-border operations of 1970 and 1971 were moves on the strategic chessboard which should have been made in 1966 and 1967."154/ (As discussed in Chapter 3, Gen. Bruce Palmer had similar thoughts and would have concentrated US combat forces and logistics effort near the DMZ.)

h. Finale

Lam Son 719 saw the last major US ground offensive in the war. The dearly bought results were mixed and difficult to judge. That "fight" apparently had little effect on the "talks." A year later only a handful of US infantry battalions remained in the RVN. Despite serious reservations, the US was more dependent than ever on Vietnamization, Pacification and withdrawal. Generals Dung and Giap were encouraged to step up the pace of modernizing and expanding PAVN for yet a heavier blow.

i. The Airmobile Concept Tested

Perhaps it is fitting to close this section with a few observations about the future of airmobility. The "debate" about the viability and vulnerability in less than a benign air defense environment continued beyond Lam Son 719 and even the Vietnam War.

General William Momyer wrote that:

> LAM SON 719 presented the first real challenge to air mobile operations. The problem is the amount of airpower that must be employed to create a favorable environment for the use of such assault forces as LAM SON 719. Up to this time the South Vietnam theater of operations hadn't tested air assault operations. In LAM SON 719, the ground fire was not as intense as in the 1972 offensive, nor had the SA-7 Strella been employed yet. (As with any new weapon, however, a countermeasure is always developed; SAMs were neutralized in North Vietnam, so they could also have been managed when employed in the south against helicopters and other slow flying aircraft). Still, LAM SON 719 was too costly because of weak planning that produced inadequate tactical air support.155/

(The USAF History on Southeast Asia noted that "US Army helicopters suffered the heaviest attrition. At least 107 were destroyed and upwards of 600 damaged, many so badly they would not fly again."156/ However, many of the components of damaged, and recovered, helicopters were used to repair others.)

In his monograph on Airmobility, LTG John J. Tolson takes on squarely the issue of helicopter "vulnerability", which was raised by Senior Army as well as Air Force officers.

> Research analysts will be working with the data base from Lam Son 719 for a long time, particularly on the vulnerability aspects of the helicopter. It would take several volumes to summarize their parameters and permutation alone. For the purpose of this monograph, I think it is fair to say that the loss rate experienced by Army helicopters compared favorably with the loss rate of high performance aircraft in Southeast Asia for the same period. Most importantly these losses were not considered unacceptable in view of the mission accomplished.
>
> The key word for airmobile operations is "survivability," not "vulnerability." Survivability of air vehicles in the land battle is one end product of a combination of actions and reactions by two opposing forces. The kinds of battlefield actions and reactions are many and varied, beginning with intelligence production and planning and ending with the last shot fired. Survivability of aircraft can be appreciated only by examining all of these influences in their proper relationship to each other.
>
> The oft-studied subject of vulnerability, which is only one input to survivability, has to be recast in proper perspective with regard to other equally or more important contributors. The development of this perspective requires considering similarities which exist among the survivabilities of all combat elements to include Army air vehicles. The survivability of Army aircraft is enhanced by suppressive ground fire support, close air defense support, the proper use of intelligence for planning aviation operations, the effect of tactic and techniques on increased survivability, the soldier's desire to accomplish his mission, and the effect of personal command attention.

> Since Army aircraft operate in the ground environment, proven techniques of ground survival are available to them; and, the most effective of these techniques is the co-ordinated use of all his capabilities by a commander on the scene. What is germane is the fact that the American soldier is more capable of carrying out his mission and more likely to survive in combat because he is airmobile.157/

(Despite the intensive enemy fire, especially during the critical landing-takeoff period at isolated firebases, the overall loss rate was reported as only one quarter of one percent per thousand sorties.158/ The Air Force would probably compute it differently.)

In his comprehensive after action report of Lam Son 719, Gen. Berry also addressed the vulnerability/survivability issue:

> Helicopter survivability. The helicopter and its crew have proven remarkably hardy and survivable in the mid-intensity conflict and hostile air defense environment of Lam Son 719. We have lost remarkably few helicopters and crew members in view of the heavy small arms, antiaircraft, and mortar and artillery fires our aircraft and crews have experienced while conducting extensive airmobile operations on NVA home ground. This is even more remarkable in view of the numerous airmobile operations conducted in support of Vietnamese ground units located in small perimeters, surrounded by NVA units and weapons, and often in heavy contact with the enemy.
>
> To assess and evaluate properly our aircraft and crew losses, one must measure these losses against the campaign plan, mission, total sorties, and number of exposures to enemy fire, and accomplishments. When viewed in this perspective, we have fared better than the most optimistic prophet would have dared predict.
>
> One thing is certain. A helicopter protected against .30 caliber small arms fire from a distance of 300-400 feet will have an appreciably greater chance of survival under conditions of conflict experienced in Lam Son 719. So will its crew.159/

In that report he also remarked that:

> While all sources of firepower contribute to the success of a combat assault, the mass of destructive firepower is delivered by the USAF.160/

> Air cavalry is one of the most versatile, most valuable assets on the battlefield today and has virtually unlimited, untapped potential for the future.161/

> We need now tank-defeating armed helicopters.162/

(Luckily some were available the following year and were flown to RVN to play a role in blunting the PAVN Easter offensive.)

The theoretical debate over the use of helicopters in varying air defense environments may continue, but the US Army and the Department of Defense have made the crucial decisions. The Army has retained its Air Assault Division, has organized the 6th Cavalry Brigade (air combat), and has significantly increased the number and missions of helicopters deployed overseas, especially in Europe. Tactics and techniques for employing them will continue to evolve with experience and experiments.

It also appears as if the USSR has made a similar judgment as to the value of both lift and firesupport helicopters. Current newspaper reports and photographs indicate that the Soviets are employing them in large numbers in Afganistan. The lead sentence of a recent Jack Anderson column starts with this sarcastic comment: "Whether or not the US military learned anything in Vietnam the Soviets certainly did."163/

The still-forming US Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) will (or should) provide yet another opportunity to test the versatility and net worth of the airmobility concept. It is not a panacea and will not replace the ground combat arms or tactical air forces, but it is a valuable supplement to both when employed properly.

4. Easter 1972 (The Nguyen Hue Campaign)

a. Theme and Sub-Issues

With some justification both sides could claim that the Easter offensive was the decisive ground campaign that predetermined (or could have) the final outcome of the war. (The DRV named the campaign for Nguyen Hue the legendary Vietnamese hero, who surprised and defeated the Chinese and later was Emperor Quang Trung.) There are three significant

sub-issues which deserve examination concerning that final year of active US combat. They are:

- What use was made, by the US and RVNAF, of the eleven critical months between the end of Lam Son 719 and the beginning of the Easter offensive?
- During the major battles, what went well or poorly, and why?
- At the end of the fighting, which antagonist was in the better posture for the inevitable next round?

b. Eleven Unique Months

As early as September 1971 Gen. Abrams was convinced that the enemy was going to make an all-out effort in 1972, probably around Tet (February). He directed that his J2, then Maj Gen. William Potts, work up a briefing for presentation to senior US and GVN/RVNAF officials. It was ready by November and was presented 120 times; the title was "1972, The Year of Decision." 164/ There remained little enough time to prepare RVNAF for the predicted trial of strength; US ground forces would not be available to assist even as emergency "fire brigades", and VNAF was not big, modern, or good enough to replace US airpower. The time was used to:

- Rebuild the "elite" 1st, Airborne and Marine Divisions and the not so elite 1st Armor Brigade after their heavy losses in Lam Son 719.
- (In I Corps) form and train the 3d (Ben Hai) Infantry Division to protect the DMZ area and the 20th Armor regiment (large tank/mechanized infantry battalion); some of the problems connected with these actions were covered in a previous section. (II & III Corps also were organizing armor regts.)
- Accelerate the withdrawal of US troops as well as the Vietnamization and pacification programs across the board; the coming battles were viewed as the penultimate test of Vietnamization. (When the USG gave up the concept of a US residual force, as a bargaining counter, it was obvious that RVNAF would eventually stand alone.)

c. Other Actions and Problems

- For several years, US forces had been instructed by General Abrams that, "This is a new kind of war; now don't go around looking for big fights; work with ARVN and dig those fellows (VCI) out." 165/ In 1971, those instructions were tightened further as the US combat elements were gradually withdrawn to a fairly close in "dynamic defense" of their bases (i.e., patrols, probes, ambushes, raids, small airmobile assaults, recce, and fire support missions were employed to keep the enemy off balance and to preclude successful mortar, rocket, or sapper attacks). ARVN took over the more remote fire support bases, such as those along the eastern edge of A Shau Valley. 166/
- In July 1971 the following oral instructions were given to the new commander of the 2d Brigade of 101st Airborne Division: avoid, if possible, big fights - leave those to ARVN; no heavy casualties; tighten up the defenses of your fire bases and base camps; "no more Mary Ann's"; work closely with ARVN on your flanks, but start to "wean them" from overdependence on US support; work with and assist the district chiefs and their advisors; "get a handle" on the drug and race problems and tighten up discipline and troop appearance; and start turning in excess equipment. 167/
- As US units withdrew, their large base camps and headquarters were turned over to the South Vietnamese. Although many of them were pleased to move into such relatively "luxurious" facilities, the operation, maintenance and security of them proved to be a heavy drain on manpower and money. Running those bases created a strain on the scarce officer and NCO base of RVNAF. 168/
- Departing units transferred their "newcomers" to remaining units whose "old hands" were sent home early. That arrangement, although equitable, created extreme turbulence at a critical period. The 2d Brigade of the 101st Abn Div, for example, received soldiers from the 1st Brigade of the 5th Infantry Division (mechanized), various units of the Americal Div, and from

the parents divisions 1st and 3d Brigades (in addition to normal rotation) in a period of seven months.

- Most company commanders had little more than two years total service, and many platoon sergeants were even greener "shake and bake" sergeants (E-5's) and the average squad leader was a Specialist 4 or Corporal (E-4). Small unit turbulence and inexperienced (but generally conscientious) leadership resulted in unnecessary casualties, especially from mines and boobytraps. This was not the same army that fought so well from 1965 through 1968. They badly needed training and close guidance. The decline in leadership quality was noted even in late 1969.
- As the enemy build up continued, it was necessary to give the constantly changing teams both individual refresher and small unit training. Emphasis was placed on field fortifications, weapons and anti-tank firing, live fire attacks by day and night and on foot or airmobile. Fire bases and base camps were turned into fortified, mutually supporting strong points. Surprise alerts were held and counterattack plans exercised. Gen. Abrams, his senior commanders and MACV-IG teams conducted frequent inspections of the defenses. No more Mary Ann's! 169/
(What had RVNAF learned from Lam Son 719 and what was done about them during the interim period between major operations? Several illustrative examples should suffice to paint the picture.)
- One of the most critical problems was that of weak command, control, cooperation, and leadership at high levels. 170/ (Yet LTG Lam was retained as the commander of I Corps and LTG Le Nguyen Khang still commanded the Marine Corps and Division at Easter.) Gen. Don noted that Thieu kept incompetent senior officers because of loyalty and politics and that "Gen. Abrams was so nice. . . he didn't want to complain." 171/
- Although much intelligence was accurate, "enemy artillery and armor capabilities were not listed as significant factors [and] reports in the area of concentrated supplies were not entirely

accurate" 172/ and there was a lack of communications security. 173/ (I Corps and 3d ARVN Div were both surprised on March 30, 1972, despite repeated strategic warning and communications; security again fell apart under pressure.)

- The major tactical error of Lam Son 719 centered on a rigid application of familiar operational patterns that had so far succeeded reasonably on the battlefields within South Vietnam. 174/

> The principal weakness of the South Vietnamese artillery was the extreme vulnerability of its fire bases. A single enemy mortar shell was enough to set an entire ammunition dump on fire and if the dump exploded the entire position was out of action. . . And frequently the fall of the artillery positions led to the defeat of the units which they supported. 175/

(Yet in 1972 RVNAF was still tied to the "familiar operational patterns," and the firebases were still highly visible and vulnerable.)

Plus

> Finally, if Lam Son 719 had been intended as a test of Vietnamization, it should have demonstrated that the RVNAF improvement and modernization program still had much to accomplish. Compared to the NVA, the ARVN was developing too slowly and inadequately especially in armor and artillery. Counterbattery capabilities was another area requiring attention, especially in view of the long-range NVA artillery. 176/

PAVN had moved faster in several critical aspects of modern mobile warfare than had RVNAF. The latter were still firmly wedded to earlier US tactics and techniques which were fast becoming outmoded. Once again they were going to be caught off balance in the wrong posture.

Only a short time prior to the offensive, the US Command structure in I Corps area had started to transition back to an advisory role. XXIV US Corps (LTG Tom Dolvin) was phasing into the First Regional Assistance Command (FRAG) under then Maj. Gen. Frederick J.. or "Fritz", Kroesen. When the attack struck, the new headquarters was still shaking down.

c. Fighting Both Well and Poorly (See Map 4-3)

Surprise!? The enemy once more pulled off the unexpected in time, place and method. Predictions were that his initial attack would be in the Central Highlands about Tet. But his first and major attack was across and around the DMZ, on March 30, in broad daylight, supported by massed artillery and tanks. (Lt. Gen. Potts said that US intelligence had intercepted an enemy message which had postponed the highlands attacks at the last minute because they knew that it had been compromised.) 177/

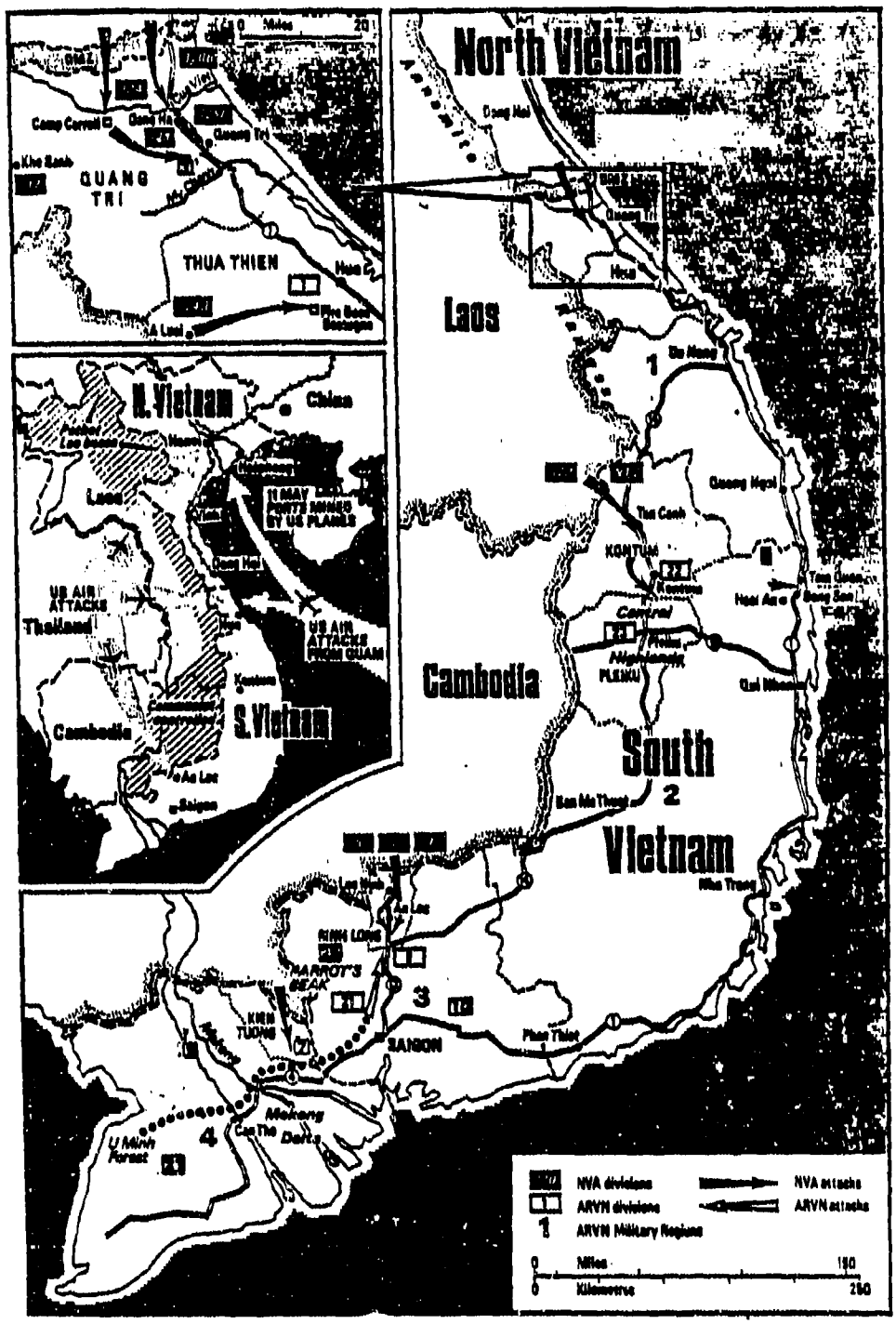
The 3d ARVN Div (still short of logistics and artillery units) was hit while in the midst of rotating regiments on its firebases; a sound scheme if the enemy is quiet, but a most awkward and dangerous one when attacked strongly. (See Map 4-4) Accurate enemy counterbattery fire silenced most of the previously pinpointed and only partially protected ARVN artillery units in the area. The weather was unsuitable for tactical air sorties and the few helicopters available, were quite vulnerable to ground fire and the newly introduced SAM-7's (Strella's). 178/

The question of who was surprised about what largely depends on the position and perspective of the individual reporting. General Kroesen wrote that in response to a pre-attack speculation about an attack directly across the DMZ, Gen. Lam replied "They cannot!" 179/ General Giai, commander of the 3d ARVN Div., wouldn't have been rotating regiments if he had expected an immediate attack. General John Vogt, who was then the Director of the US Joint Staff in Washington and saw all the messages, recently remarked that no one ever told him that the PAVN was preparing a major attack (5 Divs) in MRI. 180/ A DA study on armor in Vietnam noted:

> That the North Vietnamese were capable of a large scale offensive was apparent . . . [but] the possibility that enemy armor would be a threat was considered insignificant. . . 181/

Ex-ARVN LTG Truong reflected that:

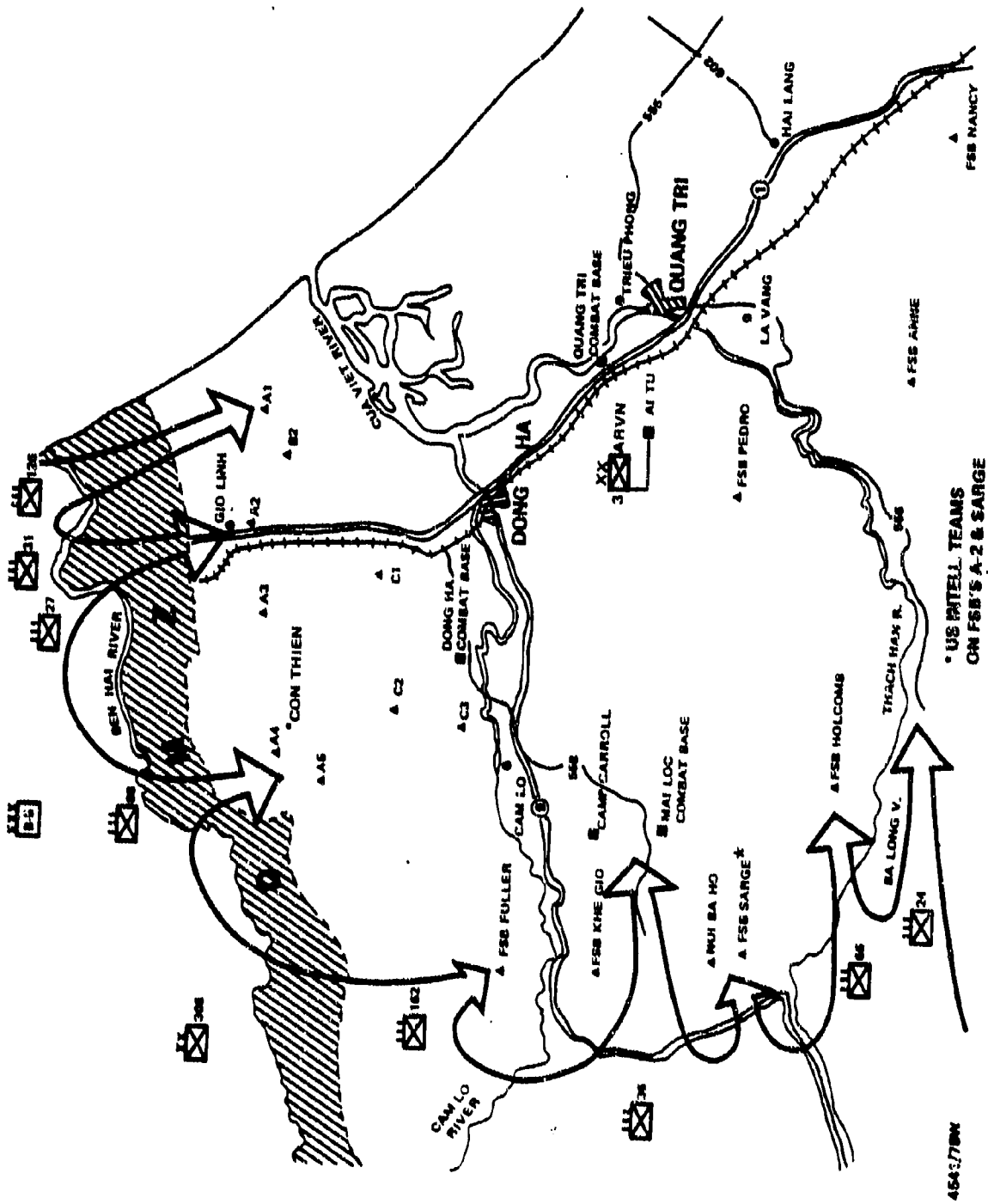
> Although the three areas of the enemy's major concentrations --northern MR-1, Kontum, and north of Saigon -- were clear indicators that the heaviest



4541/78W

SOURCE: Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph, The Easter Offensive of 1972, p. 2

Map 4-3. The NVA General Offensive of 1972



Map 4-4. NVA Attacks Across the DMZ, Quang Tri Province, 30 March 1972

> attacks would occur in these regions, it was impossible, on the basis of available intelligence, to determine the priority the enemy assigned to the three objective areas. Neither could we tell which attack would be launched first, or if they would occur simultaneously. 182/

General Potts had amassed impressive data which indicated that MACV had carefully watched and reported (both up and down the chain) the enemy buildup over a period of months. He did state, quite recently, that the exact dates and sequence of the offensives were not known (and they seldom are) and that the direct move across the DMZ was contrary to past enemy patterns, but that no commander should have been caught off balance. 183/ The problem, however, was that too many RVNAF and US officials expected the enemy to follow closely his traditional patterns. General Kroesen, in his monograph on the offensive, deduced that that belief was confirmed when the reinforced 324B PAVN Div started an attack in early March, on the traditional route from the A Shau towards Hue (prematurely triggered by the preemptive moves of the 1st ARVN Div?); General Lam and others expected the 304 and 308 PAVN Div's to follow 324B. But that time they didn't.

The reasons for the failure of the reinforced 3d ARVN Div and for the near loss of Hue are analyzed quite well in the sources cited (in End Note 178) and need not be rehashed in detail. Among the major factors were: poor leadership at high levels and extremely unwieldly command and control arrangements; at one time the 3d Div commander had direct control of, at least on paper, nine brigade level headquarters, composed of 23 battalions, plus RF/PF units! 184/ Generals Lam and Khang and the commander of the 1st Armor Brigade were as bad as they had been during Lam Son 719; Gen. Lam didn't even fly up to his 3d Div. Headquarters, at AI TU combat base outside of Quang Tri city, until late on the 2d day of the offensive. 185/

General Kroesen isolated other factors which led to the eventual disintegration of the 3d ARVN:

> When the subject of an NVA attack across the DMZ was raised with the 3d ARVN Division commander, his reaction was similar, but not exclusive of the possibility. His primary concern had to be with his western frontier and with the continued training and preparation of his division for the coming campaign. He agreed, however, that he and his staff should be concerned with identifying critical terrain, defensive positions, and the employment of his forces if such an attack should come. He indicated that he would have the division staff work on a plan for this defense, but in later weeks admitted ruefully that their other priority efforts had left too little time for adequate planning.
>
> Initially then, the enemy concentrated a numerical advantage of more than three to one over the defending 3d Division and attacked [sic] forces which were disposed to counter the infiltration and raid tactics heretofore employed by the NVA in the DMZ area. There was no plan and there were no positions built for defense against an invasion by a conventional attack. This is difficult to justify in hindsight, but the explanation is quite simple: the defensive outposts and firebases had served the US Army and US Marines well for more than five years; who in the ARVN or among the US advisors is to be held responsible for not revising a proven concept of operations? The answer, again in hindsight, must assign the responsibility to the command chain, i.e., the 3d Division and I Corps commanders principally, and to their advisors who accepted, perhaps too readily, the logic of the popular assessment. But this assignment must be tempered with an understanding of the intelligence evaluations presented to them and the history of the war in the area. . . .
>
> In the days that followed morale deteriorated rapidly. Troops which had been trained for and experienced in counter-guerrilla warfare were being demoralized by the daily toll taken by the enemy's conventional artillery fire and by the need to remain alert for enemy infantry attacks through every endless night. The absence of any aggressiveness in the ARVN troops, particularly their failure to patrol at night, provided the enemy with a respite any time he chose to take it. Consequently, a two, three, or four day lull in fighting

> occurred when the enemy rested his troops while the ARVN, with no knowledge of the enemy intent, remained alert and tense and wore themselves out. 186/

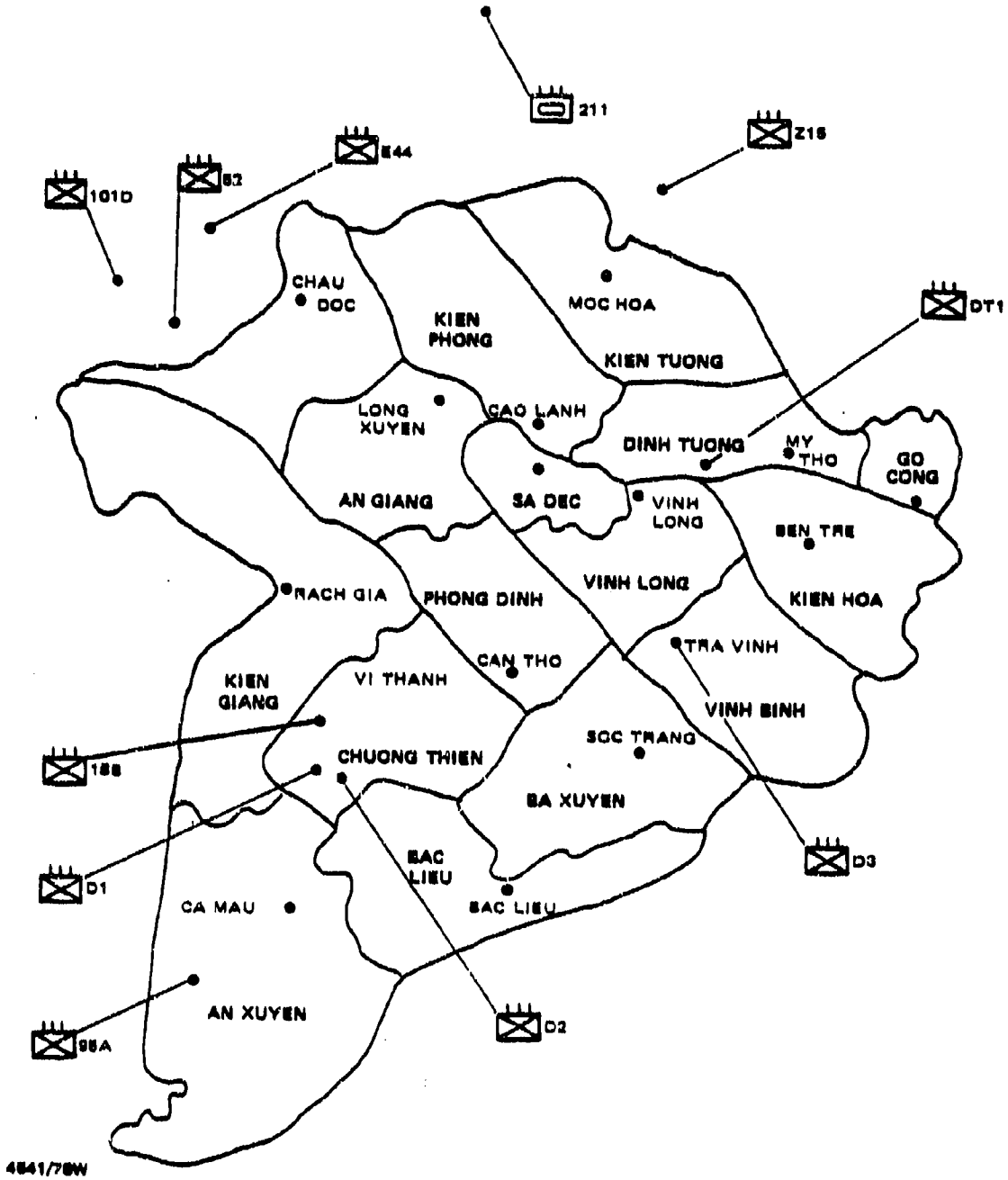
The belated replacement of ineffective senior RVNAF officers came none too soon. Almost overnight General Truong turned around the panic, chaos, and near anarchy in Hue. The average South Vietnamese soldier, to include the Marines and RF/PF, had fought hard and well; they finally had the leader their courage had earned.

Similar failures in planning, leadership, control, and tactics occurred during the early stages of the battles which subsequently took place in II and III Corps areas. In the Central Highlands, John Paul Vann virtually assumed command of the RVNAF forces until his death in a helicopter crash. At the siege of An Loc, the fighting was personally controlled by then MG James ("Howling Mad") Hollingsworth. As the crises unfolded, one by one, MACV, the RVNAF JGS, and even President Thieu took action to replace weak political generals with tried fighters and commanders. 187/

The battles in the Mekong Delta (IV Corps) were the last to start, were more diffused, and were the least dramatic and thus hardly newsworthy. Maps 4-5 a and b show the enemy dispositions before and at the end of those scattered battles in the Delta. RVNAF was spread thinner than ever in attempting to control and protect territory, people and resources; the situation was made more tenuous when the 21st ARVN Div. was temporarily transferred to III Corps in the attempt to raise the siege of An Loc. 188/

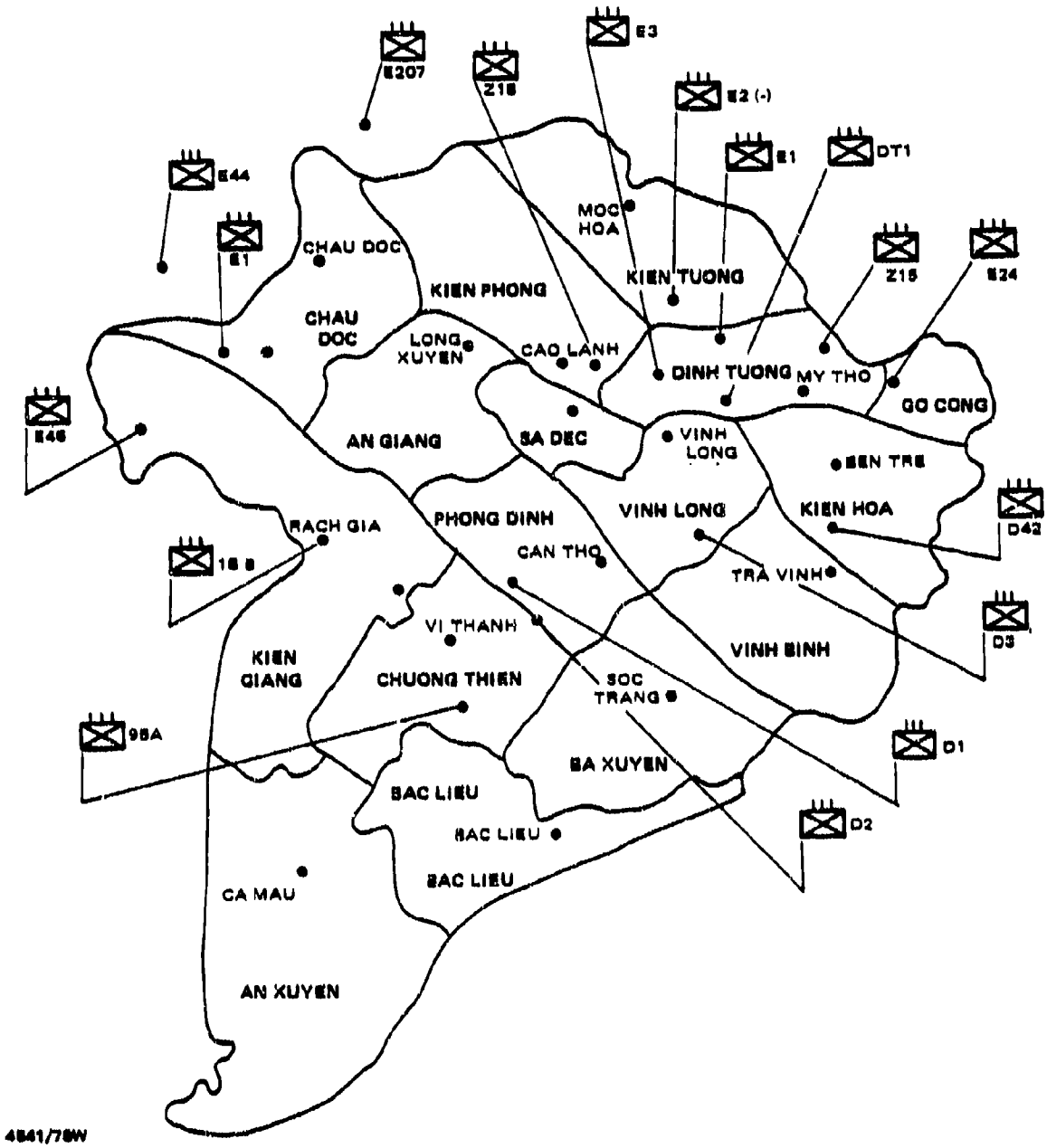
Map 4-6 is an interesting portrayal of the DRV's view of the various battles fought during their Nguyen Hue offensive. (As usual, the highly inflated data on "enemy" losses were due to a mixture of wishful thinking, false and/or optimistic reports from the field, and propaganda needs at home and abroad.)

During the first several days of the offensive there was the usual confusion, but little alarm in Washington; that attitude was due, in part, to MACV's early reports which stated in effect, "Let's wait a bit and see if this is the real offensive or just a feint." Long alerted to the massive enemy buildup, Kissinger



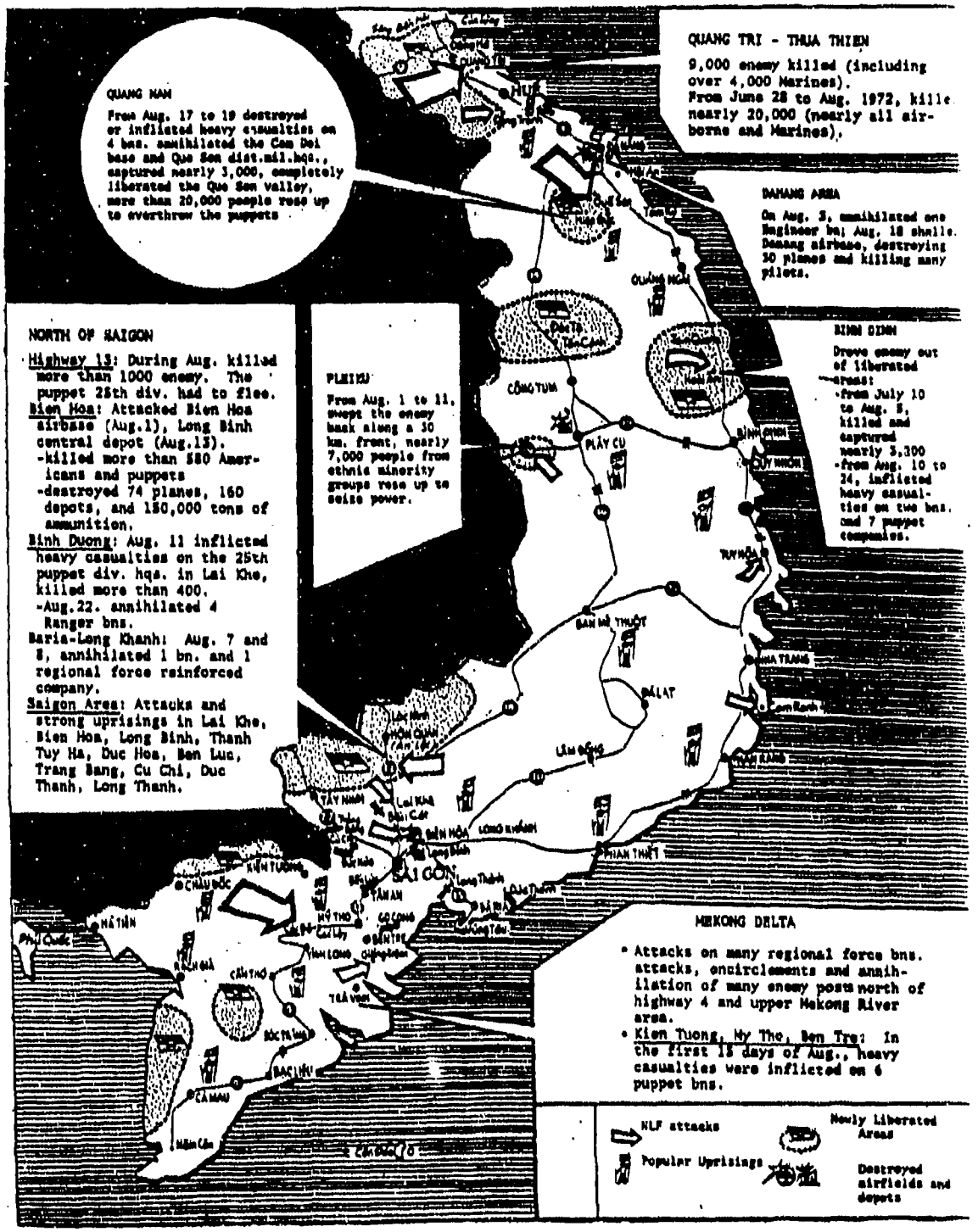
SOURCE: Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph, The Easter Offensive of 1972

Map 4-5a. Enemy Regimental Dispositions in MR-4, 1 April 1972



SOURCE: Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph, The Easter Offensive of 1972

Map 4-5b. Enemy Regimental Dispositions in MR-4, 31 December 1972



4841/78W SOURCE: Nhan Dan, Hanoi, cited in Elliot, NLF-DRV Strategy in the 1972 Spring Offensive

Map 4-6. Battlefield Situation Map, 1 September 1972

> . . .was convinced that, whatever the outcome of the offensive, it would end the war. This was Hanoi's last throw of the dice. One way or another, there would now be serious negotiations; their substance would depend upon which side prevailed on the battlefield. If South Vietnam collapsed, the war would have ended in a debacle. If Saigon, with our help, held back the entire North Vietnamese army, Hanoi would have no choice but to come to terms. 189/

President Nixon had been impatiently waiting for the right opportunity (a clear and open provocation and violation of the "tacit agreements" which earlier had halted the bombing in the DRV) to put heavy and effective military pressure on the Lao Dong leaders. His US ground force option was a thing of the past, and air force and naval responses were politically very risky at home and abroad.

When the president authorized the long-planned (by MACV and 7th AF) aerial counterattack in Route Package #1 (Southern DRV panhandle), Kissinger became obsessed by the high rate of cancelled air sorties due to the bad weather near the DMZ.

> On April 1, Nixon authorized American air attacks against military concentrations in North Vietnam, limited to within twenty-five miles north of the DMZ. But we encountered one of the perennial frustrations of the Vietnam war: bad weather preventing air operations. Since the ceiling was constantly below 2,500 feet, very few missions could be flown in into the North. I called Admiral Moorer several times a day to ask if we were yet in the air; his answer for the first forty-eight hours was negative. Poor Moorer, who was not to blame, endured my badgering and sarcasm. It seemed to me that our entire Air Force consisted of delicate machines capable of flying only in a war in the desert in July. I suggested that if they could not fly maybe they could taxi north for twenty-five miles. 190/

(Additionally, due to the inability to conduct effective air recce in those crucial early days, many of the B-52's strikes -- not weather dependent -- were "aimed almost blindly at likely enemy avenues of approach and suspected assembly areas. . .") 191/

Since the air war is covered in Chapter 6 of this volume, it would be redundant to go into the details of those operations in this section. The analysis, therefore, will be confined largely to the interaction between Washington and MACV over strategy and priorities. That there were major differences between the two is not surprising since Nixon and Kissinger were plotting and orchestrating grand strategy on a global scale while MACV had the more localized and intimate task of preventing the collapse of RVNAF and of protecting the scattered and often vulnerable remnants of US forces (and contract civilians, etc.) in the RVN.

In preparing the US better to meet the expected attack, Kissinger prepared an aide memoire for the President to use at the NSC meeting of February 2. Apparently Nixon followed the thrust of the paper, which said:

> I will not accept any failure which can be attributed to a lack of available US support or shortcomings in our own leadership or decisiveness. We must do all we can to assist the South Vietnamese and to ensure that they have both the means and the will to meet Hanoi's challenge this year.
>
> In the final analysis we cannot expect the enemy to negotiate seriously with us until he is convinced nothing can be gained by continuing the war. This will require an all out effort on our part during the coming dry season. I can think of no more crucial period in this painful conflict and I expect each of you to bring promptly to my attention any proposal you might have for additional steps which might be taken to guarantee success. 192/

In early May when the issue was still very much in doubt, the President sent his National Security advisor a strongly worded memorandum:

> We have the power to destroy his war-making capacity. The only question is whether we have the <u>will</u> to use that power. What distinguishes me from Johnson is that I have the <u>will</u> in spades. If we now fail it will be because the bureaucrats and the bureaucracy and particularly those in the Defense Department, who will of course be vigorously assisted by their allies in State,

> will find ways to erode the strong, decisive action that I have indicated we are going to take. For once, I want the military and I want the NSC staff to come up with some ideas on their own which will recommend action which is very strong, threatening and effective. 193/

(Laird, of course was firmly committed to demonstrating that Vietnamization was working and so was reluctant to sanction the use of too much US force; his International Security Affairs office was often called "The Pentagon's little State Department.")

The President was not overly pleased with his professional military leaders for showing "reticence", in his view, about employing maximum air and naval force against the DRV, and he too "chewed out" Admiral Moorer. 194/

General Abrams, in trying to carry out his very difficult missions in those trying times, was "intensely interested in the precise use" of airpower, and had detailed daily briefings by the 7th Air Force and MACV staff on the employment of tactical air and the B-52's. As noted earlier, by then air power was his sole remaining US reserve and his "flexible faucet of firepower." He strongly resisted attempts by CINCPAC or anyone else, to include the President, to divert a significant portion of that airpower to the North. As he put it, he resented the "political excursions" of the B-52's to the DRV since they "were away hunting rabbits while the backyard was filled with lions." 195/

Abrams' viewpoint and strong stand quite naturally attracted Kissinger's full attention and riposte. To continue a quote, included earlier in the text, giving Kissinger's evaluation of his "antagonist" in Saigon:

> For three years his command had been turned into a withdrawal headquarters. Now he was urged to win the crucial final battle.
>
> It is intended as no derogation of a superb military leader to say that General Abrams could not adjust rapidly to this new situation. I had met him for the first time in 1961 during my short tenure as White House consultant when, as the commander of the armored

> division responsible for Berlin contingency planning, he had given me a brilliant briefing. He had then exuded daring and imagination. But four years of frustration in Saigon had taken their toll. Torn between his convictions and his obedience to civilian authority, he increasingly took refuge in routine. His refusal to change normal operating procedures even for the Laos operation contributed to its failure to achieve decisive results. (The basic fault, however, was to attempt decisive results with insufficient forces, for which all senior officials, including myself, must bear the responsibility.) And in 1972 he saw the North Vietnamese offensive in strictly local terms. For three years Washington had been hurrying him out of Vietnam; now it suddenly urged him to prevail with his shrunken assets. His responses were testy, occasionally pedantic, disquisitions on the prerogatives of the field commander. This finally drove me at one point to tell Moorer in exasperation that the Commander-in-Chief had some prerogatives as well. 196/

Those who knew and served with General Abrams since combat in World War II and were closely involved with him before and during the Easter offensive, considered most of Kissinger's "charges" both unfair and invalid. They concede that some of Abrams' responses were, characteristically, "testy" and that when he felt a major issue was at stake he did stand on the field commander's "prerogatives" as did Westmoreland before him. They insist, however, that his messages were never "pedantic" and that he certainly was not "depressed" and that he never "took refuge in routine." 197/ In sum, it was a classic case of differences of opinion, personality and style between two strong, intelligent and dedicated men who didn't know each other very well and who were separated by over 10,000 miles and by dissimilar experiences, perspectives and responsibilities.

In large measure both Abrams' and Kissinger's (and Nixon's) views were valid. The immediate and pressing tactical problem was in the South. If RVNAF had been shattered, the war would be lost, and tens of thousands of Americans still there would be in grave danger. Yet, even a major victory in the RVN would merely result - as other "victories" had in the past - in another stalemate on a higher plane; nor would it resolve the POW issue. Large scale and effective air attacks and mining in the North

(i.e., the blitzing linebackers) was politically a much riskier course of action, took longer to take effect, but was the only option open that had a chance of achieving anything approaching decisive strategic results. However, when linebackers "blitz," they expose vulnerabilities of the defense to certain ground plays and short passes. A clear-eyed pragmatist, especially in retrospect, would say, "whatever works is right."

Liddell Hart might have viewed that dichotomy with the following judgments concerning the relationship between the physical and the psychological in war:

> In the psychological sphere, dislocation is the result of the impression on the commander's mind of the physical effects which we have listed. The impression is strongly accentuated if his realization of his being at a disadvantage is sudden, and if he feels that he is unable to counter the enemy's move. Psychological dislocation fundamentally springs from this sense of being trapped.
>
> A further consideration is that while a stroke close in rear of the enemy force may have more effect on the minds of the enemy troops, a stroke far back tends to have more effect on the mind of the enemy commander. 198/

Obviously all, or even an imbalanced preponderance of the air power, could not be allocated to stave off defeat in the South or to win in the North. Commanders-in-Chief must make the tough decisions. Luckily Nixon, with the assistance of the Joint Chiefs was, on balance, more right than wrong, and much more strategically correct than was his predecessor.

Everyone involved with the allocating and control of US air power during that critical period was frustrated by the ungainly command arrangements, but none were willing to see it finally sorted out.

> In short, there was institutionalized schizophrenia. As soon as aircraft left targets in Route Package I, Abrams had no further control over them; he therefore could not tell whether the air campaign in the North was easing the immediate pressures on him or diverting resources. He tended to the latter view. The air war

> in the North was conceptually and organizationally separated from the war in the South. This, at least as much as political restrictions from Washington, produced the random quality of the air campaign and the constant disputes over priorities. Nixon at my urging made several attempts to change these command arrangements; indeed, he ordered a change just before the resumption of unrestricted bombing of North Vietnam. But Laird and Moorer resisted furiously. The same vested interests that had produced the original pattern opposed any change; Laird and Moorer felt that they had enough on their hands without taking on an internal row this late in the game. Like almost all of Nixon's attempts at reorganization, it aborted. Nixon decided that he could not risk an internal split just as he was entering the biggest foreign policy crisis of his Presidency. 199/

One close and senior observer of the byplay noted that every service wanted to retain a "piece of the war" for future budgetary and force structure reasons. 200/ That parochial, but natural, attitude prevailed before, during and after the war.

There was, to say the least, not only misunderstanding but also mistrust between many of the civilian and military strategists. One result was the sorry spectacle, soon leaked, of a Yeoman secretly xeroxing NSC staff papers (often withheld from the Joint Chiefs) and then passing them on to the chairman of the JCS. Nixon, well aware of the civilian-military disconnect discussed the problem with Kissinger:

> Correctly he lamented that the military, abused for years by civilian leadership, proved unable to respond imaginatively when given a freer hand. (Al Haig, he granted, "certainly is an exception.") 201/

Kissinger, unhappy with input from the formal military establishment, decided to do some in-house (NSC) strategic planning:

> As the new forces were being assembled in Southeast Asia, my staff prepared contingency plans for their use. A planning paper by Al Haig dated April 6, based on my instructions, outlined our course of action should South Vietnamese forces fail to halt the offensive. It provided for the bombing of all military targets throughout North Vietnam (except in a buffer

> zone along the Chinese border) and for the mining of all North Vietnamese ports. It was in effect the plan that would be implemented on May 8. 202/

At this point one can only assume that Haig had kept open his informal contacts with the JCS. 203/

Despite those serious and vexing problems the results expected and hoped for in both the RVN and the DRV were essentially achieved. Whether they were the maximum achievable or not will be discussed in the next section. They would have fallen short of the mark without basically sound strategy and the high level moral courage to carry it out despite "the slings and arrows of outrageous" criticism (and more) both in the US and overseas. Yet even bold decisions and a correct strategy would have been worth little without courage, determination and generally solid professionalism, on the ground and in the air, displayed by the RVNAF and US men who actually did the fighting. The US advisors, from MACV to battalion level, served as "the steel reinforcing rods [that kept] the concrete from crumbling." 204/ Secretary Laird and the entire US military establishment involved in Operation Enhance (and later Enhance Plus) performed a magnificent feat in the timely replacement of the huge amounts of equipment, supplies, weapons and ammunition lost or consumed during the early debacles. All in all it was an excellent example of close team work under severe pressure where one partner compensated for the weaknesses and shortages of the other and the reverse. At several points it had been a very close-run race; any less effort and/or efficiency easily could have resulted in a quite different outcome. (Four fairly recent publications give representative views of the USAF on its role in the campaign.) 205/

d. Posture for the Endgame: Who Won and Who Lost?

The prevailing view among knowledgeable Western and South Vietnamese observers is that the DRV made an all out effort for total victory, failed miserably, and thus lost ignominously. In his memoirs, Kissinger headlined a section with "Hanoi Throws the Dice," and Nixon called it "a sign of desperation" due to the success of Vietnamization and so forth. 206/

Four Other Views

Prior to the invasion of 1972, Hanoi had launched several large-scale offensive campaigns in South Vietnam, such as the 1968 "General Offensive - General Uprising" which included the siege on Khe Sanh Base, all with the commitment of multi-division forces. But none of these initiatives equaled the 1972 Easter Offensive -- or the Nguyen Hue Campaign as the enemy called it -- in scale and in importance. Undoubtedly, Hanoi had intended it to be a decisive military effort. . . .

In retrospect, Hanoi's conventional invasion of the South did not help it attain the major objectives desired. Although always the defender with an extremely disadvantageous strategic posture, South Vietnam emerged stronger than ever. Hanoi's effort had been thwarted by U.S.-RVN determination. The American response during the enemy offensive was timely, forceful and decisive. This staunch resolve of the U.S. to stand behind its ally stunned the enemy. Additionally, it brought about a strong feeling of self-assurance among the armed forces and population of South Vietnam.

- LTG Ngo Quang Truong 207/

. . . in the end, the NVA failed to achieve its major objectives politically and militarily.

Throughout this entire enemy offensive the RVNAF demonstrated a high degree of professionalism and determination. Consequently, no single provincial capital of the RVN was lost to enemy control. Only 10 out of 260 district towns had been permanently occupied, but they were all located in outlying areas. An Loc, which had been intended as a national capital for the PRG, held firmly and gallantly against concerted attacks by three NVA divisions. The RVNAF had not been crushed as anticipated by our enemy. The people of South Vietnam remained calm, undaunted; they also supported our units during the heaviest fighting. Exhausted by serious losses, the NVA no longer had any significant offensive capability left to achieve political gains during the last quarter of 1972; its units had to disperse to wait and prepare for the next round of low-key activities. More importantly, the morale of the VCI declined markedly. The enemy offensive also failed to disrupt our pacification program, except in the areas of heavy fighting. The Mekong Delta, as an example, was not affected in any way; the enemy had been unable to

> achieve a single gain in population control. All of the surface communication in the Delta remained secure during this major enemy offensive despite the redeployment of almost one half of IV Corps forces to MR-3.
>
> The enemy 1972 Easter Offensive failed for several reasons. Our enemy became complacent after our venture into Laos in Lam Son 719. He underestimated the RVNAF capabilities and the effectiveness and power of the USAF; he also could not predict President Nixon's firm and swift reaction to the invasion. Strategically and tactically, our enemy committed many errors. Two of his most serious mistakes in strategy had to do with priority of efforts and timing. The NVA had distributed its forces among three distant objective areas instead of concentrating them on one to achieve a quick and decisive victory. Consequently, it did not have the capability to win in any one area. By improper timing our enemy also lost the chance of exploiting his initial success and gave the RVNAF enough time to regroup and consolidate their defenses. Two tactical errors added to the enemy's failure. The NVA proved inexperienced in the employment of armor and inefficient in coordinating armor and infantry.
>
> - Gen Cao Van Vien 208/

Unfortunately, and characteristically, the PAVN once again - and finally -learned more from their mistakes than did the RVNAF.

> By the time the 1972 offensive came to an end the Communists were about as far from being Saigon's "equal" as they ever had been. By their own account their holdings in the south amounted to little more than "rubber trees and bricks" -- underpopulated, mountainous territory along the western fringes of the country, plus a scattering of isolated "leopard spots" in the delta. Their political-agent network, particularly in the cities, had been decimated, and their perennial allies, the students and the radical Buddhist groups, had been broken and intimidated by Thieu's universalized military draft and by mounting economic pressures.
>
> - Frank Snepp (ex CIA) 209/
>
> So the North could see that it was about to lose all the ground that it had taken in the South. It was also suffering heavy damage in the North. And whereas a

> certain amount of arms, ammunition, gasoline, and so on could still come in through China, they could not get enough food in through China for North Vietnam. This point was proved in 1973, after Haiphong was reopened, when they had to import one million tons of grain -- a three months' supply on their current ration. Hanoi could see that situation coming by the end of 1972. Their rear bases were really under attack and the South Vietnamese rear base, at the same time, was in good shape. In my view, on December 30, 1972, after eleven days of those B-52 attacks on the Hanoi area, you had won the war. It was over! . . .
>
> But
>
> Now let us just look at that peace agreement. Here we come back again to the whole business of rear bases. That cease-fire agreement restored complete security to the rear bases in North Vietnam, in Laos, in Cambodia, and in the parts of South Vietnam that it held. It subjected the South Vietnamese rear base again to being absolutely open to military attack. That is what the cease-fire agreement actually achieved.
>
> - Sir Robert Thompson 210/

There exists yet another viewpoint of what Hanoi expected and received from that offensive. With a long and solid background in and about Vietnam, David W. P. Elliott attempted to view expectations and results from the enemy's viewpoint and strategic bent. With that perspective his study, NLG-DRV Strategy and the 1972 Spring Offensive 211/ is probably one of the most complete and challenging (and likely controversial) on the subject.

Supported by fairly impressive documentation, Elliott argues, in part, that: Nguyen Hue was not a desperate, one shot, gamble but rather was designed to improve their geo-strategic position in the South and to force RVNAF to concentrate at the three main points and there tie them down and attrite them; they intended to relink the "three strategic areas" (delta, forest, and cities) to their "great rear areas"; their attack would threaten the residual US forces in RVN and break the negotiations deadlock; they wanted to defeat RVNAF's "defense in depth" of their

long flanks, and to seize territory (even rubber trees and jungles) which was important to changing the balance of power. (He did not rule out entirely that Dung and Giap had even higher hopes however). Predictably, at the end of the offensive Hanoi loudly and proudly claimed "glorious victories" in the field and in Paris and that they had forced the final withdrawal of the US from Vietnam. 212/

After a recent review of the Elliott study, Douglas Pike made a number of comments, among them: the Easter offensive demonstrated that Dung and Giap were totally committed to high technology, big unit war with no thought of returning to neo-revolutionary guerrilla war; the Paris talks were not important to those two generals although they were to Truong Chinh and his followers; Dung and Giap probably "sold" their plan to the politburo as a "decision" which would create an "irreversible process" which might take another year or two to "wind down"; PAVN's highest expectations were at An Loc. (Pike has heard rumors that the PAVN commander there was summarily executed after his failure); and while PAVN made some limited territorial gains, etc., on balance they were "pretty damn unsuccessful." 213/

In retrospect, the results of the offensive and the negotiations give some support to Elliott's thesis. For example: RVNAF did suffer heavy casualties, to include many of the better junior leaders (although PAVN suffered many more, their leadership and system could withstand the strain better than could RVN's); the relatively small RVNAF general reserve forces were whipsawed between the three concentration areas and worn down; Map 4-6 shows how the PAVN (and to a lesser extent PLAF) improved their position in the vital delta, which further dispersed and tied down RVNAF and local force units; RVN's outer line of defense was pushed back in a number of key areas. After the cease fire, PAVN was able to construct roads and a pipeline east of the Annamite chain, and as far south as Loc Ninh; both GVN and RVNAF were impressed with the power of the expanded and modernized PAVN and knew that in the future only the US, and especially in their minds the B-52's, could save them, which reinforced their sense of inferiority vis-à-vis their Northern brothers. (Pike mentioned that a

common trait of all Vietnamese is their lack of confidence and sense of dependence. The Communists at least realize that and try to compensate with unequal success). 214/ The US had been forced to play its final trump to stop the offensive, and also to withdraw all forces within 60 days with practically no possibility of being able to reintroduce them.

Regardless of the relative merits of the opposing views, PAVN ended the campaign with a much improved geo-strategic position in the South, their "great rear base" was free to rebuild, and the balance of power was bound to shift steadily in their favor once the predicted reduction in US aid took effect. For those gains Dung and Giap might have considered 130,000 or so dead a fair trade.

F. SUMMARY ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

1. Overview

The Nixon Administration entered office with a clear mandate to extricate the US from Vietnam as quickly as possible, with the least possible cost (especially in US lives and limbs), and with the maximum possible honor; no mean task even if the president had been widely popular, well respected, and had a majority in Congress.

During the years 1969 through 1972 both the grand and the military strategies were dominated by Nixon, Kissinger, and Laird. Although their goals, rationale and methods often differed -- and sometimes conflicted -- they understood better than did their predecessors how to employ military force to gain political objectives. Their options however, were severely constrained from the beginning and became even more restricted over time.

During those years, high level political-military relations in the USG, previously severely strained by the protracted, costly, and confusing war, were pained further by unique and demanding challenges and also by strong and sometimes abrasive personality clashes. By that time the senior military leaders fully realized that they could not, or would not, be permitted to "win" the war; their desire then was to extricate their

forces in the best condition possible and to refurbish them for their neglected missions in the rest of the world. Those conservative and pragmatic views frustrated the new civilian strategists who were plotting bold and imaginative strategies on a global scale.

Throughout, the enemy's leadership never waivered from their long range goal, and they took maximum advantage of the "contradictions" within and between the USG and the GVN. They continued to be willing to pay an extraordinarily high price to achieve their aims and employed negotiations as only one -- and often the lesser -- of the steps leading to a unified Vietnam (and Indochina) under Dang Lao Dong control.

2. Insights

In 1969 the combination of Vietnamization, Pacification and the withdrawal of US forces (along with greatly reduced casualties) was probably the best strategy available to the new administration that had even a chance of gaining minimum US goals in Vietnam; the people and the Congress of the US were thoroughly tired of the war, but most did not want an ignominious surrender.

Although development of political-military strategy was concentrated at the highest levels of the USG as never before in the war, the secretive and competitive way in which it was formulated and promulgated made it very difficult for the military to execute.

The sound military rationale for disrupting the enemy sanctuaries and LOC in Cambodia and Laos was counterbalanced by the political costs of the belated operations designed to buy time and protection for Vietnamization and US withdrawal; the incursion into Cambodia did gain some time, but Lam Son 719 was ill conceived and poorly executed and that operation visibly demonstrated serious weaknesses in RVNAF. Those strategic moves brought increased public pressure and congressional restraints on the executive.

The RVNAF, still enmeshed in the dilemma of trying to find a correct balance between the requirements of territorial/population security and mobile warfare, was not properly prepared, psychologically or tactically, to stand up to the expanded and upgraded PAVN during the Easter

offensive; without massive US advice, aid and support especially from airpower, it is likely that the RVNAF would have been severely defeated in 1972.

The vast difference between the effects of weak and strong leadership in RVNAF was dramatically portrayed, again, during PAVN's Easter offensive; it also was made apparent just how thin was GVN's base of good senior leaders.

The sustained competition for the allocation of airpower for the tactical battles in the South (RVN) or for the larger range strategic objectives in the North (DRV) highlighted the doctrinal differences among the US services and also between MACV and the White House; the compromises arrived at permitted the achievement of the minimum aims of the various antagonists.

Although the results of the ground and air battles were generally quite favorable to the US and the RVN, the DRV leaders achieved the unique end of gaining more at the peace table than they had earned on the battlefield; the USG had deployed its last blue chip in December 1972 and probably achieved the maximum possible at that time under the existing circumstances.

By the time the "cease-fire" became effective on paper, the PAVN had improved significantly its geo-strategic position in the South and with the predictable diminuation of US aid to the RVN, could count on the balance of power irreversibly shifting in their favor.

". . . the fatal flaw in our strategy was in failing to threaten the survival of the enemy and his system," said General Frederick Weyand, US Army (Ret) 215/

G. LESSONS

The traditional, but largely artificial, separation between political and military ways and means in the US severely impedes the effective use of military forces in helping to gain the objectives set by the political leaders.

To achieve its optimal goals in the "fight-talk" arena against a totalitarian regime, a liberal democracy must carefully synchronize and orchestrate its politico-diplomatic-military weapons; with respect to negotiations, the application of combat power can be persuasive or counter-productive, depending upon the nature, timing, and extent of its use and the degree to which the public perceives or understands the issues at stake.

US aid and advice to an ally should be designed to support an agreed strategy that exploits the enemy's weaknesses and capitalizes on the ally's indigenous strengths.

US military aid and support should not be so foreign and specialized in given areas that withdrawal of that aid and support could leave the host country with serious gaps in those areas.

CHAPTER 4 ENDNOTES

1. Ho Chi Minh: Selected Writings, 1920-1969 (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1977), p. 361.

2. Clyde E. Pettit, The Experts (Secausus, N.J.: Lyle Stuart, 1975), p. 381.

3. William R. Corson, The Consequences of Failure (N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1974), see appendix.

4. Ibid., p. 189.

5. John Paul Vann, letter to Dr. Vincent Davis, University of Kentucky, May 1, 1969.

6. MG W. R. Peers, Hq. IFF-V, portion of a cover memo forwarding a study, "Erosion of NVA Potential," April 15, 1968.

7. The observations in this section are derived from multiple sources including the Indochina Refugee Authored Monographs (McLean, Va: GRC, 1977, 1978): Col. Hoang Ngoc Lung, ARVN, The General Offensives of 1968-69; and MG Nguyen Duy Hinh, ARVN, South Vietnamese Society. Other sources are: Tran Van Don, Our Endless War (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1978); W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson Frizzell, ed., The Lessons of Vietnam (New York: Crane, Russak & Co., 1977); Don Oberdorfer, Tet! (New York: Doubleday, 1971); and discussions with Ambassador William Colby.

8. Lung, The General Offensives, p. 136.

9. Douglas Pike, "The Tet Offensive and the Escalation of the Vietnam War, 1965-1968: View from Hanoi." Paper prepared for presentation at the Symposium on the 1968 Tet Offensive by the Curriculum in Peace, War and Defense, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C., Feb. 21, 1978.

10. Unless points/quotes are individually cited, the background for this section is an MFR from J. Angus MacDonald, dated Jan. 24, 1980, who was then a USMC colonel and Chief of the US/SEATO Plans Division (J-52) in J5, MACV, and was intimately involved in the plans and studies developed from mid 1968 to mid 1969.

11. Westmoreland papers, ICMH, Box 17, History File, March 1968.

12. Telephone interview with General (Ret.) Walter T. Kerwin on Jan. 25, 1980. Gen. Kerwin remarked that General Abrams was consulted in the refining of the mission statement for MACV, and that they performed such an exercise periodically.

13. MFR by Col. J. Angus MacDonald, USMC (Ret.) Jan. 24, 1980. A copy of The Military Objectives Study is held by The Military History Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA. It has since been declassified.

14. Stephen T. Hosmer, et al., The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders, Prepared for Historian, Office of Secretary of Defense (Santa Monica: Rand, 1978), pp. 28-30; and Douglas Kinnard, The War Managers (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1977), pp. 58, 59.

15. Memo from MG Richard L. Prillaman to BDM, July 1979, pp. 3, 4.

16. Interview with General Richard G. Stilwell, US Army (Ret) Sept. 24, 1979 at The BDM Corporation.

17. LORAPL working paper on MACV strategic objectives plan, Dec. 1, 1968, pp. 5, 8.

18. Pike, "Tet Offensive. . .", p. 26; Patrick J. McGarvey, Visions of Victory (Stanford: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1969), pp. 50, 51.

19. Circular from Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) Current Affairs Committee and Military Affairs Committee of South Vietnam Liberation Army (SVNLA) Headquarters Concerning a Preliminary Assessment of the Situation, reproduced in McGarvey, p. 253.

20. McGarvey, p. 55.

21. Lung, The General Offensives, p. 126.

22. Oriana Fallaci, Interview with History, Trans. John Sheply (NY: Liveright, 1974), pp. 83, 84.

23. Reports on Desertion and Recruitment, Viet-Nam Documents and Research Notes Nos. 56, 57, "It is Better to Return Home and Cultivate the Land Than to Join the Revolutionary Army," April 1969.

24. Lung General Offensives, p. 118.

25. Ibid, pp. 126, 127.

26. Ibid. p. 127.

27. Ibid, pp. 117-119, 126-128; it should be noted that in this monograph, as well as others, the South Vietnamese were assisted by LTG (Ret.) William E. Potts with his extensive files; Potts had been G-2 of USARPAC 1967-68, and MACV J2, 1969-73. This was confirmed by a telephone conversation with Gen. Potts on Jan. 25, 1980.

28. Ibid., p. 131.

29. Professor William S. Turley, The People's Army of Vietnam in War, Peace, and Politics, manuscript to be published, p. 303.

30. Turley, p. 305; PAVN Senior General Van Tien Dung, Quan doi Nhan dan, June 27, 1968, pp. 1-3; Vo Nguyan Giap, Quan doi Nhan dan, Aug 7, 1969, pp. 1-4, cited in Turley.

31. Maxwell Taylor interview, July 11, 1979; General Bruce Palmer, Army War College, May 31, 1977.

32. LTG Krulak, USMC (Ret), History and Museums Division, Headquarters US Marine Corps, (Oral History).

33. Ho Chi Minh, Selected Writings, "Appeal on the Occasion of July 20, 1969", p. 356.

34. Memorandum by Col. Edward Astarita, US Army (Ret) dated March 20, 1979, pp. 1, 2. Astarita was the Chief of General Abram's "close hold" withdrawal planning team.

35. Ibid., p. 2.

36. Fallaci, interview with Vo Nguyen Giap, p. 74.

37. Ho Chi Minh, Selected Writings, "New Year's Greetings" (Spring 1969) p. 351.

38. Franz Schurman, The Logic of World Power (NY: Pantheon Books, Random House, 1974) p. 528. Nevertheless, the change of command at MACV had been under consideration by Pres. Johnson and Gen. Wheeler, as discussed in Gen. Westmoreland's A Soldier Reports (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 361, 362. He also mentions the De Saussure incident (not by name) pp. 275, 276, but makes an error in referring to the 196th Lt. Inf. Brigade as a Bde of the 25th Inf. Div. In a BDM interview with Col. (Ret.) C. K. "Bobby" Nulson on Sept. 28, 1979, the incident about the delayed relief of De Saussure was discussed in detail; Nulsen was then a Bn. Cmdr. in the 196th Lt Inf. Bde., and participated in the opening battles of what became an enlarged and extended operation Attleboro. The Bde. was ordered to conduct a double envelopment in the jungle! The result: a fiasco with 19 US killed left on the "objective", to include one of the Battalion Commanders. Nulsen's Bn. was brought in as a reinforcement and his orders were to "Get in there and get 'em." Amid the general confusion another Battalion Commander, Major Grey Meloy, ended up trying to control seven different companies at night. S.L.A. Marshall also covers that battle in his book, Ambush.

39. Col. Hoang Ngoc Lung, ARVN, Strategy and Tactics, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph (McLean, VA: GRC, 1978), p. 127.

40. Pamphlet distributed by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc., P.O. Box 37240, Wash. D.C., 20013.

41. MG Spurgeon Neel, Medical Support of the US Army in Vietnam 1965-1970, Vietnam Studies (Wash. D.C.: Dept. of the Army, 1973), p. 53.

42. Ibid, p. 173.

43. Westmoreland, Soldier, p. 368.

44. Col Robert Cook, US Army (Ret) former MACV IG, 1967-1972. Interview at the BDM Corporation July 24, 1979. That evaluation was confirmed by LTG Donald Cowles, US Army (Ret) former Chief of Staff, MACV, in an interview Jan. 18, 1980 and by a US Artillery Sgt, who had been on Mary Ann the night it was attacked. The Sgt. briefed the officers and NCOs of the 2nd Bde, 101st Abn Div. and its supporting Artillery Bn. in late 1971, about the causes of the disaster. The sergeant was interviewed in 1971 by Colonel Thomas A. Ware.

45. David W. P. Elliott, NLF-DRV Strategy and the 1972 Spring Offensive, Interim Report No. 4, International Relations of East Asia, IREA Project (Ithaca: Cornel Univ., Jan. 1971), p. 16.

46. Douglas Pike, History of Vietnamese Communism 1925-1976 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), p. 119.

47. Telephone conversation between Thomas A. Ware of BDM and Douglas Pike February 28, 1980.

48. Douglas Pike, War, Peace and the Viet Cong (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1969), p. 149.

49. Quan doi Nhan dan, pp. 1-4 and Nhan dan, p. 2, Dec. 21, 1969; and Hanoi moi, Dec. 18, 1969, p. 2, cited in Turley, The People's Army of Vietnam in War, Peace and Politics, p. 305. See also Dave Richard Palmer, Summons of the Trumpet (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1978), pp. 245-46.

50. Le Duan's speech of October 5, 1971 to N. I. Podgorny and delegation as reported by Hanoi VNA International Service in English, 1510 GMT, Oct. 5, 1971, reproduced in Viet-Nam Documents and Research Notes no. 107, "Bases of Power in the DRV." US Mission in Viet Nam, October 1972, pp. 31-32.

51. Guenter Lewy, America in Vietnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 196.

52. Truong Chinh addresses Third Congress of Viet-Nam, Fatherland Front, December 17, 1971. Viet-Nam Documents and Research Notes, No. 107, pp. 38, 41. Hereafter cited as Document 107.

53. "Enemy said to be Building Supplies." (A.P.), New York Times, Nov. 27, 1971.

54. Henry Kissinger, The White House Years (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1979), p. 1099.

55. Document 107, p. 14.

56. Henry Kissinger, "The Viet Nam Negotiations," Foreign Affairs 47:2 (January 1969): 213-14.

57. Ibid, pp. 233, 34.

58. Richard M. Nixon, The Memoirs of Richard Nixon (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), pp. 447, 449.

59. Westmoreland, Soldier, p. 387.

60. Kissinger, White House, p. 1005. Kissinger did ask for Westmoreland's personal views on Lamson 719 when the latter was acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

61. Nixon, p. 369.

62. Charles MacDonald, An Outline History of US Policy Towards Vietnam (Washington D.C.: US Army Center of Military History, 1978), p. 74.

63. Ibid, p. 74.

64. Ibid, p. 75.

65. Based on a wide variety of sources, including Nixon Memoirs and Kissinger White House.

66. General Andrew Goodpaster, interview for US Army's Military History Institute, Oral History program, Carlisle Barracks, PA., Sect. 4, pp. 54-55. See also Kissinger, White House, pp. 41, 43, 46.

67. US Foreign Policy for the 1970's: A New Strategy for Peace, A Report to the Congress by Richard M. Nixon, February 18, 1970, pp. 128, 129.

68. Ibid, p. 127.

69. Kissinger, White House, p. 498.

70. Ibid, p. 990.

71. Ibid, p. 232.

72. Discussions with LTG Donald Cowles, USA (Ret.), Chief of Staff of MACV during that period, at BDM, November 1979 and BDM study team interview with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, 3 November 1979.

73. Kissinger, White House, p. 1111.

74. DELETED

75. MacDonald, pp. 75, 76.

76. Kissinger, White House, p. 276.

77. Westmoreland, Soldier, p. 381.

78. Discussions with Col. Edward F. Astarita, USA (Ret.), Feb. 29, 1980 with BDM study team. The figure 60,000 for a residual force was agreed between Secretary Laird and General Abrams during a visit to RVN by Laird.

79. Ibid. Kissinger also envisioned a residual force of about 50,000 by the end of 1972; see White House, p. 986, and on the cease-fire/POW return/US withdrawal issue, see p. 1306.

80. Lewy, p. 137. It should be recalled that the MACJ-52 had recommended in October 1968 that LTC Donald Marshall's LORAPL study team should write the MACV Strategic Objectives Plan. General Abrams so directed, and the plan referred to here by Lewy was the result. That plan, dated in the spring of 1969, was the first Strategic Objectives Plan prepared in MACV and as such it differed markedly from the Combined Campaign Plans which had appeared earlier.

81. Astarita discussion.

82. Kissinger, p. 1308.

83. Astarita discussion, and Kissinger, White House, pp. 475 f.

84. Goodpaster oral history, pp.53, 54. In a telephone conversation with BDM on 4 March 1980, former Undersecretary of State U. Alexis Johnson also pointed out that Laird was concerned solely with getting out of RVN.

85. Kissinger, White House, pp. 476-77.

86. The subject of RVNAF dependability was not openly discussed by US military, but it was a major concern. Discussions with Astarita and Col. Thomas A. Ware, USA (Ret.) who commanded the last US Combat Brigade (2d of 101st Abn) north of DaNang.

87. Kissinger, White House, p. 478.

88. Ibid, p. 479.

89. Commander in Chief, Pacific, and Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (U.S.G. Sharp and William Westmoreland), Report on the War in Vietnam (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1968), p. 178.

90. Gen. Cao Van Vien and LTG Dong Van Khuyen, Reflections on the Vietnam War, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph, Dept. of the Army (McLean, VA: General Research Corp.), p. 113.

91. Discussion with Astarita; Gen. Don A. Starry, Mounted Combat in Vietnam, Dept. of the Army, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 19), pp. 203, 204.

92. Reflections, pp. 112, 113.

93. Brigadier F.P. Serong, The Future of South Vietnam, Strategy Paper No. 8 (New York: National Strategy Information Center, 1971), p. 61. Brigadier Sarong worked closely with LTC Donald Marshall's LORAPL team. He was deeply concerned with the relationship and responsibilities of allies.

94. Nixon, pp. 380-84.

95. Kissinger, White House, pp. 239-254.

96. William Shawcross, Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979); Transcript of Unedited Tape Interview with David Frost and Henry Kissinger for NBC News, Special Program Broadcast October 11, 1979 (10-11 p.m.) on NBC-TV.

97. Norodom Sihanouk, letter to Col. Thomas A. Ware, dated January 14, 1969, No. 94/SPU. Copies of the original letter, in French, and the English translations given to the Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute under a cover memorandum. Subject: Personal letter from Prince Sihanouk, Cambodia, Jan. 14, 1969, dated July 24, 1978 and signed by Tom Ware.

98. Department of Defense Report on Selected Air and Ground operations in Cambodia and Laos, dated September 10, 1973, p. 1. Copy on file at BDM.

99. Ibid, p. 4.

100. Ibid, p. 25.

101. Shawcross, pp. 24-26.

102. Nixon, p. 455.

103. Ibid, pp. 449-50.

104. Ibid, p. 454.

105. Westmoreland, Soldier, p. 388.

106. MG Ennis Whitehead, Commander of US Army Concepts Analysis Agency, Memorandum on Vietnam for Thomas A. Ware, dated Feb. 4, 1980, pp. 11, 12.

107. Nixon, p. 457.

108. Kissinger, White House, p. 507.

109. Nixon, pp. 467-68.

110. BG Tran Dinh Tho, Cambodian Incursion, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph (McLean, Va: GRC, 1978), p. 171.

111. Kissinger, White House, p. 508.

112. Tran Dinh Tho, p. 172.

113. Ibid, p. 173.

114. Nixon

115. Tran Dinh Tho, pp, 181, 182.

116. Ibid, pp. 166-167.

117. Kissinger, White House, pp. 980-81, 986-990.

118. Ibid, p. 987.

119. Ibid, p. 990.

120. Nixon, p. 450.

121. MacDonald, p. 79.

122. Kissinger, White House, p. 991.

123. LTG Sidney B. Berry, letter to Thomas Ware, dated Dec. 17, 1979, p. 4.

124. MG Rathvon Tompkins, USMC (Ret), letter to J. Angus MacDonald, Feb. 11, 1980.

125. Westmoreland, Soldier, p. 389.

126. Starry, p. 187.

127. Gen. William W. Momyer, USAF (Ret), Airpower in Three Wars (Washington: US GPO, 1978), pp. 322-23.

128. MG Nguyen Duy Hinh, ARVN, Lamson 719, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph (McLean, Va: GRC, 1977), pp. 168-169.

129. Ibid, p. 55.

130. Gen. Cao Van Vien, Leadership, Indochina Refugee Authored Monographs (McLean, Va: GRC, 1978), Chapter IV presents a fairly objective analysis of the comparative leadership qualities of LTG Tri and LTG Thuong

131. Letter from LTG Berry, pp. 4-5. Then Brig Gen. Berry was the Assistant Div. Comdr., ADC (o) for the 101st US Abn Div.

132. Starry, p. 196.

133. Nguyen Duy Hinh, p. 154.

134. Ibid, p. 154.

135. Westmoreland, Soldier, p. 390.

136. Nguyen Van Thieu, quoted in "Die Amerikaner haben uns verraten," Der Spiegel, Trans. Dr. John Tashjean, BDM, Dec. 10, 1979, p. 198-213.

137. Observation of Col. Thomas Ware, who had three tours in RVN; also based on numerous discussions with both US and RVNAF officers.

138. Nguyen Duy Hinh, pp. 84-85.

139. LTG J. J. Tolson, Airmobility, 1961-1971, Dept. of Army, Vietnam Studies (Washington: Dept. of Army, 1973), p. 246.

140. Ibid, pp. 248-249.

141. Bernard Fall, Street Without Joy (Harrisburg, Pa: The Stackpole Co., 1961), pp. 42-55.

142. Nguyen Duy Hinh, pp. 131, 170.

143. Ibid, p. 113.

144. Ibid, pp. 131-133.

145. Ibid. Reported personnel and equipment losses are listed on pp. 126-131. Kissinger remarked that after the operations were over, the US learned that Thieu had placed a limit of 3,000 casualties on RVNAF, and when that was reached, the withdrawal started. Kissinger speculated that the enemy had learned of that quota and adjusted his tactics to inflict maximum casualties. White House, p. 1004.

146. Kissinger, White House, p. 1002.

147. Ibid, p. 1009.

148. Ibid, p. 1010.

149. Nixon, p. 499.

150. Gen. Berry's letter to Ware, pp. 5-6.

151. Nguyen Duy Hinh, p. 171.

152. Kissinger, White House, p. 1005.

153. Thompson and Frizzell, pp. 178-180.

154. Palmer, p. 243.

155. Momyer, p. 324.

156. Carl Berger, ed. The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1977), p. 116.

157. Tolson, pp. 251, 257-258.

158. Ibid., p. 252.

159. BG Sidney B. Berry, memorandum for the Record, Subject: Airmobile operations in support of operation Lamson 719, 20 March 1971, Headquarters 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), p. 13.

160. Ibid, p. 6.

161. Ibid, p. 14.

162. Ibid, p. 15.

163. Jack Anderson, "Soviet Copters Reflect Vietnam Lesson," Washington Post, 21 February 1980, p. Va 15.

164. Telecon with LTG (Ret.) William Potts, Jan 25, 1980; discussion with LTG (Ret.) Donald Cowles, March 10, 1979.

165. Telecon with LTG Potts.

166. Col. Thomas Ware, Cmdr of 2nd Brigade, 101st Abn Div.

167. Oral instructions from MG Thomas Tarpley, Commander of 101st Abn Div to Col. Ware, o/a 4 July 1971.

168. Discussion with Col. (Ret.) Ed Astarita, 29 February, 1980.

169. Col. Ware, and letter from MG Ennis Whitehead, 4 February, 1980, p. 12.

170. Ware, and interview with Col. (Ret.) Robert Cook, MACV IG.

171. Nguyen Duy Hinh, pp. 157-158.

172. Hosmer, p. 45; Nguyen Duy Hinh, p. 151.

173. Nguyen Duy Hinh, p. 156.

174. Ibid, p. 169.

175. Hosmer, p. 57.

176. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, p. 103.

177. Telecon with LTG Potts, and follow-on telecon with Potts Mar 10, 1980.

178. This and subsequent paragraphs on the Easter offensive in I Corps area are based on a variety of sources. Unless otherwise individually cited, the primary sources are the Indochina Refugee Authored Monographs, The Easter Offensive of 1972, Leadership, and Reflections on the Vietnam War; the Dept. of Army, Vietnam Studies, Mounted Combat in Vietnam; Hosmer et al., The Fall of South Vietnam; Maj. A.J.C. Lavalle, Air Power and the 1972 Spring Invasion, Southeast Asia Monograph Series; MG Frederick J. Kroesen, "Quang Tri, the Lost Province", Army War College, April 1974; and finally the personal experience of Col. Thomas Ware, who spent the first two days of the offensive at 3rd ARVN Div, Tactical Operations Center and on or near the DMZ.

179. Kroesen, p. 4.

180. General John Vogt, USAF (Ret) comments at BDM Senior Review Panel, February 14, 1979.

181. Starry, p. 201.

182. Ngo Quang Truong, p. 12.

183. Telecon with General Potts, March 10, 1980. Over the years, both US and RVNAF units had been alerted to possible enemy attacks on Vietnamese anniversaries, holidays, etc.; usually nothing happened, so senses were dulled.

184. Kroesen, p. 11.

185. Col. Thomas Ware met Generals Lam and Kroesen, his US senior advisor, when they landed at AI TU o/a 1600 on March 31, 1972.

186. Kroesen, pp. 5, 6, 16. On the night of March 30, in the 3d ARVN operations center, Col. Ware asked the senior US advisor present where the 3d's alternate (or fallback) defensive positions were located. The answer was that there were none.

187. The actions in all corps areas are well documented in the sources cited in end note 178. Additional insights concerning General Hollingsworth's exploits at An Loc were provided by LTG Don Cowles (Ret) in a discussion on March 10, 1980.

188. Ngo Quang Truong, Chapter VI, covers the South Vietnamese view of the multiple battles in IV Corps.

189. Kissinger, White House, p. 1098.

190. Ibid

191. Kroesen, p. 9.

192. Kissinger, pp. 1100, 1101.

193. Ibid p. 1199.

194. Nixon, pp. 606, 734.

195. Discussion with LTG Don Cowles, former Chief of Staff, MACV, March 10, 1980.

196. Kissinger, pp. 1111-1112.

197. Discussion with Gen. Cowles, who had checked certain details of his recollections with General Potts, at that time the MACV, J2.

198. B. H. Liddell Hart, Strategy (New York: Praeger, 1972), pp. 340-345.

199. Kissinger, p. 1112.

200. Discussion with Gen. Cowles.

201. Kissinger, p. 1200.

202. Ibid, p. 1116.

203. General Al Haig had agreed to an interview with BDM on Vietnam after his retirement. But upon his return to the US, he immediately became heavily involved in testimony before Congress and in his "probe" concerning a possible race for a presidential nomination.

204. Palmer, p. 255.

205. USAF views on the Easter Offensive: General William Momyer, Air Power in Three Wars; Berger, The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia; Lavalle, Airpower and the 1972 Spring Invasion; and BG Jane McCarthy and LTG George Allison, Linebacker II: A View from the Rock (Maxwell AFB, Ala: Air War College 1979).

206. Nixon, p. 587.

207. Ngo Quang Truong, pp. 175, 179.

208. Cao Van Vien, Reflections, pp. 103-105.

209. Frank Snepp, Decent Interval (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 53.

210. Sir Robert Thompson in Thompson and Frizzell, supra note 7, p. 105.

211. David W. P. Elliott, NLF-DRV Strategy and the 1972 Spring Offensive, Interim Report #4, International Relations of East Asia (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1974). A copy can be requested of BDM.

212. Ibid. p. 37.

213. BDM sent Douglas Pike a copy of the Elliott Study for review. He responded by telecon March 6, 1980.

214. Telecon with D. Pike.

215. Letter from General Fred Weyand to BDM, dated June 21, 1979.

CHAPTER 5

RVNAF STANDS AND FALLS - ALONE (1973-1975)

> But if the RVNAF were not as capable as official Washington had assumed, neither were they so weak as to render their defeat a foregone conclusion.
>
> Guenter Lewy
> America in Vietnam,
> 1978 1/

> The United States did not give additional aid. . . to the puppets [RVNAF]. . . mainly because . . . it knew very well that it could not save the puppets no matter how much more aid it gave to them.
>
> PAVN General
> Van Tien Dung
> May 22, 1976 2/

A. INTRODUCTION

With the signing of the Paris Agreements in January 1973, the United States' war in Vietnam was over, but the fighting was not. Key American policymakers believed that the way was now paved for "the peoples of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia [to] . . attain at long last a future of tranquility, security, and progress, a future worthy of their sacrifices." 3/ Just two and a half years later not only had the peace proved illusory, but all non-communist Indochina had collapsed before North Vietnamese military force. Only ten years after the United States had committed itself unambiguously to the survival of a non-communist South Vietnam, the Republic of South Vietnam ceased to exist.

The reasons for the collapse of South Vietnam are many. It may be argued that South Vietnam was never a viable state, that its entire existence was dependent on external props, and that, therefore, it was doomed to fail after US withdrawal. Certainly, a combination of historical, international, political, psychological and economic factors influenced South Vietnam's ability to function and survive. (Volume II looks at RVN in depth.) Yet despite the importance of these various factors, in the end

South Vietnam succumbed to military defeat. And the end, when it came, was so rapid that it surprised not only many of South Vietnam's friends but also its critics and even, to an extent, the enemy.

Much can be learned from a look at the swan song of South Vietnam as an independent state. The object of this chapter is, therefore, to trace the critical developments of the last two and a half years and highlight the forces that contributed most immediately to the military collapse of the RVNAF. The main issues are: why did the RVNAF collapse so quickly, and was this collapse of the RVNAF inevitable?

B. THE PARIS AGREEMENTS

The history of Saigon's final days must begin with the Paris Agreements which shaped, perhaps determined, the course of subsequent events. The negotiations leading to the Paris Agreements are discussed in depth in Chapter 7, Volume V; however, a summary of US, North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese objectives and their perceptions of the Agreements is critical to understanding subsequent behavior.

1. The US Perspective

Of the main participants in Paris, it was the United States which valued the signing of the Agreements most highly. Opposition to the war had long since reached such proportions as to make American continuation of the war politically unacceptable. That opposition, the election campaign and the emotional aspect of the POW/MIA issue all pressured the Nixon Administration to find a "solution" as soon as possible. The United States, quite simply, was in a hurry to get out of Vietnam once it had gained return of POWs and promise of information on MIAs. The administration wanted at least the appearance of peace with "honor" and held a muted but continued desire for South Vietnamese survival.

US policy makers may have genuinely believed that South Vietnam could survive on its own under the terms of the treaty. Kissinger's tone of hope in his conclusion to The White House Years seems to imply this, 4/ and even Tran Van Don credits Kissinger with believing that "South Vietnam

with a standing army 1,100,000 strong would have nothing to fear from the presence of 140,000 members of North Vietnamese units stationed on its territory." 5/ It would appear that the US had North Vietnamese assurances that the NVA would stop using Laos and Cambodia as bases and would stop infiltrating troops into South Vietnam - and may even have believed those assurances. 6/

It is clear that the United States would brook no argument from the GVN, which would endanger the peace process. Messages from Washington to Saigon made it evident to the GVN that a bilateral, US-North Vietnamese agreement was entirely possible if the South Vietnamese failed to cooperate. 7/ And, furthermore, it was implied that in the event of a separate Washington - Hanoi agreement, US aid to the Saigon government would cease.

Thus, while US interest in the survival of a non-communist South Vietnam had not completely evaporated, that interest had become obscured by the more pressing interest of finding an "honorable" and quick way out of Vietnam. The short-term advantages of concluding a treaty quickly led US policy makers to prefer the "bird-in-the-hand" of the Paris Agreements to any more lengthy negotiations. Then, to make the Agreements palatable to Saigon, the US promised open-ended and apparently unlimited aid to South Vietnam in the event that the Agreements were broken. Whether these promises were insincere or merely politically unrealistic, subsequent events indicate they were primarily tools for achieving America's short-term objectives (a GVN acceptance of the Paris Agreements), and not a deep US commitment to enforce the agreements or maintain the independence of South Vietnam. 8/

2. The North Vietnamese Perspective

The most critical and striking aspect of the North Vietnamese position at Paris was that their long-range objectives had not changed. North Vietnam still sought the reunification of Vietnam under the Hanoi government or rather the Lao Dong Party leadership. The North Vietnamese did not sign the Agreements to signify any fundamental change in their policy, but instead for the sake of tactical advantages which they expected to derive from the Agreement. 9/

Why Hanoi perceived tactical advantages from the Agreement is not difficult to comprehend. That North Vietnam did not win all of its demands is by no means evidence that it did not stand to gain substantially from the Agreements as they were actually signed. First and foremost, North Vietnam benefited directly and immensely from the US withdrawal, including, of course, an end to US bombing. It benefited from the "in place" nature of the cease-fire that left substantial numbers of PAVN troops in South Vietnam, and it benefited from the international recognition awarded the National Liberation Front through the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord.

Furthermore, North Vietnam viewed the Paris Agreements as essentially temporary - an experiment to see if they could gain more under the conditions created by the Agreements than through force of arms. As early as 1966 the North Vietnamese had recognized the potential benefits of some sort of agreement with its opponents but had stressed that "whether or not the war will resume after the conclusion of agreements depends on the comparative balance of forces. If we are capable of dominating the adversary [without war] the war will not break out again, and conversely." 10/

Uninhibited by any significant internal constraints to live by the Agreements, and unrestrained by the International Control Commission which was, at best, ineffective, North Vietnam had nothing to lose by signing the Agreements except giving up some US POWs. There was much to gain. In the end, it virtually disregarded the Agreements from the beginning, and used them most vigorously as propaganda tools as the following quote from Van Tien Dung demonstrates:

> In order to protect the Paris Agreement [from US efforts to continue a "neo-colonialist war of aggression"] and our revolutionary gains, we had to follow a path of revolutionary violence, rely on our military and political forces and resolutely counterattack and attack the enemy until we won total victory. 11/

3. The South Vietnamese Perspective

There is no question that the South Vietnamese were the reluctant signatories to the Paris Agreements. That was not the result of any GVN opposition to the peace process itself nor did it stem from any GVN illusion about their ability to achieve more on the battlefield than through negotiation. On the contrary, President Thieu contends that: "We [the South Vietnamese] had had enough war and were determined to end it by negotiation." 12/ However, South Vietnamese leaders perceived major, perhaps fatal, flaws in the Agreements as they had been drafted by the Americans and North Vietnamese.

Fundamentally, the South Vietnamese identified three principal faults with the Agreements. First, they allowed North Vietnamese troops to remain in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Second, they provided for an "in-place" cease-fire which did not even concentrate those troops in a manner in which compliance with the Agreements could be monitored. And third, the Agreements, by establishing a Committee of Concord and National Reconciliation, gave legitimacy to the National Liberation Front (despite its serious weakness at that time) and set the stage for a possible "coalition government" which the GVN saw as the end to its own independence. 13/

The GVN felt that these faults in combination meant that: "South Vietnam had to accept an agreement which was much too disadvantageous to its survival. It was the Paris Agreement which tilted the balance of power to the communist side and gave North Vietnam a free hand to launch its offensive in 1975." 14/ In short, South Vietnamese leaders believed that "the Paris Agreement of January 1973 served only the immediate purposes of the United States and the North Vietnamese. It enabled President Nixon to keep his promise to the American people. . . [and] offered North Vietnam the favorable conditions to pursue its conquest of South Vietnam." 15/ It "succeeded only in bringing about a return of American prisoners of war and the extraction of US forces while leaving the Saigon government to deal with a legitimized and reinforced communist presence in the South." 16/

Given those attitudes, it is not surprising that the GVN was essentially coerced into signing. Pressured by American messages that a separate peace between the US and the Hanoi government was entirely possible, the GVN was left with the option of continuing the fight without US aid or signing the Agreements despite their drawbacks. "Thieu gave in, realizing that to continue the fight without American support would result in a grand disaster, as long as the enemy was still backed by its powerful allies." 17/ In addition, the reverse side of the US threats to conclude a separate peace with Hanoi was the oft-repeated promises of the Nixon Administration (and Nixon personally) to provide aid to the RVN both under the terms of the treaty and in the event of major treaty violations by the North Vietnamese. Without these assurances of American support, it is possible that Thieu might not have been induced to sign the Agreements. 18/

Promises of future aid, in addition to sweetening the otherwise bitter prospect of signing the Agreements, were interpreted by a number of South Vietnamese leaders including Thieu, as signaling a continued strong American commitment to the RVN. 19/ Other leaders, however, including Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam and General Cao Van Vien, considered that South Vietnam had been completely abandoned as soon as they saw the terms of the Agreement. 20/ Those conflicting perceptions of America's attitude toward Vietnam were to remain important influences on GVN thinking, planning and reactions.

4. The Legacy

The legacy of the Paris Agreements were military, political and psychological. Militarily, just as Thieu had argued, the Agreements placed South Vietnam in a nearly impossible geo-strategic position. Not only was South Vietnam once again vulnerable to infiltration along its long coastline because of the withdrawal of the US 7th Fleet, but the Agreements in effect sanctioned continued use by the NVA of Cambodian and Laotian bases, and infiltration along South Vietnam's long border therefore continued and accelerated. A year after signing the Agreements, a senior US official would admit that "the ARVN. . . is putting up a hell of a fight but as long as the North Vietnamese can infiltrate, the government can't win."21/

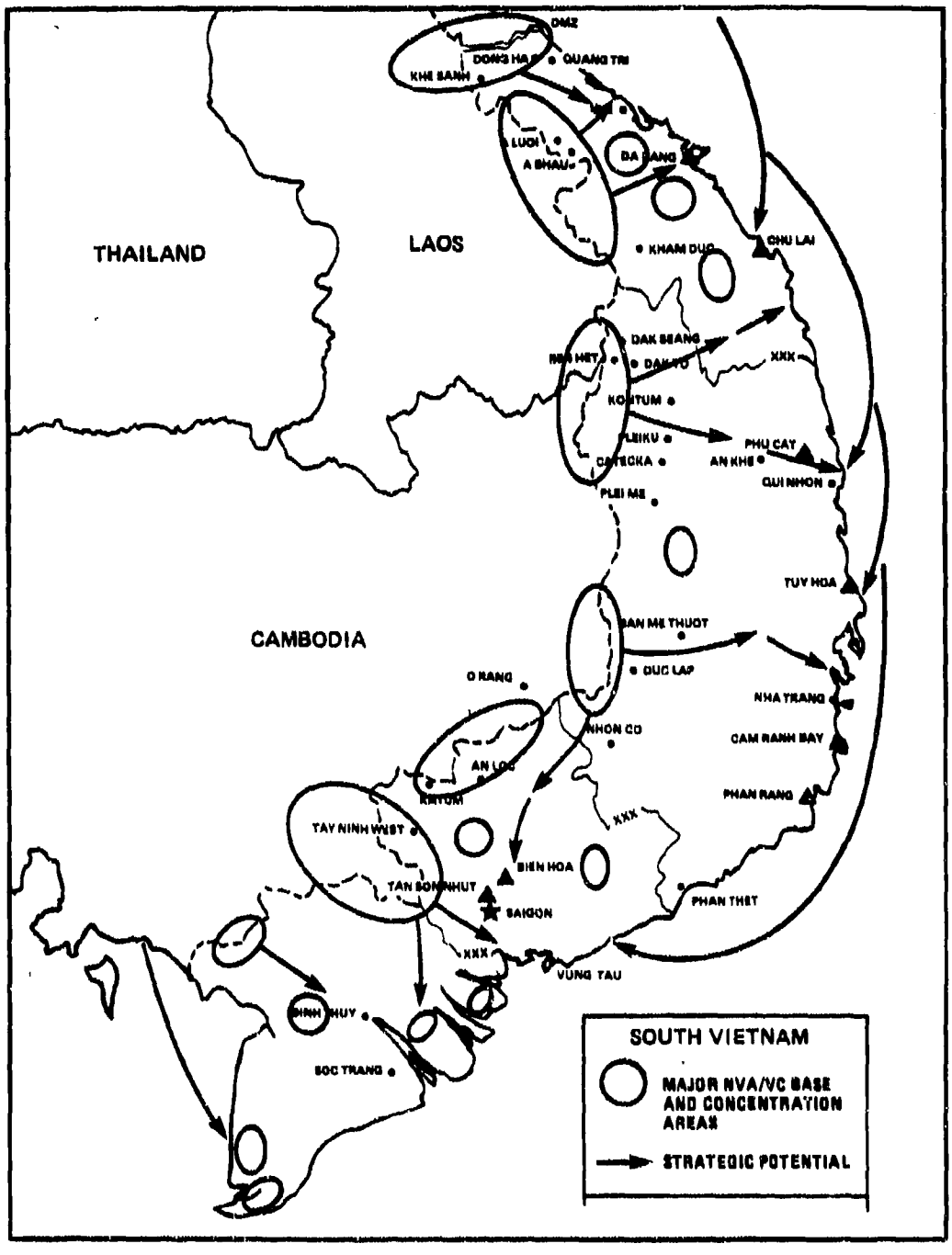
Compounding the continued infiltration were the "leopard spots" of NVA troops which the Agreements allowed to remain in South Vietnam. Those troops amounted to 11 NVA divisions and roughly 24 separate regiments. 22/ The nature of the "in place" cease-fire invited those troops to grab as much territory as possible immediately before the Agreements went into effect - or whenever the International Control Commission wasn't looking. Between the need to watch the long borders and the "leopard spots," the ARVN was forced to spread itself thinly rather than to concentrate. (See Map 5-1 for a graphic depiction of the geo-strategic position of South Vietnam in Jan 1973). General Westmoreland later summarized the situation as follows:

> The cease-fire agreement of 1973 . . . legitimatized the tactical position of the enemy, putting him in an excellent position for later operations, while at the same time dictating dispersion of South Vietnamese forces. . . 23/

From those military advantages and the symbolic victory of the National Council for Reconciliation and Concord, the government in Hanoi gained significant political victories. These are perhaps most elegantly and forcefully summarized by President Thieu speaking in an interview with Oriana Fallaci:

> . . .to tolerate the presence of 300,000 North Vietnamese, sanctioned by a juridical agreement, ratified by an international conference and therefore by the whole world, is absolutely unacceptable. Because it's like recognizing their right to call themselves liberators, their right to maintain that Vietnam is one country from Hanoi to Saigon, but belonging to Hanoi and not Saigon. . . I maintain that to accept an army of 300,000 soldiers in a country means to recognize the sovereignty of such an army over that country. 24/

Worded more simply, it was the opinion of Generals Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen that "never since 1954 had the communists enjoyed such a strong political and military posture." 25/



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SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

Map 5-1. Geo-Strategic Vulnerability of RVN After the In-Place Ceasefire, January 1973

As events unfolded, a legacy nearly as significant as the changes in the objective military situation was the psychological legacy of US promises. US assurances of aid in the event North Vietnam seriously violated the Agreements were so explicit, came from such high quarters (Nixon himself) and were repeated enough, that South Vietnamese leaders had every reason to believe they would be honored. 26/ The fall of Nixon and the greatly expanded power of the US Congress could not be anticipated in Saigon. Faith in US response to North Vietnamese aggression was to have a tragic impact on South Vietnamese behavior in the years after the Agreement was signed.

Finally, one legacy was most notable by its absence - peace. When the Paris Agreement came into force, "there was not even one hour of peace." 27/ Guenter Lewy in his book, America in Vietnam, claims that: "No sooner had the agreement been signed than North Vietnam started violating it." 28/ And "with the assured expectation that American military and economic aid would continue. . . on the one for one basis permitted by the agreement, the South Vietnamese took an eye for an eye in the early exchanges." 29/ The International Control Commission was not permitted to function freely in PAVN/NLF and thus was impotent. By May 1974, a US Senate Staff report was declaring: "Although both sides continue to charge the other with ceasefire violations, lack of respect for the Agreement is so widespread that it is impossible to apportion responsibility for the continued fighting." 30/ That the fighting continued and gradually escalated was not in doubt.

C. THE NORTH VIETNAMESE POSITION AFTER PARIS

1. Allies

Although the United States had been a major participant at Paris and thereby had given public evidence of its declining willingness to provide unlimited support to South Vietnam, North Vietnam's allies had made no similar indication. Whereas public opinion in the United States had turned against continued US participation in the war, the Soviet Union and

the PRC were not subject to such internal pressures. Furthermore, far from being discouraged by the course of events in Indochina, North Vietnam's principal ally, the USSR, was encouraged by the progress being made toward communist victory. The US withdrawal and the favorable terms of the Paris Agreement could only be interpreted optimistically in Moscow and inspire an intensification of support for their client state. Such support took the form of extensive economic and military aid, mostly from the USSR. New heavy weapons were supplied in quantities that far exceeded the one-for-one replacement levels permitted by the Paris Agreement, thereby allowing the NVA to increase, not just maintain, equipment levels in the South.31/ Although "no precise figures on the amount of heavy weapons supplied to Hanoi are available. . . .they are known to include T-54 tanks, heavy (130mm) artillery pieces, the latest portable air-defense systems armed with surface-to-air missiles (SAM-2, SAM-3 and SAM-6) and mobile, quadruple-mounted antiaircraft guns, plus large quantities of ammunition for all the above." 32/

Quite apart from the clear military value of this aid, the continued, undiminished support of powerful allies was a major psychological advantage for the North Vietnamese. Those supplies represented increasing technological capability, and ensured that operations would not be inhibited by equipment or ammunition shortages. The DRV was virtually guaranteed tactical superiority vis-a-vis the South Vietnamese. It was clear that North Vietnam did not stand alone and could count on continued aid in the long run. North Vietnam did not have to fight under the handicap of having been visibly abandoned by its superpower ally.

2. Economy

The economy of North Vietnam also benefited from continued allied support and aid, 33/ but far more significantly from the end of US involvement. With US withdrawal came the end of US strategic bombing and the clearing of mines from North Vietnamese harbors. While the strategic bombing of the North may not have crushed Hanoi's will to resist, it had been a significant economic and military handicap, particularly damaging to infrastructure and domestic production capacity. The mining of Haiphong

and other harbors had inhibited the importation of needed materiel. With the end of US participation in the war, the process of reconstruction (especially with Soviet help) could get underway, and with the harbors open the import of needed military and economic supplies was facilitated. Inevitably, the economic situation in North Vietnam began to improve immediately after the Paris Agreement came into force. (By 1980 the economy was faltering badly, but that was not yet the case in 1975.)

3. Military Position

As soon as the terms of the Paris Agreements (allowing for an "in-place" cease-fire) had become clear to the North Vietnamese in late 1972, an effort was made to increase their "in-place" position before the treaty was actually signed. The North Vietnamese realized that wherever they could raise their flag, even if their control was extremely superficial or represented an occupation rather than a government, any efforts by the GVN to regain that lost territory would constitute cease-fire violations after the Agreements were signed. That was a game that two could play, of course, and the RVNAF had rapidly caught on to the communist intentions and retaliated in kind. A mad dash ensued to seize nominal control over a maximum number of hamlets and outposts in the "battle of the flags". While this cooled off in intensity after the official announcement of the cease-fire, North Vietnamese efforts to improve their military position certainly did not.

Although estimates vary concerning the size of NVA buildup of troop strength in the South, it is clear that North Vietnamese forces in the South grew substantially after the cease-fire. General Timmes contends that: "In the first year of the cease-fire, NVA combat strength within South Vietnam had increased by roughly 20,000 men to a total of 200,000. . ." 34/ Guenter Lewy places increases in NVA strength in the South at 45,000 men by early March 1974, up to 185,000 men, 35/ and the Senate staff report of May 1974 reports that: "US intelligence sources believe that since the cease-fire some 100,000 North Vietnamese have entered South Vietnam in violation of the Agreement." 36/

These troop increases were accompanied by major increases in equipment; "the number of 122mm and 130mm guns had increased from under 100 to more than 350, and tanks from about 100 to more than 400." 37/ Other sources stress increases in antiaircraft weapons as well as artillery and armored vehicles. 38/ While specific data are scarce, it is virtually self-evident that the massive Soviet arms exports to North Vietnam were intended for use by the NVA against South Vietnam and that large portions of those exports found their way into South Vietnam, or Cambodian and Laotian bases, before the 1975 offensive. 39/

But, as the Senate staff report of 1974 says, "perhaps the most significant strategic development [of 1973-1974] was the creation by the North Vietnamese of a secure base of operations in the western border highlands of South Vietnam." 40/ This "base of operations" was not merely a sanctuary from which to launch tactical attacks, but was a very expensive and complicated network of roads, storehouses and pipelines clearly designed for a major offensive. The Senate staff report of 1974 described it as follows:

> The principal features of this logistical complex are a newly constructed road system within South Vietnam extending from the DMZ southward into Quang Duc province. . .; the extension of the alternate Ho Chi Minh road system in Laos to the Tri-border (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) area; the improvement of six old airfields in the northern highlands; the lengthening of the North Vietnamese petroleum pipeline through Laos to the tri-border area with lateral lines into the A Shau valley and Quang Tin province and the building of an alternate pipeline across the DMZ into Quang Tri province; and the construction of extensive permanent petroleum and supply storage facilities in a number of locations.41/

Such extensive construction can only reflect long-term strategic planning which, unmolested by US air attacks, proceeded rapidly to give North Vietnam the kind of strategic position it needed for a final campaign.

Cumulatively, those improvements in troop strength, equipment and logistics bases gave to the NVA what General Westmoreland described as "overwhelming. . .strength in men and weapons." 42/

4. Political Objectives and Perceptions

That build up of troops and support systems provided proof, if there was any doubt, that the North Vietnamese objectives with regard to South Vietnam remained unchanged. Hanoi sought nothing short of the reunification of Vietnam under a communist government. 43/ Adherence to the Paris Agreement had "always been considered necessary only as long as it advanced the goal of liberating the South." 44/ The decision that more could be gained by breaking the Agreement than from abiding by it must have been made very early on because Van Tien Dung claims that in June of 1973 he "plainly told Kissinger" that North Vietnam saw no reason for continuing to respect the Agreement. 45/

It was probably another year, however, before North Vietnam decided upon an all-out military offensive against the RVN in the near future. That decision was precipitated largely by astute assessments of the changing political climate in the United States. Congressional actions to reduce financial aid to RVN were noted in Hanoi and interpreted (rightly) as indications of declining US commitment to the GVN. General Giap had, after all, insisted throughout the war that North Vietnam would win because the American will to win would falter. 46/ Starting with the first US troop withdrawal, Giap's view was increasingly confirmed in North Vietnamese eyes.

Equally important, however, was the fall of Nixon. The Watergate and the serious paralysis of presidential power that surrounded that crisis inevitably encouraged Hanoi to believe that the US would not respond to North Vietnamese military actions against the RVN. The Congress was unsympathetic to South Vietnam's needs and the Executive branch, as a result of Watergate, was temporarily impotent.

The temporary nature of the presidential crisis may have been instrumental in convincing the North Vietnamese to act as rapidly as possible. The North Vietnamese, recognizing the advantage they now possessed,

were anxious to seize it and convert it in to total victory. General Dung described the North Vietnamese viewpoint as follows:

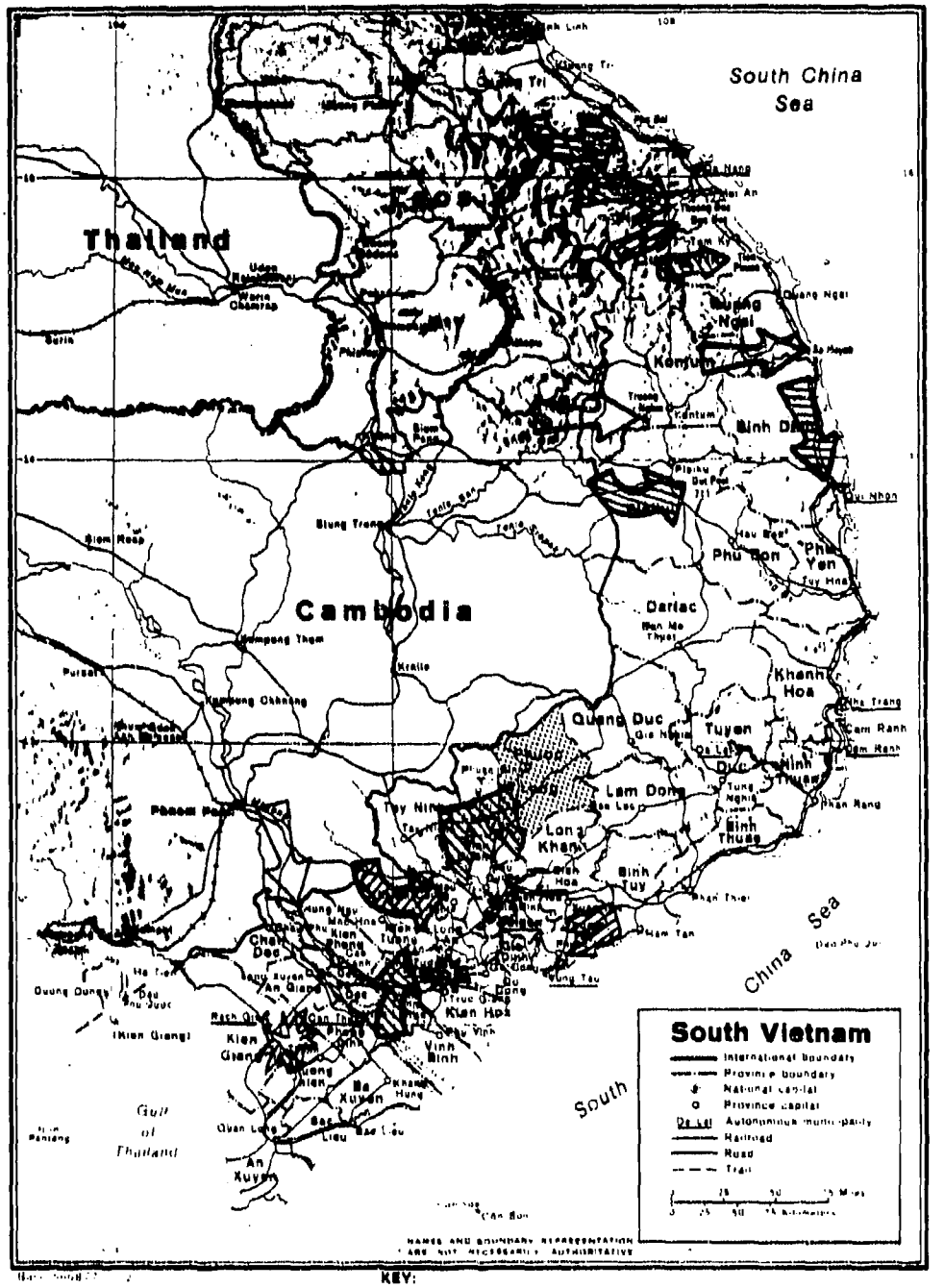
> . . .the balance of forces had changed to our favor. Therefore, we could and had to shift from attacking chiefly to destroy vital enemy forces to attacking . . .to liberate the people and hold the land. . 47/

5. Strategy and Action

With an eye toward launching a full-scale and conventional attack in the not too distant future, Hanoi sought to achieve a number of objectives in the meantime. First, any "international campaign to put a stop to the flow of aid to Saigon was as important as the endless flow of Russian ships unloading war materials in Haiphong" and was therefore to be encouraged. 48/ That required a propaganda campaign in which a blend of fact and fiction was essential. "What Hanoi needed was a climate of international opinion, but especially American opinion, to ensure that the US Congress did not rise in the defense of its ally when the guns started firing. . . ." 49/

Militarily, North Vietnam set out to cautiously test US resolve, their own strength vis-à-vis the ARVN and to gain some "lessons learned" which would be useful in the major campaign ahead. 50/ As a beneficial side effect, the NVA hoped to inflict large casualties on the ARVN and seize territory that would be useful for a full-scale offensive. General Dung places special emphasis on the capture of the district capital of Thuang Duc. Repeated attacks by the ARVN's Airborne Division failed to dislodge the North Vietnamese from their position, and Dung interprets this as a victory for the PAVN. General Timmes, in contrast, claims that the Airborne Division successfully halted the enemy advance. In either case, Thuang Duc was captured and the Airborne Division suffered heavy casualties. 51/ (See Map 5-2 for a summary of communist offensives in 1973-1974.)

The ARVN was quite successful at responding to the many NVA attacks in 1973 and 1974. For the most part the enemy had made only modest territorial gains, but the heavy casualties inflicted on the ARVN



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SOURCE: Charles Timmes, Vietnam Summary: Military Operations After the Cease-Fire Agreement, pp. 61, 70, 72, 73, and 74

Map 5-2. Communist Offensives - 1973, 1974

inevitably sapped morale; equally important, the North Vietnamese strategy of attacking in widely dispersed areas successfully exhausted the ARVN's mobile units. 52/ General Timmes summarized the situation as follows:

> By the end of 1974, the GVN forces recovered all strategic areas captured by the NVA earlier in the year. However, the NVA succeeded in causing severe casualties to the ARVN and in overextending the ARVN units, thereby adversely affecting morale. 53/

D. THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE POSITION AFTER PARIS

1. Allies

The United States, when she entered the war in Vietnam, was widely believed to be the most powerful nation on earth and certainly the wealthiest. Yet, ultimately, this ally proved less faithful and less effective as an ally than did North Vietnam's allies. Volumes III and IV examine, in depth, the shift in mood and policy in the United States over time. A few paragraphs, highlighting some of the key factors with relevance to the post-Paris years, should therefore suffice here.

Throughout the war United States involvement had been handicapped by a variety of factors characteristic of a democratic society. For example, the USG was reluctant to allow their own military to control political institutions in Vietnam; and they wished to see the GVN adopt more democratic practices within South Vietnam. 54/ Another problem was that being a pluralistic society, Americans frequently adopted foreign policy stands out of compromise between conflicting goals. Those attitudes produced policies which appeared inconsistent.

> The push for greater South Vietnamese military strength was incompatible with the push for greater democracy and freedom. The Americans wanted the South Vietnamese government to create a broader political base and reduce corruption, but they supported Thieu. The Americans gave the South Vietnamese a military machine that was inherently costly to maintain and operate, and then wanted them to reduce military costs and operate with far less aid. 55/

Finally, US policy kept changing. Former Generals Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen in their Reflections on the Vietnam War, criticize the Americans not merely for creating an RVNAF dependent on expensive equipment and tactics far beyond Vietnam's domestic capacity to produce and maintain, but also for failing to warn the GVN of how long aid would continue and to what levels; long-range planning by the JGS was made impossible by the American system of annual congressional budgets. 56/

But even more devastating for South Vietnam's future than those institutional handicaps, was the psychological climate in the United States as the war progressed. During the 1968 Tet Offensive, the US suffered a psychological defeat which, when compounded by the Middle East War, the subsequent oil embargo, the Watergate crisis and finally, the resignation of a president, ultimately destroyed American will to remain involved in Southeast Asia. 57/ After Tet 1968, the United States moved inexorably toward complete disengagement, step by step: troop reductions, negotiations, nonenforcement of the Paris Agreement, aid reductions, and finally abandonment in the midst of crisis.

After January 1973, the most critical events were the US failure to enforce the Paris Agreements, the War Powers Resolution of November 1973, the dramatic cuts in aid to South Vietnam, and the resignation of Nixon. Hosmer, Kellin and Jenkins concluded from their interviews with South Vietnamese civilian and military leaders that: "Even more pernicious than the Agreements themselves, according to respondents, was the fact that violations of the Agreements were tolerated by the United States." 58/ This American inaction worried South Vietnamese leaders more than did the violations themselves - which had been anticipated. 59/ The War Powers Resolution restricted the power of the executive branch (Vietnam's staunchest friend in the US government) to use military force in hostilities outside the United States, and gave Congress (which by then was not particularly sympathetic to South Vietnam) considerable power to limit or terminate any executive efforts to aid South Vietnam militarily. Meanwhile, Congress reduced aid to South Vietnam from $2.27 billion in fiscal year 1973, to 1.01 billion in fiscal 1974 and then to just .7 billion in fiscal

1975. 60/ Finally, the resignation of Richard Nixon, as it turned out, erased the promises made personally by him to aid the RVN in the event of major PAVN attacks. The United States, weary of the Vietnam War and preoccupied with difficulties at home and in other parts of the world, had essentially lost interest in the plight of South Vietnam.

2. The Economy

Even before the full military impact of US withdrawal from Vietnam was felt, the economic impact was obvious. The drop in US aid by then quickly cut into South Vietnam's ability to finance imports. An economy addicted to such imports as nitrate fertilizers (for the production of high-yield rice) and petroleum for everything from irrigation pumps to motorcycles and out-board motors for sampans, found itself with less and less money available to purchase those necessities. The reduction in US aid was aggravated by global and local inflation, especially the fourfold increase in oil prices, which further shrank the value of US aid. 61/

But while prices rose and shortages started to appear, more and more Vietnamese were out of work. The departure of the Americans eliminated large numbers of jobs directly and indirectly, and took money out of the economy. Higher taxes, higher prices, and lower incomes beset the average Vietnamese household. And economic hardship inevitably began to undermine morale. 62/ (See Chapter 4, "Economy", in Volume II.)

3. Military Position

As early as 1970 some American analysts had recognized that:

> . . .there is the danger that as we "Vietnamize" the war, our institutional rigidity will cause us to impose our doctrine, our organization, and our technology on the Vietnamese armed forces to the point that they might be rendered incapable of successfully continuing the war after our withdrawal. 63/

It is now widely believed that this is, in large measure, what happened. Although some individuals, for example Vice Defense Minister Biu Vien, believe that the outcome of the war would have been the same, regardless of the force structure of the ARVN, 64/ the dependence on American technology was indisputable. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen argue that: "the

strength of South Vietnam and its armed forces had been built primarily on foreign aid, not on its national resources." 65/ Thus, as US aid decreased, the fighting capacity of the RVNAF also decreased. "By the fall of 1974 available funds were no longer sufficient to allow the one-for-one replacement in lost aircraft, tanks or artillery pieces permitted by the Paris agreement, and almost all funds had to be used for fuel, ammunition, medical supplies and technical assistance." 66/ Soon even ammunition stocks had dropped by over 25%. 67/ Finally, Thieu felt forced to institute strict munitions rationing of one hand grenade per man per month; 85 rifle bullets per man, per month; four rounds of 105mm artillery ammunition per howitzer, per day and two rounds for the 155s. 68/ General Vien described the situation as follows:

> When military aid was reduced, our forces plummeted from a state of material abundance to one of privation, and this seriously downgraded our combat capabilities and troop morale. 69/

General Westmoreland described the situation more simply when he said it was one of "appalling shortages in the South Vietnamese military forces of spare parts and ammunition". 70/

Quite aside from these equipment shortages, the absence of the Americans left huge gaps in the Vietnamese military structure which the Vietnamese were not prepared to fill. The South Vietnamese Air Force, for one, was simply not of a calibre to provide the same kind of effective and comprehensive tactical and strategic air support that the ARVN had become accustomed to receiving from the USAF. A second area of difficulty was the logistical system. In a report submitted to the Department of Defense, at the end of his tour of duty as Army Attache' to the Republic of Vietnam, Colonel Richard A. McMahon noted that:

> . . .the ARVN supply system has not yet managed to fully cope with the requirements of its units in the field. Much of the fault rests with the US for allowing ARVN to inherit a logistics system far too complicated for them to manage. 71/

Finally, in the area of strategic planning the US practice of working up all joint plans independently and submitting them to the Vietamese for their approval only, and not for their contribution, inevitably failed to train Vietnamese commanders and staffs in long-term planning. Corps Commanders like Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong of I Corp noted that "after the US withdrawal, command and control from Saigon became weak, as did planning." 72/ It has been said that after the Americans left, Saigon had no real strategy at all. 73/

Long before the American withdrawal, South Vietnam was known to suffer from inadequate leadership in the armed forces, but after the US had departed this weakness became more acute as a result of the greater military burden which now had to be shouldered by Vietnamese officers. For the first time in their history, Vietnamese commanders had no French or American officers to fall back on for guidance and assistance.

Vietnamese leadership was handicapped by that very history of dependence. General Cao Van Vien claimed that as a result of the French colonial experience, the military profession came to be regarded as a lowly profession because it was associated with "servility and collaborationism." 74/ Furthermore, he contended that Western principles of leadership which presuppose ideological unity and loyalty to the national leadership were unworkable in Vietnam because the unity and loyalty were lacking. 75/ As a result of those factors, RVNAF leaders were selected by the government primarily on the basis of political loyalty rather than competence alone, and the quality of leadership could not necessarily be very high.

At the lower levels politics were less a factor, but where senior officers were corrupt or incompetent they did not generally inspire high performance from subordinates, and the long war had taken its toll of the more competent and dedicated junior officers. 76/

"Vietnamization" had inadequately addressed those shortcomings, if it was possible to do so at all. When North Vietnam began its final push in 1975, it faced essentially the same quality of leadership of the RVNAF that it had faced in the past but without any stiffening from France or the United States.

Among the rank and file of the RVNAF, one of the most serious problems was the low rate of pay. The Senate staff report of May 1974 summarized the plight of ARVN soldiers as follows:

> Between January 1973 and May 1974, the cost of living in South Vietnam increased over 100 percent while military salaries increased only 25 percent. . .the average South Vietnamese soldier receives only 1/3 the amount required to support an average family. The impact of inflation on the individual soldier has been compounded by the disappearance of American supported jobs which previously provided supplemental income for soldiers and their families. 77/

Such a situation could not but seriously impair the morale and thereby the combat effectiveness of the ARVN.

Unfortunately, morale was being assaulted by a variety of other factors as well. The low pay and the low standard of living for soldiers was aggravated by the corruption common in higher ranks which frequently allowed officers, especially more senior ones, to live far beyond what their salaries would allow. Another morale-eroding factor was the length of the war and the increasingly dim prospects of a satisfactory ending now that the Americans were gone. Drafted "for the duration" in a war that had already lasted more than 20 years, soldiers could hardly be expected to perform with great enthusiasm.

But worst of all, no doubt, was the obvious deterioration of the RVNAF's material resources (the shortages of ammunition, equipment, spare parts and petroleum), and the decline in air support, artillery support and medical support occasioned by the American withdrawal. The South Vietnamese soldier felt he no longer had the means to fight against an increasingly well supplied enemy and he felt he was being asked to bear too heavy a burden without sufficient support and without sufficient reward. Finally, he, like most Vietnamese, felt he had been abandoned by the United States. That sense of abandonment, combined with a deteriorating economic and military situation, undermined the ARVN's self-confidence and tended to create a mood of fatalism concerning the final outcome of the war. 78/

4. Political Objectives and Perceptions

In light of the fundamental changes which had affected South Vietnam's international and domestic position, a new strategy designed to cope with the new environment would have been in order. Instead, the GVN tried to go on as before as if nothing had really changed. They underestimated Hanoi's determination to conquer the South, and they failed to see -or believe - what their enemies had clearly seen: that the US commitment had completely disintegrated. 79/ To the very end, leaders in the GVN continued to expect fulfillment of the Nixon promises despite the diminishing aid which demoralized the troops. The belief that the B-52s would return in a crisis lay behind GVN strategy. The failure of that hope to materialize was instrumental in the final, psychological collapse of the RVN. In retrospect, Cao Van Vien was to write:

> South Vietnamese leaders failed to realize that US policy had shifted toward appeasement and accommodation with the communists even at the price of reneging on a commitment to help an ally achieve self-determination. Therefore, they could not adjust to the realities of the post agreement period but continued to stake South Vietnam's fate on the elusive and the impossible.80/

Militarily that meant a continuation of the inflexible Thieu policy of surrendering no territory to the enemy. Such a policy required spreading the RVNAF thinly and virtually ensured that the enemy could achieve tactical superiority wherever he chose to concentrate and attack. With such tactical superiority, the enemy was also virtually assured of initial success against the single line of defense employed by the RVNAF, which had no provision for defense in depth. 81/ Thieu's strategy also meant restricting ARVN mobility, as even when an attack developed, there would be few or no reserves to reinforce the garrisons under attack without seriously weakening or abandoning defenses in another region. With US aid in equipment also dwindling, the South Vietnamese forces were denied even superiority of firepower to compensate for the lack of troops. The dispersed deployment of ARVN forces also complicated supply, command and control problems, areas in which the South Vietnamese were already weak.

Finally, the strategy was essentially rigid, thereby providing the enemy with a clearly defined situation and leaving with him all the initiative. 82/

South Vietnamese military leaders were not blind to the disadvantages of Thieu's military strategy, and they sought ways to minimize these disadvantages. Especially noteworthy in this sphere were efforts to increase the size and mobility of the "General Reserve." Throughout the years of US ground-force involvement in Vietnam, the RVNAF had been asked to play primarily a territorial defense role. As a result, ARVN infantry units lacked experience in mobility and had, meanwhile, become tied to their particular region by family ties and familiarity with local conditions. Efforts to reinforce hard-pressed areas with infantry units from other regions had been notably unsuccessful. Without mobile US units available, the GVN was dependent on just two mobile divisions: the Airborne Division and the Marines. This lack of mobile reserves was to have a dramatic, negative impact on the last campaign as was the generally territorial nature of the RVNAF. If the JGS had succeeded in building up a larger mobile reserve, at least some of the chaos of the last months might have been prevented; but the JGS, like Thieu, continued to expect a return of the B-52s if the military situation became very bad.

Politically, the failure to perceive the changes in the external environment also entailed a continuation of the status quo. Not only was there no serious effort to move toward a government of national reconciliation involving members of the opposition (and some Vietnamese believed such a government was possible), 83/ but Thieu clearly sought to retain power personally. He amended the constitution to enable himself to run for reelection and retained essentially the same cabinet and practices of "cronyism" as before the ceasefire. 84/ Meanwhile, ". . .corruption in Vietnam had reached such staggering proportions that it now exceeded[ed] all known bounds even by Asian standards." 85/ Corruption had been tolerated to a certain extent as long as Americans were present in large numbers. Most corrupt practices were viewed by the Vietnamese as taking from a rich Uncle Sam more than from Vietnam itself; the withdrawal of Americans

and the decline in American aid tended to make evidence of corruption less acceptable than before. 86/ As a result, another aspect of pre-cease-fire South Vietnam also survived the transition: the inability of the GVN to mobilize mass support for the regime. 87/ With some exceptions, the GVN remained out of touch with its own people and therefore out of touch with domestic reality.

But if the government failed to win popular support, the opposition parties were not doing any better. "No South Vietnamese political party had a significant popular following. . .[and] political parties in general had nothing to show for themselves that could attract followers." 88/ Vietnamese society, despite the increasing threat occasioned by US withdrawal and the terms of the Paris Agreement, remained split into innumerable factions and, particularly in rural areas, apathetic to politics. 89/

Apathy by no means indicated pro-communism, however. When the final collapse came in 1975 (and even since then) the exodus of people away from advancing communist forces represented a rejection of communist control. Anticommunism and anti-Northern sentiments were stronger than was dissatisfaction with the Thieu government. 90/

5. Strategy and Actions

In contrast to the enemy's clear vision and strategy, the government of South Vietnam was relatively confused and directionless. Throughout its history, the GVN had been handicapped by what were essentially negative goals - the prevention or defeat of communist political and military initiatives. That negative aspect of South Vietnamese strategy is perhaps best illustrated by Thieu's famous "four no's" which defined his position vis-à-vis the enemy. (Thieu's four no's were: 1) No negotiation with the enemy, 2) No coalition government; 3) No communist or "neutralist" activity in the country; and 4) No surrender of territory.) Yet, since the Paris Agreements, even that negative form of strategy had been considerably undermined. Negotiations had taken place, and the Council for National Reconciliation, nominal as it was, could be perceived as the first step to a "coalition government". The second half of Thieu's program was also in large measure no longer realistic in view of American disengagement.

Unfortunately the failure to appreciate either the extent of American disinterest or the determination of the enemy did not lead to a revision of strategy but rather to a "strategic vacuum." 91/ Efforts to evolve a new "Vietnamese strategy," which would have been better suited to the 'poor man's war' which they now had to fight, were only half-hearted. Furthermore, South Vietnamese leaders continued to expect and prepare for a political offensive and the use of guerrilla subversive tactics by the enemy rather than a massive conventional attack. As a result, the RVNAF was asked to perform a territorial mission of securing people and the countryside, and was spread out and "frittered away" in minor engagements. 92/ To the extent that a conventional attack by the PAVN was considered, Thieu recognized that it might be necessary to abandon large portions of the country and defend only selected, strategic areas. 93/ But, continuing to put his faith in American aid and reluctant to abandon his own tenet of "no territorial surrender," Thieu did not instigate any planning for such a strategic withdrawal at lower levels; nor did the JGS. Instead, the atmosphere in Saigon remained relaxed. While the picture painted by Bui Diem may be somewhat overdrawn, his description of Saigon's attitudes in that critical, post-Paris period is significant and striking:

> Somehow there was no sense of purpose or direction among high officials of the government, and strangely enough in a country so pressed by the requirements of war, not a single member of the government, including the President himself, had any sense of urgency about the situation. 94/

Thus, while the material and strategic handicaps of Saigon were real and important, the psychological inability of the GVN to respond appropriately, indeed the failure to respond at all, turned those objective disadvantages into insurmountable obstacles. A more realistic and active response by the Saigon government to the circumstances might not have enabled the Saigon government to defeat the PAVN, but it might have at least spared South Vietnam the humiliation of a rapid and ignominious collapse.

Meanwhile, without new strategic guidelines, fighting continued throughout Vietnam in response to PLAF incursions. Again, as in 1972,

South Vietnamese forces successfully repulsed major PAVN attacks and even regained control of some 10-20 percent of the formerly contested areas. Although North Vietnamese casualties were significantly higher than were RVNAF casualties, there was a growing awareness that if the PAVN escalated their attacks and began using North Vietnamese troops held in reserve in the North, then "only US Air Force intervention could prevent defeat." 95/ In 1974, NVA pressure did increase, and while the RVNAF again succeeded in meeting the challenge, they did so only at the expense of very high casualties and further dispersion. (See section C, 5 above). The RVNAF was over-extended, under-armed and rapidly becoming exhausted and demoralized.

E. THE LAST CAMPAIGN

1. The Balance of Power, 1975

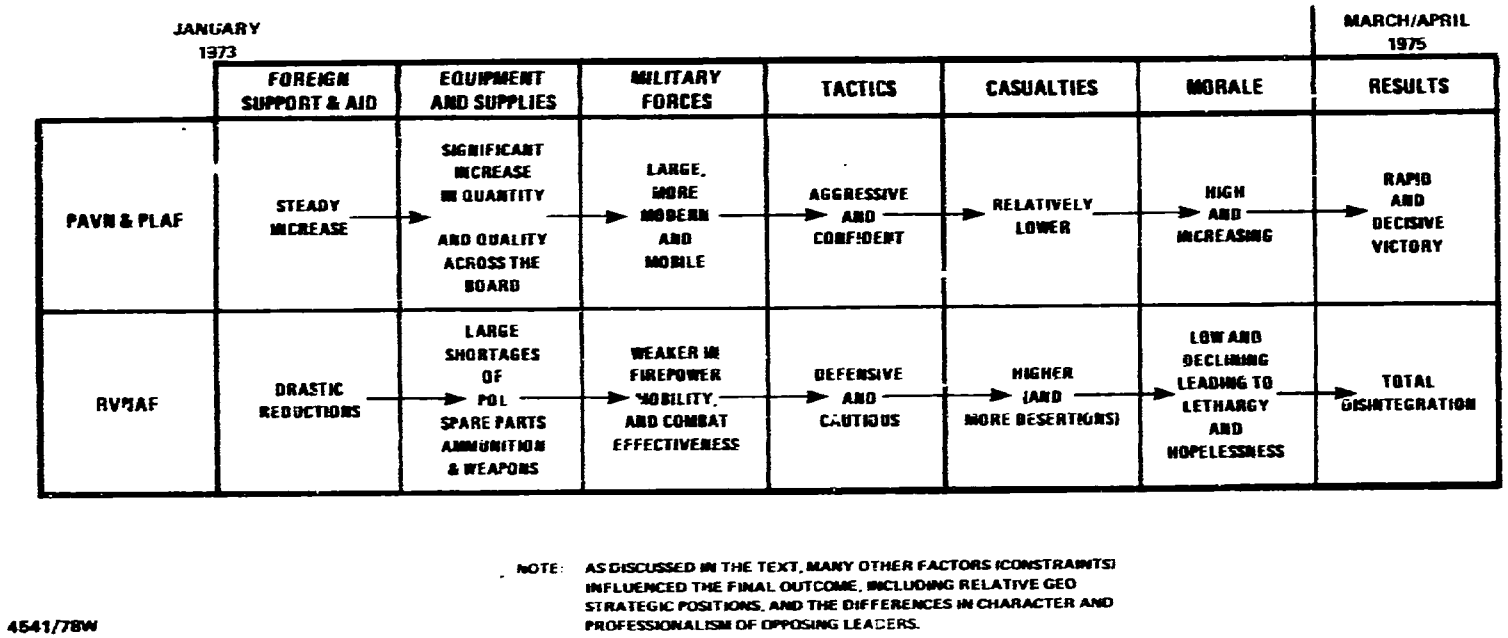
By the end of 1974 the general situation in Indochina had deteriorated to a dangerous level for the Republic of Vietnam. In Laos a coalition government had been established in February 1973 through negotiations separate from, but related to, the Paris Agreements. That Lao government had proved to be an unintentional vehicle for communist political gains. While the military cease-fire, which had gone into effect with the new government, kept the fighting to the level of periodic skirmishing, the coalition government opened the entire country to communist propaganda efforts. By the end of 1974, the cease-fire was gradually breaking down and communist propaganda and agitation were gaining momentum. 96/

In Cambodia the situation was even worse. The Khmer Republic had come into being in 1970 largely in response to PAVN and NLF/PLAF incursions into Cambodia, which the Lon Nol faction was no longer willing to tolerate. The vigorous protests and active campaign to end the use of Cambodian territory for enemy sanctuaries had provoked retaliation by the PAVN and PLAF against Cambodian forces, which rapidly developed into a full-scale war. Although the Khmer Government sought an end to hostilities via a unilateral ceasefire at the time of the Paris Agreements for Vietnam and Laos, this attempt had proved futile and the war expanded. The enemy had,

meanwhile, trained and indoctrinated enough Cambodians to create the Khmer Rouge and from 1973 on the war had the appearance of a civil war, but with the major military clout still provided by the PAVN. By the end of 1974 the PAVN-supported and directed Khmer Rouge had expanded its control over most rural areas and was applying military pressure to provincial capitals and Phnom Penh itself. Although the government forces continued to fight with considerable determination and achieved some tactical successes, morale was sinking and the general military situation continued to deteriorate. 97/

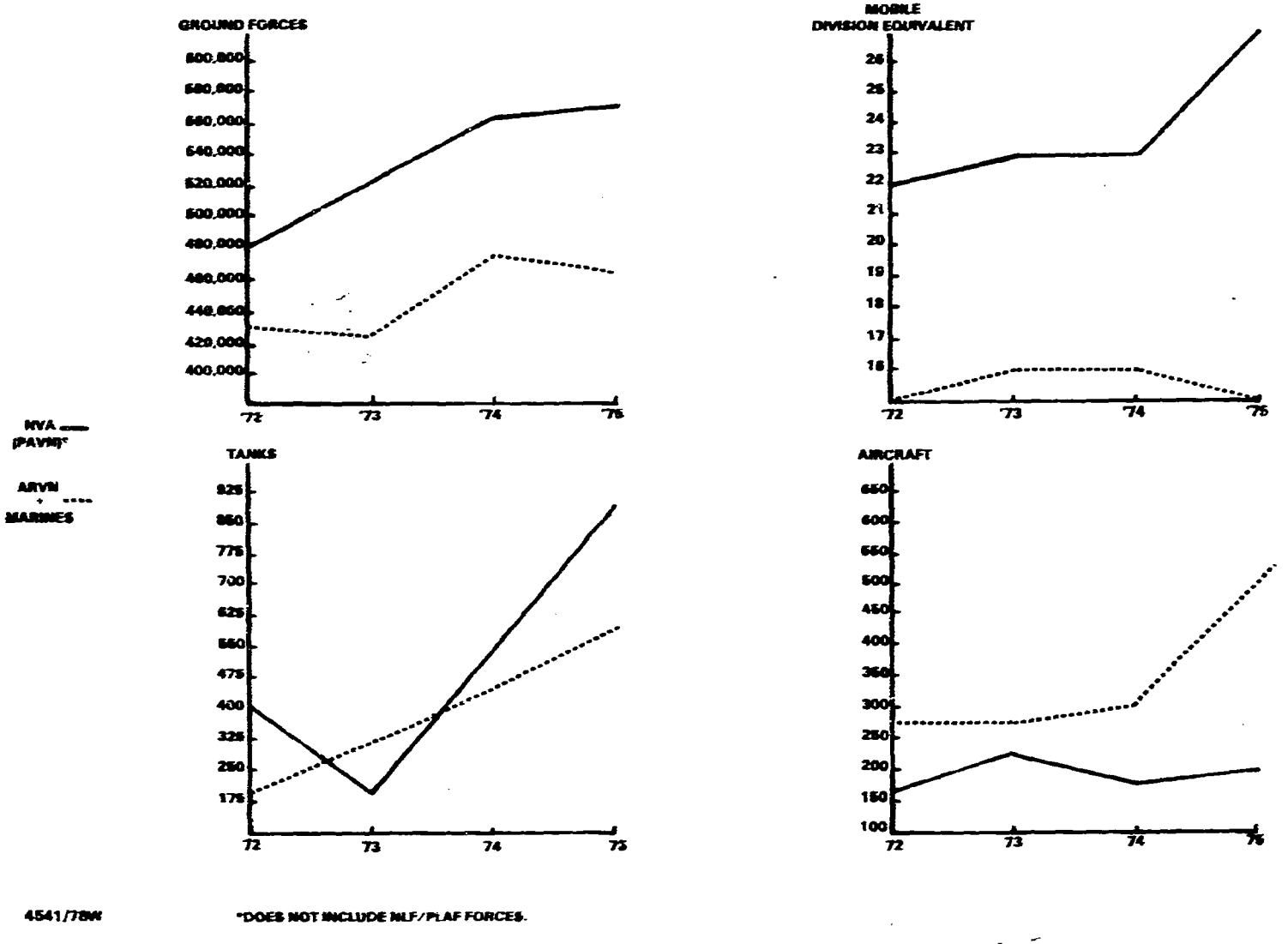
South Vietnam was thus surrounded by increasingly helpless neighbors, leaving RVN in an ever worsening geo-strategic position. Meanwhile, the situation within Vietnam was also becoming increasingly unfavorable to the RVN. The dwindling aid, the economic difficulties, and the political malaise all described above undercut the fighting capability of the RVNAF while the strength of North Vietnamese forces was steadily growing. It is now generally agreed that American withdrawal was the beginning of the end for South Vietnam because "the overall balance of forces had shifted decidedly in favor of Hanoi as a result of the complete American withdrawal and the Congressional prohibition of any reintroduction of American combat forces." 98/

The actual shift in the balance of forces occurred sometime between the Paris Agreements and the North Vietnamese offensive of 1975, but the precise point is virtually impossible to determine. 99/ (See Figures 5-1 and 5-2 for a look at trends between 1972 and 1975). 100/ Certainly, with the RVNAF spread out and the PAVN able to concentrate for attack, the enemy could achieve local tactical superiority of 5.5-1 in troops, 2.1-1 in artillery and 1.2-1 in tanks and armor. 101/ Such superiority was further enhanced by abundance in ammunition and petrol, and well-developed logistics support, not to mention clear and coherent planning, effective and experienced leadership and high morale. 102/ Perhaps the key point here is not objective inventories or assessments of strength but, simply, that South Vietnamese military leaders believed the balance of forces had become unfavorable to them in every respect. 103/



SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

Figure 5-1. Shifts in Balance of Power Following 1973 Ceasefire



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*DOES NOT INCLUDE NLF/PLAF FORCES.

Figure 5-2. Changing Military Strengths, 1972-1975

2. The Test: Phuoc Long

Militarily, Phuoc Long City was a relatively easy target. It was located near North Vietnamese forces and supplies, the city had been virtually surrounded by communist forces for months, and its defenses were weak. When it was attacked in early January 1975, the GVN could launch only half-hearted efforts to relieve it because it was more or less isolated and supplies and reinforcements were difficult to send in. The defenses collapsed quickly. 104/

The rapid fall of a provincial capital like Phuoc Long was not in itself significant. Many times in the long war the PLAF, with mobile and tactical superiority and surprise, had overwhelmed local RVNAF defenses, but the RVNAF, in its much slower, less flexible manner, usually rallied and launched a counterattack to regain lost territory. In that way the RVNAF had generally held its own in 1973 and 1974. 105/ But at Phuoc Long, "South Vietnam, unable to pay the price in men and material which would have been required to retake the territory, wrote it off". 106/ In writing off Phuoc Long City, the GVN conceded or formalized the loss of an entire province - something which had never happened before in the Vietnam war. 107/

Thus, while the defeat of Phuoc Long's defenders did not represent a major test of military strength in a conventional sense, it had tested the reactions in Saigon and Washington to a flagrant violation of the Paris Cease-Fire. It underlined Saigon's strategic weakness and confirmed North Vietnamese assessments of potential American reactions. General Dung would later claim that, by inaction after the fall of Phuoc Long, "the United States had proven itself completely impotent." 108/

The decision to abandon Phuoc Long sent clear signals to the enemy and even clearer signals to the people of South Vietnam. "People began to lose confidence in what the government said and lost faith in the capability of the armed forces to protect the country. After Phuoc Long, many people became skeptical about the intent of the government, and angry people engaged in talk about Phuoc Long being sold out to the communists." 109/ The abandonment of a province was to cast a shadow over

subsequent months, creating a fear of abandonment in each threatened region which gained momentum with each withdrawal and contributed to the panic which led to successive defeats. In that sense, Phuoc Long was not merely symbolic but was a critical factor in the fall of South Vietnam.

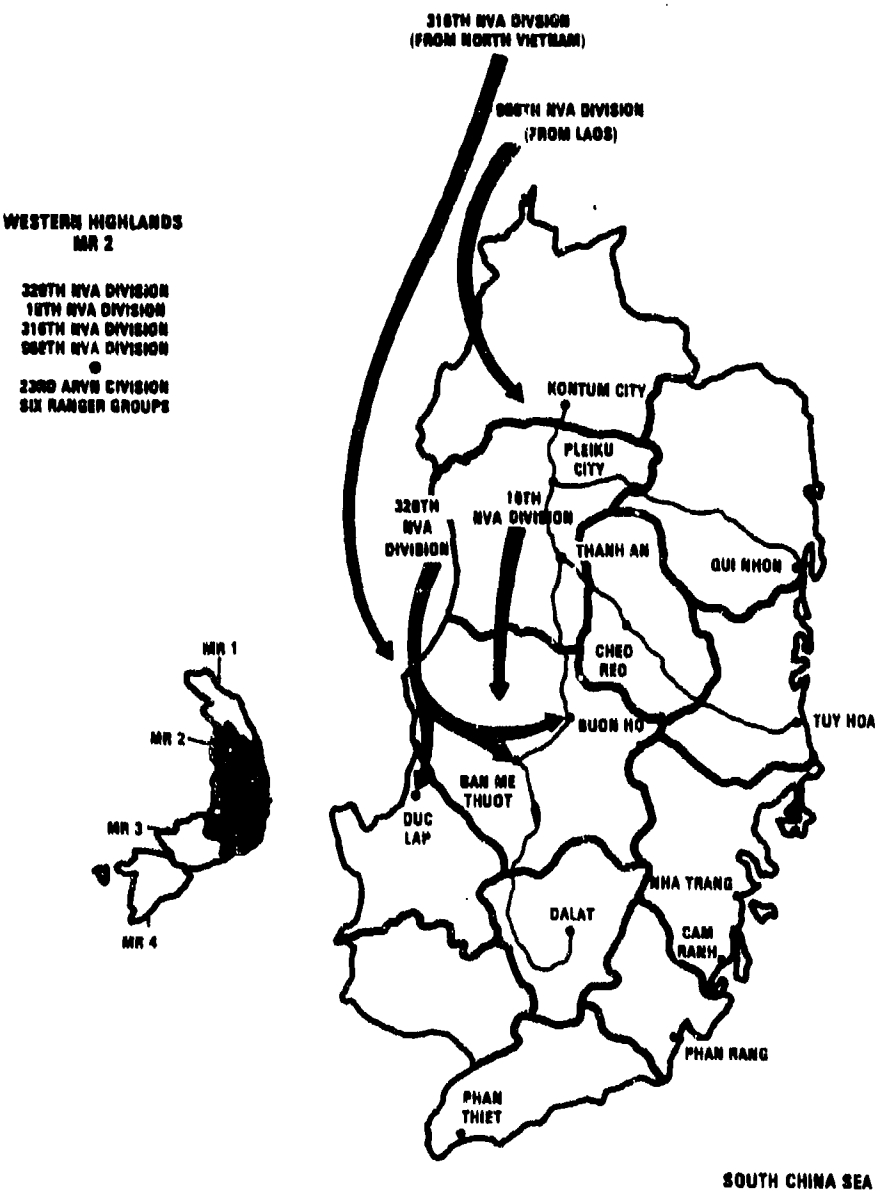
3. The Final Days

a. Ban Me Thuot

The next North Vietnamese attack was neither so experimental nor so limited. In the beginning of March 1975, three PAVN divisions were employed in an offensive against the Central Highlands city of Ban Me Thuot. (See Map 5-3). Ban Me Thuot was important for at least two reasons: first, it was the unofficial Montagnard capital and therefore politically significant, and second it was seen as a first step to an offensive against Saigon. General Westmoreland argues further that "by concentrating in the Central Highlands. . .the North Vietnamese easily outflanked much of South Vietnam's territory and military forces. . .[and] collapse of the defenders, even had they been much better experienced and possessed of much better leadership than had the South Vietnamese, was predictable." 110/

As it was, General Pham Van Phu, the commander of MR 2, failed to recognize the threat to Ban Me Thuot in time. Anticipating North Vietnamese moves against Kontum or Pleiku and an effort to close Route 19 from Pleiku to the coast, Phu kept his forces pinned down in defense of those positions, leaving the equivalent of one regiment to defend Ban Me Thuot. 111/ By March 7, the North Vietnamese had successfully severed the road links between Ban Me Thuot and Pleiku, Ban Me Thuot and Ninh Hoa, and between Pleiku and Qui Nhon. Ban Me Thuot was attacked on March 10th and fell on March 13th.

During the battle for Ban Me Thuot, two incidents occurred which are noteworthy because they were to prove characteristic of the whole campaign. First, in an effort to provide tactical air support, the Vietnamese Air Force mistakenly bombed the advance command post of the ARVN's 23rd Division, destroying their communications "and disrupt[ing] any further organized defense." 112/ That ineffective (at best) use of air power and the weakness of RVNAF communication and coordination systems was



SOURCE: Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, pp. 89-97, and Frank Snepp, Decent Interval, p. 173

Map 5-3. NVA Campaign for Ban Me Thuot

a constant feature of the 1975 campaign. Second, one ranger group which was sent to relieve Ban Me Thuot and was making progress toward that objective was diverted from its military mission by the commander of the 23rd Division in order for it to provide protection for the evacuation of the general's family. 113/ Misuse of command authority, defeatism, and preoccupation with the safety of family members also were going to be dominant aspects of the collapse of South Vietnam.

Strategically, the fall of Ban Me Thuot precipitated a major revision in South Vietnamese thinking and plans. Abandoning his hopes and efforts to hold onto all of South Vietnamese territory, Thieu now called for a complete withdrawal of ARVN (but no regional and popular) forces from the Central Highlands (Kontum and Pleiku). That decision was highly controversial. Van Tien Dung called it "an error in strategy" which once committed led to certain defeat. 114/ General Westmoreland, on the other hand, endorsed the strategy, believing it was the only way to prevent South Vietnam's defeat unit by unit. 115/ General Cao Van Vien also considered the withdrawal a necessity but explains that the decision was arrived at too late and was improperly carried out. 116/ Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen both complain that the decision not to withdraw popular and regional forces as well as regular ARVN forces was a serious mistake because it was bound to affect adversely the morale of PF and RF troops throughout the country. 117/

In fact, the withdrawal from the Central Highlands was bound to be a blow to South Vietnamese morale regardless of how it was carried out. Worse yet, the way in which the withdrawal was executed turned it from a major set-back into a complete catastrophe.

b. Phu's Withdrawal from the Central Highlands

It has been said that the "most difficult of all military operations" is a "withdrawal in the face of a powerful enemy." 118/ Denis Warner explains:

> Planning a withdrawal is just as complex as planning an advance. . . To have any chance of success, the retreat from the highlands had to be planned in detail so that

> a rear-guard could fight an effective delaying action, refugees could be cared for, and arms and equipment withdrawn. 119/

Instead, the withdrawal was carried out in haste, which rapidly turned into panic.

General Phu, under pressure from Thieu to redeploy his forces rapidly, turned down his Chief of Staff's request for "at least" three days to prepare a plan for withdrawal. 120/ General Phu then went on to announce a series of decisions already made. First, he announced that he was himself pulling back immediately in order to establish a new headquarters; there was, however, some confusion over who would actually oversee the retreat. 121/ In addition, the decision had already been made to use Route 7B for the withdrawal; no effort was to be expended to clear the enemy off Route 19, the better road, hence all traffic was to be confined to one longer route in poor condition, with many bridges already down. Finally, and as it turned out most disastrously, there was no provision made for the evacuation of the soldiers' families.

As the word spread that Kontum and Pleiku were to be abandoned, officers and soldiers alike "left their units in order to prevent their families from being abandoned in areas to be conceded to the communists." 122/ The news rapidly spread to the civilian population and soon, in addition to the troops and their families, there were countless refugees flooding down Route 7B. The engineers sent out to repair the bridges failed to do so in time; the column of retreating soldiers and civilians was forced to halt and became subjected to enemy attacks. No substantial rear guard had been provided and the NVA launched a major attack on the rear of the column. The South Vietnamese Air Force again mistakenly bombed RVNAF forces instead of the enemy. Discipline in the RVNAF disintegrated. "Lack of command and control and general panic led to ARVN units fighting among themselves and to atrocities against the civilian population." 123/ Ultimately, seven infantry regiments and an armored brigade were rendered completely "combat ineffective." 124/ Of the 60,000 troops which set out from Pleiku and Kontum, only about 20,000 men,

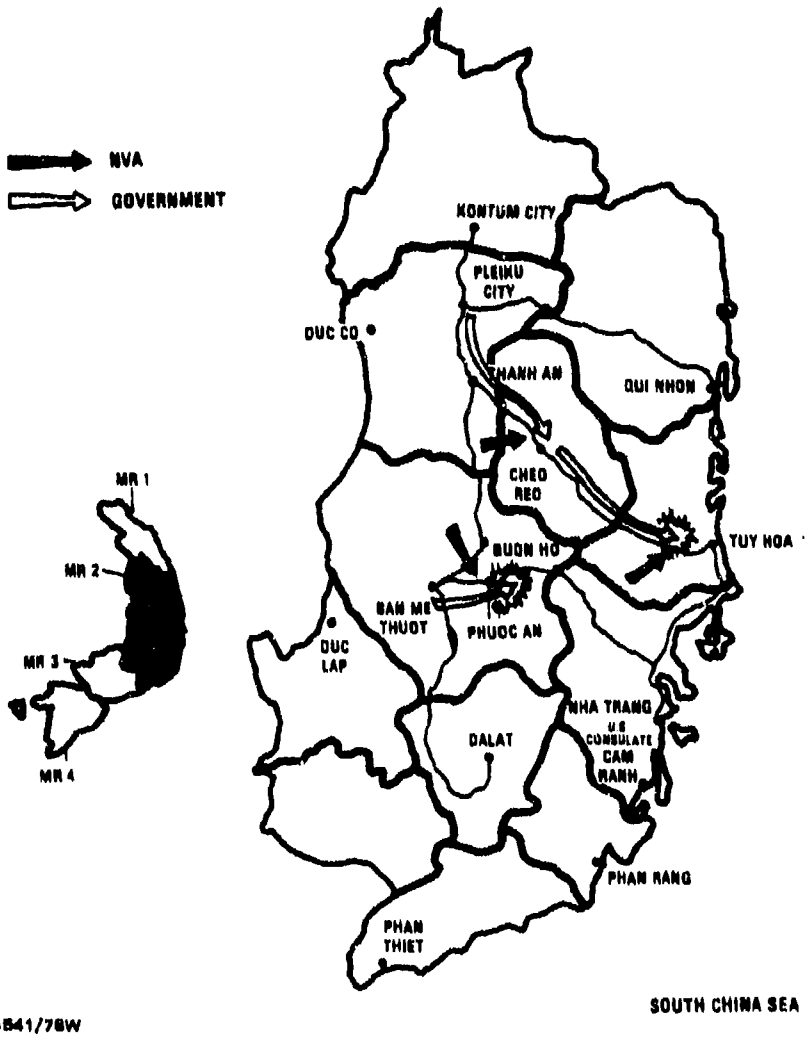
disorganized and no longer fit for service, made it to the relative safety of Tuy Hoa. 125/ (See Map 5-4 for a diagram of Phu's retreat.)

In effect, those units of the ARVN had virtually destroyed themselves with very little pressure from the PAVN. In addition to the loss of the provinces, the troops and the equipment, the withdrawal-turned-rout had further confirmed in Vietnamese eyes that the country had been abandoned by the United States, was being abandoned piecemeal by the government, and that its defeat was certain because the RVNAF could no longer defend it against a powerful enemy.

c. The Fall of Hue and Danang

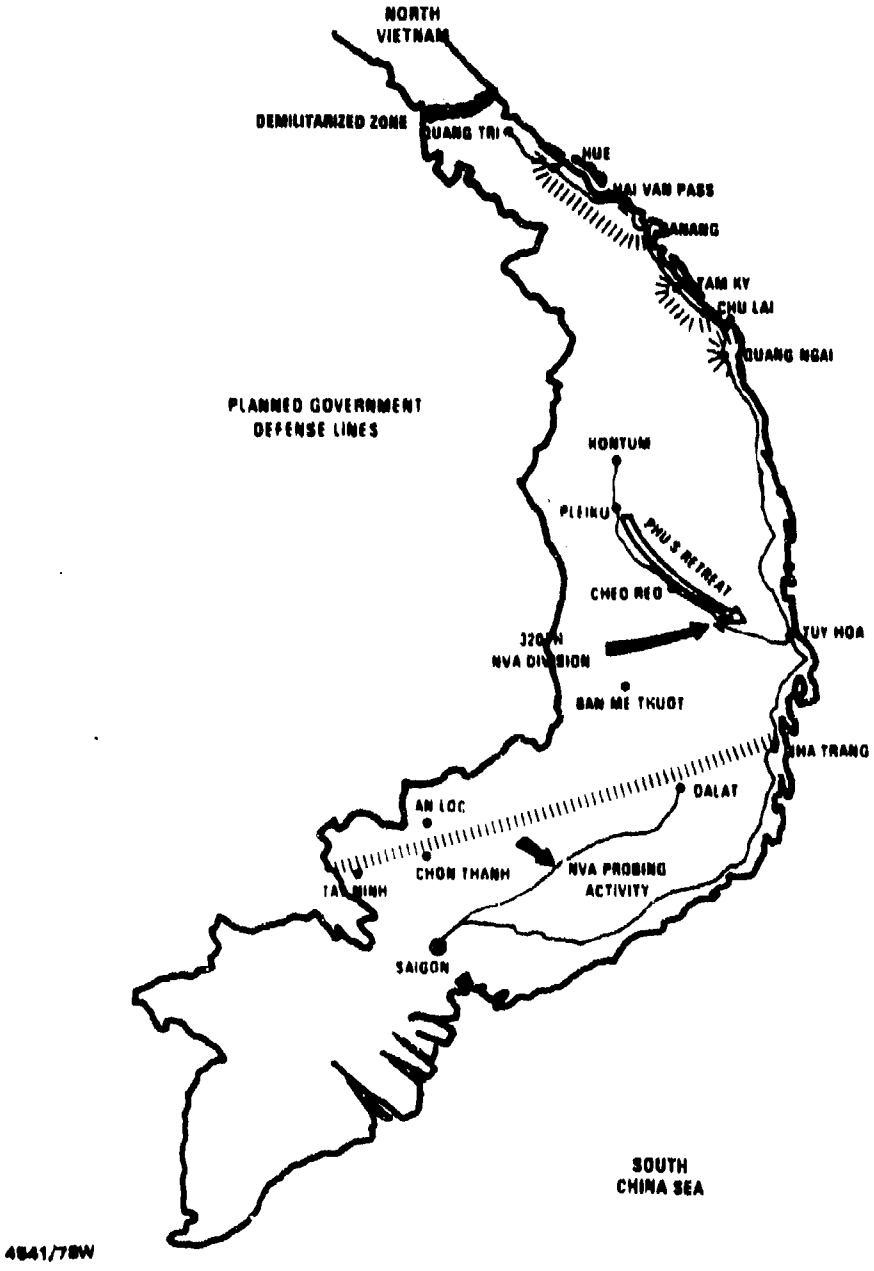
The GVN's strategy, when it ordered the withdrawal from the Central Highlands, had been to shorten its lines of defense by pulling most forces back behind a main defense line stretching from the border near Tay Ninh to Nha Trang, and to pull forces in the north back to defensive positions around key cities like Hue and Danang. (See Map 5-5 for the planned government defense lines.) This was essentially the strategy which Thieu had previously considered but failed to prepare for. Lack of planning and poor leadership were major factors in the deplorable way the withdrawal was executed; that operation left the impression not that the government was carrying out a national defensive strategy but rather that it had lost control of the situation which, in fact, it had.

Thieu went on the radio and tried to explain the situation. He told the public that Pleiku and Kontum had been abandoned only to conserve the strength of the RVNAF. He also promised that Military Regions 3 and 4, and the cities of Hue and Danang would be defended at all costs. 126/ But after the fall of Phuoc Long, Ban Me Thuot and Pleiku and Kontum, people had lost confidence in the government's willingness and ability to protect them. In Military Region 1 the situation was further aggravated by two factors. First, the general fear of invasion was compounded by vivid memories of both the 1968 Tet Offensive and the 1972 Easter Offensive, in which massacres of thousands of people had occurred in Hue at communist hands. Second, Thieu's fear for the safety of the capital led him to believe that it was necessary to pull the ARVN's Airborne Division out of



SOURCE: Charles Timmes, Vietnam Summary: Military Operations After the Cease-Fire Agreement, Part II, pp. 24-25; and Frank Snepp, Decent Interval p. 197

Map 5-4. Phu's Army Withdraws From the Highlands



SOURCE: William Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 398; and Frank Snepp, Decent Interval, p. 207.

Map 5-5. Planned GVN Defense Lines, March 1975

Military Region 1 and down to Saigon to act as the JGS's mobile reserve. This "unhinged the MR 1 defenses and caused a repositioning of the remaining four divisions." 127/

The enemy had now deployed seven divisions in MR 1; two were poised to seize Hue and two were preparing to attack Danang. General Truong, commander of MR 1, at first planned to defend both cities as the president had promised, but Thieu now vacillated. 128/ Confusion concerning Saigon's intentions with regard to the deployment of the Marines and ambiguous orders concerning the defense of Hue finally led General Truong to believe he had to abandon Hue. 129/

Meanwhile, the multiple efforts to redeploy forces (first the Airborne from Quang Nam, then the Marines from Quang Tri, and finally the 1st ARVN Division from Hue to Danang) had completely unnerved the civilian population, completing the destruction of confidence which had begun with American withdrawal. Panic is notoriously contagious. As the civilians began to seek refuge in "safe" Danang, the soldiers and officers became increasingly concerned about the safety of their own families. Refugees soon clogged the roads, especially Route 1 down the coast from Quang Tri to Danang. The fleeing civilians prevented coherent movement of troops, and flooded Danang itself with an estimated two million refugees. 130/ Discipline collapsed. Troops reached Danang no longer as part of a unit but as individuals preoccupied with finding and securing the safety of their families through evacuation to Saigon. 131/

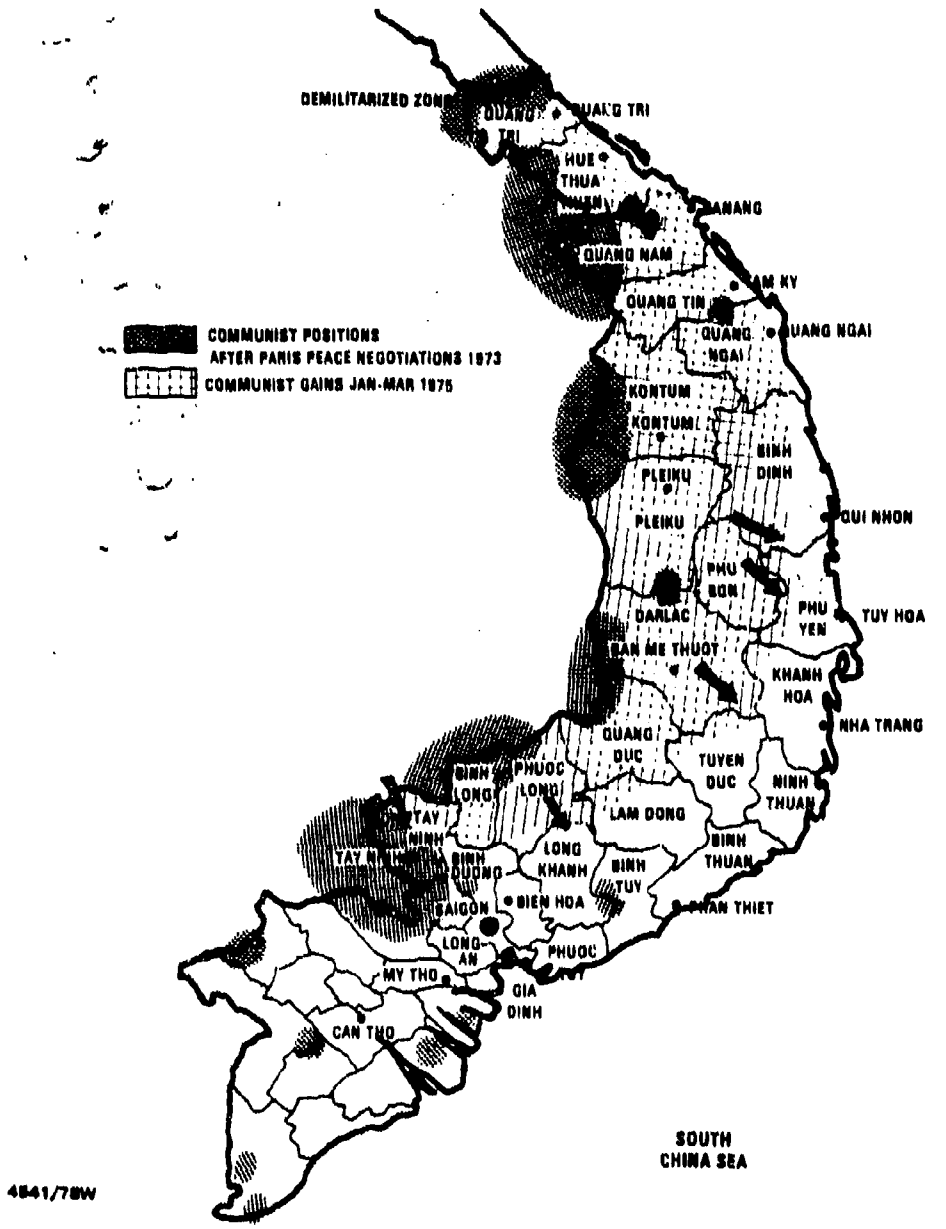
Truong was now facing five enemy divisions with only a fraction of his inadequate forces still combat effective. The continuing influx of refugees and the inevitable sense of panic and disorder which they brought with them rapidly destroyed civil authority in Danang. "Realizing the situation was becoming unmanageable, and unwilling to stop the flow of refugees for humanitarian reasons, General Truong urgently requested assistance from Saigon," but none was forthcoming. 132/ The situation could only deteriorate, and Truong made the decision to withdraw. But if withdrawal by land had been difficult, withdrawal by sea, in the midst of ever growing panic and desperation, was nearly impossible.

Without a battle to speak of, Hue and Danang fell and the RVNAF forces in MR 1 were eliminated as fighting forces. Van Tien Dung was to brag: "Within 32 hours we had destroyed or disbanded more than 100,000 enemy troops, captured a strong military complex and liberated Danang, the second largest city in the South". 133/ But the PAVN had had only indirect responsibility for the "victory." General Truong more accurately described the situation when he said his troops did not have the opportunity to fight because of the multiple redeployments, the mass of refugees and the breakdown in command, control and communication. 134/ Guenter Lewy concludes: "Truong's attempts to organize the defense of Hue and Danang floundered on what the defense attache later called the 'family syndrome.'" 135/ Thus, by the end of March 1975, the North Vietnamese had control of most of South Vietnam. (See Map 5-6.)

d. The Last Act: Saigon

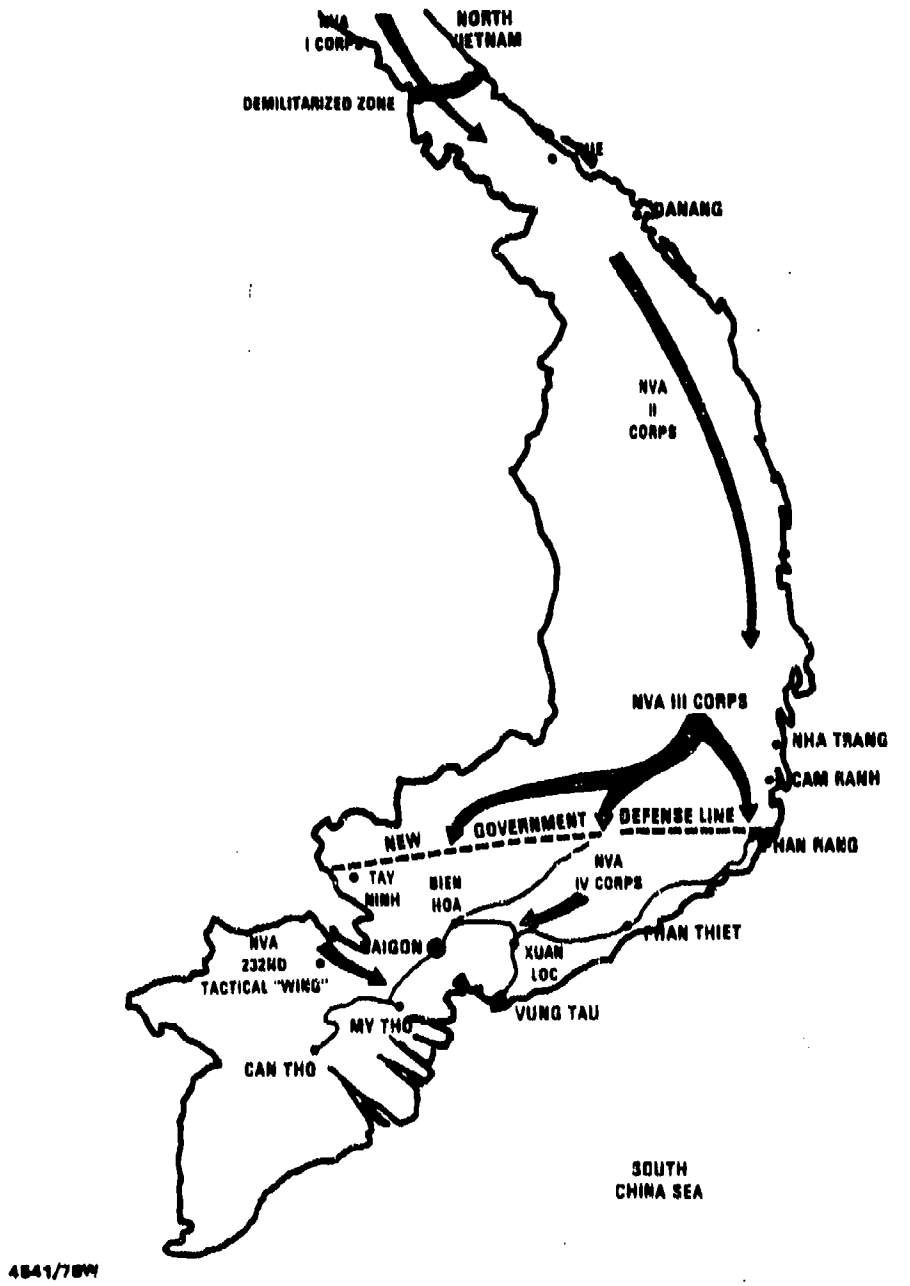
At that point, the nature of the war changed. Drawn up behind a new defense line (See Map 5-7), the RVNAF dug in and began to hold. For the first time in the campaign, the North Vietnamese had to fight for their gains against troops which were not panicked. The sustained defense of Xuan Loc by the 18th ARVN Division and its reinforcements was the only bright spot in the "Ho Chi Minh Campaign." But with roughly half the RVNAF destroyed and the PLAF concentrating its resources on Saigon, it was only a matter of time before complete defeat. A plan to defend the Mekong Delta was unrealistic; thus, the GVN had just two options: it had to either convince the United States to reenter the war, or come to a settlement with the enemy. In short, the main issues had become political rather than military.

As the month of April progressed, the hope for American assistance was firmly and finally extinguished. Efforts turned more and more to finding some political compromise that would stave off unconditional surrender. 136/ Against the back-drop of the American evacuation, first from Phnom Penh and then from Saigon, what was left of South Vietnamese will to resist crumbled. There were at this time still some 6,000 Americans in Vietnam; with conditions what they were and with no



SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

Map 5-6. Communist Gains by the Last Week of March 1975



SOURCE: Van Tien Dung, Great Spring Victory, pp. 70-97, and Frank Shepp, p. 274

Map 5-7. The Ho Chi Minh Campaign, April 1975

prospect for military assistance from the US, the American Embassy could no longer place the symbolic value of American presence above the safety of American lives. The evacuation of Americans and their dependents had been delayed as long as possible. Under fire from North Vietnamese artillery and fighting off Vietnamese who wished to escape from Saigon, the last Americans left Vietnam. 137/

The war in Vietnam was over. What had started as a People's War had ended as a civil war conducted in a conventional military manner. "The final defeat of South Vietnam had been brought about by a vast North Vietnamese army, equipped with the most modern heavy weapons, and not by a revolutionary uprising of the people." 138/ While the US had not been directly defeated, US interests, US allies and US prestige had been lost, and US perceptions were going to be warped by that psychological defeat for several years to come.

F. INSIGHTS

1. The Enemy

From the Paris Agreements forward, the enemy progressively grew stronger, building on the geo-strategic advantages gained from the in-place nature of the cease-fire and the end to US bombing. The North Vietnamese developed a military capability and a strategy for victory uninhibited by scruples concerning the intent or the letter of the Paris Agreements. With considerable Soviet and some Chinese military and economic assistance, the North Vietnamese were able to create an army that was larger in size and better equipped than any that they had ever previously fielded. Learning from past mistakes in the 1968 Tet Offensive and the 1972 Easter Offensive, the North Vietnamese placed little reliance on an "up-rising" of inhabitants in the South and instead put together a strategy which "had more to do with Guderian's panzer tactics than it did with the tactics of guerrilla war." 139/ Finally, the North Vietnamese were careful to exploit the weaknesses of their opponents. They kept a close watch on Washington and rightly judged when the United States would be most impotent or reluctant

to respond to events in Asia - the aftermath of Watergate. In Vietnam they kept their plans flexible enough to be able to respond rapidly and fruitfully to unexpected opportunities - such as General Phu's withdrawal - as they arose. It would be wrong to give the impression that the North Vietnamese did not have problems or that they did not make mistakes. But the bottom line shows that in 1975 the North Vietnamese possessed a number of material and psychological advantages and that they successfully capitalized on those advantages to achieve a rapid and total victory. In sum, the following can be attributed to the enemy:

- The DRV was prepared for and was capable of fighting a protracted war, and recognized that the United States was not able psychologically to carry on with an inconclusive war in support of an ally that did not enjoy the respect of the US public.
- The Lao Dong Party leadership resisted all diplomatic efforts by the US to end the war until it was apparent that the primary US goals in Indochina had changed from that of having a free, viable, and independent RVN to that of recovering its POWs and extricating its forces from RVN; then the Lao Dong settled on their own terms, which included the "leopard spot" in-place cease-fire that gave them a vital geo-strategic advantage over RVNAF.
- The Lao Dong Party was unswerving in its ultimate goal to unite Vietnam and dominate all of Indochina, and all of their military actions were in support of that political goal.
- The DRV used the two-year period from January 1973 to the final drive for victory in 1975 to tie down and attrite the RVNAF, modernize their own armed forces through reequipping and retraining them, and then redeploy them strategically for the final thrust. PAVN learned to coordinate and control large combined arms forces in mobile operations -- RVNAF did not.
- The DRV/PAVN had superior leadership and strategy and enjoyed the political, military and psychological advantage over GVN/RVNAF.

2. South Vietnam

South Vietnam was, of course, the reverse side of the coin. Throughout that period it suffered from a number of serious tangible and intangible weaknesses. Not only did the terms of the Paris Agreements generally favor the North Vietnamese, but even in those areas where the effects should have been evenly distributed (for example the provision which limited military aid to one-for-one replacement), the impact was nearly always worse for the South Vietnamese than for the enemy because the North Vietnamese and their allies did not respect or abide by the terms or spirit of the treaty.

In addition to the terms of the cease-fire itself, South Vietnam was handicapped by the structure, training and strategy of its own armed forces. In the years of American involvement, the RVNAF had learned how to fight the American Way - with sophisticated weapons and support systems. The war had always been financed by the United States. "The unexpected huge slash in US military aid appropriations for South Vietnam seriously affected the combat potential and morale of its troops and population." 140/ The RVNAF could no longer implement American tactics now that it was in the midst of a severe economic crisis, and it had forgotten how to fight a war without American aid and tactics. 141/

The economic crisis was the third and possibly the most critical of the RVN's material handicaps at this time. The sharp cuts in US economic and military aid coupled with the fourfold increase in oil prices and global inflation had produced a domestic economic crisis characterized by high inflation, unemployment and sharply declining standards of living for much of the population, especially military families. The situation was far beyond the capacity of the GVN to solve quickly (if at all), and in the meantime ammunition and fuel were so tightly rationed as to undermine seriously the fighting capability and morale of the RVNAF.

Finally, in the climactic campaign the RVNAF was poorly led for the most part and fell victim to the strategic and tactical errors of its own commanders, which played into the hands of the enemy. Most significant of those errors was President Thieu's hasty redeployment after the start of

the offensive which most South Vietnamese officials believe "led directly to the collapse of 1975." 142/ The decisions to abandon Phuoc Long, Pleiku and Kontum, and later Hue, were similarly critical strategic decisions which backfired. However, while it is unclear if Thieu had any options when making those decisions, it is quite clear that the mishandling of the retreat from the Central Highlands and the ambiguity and confusion which surrounded the orders for I Corp were tactical blunders that could have been avoided. Had these blunders been avoided, it is possible that the defeat of South Vietnam might have been delayed and made more costly for the enemy.

There can be no doubt, however, that psychological factors rather than material factors tipped the balance of forces against South Vietnam and ensured its defeat. Dependence upon American aid had, after more than 20 years, become as much psychological as physical. 143/ From President Thieu on down, South Vietnamese leaders had come to believe that without sufficient US aid or intervention, "even the most strenuous efforts at self-improvement would be of little value." 144/ While continued faith in US aid forestalled Vietnamese leaders from seriously developing a new strategy of self-reliance, the mentality necessary for self-reliance and self-confidence also failed to evolve. The South Vietnamese came to see their future as being controlled by others as a matter of fate. 145/

When American aid began to evaporate in the post-cease-fire period, South Vietnamese leaders felt like the victims of fate. While the shattering of their faith in US support was a severe psychological blow, it did not inspire greater determination to fight on alone, but rather resulted in despair and a sense of utter helplessness. General Westmoreland describes this phenomenom as "a psychological malaise among the South Vietnamese born of the knowledge that American help was at an end while the enemy's suppliers persisted" and concludes that, "in the face of that grave psychological blow [the failure of the US to intervene]. . .it required no

military genius to assure South Vietnam's eventual military defeat." 146/ William Colby put it this way:

> The tactical errors of the final days, of course, contributed to Saigon's fall, but I believe the root cause to have been the Congressional signal of sharply reduced aid, with its inevitable effect in loss of morale and panic. 147/

In short, dependence upon and faith in US aid and support stunted the development of South Vietnamese self-confidence, and their subsequent disillusionment in the US triggered widespread defeatism.

At lower levels depression brought on by the sense of being abandoned by the US was aggravated by very real material shortages, low pay, and lack of trust in GVN leadership. The war seemed unending at best; effective operations were difficult if not impossible without adequate equipment, ammunition, petrol or airsupport, and soldiers and civilians alike lost all faith in the possibility of victory. 148/

With generally low levels of commitment to the GVN to start with, the rapidly deteriorating prospects for success against the enemy undermined the soldiers' sense of duty. Family obligations rapidly overshadowed any sense of obligation to a faltering, unpopular government, and the desire to save family members from a feared enemy overpowered military discipline. The RVNAF disintegrated into a disorganized mob of men seeking to serve their families rather than their country.

The rapid collapse of South Vietnam was a major victory for the North Vietnamese armed forces. Yet, it is important to note that no significant role in the final campaign was played by communist cadres in South Vietnam; they were no longer strong enough. Nor were there mass uprising in favor of the invaders in spite of the utter disappearance of GVN authority in threatened regions. 149/ Most significant of all, the invasion was not even greeted by indifference. The massive and desperate nature of the refugee movements away from advancing North Vietnamese forces indicate that while the people of South Vietnam may have "opposed or disliked their government, the majority always preferred nationalism to communism." 150/

Naturally, not all refugees were motivated by anticommunism, but studies indicate that as many as 60 percent of the refugees during the final collapse were "in effect. . .voting with their feet for life in a non-communist system" 151/ South Vietnam was defeated, invaded and subjugated, but the hearts and minds of the people had not been won by the North Vietnamese or their ideology. The flight of the "boat people" continued to demonstrate that point.

Any valid evaluation of the final collapse of both GVN and RVNAF must give due weight to a salient fact: the Lao Dong Party and its armed forces had a tremendous political/psychological/military headstart that was never in danger of being overcome by the relatively short periods of "Americanization" and "Vietnamization." From the founding of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1930, the enemy had gradually built and refined his organization. The Lao Dong Party's philosophy, doctrine, and flexible long-range strategy were highly relevant to the indigenous environment, and much of the maturation process of the system and the leaders took place under fire. A series of miracles would have been needed to provide the South Vietnamese with similar discipline, cohesion, continuity, zeal, and experience; but no miracles were forthcoming unless one counts the mixed blessing of massive US intervention in the middle years of the struggling Republic. In sum, the following can be attributed to the South Vietnamese:

- After the US withdrawal, the balance of power shifted to the DRV/PAVN, and this situation was exacerbated by the cut in US aid and moral support.
- Physically and psychologically the RVNAF was unprepared to fight a "poor man's war," having become reliant on US know how and resources.
- President Thieu's "Four No's" appear to have been politically necessary, but they were militarily self-defeating.
- GVN/RVNAF had permitted themselves to become dependent upon the US, (and the US virtually encouraged that dependency by its actions if not its policies) and they were unable to overcome that disability in the series of crises following US withdrawal.

- Probably because of its dependence on the US for major tactical and strategic planning, the GVN/RVNAF were unable to develop realistic strategies for defense of RVN after the US withdrawal; they were rigid and defensive in contrast to the flexible offensive strategy and tactics of DRV/PAVN.
- Lacking US support, VNAF was defeated by PAVN's air defense system (supplied by the USSR and with extensive experienced gained over the years in defense of the DRV and the Laotian Panhandle) and VNAF was unable to provide to RVNAF the air support needed in defense of RVN.
- On balance GVN/RVNAF leadership was far below that of the DRV/PAVN in experience, cohesiveness, objectivity, and singleness of purpose.
- Faulty planning, poor execution, and lack of intelligent leadership, especially in Military Region II, speeded the final collapse.
- RVNAF commanders failed to take into account the strong bonds that tied their soldiers to their families, and that failure contributed to the desertions and masses of refugees.

3. The United States

During the period covered in this chapter (1973-1975), the Nixon and Ford administrations were virtually powerless to influence events in Indochina. Because of congressional opposition, Nixon's promises to Thieu of US support could not be kept when the DRV/PAVN committed flagrant violations of the cease-fire in 1974-1975. Clearly such violations were expected; the record shows US awareness of the DRV's unceasing violations of the 1962 Geneva Agreement on Laos and the Easter Offensive of 1972 demonstrated the growing combined arms capabilities of PAVN.

On the one hand, US operations in Indochina for nearly two decades had some salubrious effects. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) had time to mature and to develop viable economies and international relationships, while the communist forces were distracted by the war in Vietnam. Early in the period, Indonesia was able to resist a

Chinese Communist-supported attempt to seize power. Japan flourished during the period. And finally, the Sino-Soviet split enabled the US to mend fences with the Chinese.

On the other hand, several allies were deeply concerned over American involvement in Vietnam because that effort seriously eroded the US's basic economy and ability to exert influence and meet obligations elsewhere. US failure to come to the aid of the GVN in its extremis in 1975 may have brought relief to those allies who valued US friendship but who disagreed with the debilitating American commitment in RVN, but that failure also raised doubts about US credibility as an ally.

In sum, the following can be attributed to the US:

- President Nixon made commitments to the GVN for US aid and support, implementation of which was beyond the purview of the executive branch and which depended on the will of the Congress at a time when the American public and the Congress were clearly withdrawing their support from the South Vietnamese and any further combat by US forces.
- The balance of power in Vietnam had shifted so decisively by 1975 that, despite the beneficial effects such aid would have had on morale, even had the US provided air support to RVNAF at that time it is doubtful that the results would have been much different; although the final collapse might have been delayed, the cost would have been much greater to both sides.

G. LESSONS

- The American Way of War cannot always be exported successfully. First, it may not be appropriate to the situation (See Chapter 3), and second, it makes an ally dependent upon continued high levels of American support. Dependence upon US equipment, support systems, and tactics (which are materiel-intensive) creates financial, technological, and psychological dependence, thereby robbing an ally of the capability and self-confidence to fight on alone if the US withdraws from the conflict.

- The temporary support of an ally and subsequent abandonment can cost the US not only the betrayed ally but credibility as an ally generally. When the US abandoned South Vietnam, other allies, including several of our NATO allies and Japan, began to doubt the value of US defense guarantees. 152/ As a result, every alliance system in which the US was an important member was shaken and weakened by America's reneging on military aid and support commitments to RVN after the US withdrawal. Furthermore, the perceived unreliability of the United States as an ally may discourage presently neutral nations from seeking closer association with the US. Finally, the perception of US unreliability gives our adversaries a valuable propaganda tool for weaning nations away from association with the US and into their own camp. Only by refraining from making commitments which we are unwilling to see through to the end, and by demonstrating our willingness to go the whole distance with those allies we do openly support can the US reestablish credibility as an ally.

CHAPTER 5 ENDNOTES

1. Guenter Lewy, America in Vietnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 221.

2. Van Tien Dung, Great Spring Victory (Washington, D.C.: Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 1976), p. 126.

3. Henry Kissinger, The White House Years (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1979), p. 1474.

4. Ibid p. 1471-1476; Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams believed that President Thieu "could hold out if we kept our part of the bargain.": Interview with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker at The BDM Corporation, 8 November 1978.

5. Tran Van Don, Our Endless War: Inside Vietnam (London: Presidio Press, 1978), p. 203.

6. Denis Warner, Certain Victory: How Hanoi Won the War (Kansas City: Sheed Andrews and McNeel, Inc., 1977), p. 5.

7. Tran Van Don, p. 213. General Alexander Haig unsuccessfully solicited the services of General John Vogt in an effort to have Vogt provide assurances to his Vietnamese associates in VNAF that The US would take decisive action if the North Vietnamese broke the agreement. General Vogt refused to do so, pointing out that the Legislative Branch was saying no: Comments by General Vogt, USAF (Ret) at The BDM Senior Review Panel meeting, 13 February 1979. Ambassador Bunker stated that he personally delivered two or three letters from President Nixon to Thieu in December 1972 and January 1973 committing the US to come to RVN's assistance for major violations. He further stated that the GVN finally decided to sign the agreement based on those assurances: Bunker interview.

8. According to Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger told him (in 1978) that he (Kissinger) felt he could use the sanction of air power if the DRV flagrantly violated the cease-fire, but the attitude on Capitol Hill deteriorated so badly, even before the restrictive legislation emerged, that the administration couldn't act. Remarks by Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson at the BDM Senior Review Panel meeting, 14 February 1979.

9. David W. P. Elliott, NLF-DRV Strategy and the 1972 Spring Offensive, International Relations of East Asia (IREA) Project, Cornell University, Interim Report Number 4, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 36.

10. General Nguyen Van Vien, quoted in Lewy, p. 204.

11. Van Tien Dung, p. 125.

12. Nguyen Van Thieu, quoted in "Die Amerikaner haben uns verraten," Der Spiegel, translated by Dr. John Tashjean of BDM, Dec. 10, 1979, p. 201.

13. Stephen T. Hosmer; Konrad Kellen; and Brian M. Jenkins, The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders. A report prepared for Historian, Office of the Secretary of Defense (Santa Monica, Ca., Rand Corporation, 1978), p. 6.

14. Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program. Prepared for the Department of the Army, Office of Chief of Military History by General Research Corp. (McLean, Va.: GRC, 1976), p. 204.

15. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, Reflections on the Vietnam War, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program. (McLean, Va.: General Research Corporation, 1978), p. 116.

16. Vietnam: May 1974. A staff report prepared for the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), p. 17.

17. Tran Van Don, p. 217. Ambassador Bunker sent a message to President Nixon in January 1973 before the cease-fire was signed pointing out that the US had to make it clear to President Thieu that the US would go ahead with the agreements unilaterally if necessary. Nixon then sent a letter to Thieu so stating. Bunker Interview.

18. Lewy, pp. 202-203; Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, p. 27; Warner, p. 178; Tran Van Don, pp. 209-217; and Bunker interview.

19. Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, p. 205; and Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, pp. 10-15.

20. Tran Van Don, p. 208. Ambassador Bunker described the Vietnamese reaction when they first saw Kissinger's draft as one of shock. Bunker interview.

21. Vietnam: May 1974, p. 4

22. Charles J. Timmes, "Vietnam Summary: Military Operations After the Cease-fire Agreement, Part I," Military Review, Aug. 1976, p. 65.

23. William C. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports (New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1976), p. 396.

24. Nguyen Van Thieu quoted in Oriana Fallaci, Interview With History (New York: Liverwright, 1976), p. 51.

25. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, Reflections in the Vietnam War, p. 116.

26. Harvey A. DeWeerd, "The Fall of Vietnam: An Inside View," Army, July 1979, p. 17; Lewy, pp. 202-203; Tran Van Don, pp. 217-218; Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, p. 204; and Denis Warner, p. 5. According to Ambassador Bunker, Thieu did not expect US ground combat units to redeploy to RVN, but he did believe US air forces would be committed. Bunker interview.

27. Warner, p. 7.

28. Lewy, p. 203.

29. Warner, p. 7.

30. Vietnam: May 1974, p. 1.

31. Dave Richard Palmer, Summons of the Trumpet (San Rafael, Ca., Presidio Press, 1978), p. 264; Vietnam: May 1974, pp. 5-6.

32. Lewy, p. 206.

33. The Senate Staff report cited above gives the value of total aid from the Soviet Union and China in 1973 as $715 million of which $425 million was economic aid. Vietnam: May 1974, p. 9.

34. Timmes, p. 68.

35. Lewy, p. 206.

36. Vietnam: May 1974, p. 17.

37. Timmes, p. 68.

38. Vietnam: May 1974, pp. 5-6.

39. Ibid., p. 6.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Westmoreland, p. 396.

43. Bui Diem, former GVN Ambassador to the US (Jan 1967 - Dec 1971) in BDM interview, June 8, 1979, Washington, D.C.

44. Lewy, p. 204.

45. Van Tien Dung, p. 125.

46. Westmoreland, p. 405.

47. Van Tien Dung, pp. 2-3.

48. Warner, p. 17.

49. Ibid.

50. Tran Van Don, p. 230; and Warner, pp. 19-20.

51. Timmes, pp. 69-74; Tran Van Don, p. 230; Dung, p. 2.

52. Ibid., pp. 67-75.

53. Ibid., p. 75.

54. Fred C. Weyand and Harry C. Summers, Jr., "Vietnam Myths and American Realities," Commander's Call, July-Aug 1976, pp. 2 and 6.

55. Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 130.

56. Cao Van Vien, and Dong Van Khuyen, Reflections on the Vietnam War, pp. 157-158.

57. Weyand and Summers describe the psychological defeat of the US in Tet 1968 despite military success, p. 5; Palmer looks at the explicit statements of Congress against further involvement in Vietnam and their impact on North Vietnamese thinking, p. 264.

58. Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 5.

59. Ibid.

60. Lewy, p. 206.

61. Ibid., pp. 208-209.

62. Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, pp. 204-205.

63. Brian M. Jenkins, The Unchangeable War (Santa Monica, Ca: Rand Corporation, 1970), p. 10.

64. DeWeerd, p. 18.

65. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, Reflections on the Vietnam War, p. 135.

66. Lewy, p. 207.

67. Timmes, pp. 68-69.

68. Westmoreland, p. 397.

69. Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, p. 212.

70. Westmoreland, p. 396; Palmer also describes equipment shortages in Summons of the Trumpet, p. 264.

71. Richard A. McMahon, DD form 1396, July 5, 1974, p. 4.

72. Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 37.

73. Ibid., p. 47.

74. Cao Van Vien, Leadership, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program (McLean, Va: General Research Corporation, 1978), p. 162.

75. Ibid, p. 170.

76. McMahon, p. 2.

77. Vietnam: May 1974, p. 8.

78. Warner, p. 9; McMahon, p. 4; Vietnam: May 1974, p. 8; Westmoreland, p. 396.

79. Warner, p. 155.

80. Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, p. 205.

81. Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 79.

82. Cao Van Vien, Leadership, p. 168.

83. Tran Van Don, p. 232-235.

84. Ibid., pp. 235 and 243.

85. McMahon, p. 5.

86. Lewy, p. 219.

87. Nguyen Duy Hinh and Tran Vinh Tho, The South Vietnamese Society, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program (McLean, Va: GRC, 1978), p. 161; Warner, p. 28; Lewy, p. 218-219; Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, p. 205.

88. Nguyen Duy Hinh and Tran Dinh Tho, p. 161.

89. Ibid., p. 156, 161, 171-174; Lewy, pp. 193-195; Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, p. 205.

90. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, Reflections on the Vietam War, p. 122; Lewy, pp. 220-221.

91. Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 50.

92. Tran Van Don, p. 219; Lewy credits the concept of a strategic withdrawal to Australian advisor Brig. F. P. Serong, p. 212.

93. Westmoreland, p. 398.

94. Bui Diem, as quoted in Harvey A. DeWeerd, p. 16.

95. Timmes, p. 68.

96. Oudone Sananikone, The Royal Lao Army and US Army Advice and Support, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program (McLean, Va: General Research Corporation, 1978), pp. 145-181.

97. Sak Sutsakhan, The Khmer Republic at War and The Final Collapse, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program (McLean, Va: General Research Corporation, 1978), pp. 114-149 and 173-174.

98. Lewy, p. 205.

99. General Timmes contends that the balance of forces was still in the RVN's favor although "The Communists appeared to be closing the gap by the end of the year." (Timmes, p. 75). Other sources including Lewy, Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen believe the balance had already shifted to the North Vietnamese before the campaign opened at Phuoc Long.

100. Figure 5-2 was derived by BDM analysis of the data in The Military Balance 1971-1972, pp. 51-52; The Military Balance 1972-1973, pp. 54-55; The Military Balance 1973-1974, pp. 57-58; and The Military Balance 1974-1975, pp. 60-61 in addition to other sources cited in these endnotes.

101. Lewy, p. 211; and Van Tien Dung, p. 18.

102. Van Tien Dung for example describes the close coordination, cooperation and concurrence of views between the political leadership and the military leadership of North Vietnam and considers it a "decisive factor" in the 1975 victory. While much of this is self-serving hind-sight, there is also probably more than a grain of truth to the notion that clear and disciplined leadership combined with good communication between Hanoi and the field commanders was a contributory factor to NVA successes, which contrasted with the RVNAF's generally vacillating and poorly coordinated leadership.

103. Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 73. Also, see preceeding discussion of the balances of forces, pp. 71-73.

104. Ibid., pp. 79-80.

105. Timmes, pp. 66 and 75.

106. Palmer, p. 265; Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins also make this point, p. 80.

107. Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 80.

108. Van Tien Dung, p. 63.

109. Buu Vien, quoted in Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 81.

110. Westmoreland, p. 406.

111. Charles J. Timmes, Vietnam Summary: Military Operations After the Cease-Fire Agreement, Part II, pp. 22-24, and Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 83.

112. Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 84.

113. Ibid.

114. Van Tien Dung, p. 47.

115. Westmoreland, p. 400.

116. Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, p. 205. General Timmes agrees with this assessment; see "Military Operations After the Cease-Fire Agreement Part II", p. 25.

117. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, Reflections on the Vietnam War, p. 128.

118. Westmoreland, p. 396.

119. Warner, pp. 58-59.

120. Colonel Ly as quoted in Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 92.

121. Ibid.

122. Timmes, "Military Operations After the Cease-Fire, Part II", p. 25.

123. Lewy, p. 212.

124. Timmes, "Military Operations After the Cease-Fire Part II", pp. 24-25.

125. Hosmer, Kellen, and Jenkins, p. 96.

126. Van Tien Dung, p. 48.

127. Timmes, p. 26; also see Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, pp. 103-106.

128. Timmes, p. 27.

129. Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 108.

130. Ibid., p. 111.

131. Timmes, p. 27; Lewy, p. 213; Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, pp. 109-110; Palmer, p. 265.

132. Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 110.

133. Van Tien Dung, p. 51.

134. Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 114.

135. Lewy, p. 213.

136. For an excellent and detailed description of the political considerations and maneuvering of the last month see Tran Van Don, pp. 241-255.

137. MG Alfred M. Gray, who commanded the 4th Marine Regiment during the evacuation of both Phnom Penh and Saigon argues that: "There were people who wanted to come out who were left behind in Saigon, but it was the fault of the people they worked for or their own fault. There was plenty of time to do it better." MG Alfred M. Gray, BDM interview, August 9, 1979, Quantico, Virginia. A far more common view is that of Tran Van Don, that the United States never provided sufficient transport for an adequate evacuation. Tran Van Don, p. 239. Certainly, it is widely perceived as a disgrace. See Warner, p. 246; John Pilger, The Last Day (New York: Vintage Books, 1975); Palmer, p. 266.

138. Lewy, p. 215.

139. Weyand and Summers, p. 5.

140. Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, pp. 204-205.

141. Tran Van Don, p. 243.

142. DeWeerd, p. 19.

143. Nguyen Duy Hinh, and Tran Dinh Tho, The South Vietnamese Society, p. 168.

144. Oriana Fallaci, p. 57; and Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 14.

145. Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 131.

146. Westmoreland, pp. 396 and 406.

147. William Colby and Peter Forbath, Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 287.

148. Warner, pp. 71-76; Lewy, pp. 193-195; Hosmer, Kellen and Jenkins, p. 60.

149. Westmoreland, p. 402.

150. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, Reflections on the Vietnam War, p. 139.

151. Lewy, p. 221.

152. See Volume VIII for discussion of the impact of the US's failure to win in RVN or to support GVN/RVNAF in the final days. Data based on comments provided to BDM analysts by the following:

- General John Vogt, USAF (Ret) noted at the BDM SRP meeting on February 1979 that senior representatives of six NATO air forces under his command in Europe in the mid-1970's asked him if the US would do the same to them.

- Jonathan D. Stoddart, Special Assistant to the Commander in Chief, Allied Forces Southern Europe, commented in a 5 July 1979 letter to BDM that because of the results of the war, "the US image was badly marred in European eyes."

- Robert L. Brown, Minister Counselor of the USA with The Office of The Supreme Allied Commander Europe, wrote in a letter to BDM, 27 August 1979, inter alia, that the consequences of the war". . . raised the issue of our credibility in the eyes of other nations, the reliability of the United States as an ally." Mr. Brown added that it was the precursor of the final demise of SEATO and CENTO.

- Dr. Henry J. Kenny, Special Assistant to US Ambassador Mike Mansfield in Japan, in a discussion with a BDM analyst, related that a 1979 survey by the Asahi Shimbun showed that about 56% of the Japanese surveyed did not believe that the US would come to their aid in a military crisis.

CHAPTER 6
AIR OPERATIONS

> All four services had developed formidable capabilities in the air. From the US Army helicopters to the US Carrier Task Forces to the strategic bombers of the Air Force, airpower was held in high regard and promised decisive results.
>
> Thompson and Frizzell,
> The Lessons of Vietnam.1/

> Why don't the services just buy one airplane and take turns flying it?
>
> President Calvin Coolidge.2/

A. INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, American airpower meant different things to those who participated in the conflict. The soldier on the ground often thought of airpower as flying artillery. When he was the senior US soldier in Vietnam, General Creighton Abrams considered airpower to be a "uniquely switchable faucet of firepower." To senior air planners, US airpower was a tremendous potential asset which was not decisively applied until the closing days of American involvement. To the enemy, US airpower was a fearsome weapon which required him to adopt a diverse array of active and passive defenses. Moreover, to American policymakers and some segments of the population, airpower was the focus of a furious debate as to its "correct" application, with sharp controversies remaining to this day over issues such as its overall effectiveness, targeting policy, and POWs.

Nevertheless, there are several aspects of the air war upon which most observers can agree. For example, the US undoubtedly possessed the most formidable air armada in the world during the war years, a supremacy that remains intact to this day. American technology, which produced a vast array of sensors and precision-guided munitions (PGMs), enabled tactical airpower to play a key role in searching out and destroying enemy forces. The air war also was characterized by a high degree of interservice rivalry

over roles and missions.3/ In addition, strike planners and pilots were burdened with a bewildering series of restrictions and complex "rules of engagement."

The US entered the Vietnam conflict with great confidence in its air forces. Remembering the vital roles played by airpower in World War II and Korea, US planners may have expected too much from aviation forces. The obscure nature of the enemy's supply routes, numerous restrictions imposed on US air forces, and involvement in a "people's war," a first in America's modern military history, seriously inhibited the exploitation and application of airpower.

This chapter is comprised of five sections of text and supporting graphics. First, it will briefly examine the French air forces in combat against the Viet Minh. It then will assess the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) which fought alongside the US. Major subsections include "The American Air War in Indochina" (with particular emphasis on operations in the RVN), and "The Out-Country Air War" which treats operations in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam. The chapter concludes with "Meaning for the Future" (including "lessons learned"). In view of the importance which US defense planners continue to place on airpower and on the "mixed review" which some military experts gave the performance of US airpower in Vietnam, the chapter is analytical in nature and presents an objective view of the benefits and costs of the air campaign.

B. FRENCH AIR POWER IN THE FIRST INDOCHINA WAR 4/

1. An Overview

During campaigns against the Viet Minh, French Air Force, Navy, and Army aviation provided independent operations (interdiction), direct and indirect fire support missions, reconnaissance, and transport support. Thus, some parallels exist between employment of aviation by French forces and later by the US.

Independent or interdiction missions, sometimes called strategic missions by the French, were conducted on a limited basis against major

roads, vehicle parks, supply depots, and some dams and irrigation canals. Attacks against important roads forced the enemy to use alternate routes, to move at night, and to employ laborers to repair the roads, but Viet Minh logistic areas were well camouflaged and dispersed, and their destruction required more advanced munitions than those available to the French. Consequently, the bombings could accomplish only part of the desired effects. Overall, the Viet Minh's essential lines of communications were not severely interrupted, and interdiction was not a decisive factor in the war.

Throughout the First Indochina War (1946-1954), the French Army and French Air Force contested with each other over aviation assets. The Army's Artillery Aviation Command was organized in 1946, but it passed under Air Force control from 1948 to 1952, after which control gradually returned to the Army. The commander of Army aviation in the French Far East ground forces described the requirement for Army aviation in these terms:

> Observation aircraft were called upon for many kinds of tasks: air spot for mortar and artillery fires, reconnaissance patrol, close support for ground forces, radio relay, air direction of Air Force fighter and bombardment aircraft, reconnaissance of drop zones, aerial supply of rations, mail, medical stores, air evacuation, etc., to which should be added command liaison, battlefield surveillance, and the armed reconnaissance missions flown at the beginning of the war when the observers would attack targets of opportunity with their automatic rifles. 5/

2. Close Air Support

With respect to close air support, the French experience in Indochina 1946-1954, revealed the following: 6/

- Preplanned air support was seldom used.
- Priority requests predominated.
- Some aircraft were kept on 10-minute alert for ground support.
- All aircraft returning from missions could be diverted by the Morane observation aircraft for strafing targets.
- Air request forms made provisions for static defense positions to give accurate information to support aircraft.

- Support of mobile groups was usually coordinated by observation aircraft rather than air liaison officers with those groups because of a greater capability to identify targets accurately.
- Napalm and 260-lb. fragmentation bombs were the most effective ordnance used.
- When attacking villages and caving in fortifications and tunnels, 500 and 1,000 lb. bombs were required, and two 500-lb. bombs were more effective than one 1,000-lb. bomb.

French aviators objected to the French High Command's allocation of almost all air resources to the close support effort with only a negligible fraction for independent (interdiction or strategic) operations. They held that when weather or battlefield conditions permitted, the bulk of the air operations should have been directed against deep, lucrative targets.7/

The French ground forces became heavily dependent on air support for many types of missions, including reconnaissance and transport. Significantly, this dependence often led to paralysis within the infantry whenever air support could not be provided. Similar charges have since been leveled against US and RVNAF forces.

3. Helicopters 8/

Helicopters appeared very late in the war. The Air Force operated two helicopters acquired by the medical services in 1950. In 1954, the Army organized a helicopter training command, but funding limitations required that a mixed squadron of Army and Air Force personnel be formed. By the end of the war in 1954, only 28 helicopters were available to the 65th (mixed) Group.

4. Naval Aviation 9/

French Naval aviation flew both shore-based and carrier-based air support. Land-based air was used along the coastline of Vietnam to interdict supplies moving in from the sea. A 2,000-km blockade was maintained both day and night. Carrier aviation generally operated when weather conditions interfered with shore-based missions, but carrier units were poorly equipped and were only intermittently used.

5. US Dilemma at Dien Bien Phu

The loss of Dien Bien Phu dealt a severe blow to French morale and was the basis for French withdrawal from Indochina. The potential for US involvement at Dien Bien Phu and the related decision-making process is presented in Volume III of this study, but a recapitulation of the basic factors is useful to any consideration of air power in Indochina. (Also see Chapter 1 of this volume.)

Just prior to the final battle, the Eisenhower administration considered intervention in the form of tactical strikes by the US Air Force and Navy. The use of B-29 bombers was discussed, as was the possible use of tactical nuclear weapons, in the expectation that air attacks would relieve the pressure on the French forces.

US aircraft flew covert aerial reconnaissance missions over Dien Bien Phu to evaluate the possible effects and success of such actions, and US planners concluded that B-29s could be employed without high risk of loss or damage.10/ Despite affirmative recommendations by Secretary of State Dulles and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Radford, eight key congressional leaders including Lyndon B. Johnson, meeting on 3 April 1954, opposed US intervention. Further, Secretary Dulles had been unsuccessful in gaining British or other allied support. On April 4, President Eisenhower rejected the proposed strikes.11/

Dien Bien Phu fell to the Viet Minh. The French described the debacle, as it related to air power, in this way:

> Our air superiority was in fact a myth, and this term so frequently used was meaningless. Our aviation certainly did not have to engage an enemy in the air, but the battle of Dien Bien Phu had imposed requirements that our resources could not satisfy. Distances, topography, climate, command, organization, infrastructure, enemy tactics--all of these factors together served to diminish in tragic manner the effectiveness of an aviation whose strength was already very modest.12/

C. THE VIETNAMESE AIR FORCE 13/

1. Genesis of the VNAF

Early in 1951, the French-backed Bao Dai government asked for volunteers to form an air force. Nguyen Cao Ky, one of the early volunteers, described his training cycle: basic training in Marrakesh, Morocco for a year, two years of advanced training in DC-3s in Franco, followed by five months in Algeria for bombing and strafing training.14/ He graduated in 1954 as a fully qualified pilot.

The small Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) was authorized 4,140 men. It consisted of an F-8F fighter squadron, two C-47 transport squadrons, two L-19 liaison squadrons, and an H-19 helicopter unit. The French continued to train the VNAF until early 1957, after which the US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) took over the training.15/

During this period, the US was primarily interested in improving the South Vietnamese counterinsurgency capability. The VNAF did not receive serious attention until mid-1960 when the VNAF Commander grounded all F-8Fs because they were unsafe for flight.16/ In September 1960, the US provided 25 AD-6s and 11 H-34 helicopters.

With the war continuing to expand, it was apparent that the VNAF would have to achieve an increased capability for supporting ground forces. The French had not allowed the VNAF to develop as an independent air force. Only a limited number of Vietnamese combat leaders were available to handle expansion, and only a few VNAF pilots were trained in air-to-ground operations. The ARVN needed effective and constant air support, but the VNAF -- when confronted with these demands -- was unable to fight, train, and expand simultaneously.

The VNAF's command and control structure differed greatly from that of US air forces. South Vietnam was divided into four corps areas and each corps commander had absolute authority over his corps area. While the corps were technically under the Joint General Staff, each corps commander reported directly to the president. All military forces, including VNAF air units in a corps zone, were under the command of the corps commander.

The corps commander looked upon these units as his own, and the air units were not used in adjacent corps zones. VNAF Headquarters made no attempt to provide centralized control so that efficient use could be made of limited resources during critical situations. This situation prevailed throughout the war.

From 1961 through 1972, the VNAF provided credible support to the ground war in South Vietnam, with close air support, air cover to convoys, airlift, reconnaissance, helicopter operations, and interdiction strikes in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.17/ It also made significant contributions to support the ARVN in airlift operations at Kontum, Pleiku, and An Loc during the enemy's 1972 spring offensive. However, in every case, VNAF resources in the corps area were strained and success was only possible with the help of US airpower. For example, the VNAF had insufficient airlift capacity to support more than two divisions of troops deployed in defense of Pleiku. The US augmented the VNAF, which enabled the ARVN to hold the area and avert disaster.

2. Vietnamization 18/

Main air bases and other facilities were turned over to the VNAF as the US forces withdrew. The Vietnamese also took over and operated air navigation facilities at eight air bases. During 1971, the VNAF flew more combat sorties than all US air forces combined. By this time, the VNAF had a strength of over 35,000 officers and airmen -- many of whom had been trained in the US. However, modernization of the VNAF with high-performance aircraft never occurred. The most advanced VNAF jets were the A-37 and the F-5, both types limited in load, range, and time on target. When the enemy Easter Offensive of 1972 began, the NVA/VC had increased its air defense capability, which placed new limits on the air support that A-37 and F-5 aircraft could provide.19/ Nevertheless, the VNAF flew 20,000 strike sorties in 1972 to help blunt the North Vietnamese advances. By the end of 1972, the VNAF had grown to 42,000 officers and airmen and had 10,000 personnel in training, and had 49 squadrons equipped with 2,000 aircraft. Furthermore, the VNAF had received an armada of US-made helicopters including several hundred UH-1 "Hueys" and a small number of AH-1 "Cobra" attack helicopters.

After US air units withdrew, the VNAF had to perform on its own, and in 1973 and 1974 the VNAF found its capability eroding. The North Vietnamese had sent many antiaircraft units to the South, including SA-2 battalions and shoulder-fired SA-7s. The ARVN had always depended heavily on airpower, especially the US B-52s. Although the 2,000-plane VNAF should have weighed heavily in the balance of forces, the limited capability of its A-37s and F-5s could not make up for the withdrawal of the US B-52s, F-4s, F-111s, A-7s, and A-4s. The enemy, sensing the situation, began to move and assemble forces in broad daylight and employed conventional rather than guerrilla tactics.

3. The Ending

The VNAF's overall capability continued to diminish until its final demise in 1975. Shortages of spare parts and POL degraded the availability of aircraft. At one point only five C-130s out of a total of 30 were available to fly missions each day. The ARVN was unable to contain the enemy or prevent his attacks against air bases. As the enemy closed in, the variety and intensity of his air defense capabilities began to affect VNAF tactics and overall effectiveness. The will of the VNAF and the other South Vietnamese forces collapsed in April 1975.

Numerous VNAF aircraft fell into enemy hands. The enemy captured about 1,000 aircraft of all types, including 75 F-5s, 113 A-37s, 10 C-130s, 40 UH-1 helicopters, and 25 AH-1G attack helicopters.20/ The current effectiveness of these air assets in communist hands remains uncertain, primarily due to a general lack of spare parts.

In looking back and assessing what VNAF had learned from its American teachers, one Vietnamese officer summed up as follows:

> The American Air Force trained the Vietnamese only in how to use American planes. How to fight the supply arteries, the LOCs and release the bombs, that's all. As for tactics and strategy, we never had a chance to learn them, except some of the F-5E pilots. We just had to learn ourselves in the field. So we benefited from the American force through the U.S. advisers only in technical matters - how to repair planes with the system used by the USAF. Supply, that's all. Battlefield - we learned nothing from them.21/

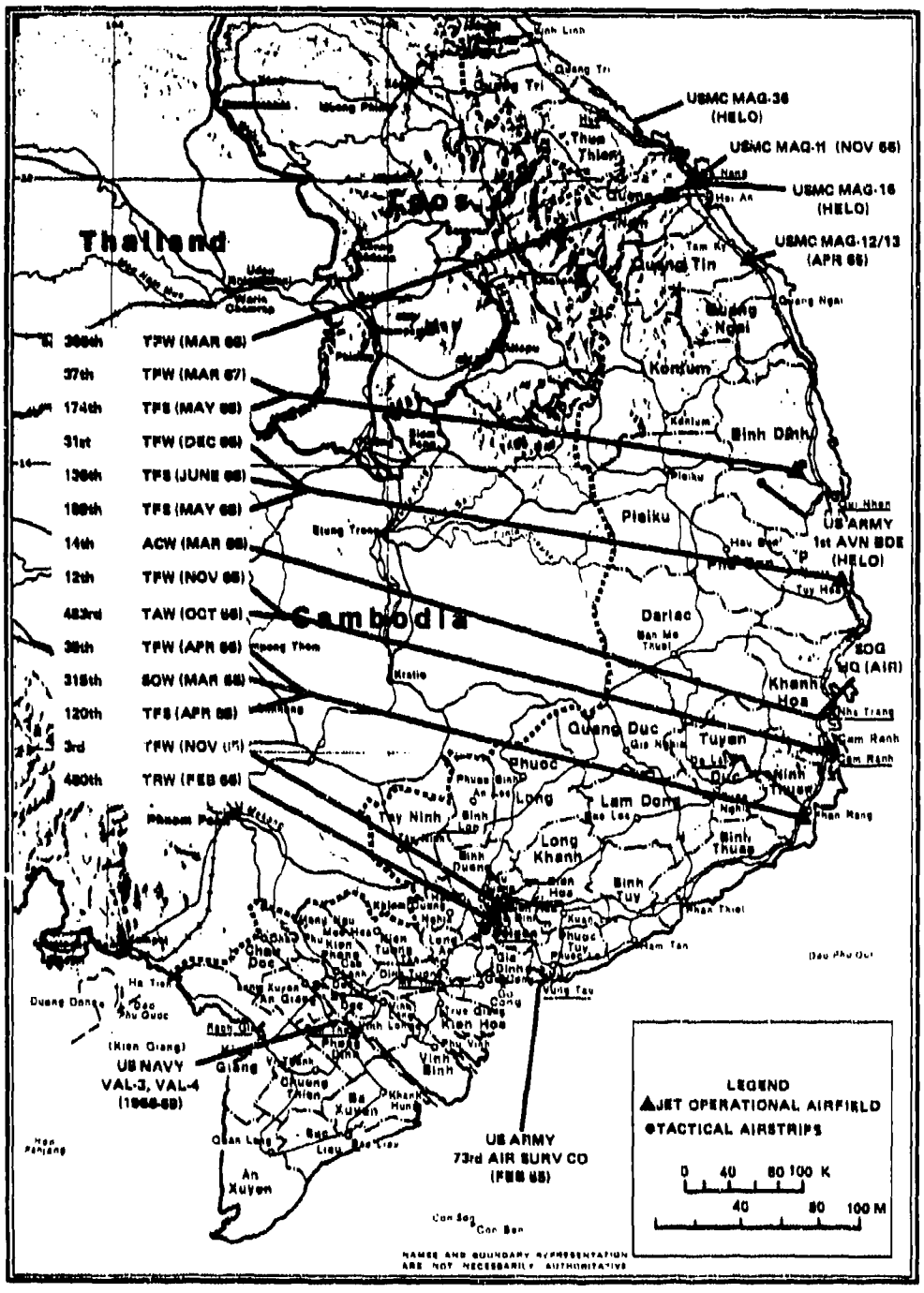
Clearly, VNAF had been inadequate to the task of defending RVN against a massive attack. US congressional restrictions on military aid severely limited their ability to stock spare parts, fuel, and munitions. Operational availability of aircraft fell off sharply. Rapidly rising oil prices after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war caused ruinous inflation and further hurt GVN's ability to support RVNAF properly. Lack of adequate high-performance and electronic countermeasures (ECM) aircraft and other sophisticated systems serious inhibited VNAF's capability to attack targets on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the face of the enemy's impressive gun and missile antiaircraft defenses. After the January 1973 cease-fire, the trail had virtually become a super highway for moving vast quantities of PAVN supplies into position opposite RVN's Central Highlands and near Saigon itself. Vehicular convoys numbering more than 300 trucks were photographed by 7th Air Force, then headquartered at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, but no US action was taken.22/ Watergate had made it difficult for the administration to take any action that might reopen hostilities.

D. THE AMERICAN AIR WAR IN INDOCHINA

1. The Changing Objectives of Airpower 23/

At the first stage of US engagement in actual combat, Secretary McNamara believed that the war should be fought only in South Vietnam, with airpower used to provide close air support to ground forces and to interdict lines of communications. These objectives held through the Kennedy Administration and the opening months of President Johnson's term in office.

The Johnson Administration eventually adopted a program of controlled air strikes against enemy LOC's in Laos, in order to reduce or halt the flow of supplies, equipment, and reinforcements to the Viet Cong. Restraints placed on the full use of airpower, plus the difficulty of trying to interdict supplies on the move, limited tactical air operations and the campaign was never totally effective. (See Map 6-1 for major US Aviation Units in RVN.)



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SOURCE: Numerous Unclassified Sources

Map 6-1. Major US Air Units in RVN as of Mid-1968 (Showing Date of Arrival)

The declared American purpose in South Vietnam was to halt the spread of communism, stop the enemy aggression, negotiate a settlement, and permit South Vietnam to determine its own future without external interference. In support of these goals, the air campaign in North Vietnam was initiated. (The overall effectiveness of this campaign is assessed in the subsection on the "Out-Country" Air War.)

This bombing campaign had three major objectives: 24/

- To make it clear to the leaders of North Vietnam that if aggression against the South continued the North Vietnamese would have to pay a heavy price.
- To indicate US commitment to South Vietnam and to raise the morale of its people.
- To reduce the flow of supplies and personnel from North Vietnam and to increase the cost of infiltration.

The North Vietnamese, however, sensed that US policy lacked determination, and reacted by lessening the flow of supplies to the South until the next US slowdown or full bombing halt, and then increased the flow again. With the open attacks by the North Vietnamese in March 1972 and the failure once again to reach a negotiated peace, President Nixon ordered the mining of ports, the interdiction of internal and territorial waters, and the cutting of lines of communications by air and naval strikes. Many of the previous restrictions on bombing were lifted and an effective bombing campaign finally could be accomplished.

2. Major Constraints 25/

From the very beginning, constraints were imposed on the employment of airpower which seriously limited its overall effectiveness. Initially, US pilots had to be accompanied by a South Vietnamese pilot on combat missions and this created problems because there was lack of sufficient, qualified, English-speaking VNAF personnel. In addition, all air strikes in South Vietnam had to be controlled by Forward Air Controllers (FACs). With insufficient FACs to meet all requirements, serious delays occurred in carrying out requested strikes, and the flexibility of tactical airpower was extremely restricted. President Johnson severely limited the

air commanders' authority to make decisions about the air campaign by imposing strict rules of engagement for each area.26/

In Laos, the US Embassy established the policy for conducting the air war. Many constraints were imposed which, coupled with bad weather, poorly mapped terrain, and a triple canopy jungle, served to restrict the air campaign from achieving its objectives. Furthermore, the enemy effectively used "sanctuaries" in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia where supplies and armaments could be stockpiled until they were shuttled into the RVN under cover of night or bad weather. The most severe restrictions were those imposed by Washington on the selection of high-value targets throughout North Vietnam. Senior USAF planners noted that if interdiction was to succeed, it had to attack vital targets from the border of China to the DMZ.27/

Targeting during the initial Rolling Thunder bombing campaign was very restrictive. The JCS developed a "94 Target List," although air strikes against all 94 targets were not authorized until 1972.28/ The restrictions, combined with "on again - off again" decisions, severely limited the effectiveness of the early bombing campaign. The campaign had little effect on North Vietnam's will to continue infiltrating and fighting in South Vietnam.

When bombing was authorized north of the 20th parallel, top policy-makers placed further restrictions on the bombing. A 25-30 mile "buffer zone" was established between North Vietnam and China to minimize possible US violation of Chinese territory. This caused problems in tactics for striking targets near the buffer zone, and it also created a sanctuary of which the North Vietnamese took full advantage. There was a ten-mile "prohibited area" around Hanoi and a four-mile "prohibited area" around Haiphong. In addition, "restricted areas" 30 miles around Hanoi and 10 miles around Haiphong were established. No strikes were authorized in the "prohibited areas," and until 1972 only a very few targets were struck in the "restricted areas."

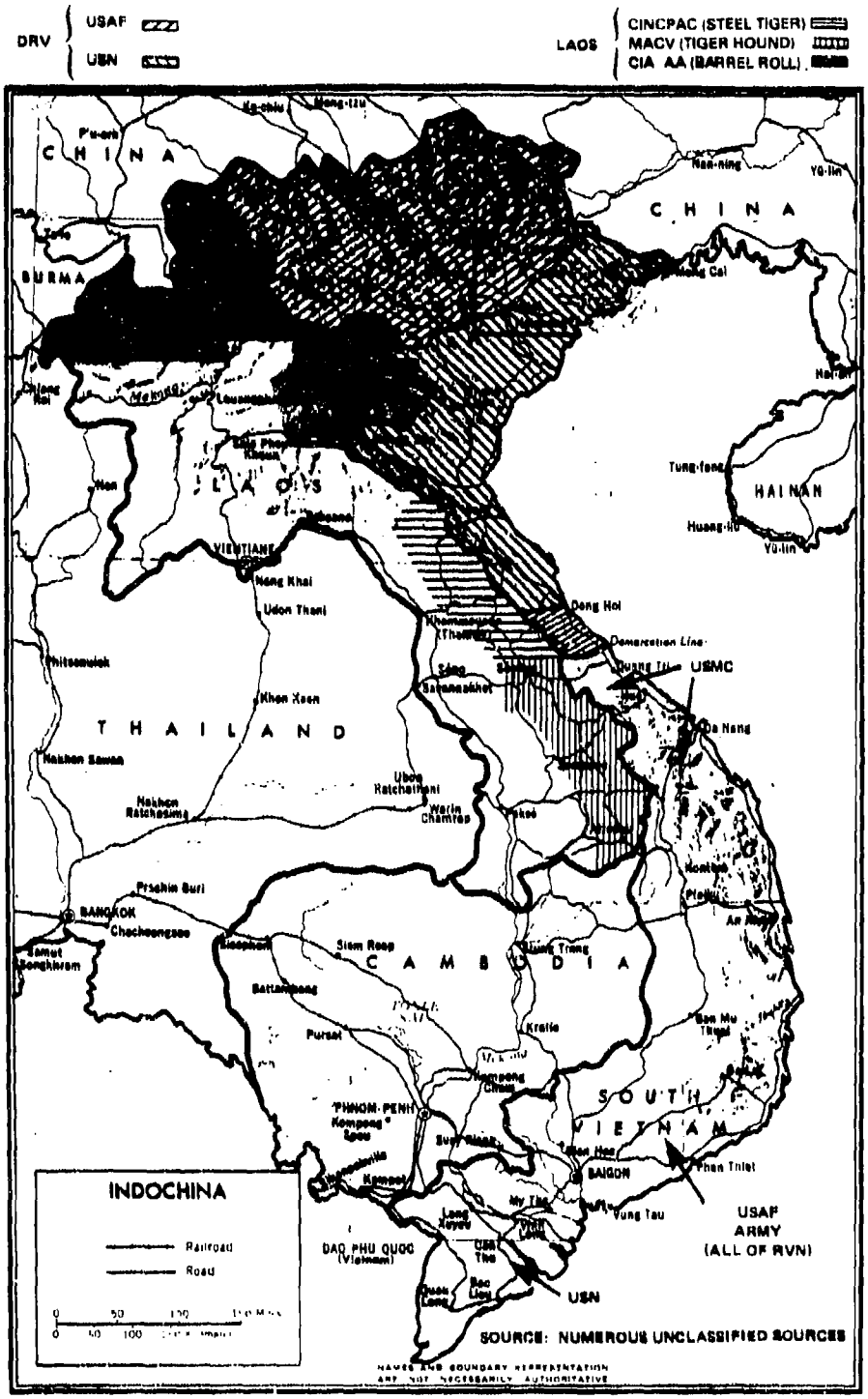
The North Vietnamese anticipated the US policy of gradualism, and used the lulls in bombing campaigns to strengthen their air-defense system, which was very sophisticated and effective by the end of the war.

3. Command and Control

During most of the war, aviation forces that operated in Indochina included elements of US Army aviation, the USAF's Tactical Air Command (TAC) and Strategic Air Command (SAC), US Navy tactical air forces, USMC tactical aviation elements, the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF), and the CIA-sponsored Air America. (See Map 6-2.) Each had its own command and control procedures. The interservice battles for control of aviation assets warrant only brief mention in this chapter, but they are examined at length in Chapter 11 on "Command and Control."

Each of the military services had clear-cut ideas of how to manage its own aviation, but this parochialism tended to impede efforts to get maximum effectiveness out of all aviation assets. A series of interservice disputes over roles and missions, operational control of forces, and other details took place during the early days of US involvement in Indochina. Some US defense planners believed that command and control of aviation assets in Vietnam could be streamlined by creating the position of "Air Manager" or "Single Manager for Air."

Disputes regarding control and allocation of aviation assets usually varied with the particular geographic area of the Indochina theater in which they were used (see subsequent treatment of the air war in Laos and North Vietnam). Even after the 7th Air Force was reestablished in March 1966 to direct the air war in North and South Vietnam, the overall system of command and control of aviation forces would remain difficult for many to understand. According to General John Vogt, USAF, CINCPAC usually functioned as a "5th Wheel" in the US air effort.29/ In South Vietnam, the Marines and Air Force were often at odds over how best to support operations in I Corps. It was not until the defense of Khe Sanh in January 1968 that USAF General William Momyer was able to put the "Single Manager for All Fixed Wing Air" concept into practice. General Westmoreland, then COMUSMACV, directed that all USMC air operations, less helicopters, be put under control of the Deputy Commander for Air Operations, MACV, General Momyer, who also was Commander, Seventh Air Force.30/ This arrangement



4541/78W

SOURCE: Numerous Unclassified Sources

Map 6-2. Major Sectors of Responsibility, 1966

later would be repeated when General Abrams (General Westmoreland's successor as COMUSMACV) employed General George S. Brown, USAF, in this role. See Chapters 3 and 11 of Volume VI for a more detailed presentation of air command and control and air operations in defense of Khe Sanh.

4. Types of Missions Flown in South Vietnam

a. Helicopter Operations

The fleet of Army helicopers was an integral part of the total aviation force which the US deployed to Vietnam. Interservice rivalry over the roles and missions of helicopters is treated at some length in Chapter 11, "Command and Control."

In brief, the Air Force wanted control over all fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters in the theater. It should be noted that South Vietnamese helicopters were in VNAF, and helicopter schooling and advisory functions were accomplished by USAF personnel. Interservice rivalry over control of helicopters culminated in April 1966 with a formal agreement between the Chiefs of Staff of the Army and Air Force, in which the Army agreed to relinquish claims to the C-7 Caribou fixed-wing transport aircraft, but it would assume the primary mission for helicopter-borne airmobility and helicopter gunship operations. This landmark agreement was reached only after the Army realized that it might eventually lose its case for organic aircraft and might end up with none at all.

The so-called "Caribou transfer agreement" set a precedent which the services follow today. Under the terms of the agreement, the Army agreed to relinquish "all claims for Caribou transports and for future fixed-wing aircraft designed for tactical airlift." In turn, the Air Force relinquished to the Army "all claims for helicopters and follow-on rotary-wing aircraft which are designed and operated for intratheater movement, fire support, supply, and resupply of Army forces....," with the exception of those helicopters employed by USAF special air warfare units, SAR (search and rescue) forces, and administrative mission support units.31/

After this agreement, the Army airmobility and helicopter gunship operations came of age in Vietnam. With the escalation of the war and the need for specialized fire support for the Army's airmobile divisions, funding was finally made available for development of the first

truly effective helicopter gunship -- the AH-1 "Huey Cobra." In late 1967, the AH-1 began to take over the primary gunship mission from the armed version of the UH-1B, which saw considerable action during the early years of the conflict.

Army ground forces came to rely increasingly on helicopters for fire support, transport, medical evacuation, and other types of support missions. Army helicopters played a key role in Operation PEGASUS, the operation to relieve Khe Sanh in April 1968, and in a series of sustained combined arms operations to seize back the momentum from the enemy after the Tet Offensive. Operation LAM SON 719 (the ARVN incursion into Laos in 1971, supported by US helicopters) is described in a separate subsection as an illustration of some vulnerabilities of helicopters.

b. Close Air Support 32/

Close air support in Vietnam had some unusual aspects. No clear lines separated the South Vietnamese from the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong, and the enemy was apt to be anywhere. Accordingly, the technique of applying airpower was complex. In South Vietnam, many towns and villages were occupied by the enemy and used as sanctuaries, but US restrictions were imposed on air strikes to minimize civilian casualties. This was done primarily to convince the civilian population to help the government identify and eliminate enemy forces. Forward air controllers (FACs) became the primary means by which air attacks were controlled, including fighter aircraft, gunships, and sometimes bombers.

The US deployed its first FACs to Vietnam in 1963. FACs were placed at provincial headquarters and with major ground force units. The demand for close air support attacks on relatively small targets, some of which were very close to friendly forces, enabled FACs to prove that they could provide some of the most effective and timely close air support - on an average of 800 to 900 sorties a day.

There were few limitations on supplying close air support, especially by day fighters early in the war when enemy defenses were limited, and multiple passes over a target were possible. Later on, improvements in, and increased deployment of, the enemy's air defenses had

an impact on close air support tactics. Where enemy air defenses were fairly heavy, losses could be expected, especially if aircraft operated below 2,000 feet. When US ground forces were involved, air attacks usually were pressed as low as possible. When the US ground forces were not involved, fighters were required to pull out at a higher altitude to minimize the risk.

The enemy's tactic of fighting at night reduced the effectiveness of airpower. However, as the war progressed, US aviation was able to provide effective support at night with the AC-47 and AC-130 gunships using a combination of flares and electronic sensors. These aircraft could destroy armored vehicles, trucks, and other targets with a high probability of a kill.

Aircraft based in Thailand generally could not be used in the close air support role in South Vietnam because of political constraints, but were used instead against enemy supply lines in Southern Laos along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

1) A Systems Analysis View

A continuing detailed study was made of most aspects of the air war in Indochina by DOD Systems Analysis, and the study results were published periodically by OASD/SA in "Southeast Asia Analysis Reports" and by OSD in "Southeast Asia Statistical Summaries." Comments or rebuttals from interested agencies, such as the Air Force and the Joint Staff, were included to provide balance. A particularly useful document resulted, A Systems Analysis View of the Vietnam War: 1965-1972. Volume V of that series is entitled "The Air War," and many of the points and counterpoints in that volume shed light on this study task, to "...seek to determine if the US air operations in North Vietnam were effective or if those assets could have been better used in South Vietnam to support combat operations."[34] Volume V, "The Air War," reflects the following (through May 1970):

- Close Support in South Vietnam (SVN) - Only a very small percentage (about 4%) of the total air effort in Southeast Asia is in support of allied troops in contact with enemy units in South Vietnam. Most of the

remaining sorties attack known or suspected enemy locations, roads, and supply storage areas. (p. 83)

- South Vietnamese Air Support - Of the total allied air effort in South Vietnam, about one-fourth of the attack sorties are reported as being flown for the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) units. In line with our Vietnamization objectives, the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) has increased the percentage of these missions it flies from 25% of total in early 1969 to over 50% currently. Increases in VNAF sortie capabilities will continue VNAF's trend toward complete independence from US air support. (p. 83)

- Communist Bloc Support to North Vietnam (NVN) - Air operations impose no meaningful materiel costs on North Vietnam since its allies pay for most of the resources. North Vietnam's foreign aid during the past three years has been two to three times as large as the costs of keeping her forces in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos supplied and replacing the damage caused by the bombing of North Vietnam. (p. 83)

- Cost Impact (p. 87):

  - The estimated incremental costs of allied air operations in Southeast Asia currently are about $3.5 billion per year.

  - The costs of air operations in South Vietnam represent $1.9 billion (55%) of the total.

  - U.S. air operations account for $3.2 billion (91%) of the total.

  - B-52 operations account for $700 million (20%) of the total.

- Direct Air Support (p. 89):

  - Less than 10% of all air strikes in SVN (4% of total in SEA) are flown to support allied forces in contact with enemy forces.

  - Another 25% of SVN sorties fulfill a request from a ground commander or forward air controllers for an "immediate" strike on a target that is time sensitive (e.g., enemy troops, an occupied base camp, an antiaircraft site, etc.)

- Most of the remaining sorties are preplanned 24 hours or more in adance to strike known or suspected enemy locations.

- South Vietnam - High priority strikes include air strikes for allied troops in contact with enemy forces, and other strikes called for by the ground commander or forward air controller on an immediate basis (i.e., time-sensitive targets). Preplanned strikes in SVN can be reduced with little degradation in quality of close air support. (p. 104)

- Requests for External Fire Support - Tactical air support is requested in only 8% of the total ground contacts. On the other hand, artillery or armed helicopters are requested to provide fire support for almost 40% of the ground contacts. More than half (53%) of the fire fights are either over so quickly or so small that they do not generate requests for any type of fire support. (p. 118) Tactical air support is typically requested for contacts with large numbers of enemy troops (about 150) and which last for long periods of time (three to six hours). This could be a result of slow air response times for tactical aircraft (up to one hour) and an unwillingness of ground commanders to call for air support in relatively small engagements with the enemy. Contacts with small enemy forces (about 35 personnel) and shorter durations (45 to 90 minutes) usually led to a request for only artillery and armed helicopter support. (p. 119)

- Summary - Overall propeller aircraft are almost three times as efficient per target destroyed as jets and cost only 20% as much to destroy a target. However, to destroy a target at night with a jet costs about 13 times more than with a propeller aircraft. Furthermore, prop aircraft suffer about the same or fewer aircraft and crew losses as jet aircraft per target destroyed. Yet even in face of the cost effectiveness of propeller aircraft relative to jets, over 90% of the sorties in Southeast Asia are flown by high-performance jet aircraft. The ready availability of jets that were used over NVN and the lack of props in the US air forces causes this seemingly inefficient use of aircraft.

2) The Adequacy of Close Air Support

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that there were sufficient US air assets in Southeast Asia to provide all of the close

air support sorties that were requested. Indeed, many experienced ground commanders report that on occasion they were coaxed or coerced to provide (meaningless) targets for aircraft that carried live ordnance but, for whatever reason, had no targets or had been diverted and needed a place to unload.35/ Because of the nature of the war and the combat engagements, most commanders in the field employed only their organic weapons, neglecting or choosing not to call for any external fire support, or they called for the more readily available artillery or helicopter gunship support. There is no evidence to suggest that fixed-wing support for US forces was in short supply, either on a preplanned or immediate basis, at any time during the war, except for the US Army and ARVN divisions in I CTZ. When in early 1968 General Westmoreland reinforced I CTZ with the Americal Division, two brigades of the 1st Cavalry Division, a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, and the Korean Marine Brigade, he was disturbed by the failure of III MAF to provide tactical air support for the Cavalry Division.36/ The General commented that "...Marine ground troops got more support than the Air Force could provide Army units, and Marine aircraft were often capable of doing more."37/ The ARVN commander of I CTZ complained to 7th Air Force General Momyer in 1967 that the ARVN did not get enough air support but that the Marines got too much; the Americal Division registered similar complaints.38/ General Momyer acknowledged that the problem, in part at least, stemmed from Marine configuration for amphibious operations which left them short of organic artillery and airborne FACs, but he also suggested that the III MAF (and 1st MAW) staffs were not sufficiently flexible to adjust to the radically changing situation.39/

c. Interdiction 40/

The backbone of tactical interdiction was the combined fighter-bomber forces of the USAF, USN/Marines, and the VNAF. Initially propeller-type aircraft were used, but by 1967 tactical jet aircraft made up the bulk of these fighter-bombers. They were supplemented by some B-57 light bombers and by AC-47, AC-119, and AC-130 gunships. B-52 strategic bombers were modified to carry conventional munitions (84-109 bombs per aircraft), and in June 1965 they dropped their first bombs north of Saigon.

From 1967 on, the AN-MSQ-77 (Radar Bomb Directing Central) and Loran were used to guide strikes on targets at night and during bad weather. The B-52s used the MSQ-77 and, to a very limited degree, LORAN. Gunships used their internal capability such as Low-Light Television (LLTV) and infrared sensors.

B-52 strikes had a devasting psychological effect on the enemy while building the morale of the US forces and the South Vietnamese, according to senior USAF planners. They were able to inflict severe casualties on enemy troops and destroy tanks, vehicles, and other equipment.41/ The B-52 was a decisive factor in battles for Ben Het, Khe Sanh, Kontum, and An Loc.

There were those in the United States who critized the use of B-52 as "swatting flies with sledge hammers." When targets were in jungle areas, the results were hard to assess. While General Westmoreland and field commanders have praised the B-52 ARC LIGHT operations, the overall effectiveness of interdiction is still being debated by military analysts. Interdiction is covered in detail in the subsection to this chapter dealing with the "Out-Country" Air War.

d. Airlift 42/

The first US transport aircraft sent to Vietnam were USAF C-47s, which provided airdrops of Vietnamese paratroops, night flareship operations, and general airlift support. After the C-47 came C-123s, C-7s, and finally C-130s. The peak of available airlift was reached in early 1968, when 15 squadrons of C-130's were assigned to Southeast Asia. These were augmented by C-124, C-141, C-5, and commercial transports flying personnel and supplies from the US.

Fixed-wing transports were pivotal in support of search and destroy operations. The tactical airlift aircraft transported multi-battalion task forces to forward airheads and resupplied them with ammunition, supplies, and POL. Army helicopters performed assault missions and short-haul distribution of supplies, refueling and rearming at the various airheads.

The USAF was assigned the task of strategic airlift from the US to Southeast Asia in 1965.43/ The demand became so great that Air Force Reserve personnel were placed on short active-duty tours and military airlift was augmented by commercial air.

Tactical airlift assets made a significant contribution to the in-country war by providing air supply of allied units in critical battles such as Khe Sanh (1968), and An Loc, Kontum, and Pleiku (all in 1972).44/ The air supply of Khe Sanh, over a four-month period, enabled 6,000 allied defenders to survive under heavy NVA pressure and supplemented the efforts of all other forces defending there.

Kontum was resupplied by airlanding and airdrop. Airlanding was the initial mode until the enemy seized a part of the runway. Then C-130s airdropped some 2,000 tons of supplies in 130 total sorties.

Aerial resupply to An Loc began with helicopters and C-123s. However, losses became so great that helicopter and C-123 operations were suspended and the C-130 became the workhorse. Daylight parachute drops were first used as the method of resupply. Battle damage to the first four C-130s and the loss of a fifth required changes in tactics to minimize damage and prevent losses. High altitude, low-opening (HALO) parachutes, medium altitude radar guidance, and night missions were used with varying degrees of success. In all, 7,600 tons of supplies were dropped into An Loc and the garrison survived the seige.

e. Reconnaissance

Reconnaissance aircraft played a major role in attempts to find the enemy in all areas of the Indochina theater. The Air Force and Army provided most of the day-to-day reconnaissance in South Vietnam. The Air Force's 460th Tactical Reconnaissances Wing flew over 10,000 hours in one particularly busy month and processed some 4.5 million feet of aerial film.45/ The Army's OV-1 Mohawk was a very effective reconnaissance platform. Its high speed enabled it to approach enemy targets undetected, and its in-flight film processing system ensured that vital information could be relayed quickly to ground commanders. US Navy carrier-based planes operating over the DRV and SAC's U-2s, SR-71s, and Buffalo Hunter

drones were also used (see Chapter 9, Intelligence).46/ In all, US forces met over 90 percent of the total in-country aerial reconnaissance requirements, with the VNAF fulfilling the remainder.

The task of detecting the enemy on aerial film was difficult throughout the war, particularly in photos taken over jungles. Use of proper cameras, light conditions, film processing, and experienced photo interpreters eventually pinpointed thousands of targets along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but most of those targets were not attacked.47/

f. Search and Rescue

The American search and rescue (SAR) effort was distinguished, as nearly 3,900 US and allied airmen and ground troops who went down in the jungles, mountains, and waters of Southeast Asia were rescued.48/ The USAF's 3rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group coordinated the theaterwide SAR effort from Tan Son Nhut beginning in January 1966, and directed the activities of rescue squadrons based there, at Da Nang, at Tuy Hoa, and at Udorn, Thailand. Ten rescue detachments were based throughout South Vietnam and four were in Thailand.49/

SAR operations were often quite complex, particularly those performed behind enemy lines, but they were an important morale booster for aircrews. Usually a small task force was assembled, consisting of two HH-53C rescue helicopters, an HC-130P refueler aircraft, and several A-1 Skyraiders to provide close air support if necessary. OV-10 FACs directed and coordinated many rescue operations, calling in additional air (or artillery) support.50/ In some areas of Laos, aircrews called on Air America (AA) helicopters for rescue assistance. The Air America pilots usually responded quickly, and often had to put down in some "impossible" landing zones (LZs).51/

The SAR effort was an example of the successful application of American technological advances in Vietnam. Most of the new equipment was directed toward finding downed aircrews at night: electronic location finders, infrared sensors, and low-light-level TV.52/ Furthermore, there was no shortage of aircrews and pararescuemen to employ this equipment, even in the most dangerous of SAR operations.

5. The Psychological Impact of Air Operations

a. On Enemy Forces

Regardless of the actual casualties inflicted, US airpower clearly affected the morale of enemy troops. In the South, the enemy could seldom mount a significant ground operation without considering that his activities might trigger an air strike in return. As a result of this concern, enemy forces often staged hit-and-run attacks, attempted to blend in with the civilian population in the South, and adopted a variety of techniques for camouflage, cover and deception (CC&D) when in the field.

The enemy was particularly afraid of the B-52s and AC-130 gunships.53/ The most feared aerial weapons employed by fighter-bombers were napalm and cluster-bomb units (CBUs). These weapons had a greater radius of destruction than conventional high-explosive (HE) bombs, and were better suited than HE bombs for antipersonnel strikes.54/

The psychological effect of US air strikes on North Vietnam is more difficult to assess. The strikes, according to some analysts, caused the North Vietnamese to "buckle down" and fight on even more doggedly, as did the British in 1940 in World War II.55/ Official North Vietnamese propaganda used these attacks to incite the people against the US. The lack of access to the North Vietnamese population has prevented an authoritative assessment by US officials of the overall psychological effects of the American air campaign. There is little doubt, however, that the North Vietnamese leadership felt the psychological pressures of the Linebacker I and II air campaigns; the latter brought them back to the peace table in Paris.56/

b. On Friendly Forces

US ground forces have come to expect American air forces to have complete control of the airspace above the battlefield and to provide readily available close air support and interdiction. This is a long-standing tradition, and the last time US ground forces faced any serious enemy air-to-ground threat was during the North African campaigns of 1942.57/

The provision of air support has important psychological effects. The knowledge that US aircraft are available to strike the enemy is reassuring, and the sight of US aircraft pounding enemy positions can raise the morale of ground troops. Studies on the effects of close air support indicate that the "morale boosting" factor need not be related to the actual number of enemy troops killed during these strikes.58/ Even if such strikes only force enemy troops to keep their heads down or curtail an attack, they stand to achieve a positive psychological effect on friendly forces.

In Vietnam, US ground commanders relied on air support, which was readily available and responsive to the needs of the tactical situation. No other military force has been able to match the US capability to deliver so much ordnance so quickly.59/

c. On Vietnamese Allies

The South Vietnamese probably were even more awed by US airpower than were American forces. As early as 1964, RVN officials believed that US airpower would produce a major turnaround in the campaign against the enemy. In that year, General Khanh had complained of South Vietnamese war-weariness, which in retrospect was a transparent tactic to pressure US officials to bomb the North to improve the unity and resolve within RVN's military and civilian population.60/ After the raids on the DRV began, there was an appreciable improvement in South Vietnamese morale. The bombing campaign could not, however, constitute a permanent support for morale in the South, according to one study sponsored by the Defense Department.61/

Perhaps more important was the psychological effect on the RVN leadership. Major South Vietnamese political leaders associated progress of the war effort and prospects for their country's survivability with the US bombing campaigns in the South and throughout the rest of Indochina. Some South Vietnamese were disappointed by the termination of all US air strikes in August 1973, and others expected (or hoped for) B-52s to save the day as late as 1975.62/

d. On Public Opinion

The air war led to common stereotypes of the American "Goliath" pounding the helpless "David" (the VC and NVA, which did not employ airpower in the South). Regardless of the effectiveness of the bombing, this stereotype view persisted, particularly among the "counter-culture," intellectuals, and antiwar groups and was raised with each new revelation of US bombing in Laos, Cambodia, or North Vietnam. In addition, antiwar propaganda focused sharply on those US air weapons which had the most effective military benefit, such as napalm.63/ The theme of "stop the bombing" mobilized antiwar groups to take action against US policies in Indochina. One result of this political action by antiwar groups was the reluctance by some US officials -- particularly those of the Johnson Administration -- to expand the air war or to strike targets in restricted areas of the DRV.

The protests were not limited to the United States. In Britain, Japan, and Australia, large crowds demonstrated against US involvement in Indochina. One of the principal issues was "stop the bombing."

In media terms, the image of the might of US airpower (such as a picture of a B-52 or a formation of F-4s or helicopters) could be contrasted sharply with the popular image of the "primitive" enemy forces. No matter how adept the enemy had become in countering the effects of US airpower, he would often be portrayed as "helpless" against the "onslaught" of US airpower. This was just one of the many ways in which media reporting tended to distort events in the field to the overall detriment of the US/allied effort. Antiwar groups tended to use the same yardstick as did the Pentagon -- such as the fact that USAF aircraft expended over six million short tons of munitions during the war -- even though these measures told very little about trends in the guerrilla war in the South.64/

6. Illustrations of Air Support in Two Campaigns

a. Air Support of Lam Son 719

From February to April 1971, US helicopters and ground attack aircraft provided extensive support to the ARVN ground interdiction

of the Ho Chi Minh Trail -- Operation LAM SON 719. This operation was a bold attempt by RVNAF forces, with US support, to cut that supply line.

More than 8,000 USAF, Navy, and USMC TACAIR sorties were mounted, along with 1,352 B-52 sorties.65/ On 6 February, 120 helicopters from the US 101st Airborne Combat Aviation Group airlifted two ARVN battalions into the area of Tchepone astride Route 9, 22 miles west of the RVN/Laos border.66/ This was the largest and longest-ranging combat helicopter assault of the war. Enemy resistance, which was minimal at first, grew increasingly tenacious with a counter-offensive on February 25, and enemy reinforcements arrived in the Tchepone area during early March.67/ Faced with mounting losses, the ARVN commander ordered a withdrawal in late March.

In the hasty retreat that followed, the South Vietnamese abandoned large quantities of armor, trucks, and other military equipment. Intense enemy ground fire made helicopter missions extremely dangerous. More than 100 US helicopters were lost, and 618 received combat damage but were economically repairable. This led to panic among many ARVN troops, but, under massive B-52 and tactical air cover, almost all surviving ARVN troops were extricated by March 24, and the operation officially ended on April 5. Although US and ARVN forces claimed to have achieved a very favorable "kill ratio," many viewed the operation as a setback to the Vietnamization program.68/

USAF sources point out that neither the invasion nor the withdrawal would have been possible without the extensive use of airpower. This statement cannot be denied, but in addition, some constraints on the operation and on the effective employment of helicopters warrant special mention here.69/

-- From the start, the element of surprise had been compromised to enemy intelligence. The enemy had received word of the impending invasion at least several weeks in advance, and was able to rehearse defensive ground maneuvers.

-- Allied intelligence had underestimated the size of enemy forces in the Tchepone area. More NVA troops were based there (about 35,000 total combat and support personnel) than previously expected.

-- Pre-operation planning reflected a great degree of interservice disagreement, particularly with regard to the roles and missions each service's aviation forces would perform.

-- The NVA defenders had already positioned their air defenses near the likely helicopter launching zones (LZs). These air defenses provided for overlapping rings of fire, which would prove to be deadly for the US helicopters.

-- There were few landing zones available at the objective which were suitable for large-scale helicopter operations.

-- Aviation support of all kinds was hampered by weather, including rain, fog, haze, and cloud cover. In the morning and afternoon, the thick haze mixed with the smoke from artillery shells and hindered the visibility of US pilots who were supporting ARVN ground units.

-- In many instances, no ARVN battalion stayed in the LZ area long enough to hold it against enemy counterattacks.

-- The rugged terrain, combined with adverse weather, tended to channel the routes of US helicopters along predictable routes, which gave the enemy many opportunities to "stack" his air defenses.

LAM SON 719 illustrated three points about the interdiction program and the Trail. First, the fact that an attempt at ground interdiction was made at all reflects the difficulty of impeding the flow of men and supplies by air operations alone. Second, the increasingly stiff resistance by the enemy forces indicated the large value which Hanoi had placed on the supply line. The 1971 invasion disrupted and temporarily reduced the volume of supplies reaching enemy forces in South Vietnam through Tchepone and areas to the east of that district town. But US planners still did not fully understand the diffuse system of jungle paths which comprised the Trail network; enemy forces had built a whole new network of trails west of the Tchepone area, and these were not seriously threatened.70/

b. Airpower versus Guerrillas and Conventional Forces: The Case of the Easter Offensive

As long as the enemy relied on his time-tested guerrilla tactics of blending into the jungles and local population, he continued to be a very difficult target for US pilots to identify. By the early 1970s, enemy forces started using conventional tactics in increasing degrees, perhaps with the knowledge that the US had no desire to build up its troop strength again. At the same time, the enemy's increased use of conventional heavy weapons was looked upon favorably by US air commanders, since they had air-to-ground ordnance which was well suited to strike armored vehicles and other heavy equipment.

US airpower used against the enemy's heavy equipment was well tested during early 1972 in the Easter Offensive.71/ For the first time, the enemy used T-34, T-55, and PT-76 tanks and 130mm artillery in large numbers. In some battles, these weapons left South Vietnamese troops reeling, but US airpower played a key role in blunting enemy drives. By now, enemy forces were simply easier to find. American weapons such as the TOW (Tube-launched, Optically tracked, Wire-guided) antitank missiles would have been ineffective against a platoon of guerrillas on foot, but proved their worth against enemy armor.

Airpower proved to be a key factor in several major battles of the Easter Offensive. The air offensive against enemy forces around An Loc was termed a "monument to airpower," as B-52s, TACAIR, and helicopter gunships pounded enemy units. In the Central Highlands, B-52 and Tacair raids smashed enemy troop concentrations and bunker complexes. In the defense of Kontum during May, the enemy was diven back by massive use of B-52s, TACAIR, and helicopter gunships (which used TOW missiles with deadly effect on enemy tanks).

E. THE "OUT-COUNTRY" AIR WAR IN INDOCHINA

1. The Air War in Laos

a. Northern Laos

The air war in northern Laos cannot be fully understood without an appreciation of early US-backed efforts on behalf of the Royal

Lao Government (RLG) led by Prince Souvanna Phouma. For years, a large-scale conflict was waged in northern Laos that eventually required a large commitment of USAF airpower.

President Kennedy's "Country Team" directive of May 1961 placed all US agencies operating within a foreign country under the direct supervision of the US Ambassador. In Laos, this gave the Ambassador direct control of all US military and paramilitary (PM) operations; in effect, he became the commander in a theater of war, responsible directly to the president. US military operations in Laos were conducted first using paramilitary organizations (such as General Vang Pao's Armee Clandestine) and later US airpower -- but with target and strike approval in the hands of the US Embassy in Vientiane.

MATERIAL DELETED

US Bases in Thailand and Laos

Thailand	Major Combat Unit	Miles to Laos/DRV
Udorn	432nd TRW (from Sep 66)	30/150
Ubon	8th TFW (from Dec 65)	40/160
Nakhon Phanom	56th Air Cdo Wg (Apr 67-Aug 68) redes. 633rd Spec Ops Wg (Jul 68-Mar 70)	1/65
Korat	388th TFW (from Apr 66)	200/305
Takhli	355th TFW (Nov 65-Dec 70) 366th TFW (June-Nov 72)	155/360
U-Tapao	4258th Strat Wg (June 66-Apr 70) redes. 307th Strat Wg	305/470

Laos		Function
Lima 2	(near Rte 7)	forward base for Meo ops
Lima 6	(north of PDJ)	base
Lima 15	(Bau Na)	base
Lima 23	(north of PDJ)	base
Lima 36	(Na Khang)	Nav. guidance site to aid bombing of DRV; lost in Mar 68
Lima 85	(Phou Pathi)	Nav. guidance site to aid bombing of DRV; lost in Mar 68
Lima 201	(near Rte 7)	forward base for Meo ops

(Other unlocated sites are Lima 5, Lima 14, Lima 22, Lima 54, and Lima 108)

Source: The USAF in SEA; Hersh article in NYT, 1972; Robins, Air America, passim.

Figure 6-1. US Bases in Thailand and Laos

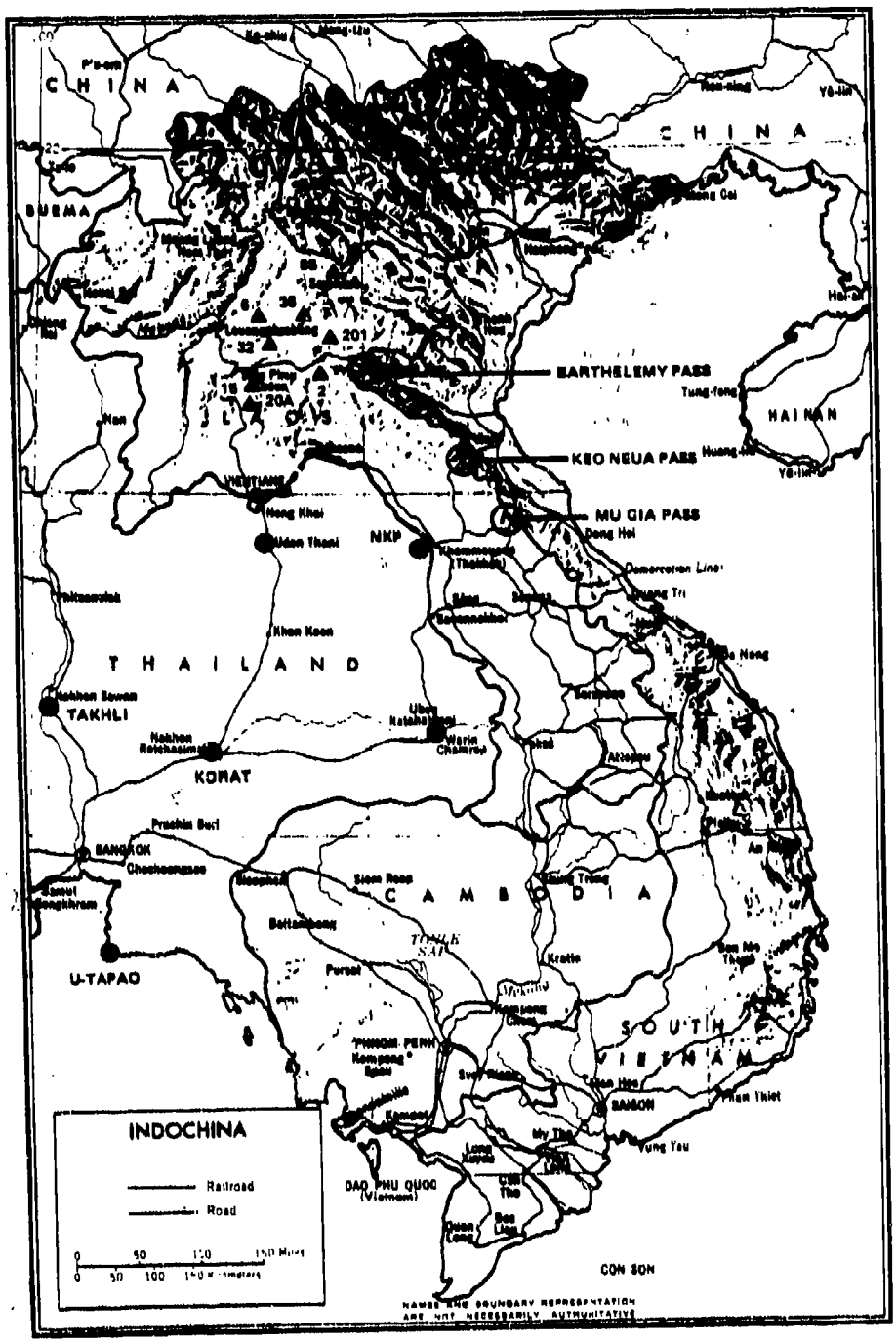
Against this backdrop, USAF planes began to fly cover missions for the RLAF/AA T-28s in October 1964. The first independent strike by USAF aircraft, apart from these missions, occurred in December 1964, under the code name of Barrel Roll.75/ Barrel Roll was designed to support the ground combat in northern Laos and differed from the Steel Tiger program (See Map 6-3 for US Lima Sites and Air bases and Map 6-4 for Barrel Roll and Steel Tiger), which was to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail (HCMT).

During the mid-1960s, the ground war had a cyclical pattern: Pathet Lao (PL) forces and their North Vietnamese Army (NVA) supporters would advance during the dry season, about October to May; during the monsoon season, the RLG Army and the Meo guerrillas would regain the lost territory.

c. US Air Operations in the Late 1960s

The US accelerated air operations in northern Laos in the late 1960s. In 1967, the US began a highly sensitive weather modification program there (first termed Operation Compatriot, then Operation Intermediary, finally Operation Popeye) in order to complicate the movement of military supplies from the DRV.76/ US air activity in northern Laos rose sharply when planes which had been flying missions against North Vietnam became available in November 1968. In May 1969, the US acceded to General Vang Pao's request for direct air support of his guerrilla units. During this time, the USAF sortie rate in northern Laos reached 300 per day, a rate equal to that of the Rolling Thunder campaign against the DRV. Moreover, the US began B-52 missions over Northern Laos during 1969, according to former Ambassador William Sullivan.77/ B-52 raids over Laos began in significant size and duration in February 1970, with the commencement of Operation Good Luck, designed to stop a PL/NVA offensive.

A strategy was evolved which would blend the effectiveness of abundant airpower with the relatively ineffective Lao ground troops. Its aim was to turn major battles into contests primarily between US airpower and PL/NVA ground forces. During major offensives, the RLG/Meo



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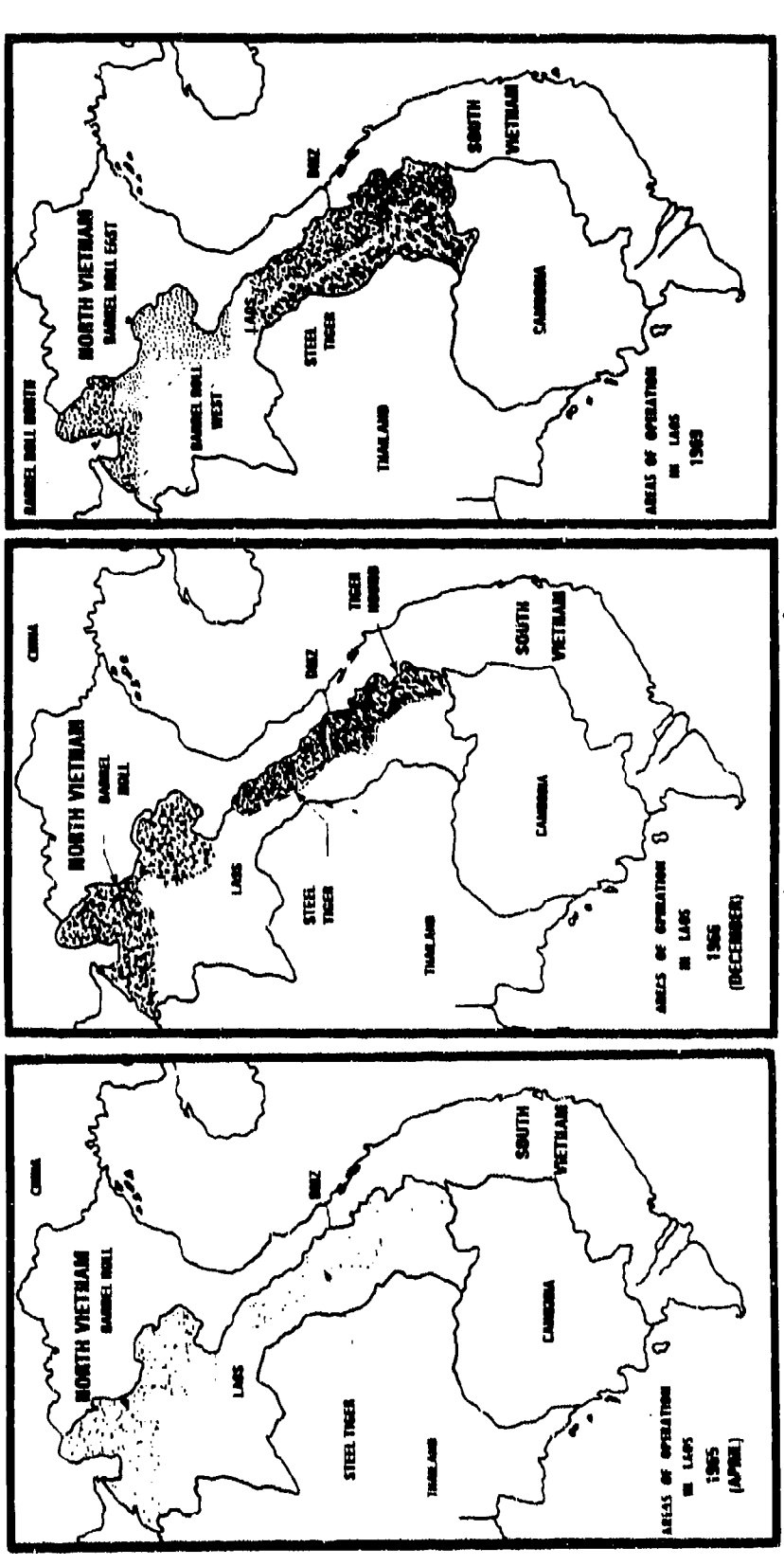
SOURCE: The USAF in Sea, pp. 132-133

Map 6-3. US "Lima" Sites in Laos and USAF Bases in Thailand



Map 6-4. Areas of Operation in Laos

forces held positions only long enough to draw the enemy into the open where he could be attacked from the air. According to one account, "Vang Pao and his troops would move out, identify the enemy, pull back, and the airpower would come in."78/

d. Command Arrangements

Command procedures for such operations were complex and difficult, certainly from the USAF point of view.79/ All air operations came under the detailed surveillance and control of the embassy; in effect, the embassy's air attache -- apparently detailed to Project 404 -- functioned as an air commander since he could determine the employment of 7th Air Force assets through the authority of the ambassador. According to General William Momyer, who formerly commanded the 7th Air Force, the embassy's special staff were incapable of controlling sophisticated air operations, and other sources state that this staff was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of bombing activity.

Relations were poor between the USAF and CIA over the conduct of Barrel Roll operations. USAF commanders resisted the embassy's requests for putting certain types of propeller aircraft under direct embassy control, and the CIA was reluctant to apprise USAF officers of sensitive paramilitary missions. Fundamental questions of allocation of aircraft to specific missions often were not resolved to the satisfaction of either party.

The problem of organizational rivalry for airpower was, in fact, much larger than the scope of Barrel Roll operations. If airpower had been allocated to the satisfaction of the US Ambassador in Laos, there would have been insufficient forces for other missions in South Vietnam, southern Laos, and North Vietnam, according to the 7th Air Force view point. Indeed, CINCPAC considered the war in North Vietnam a priority commitment, COMUSMACV considered his mission in South Vietnam dominant; and the ambassador in Laos was convinced the preservation of the status quo in Laos deserved extensive airpower.80/

During the late 1960s, the "rules of engagement" in Laos were relaxed, and US aircraft were freer than before to attack suspected

enemy ground targets. This led to a US/RLG program to evacuate civilians from areas of major air attacks, such as the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) in north central Laos. The strategic movement of the population denied the enemy the resources of the local population and secured a large segment of the population under RLG control. It also cleared areas, such as the PDJ, for unrestricted air strikes against enemy forces. According to one account, "most of the Plain has indeed become a free-fire zone."81/

e. Effects

On some occasions, US airpower was able to slow or stem enemy advances. Excellent bombing by F-111s, F-4s, and A-7s made possible the defense of Vang Pao's headquarters at Long Tieng, for example. All-weather bombing sorties were necessary there because enemy units positioned on the surrounding mountain peaks often were obscured by clouds.

Some observers argue that in the long run, airpower -- associated with relatively weak ground forces -- was unable to hold the line in northern Laos. Despite the massive concentration of air strikes into a relatively limited geographical area, enemy forces kept advancing throughout the late 1960s. By 1970, Meo forces had been ground down and Lao adolescents and Thai "volunteers" were being called on to stem the enemy thrusts.

Western journalists who visited the Laotian province of Sam Neua found a landscape covered with bomb craters, "a chaos of red earth, broken rocks, devastated trees."82/ About one-quarter to one-third of the Laotian population had become refugees after 1960, and the main reason for leaving their homes was the fear of US bombing. These reports added fuel to the antiwar movement in the US, and American policy was hit where it was perhaps most vulnerable -- in the "hearts and minds" of a significant proportion of the electorate.

f. Southern Laos

Of the various US air operations in Indochina, interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail (HCMT) supply lines was the most concerted and continuous. Interdiction efforts began in 1964 and continued until 1973, by which time USAF raids on the Trail had become commonplace.83/ The US

increased the number of air strikes on the Trail network in southern Laos and had significantly upgraded the sophistication of aerial weapons and support equipment by the end of the war.

g. Relationship to Other Areas

A close relationship existed between Trail interdiction and the conduct of the ground war in South Vietnam. Initially, US spokesmen often associated success of the air interdiction effort to the number of enemy troops the US and ARVN forces would meet on the battlefield. Later, US strategists considered Trail interdiction a prerequisite for the success of the Vietnamization policy.

Similarly, a close relationship existed between bombing in southern Laos and the air war against North Vietnam, which also included interdiction among its objectives. The two operations competed for aircraft, and planes which were unable to hit their programmed targets in the DRV often were diverted onto the Trail in Laos. After the US halted the bombing of North Vietnam in October 1968, the sortie rate against the HCMT in Laos rose markedly.84/ In addition, the interdiction effort was closely tied to Barrel Roll operations in northern Laos.

h. Net Effectiveness

DOD analysts argued among themselves as to the overall success of the interdiction, and even the Joint Chiefs of Staff were divided in their assessments. The Air Force and Marines generally were enthusiastic supporters of the effort, the Army usually had reservations, and the Navy gave the effort its reluctant support (Navy strike aircraft flew about half as many sorties over the Trail as did USAF planes).85/ The US Intelligence Community's assessment about interdiction often reflected service views, and the CIA analysis usually was pessimistic about prospects for the program's success. Perhaps with this assessment in mind, Admiral U. S. G. Sharp testified in 1967 that the bombing was not intended to stop infiltration completely, but to impede that effort and make it as costly as possible for the enemy.

Unfortunately, the US lacked a clear, comprehensive picture of the enemy's logistical efforts and the Trail network in particular.

The HCMT network evolved and widened as the need arose, primarily in response to US interdiction efforts, and US planners expected more from the interdiction program than the combined efforts of USAF and Navy aviation forces were able to deliver.

US planners further lacked a full appreciation of the net effect of infiltration and interdiction on the conduct of the war in the RVN. For example, few could estimate with confidence the volume of military supplies needed to sustain the enemy's effort in the South. Undoubtedly, the more than 1.5 million out-of-country interdiction sorties flown did hamper the flow of supplies down the HCMT, and the enemy had to increase his efforts to maintain the net flow of material he received in RVN, but interdiction did not choke off VC/NVA activity in the South, and all of the estimates of supply flows along the Trail were uncertain.86/

Perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of the interdiction program (from the US point of view) was the degree of sophistication the enemy had attained in the art of camouflage, cover, and deception (CC&D), which he used to reduce losses during the long march to South Vietnam (see Figure 6-2 for selected examples).

Even under the best of circumstances, measuring the success of an interdiction effort is a difficult task. The results achieved are hard to verify and the volume of supplies reaching their destination is precisely known only to the enemy's quartermaster corps. Interdiction is a long-term effort, but results can be masked, to a certain degree, by stockpiling. In addition, the enemy may adjust the level and style of his fighting to accommodate the supply situation. Moreover, he may respond by stepping up infiltration, and he could start a much larger volume of supplies down the Trail routes to obtain the amount actually needed at the other end.

In the infiltration/interdiction "battle," the NVA had the advantage of initiative and a flair for circumventing USAF/USN air strikes. Both sides made great efforts to tailor their tactics throughout the interdiction, and US pilots performed well. But the cumulative effects of initiative, surprise, and flexibility on the enemy's side -- combined with

- Paper mache trucks on Ho Chi Minh Trail (HCMT)
- Paper mache MIG-21s at Gia Lam airfield
- Enemy built phony roads (to attract U.S. bombing)
- If in a paddy field, a labor battalion (spotting the approach of U.S. aircraft) would fall in straight lines to look like a rice dike
- Extensive tunnels, with camouflaged entrance and exits, in South Vietnam
- Submerged bridges built just below the surface of rivers
- Pontoon bridges which swing aside and were concealed by trees and camouflage by day
- Enemy covered bomb damage on HCMT by using bulldozers and large animals
- Enemy set fires apart from trucks to divert IR systems
- Enemy used bicycles and human portage to move supplies southward
- Extensive use of radio silence and ICD (imitative communications deception).
- Enemy would set off decoy explosions when trucks were attacked so pilots would believe trucks to be destroyed, even if they were not hit

SOURCE: Numerous Unclassified Sources

Figure 6-2. Enemy Camouflage, Cover, and Deception

a bewildering set of "rules of engagement" which the US imposed on itself -- ensured that infiltration would continue throughout the war. BG D. D. Blackburn, a former SOG commander in RVN, remarked that policy restraints made interdiction difficult, but that MACV never got the most out of what it had and what it could do.

f. Command Arrangements

The command and control of air operations in southern Laos was as cumbersome as that in the north.87/ In early 1965, the area south of the Mu Gia Pass to Route #9 on the 17th parallel was designated Steel Tiger. CINCPAC had overall responsibility for air interdiction there. Although the 7th Air Force had responsibility for determining the targets along the LOCs in the area, the US Embassy in Vientiane established the rules of engagement for targets more than 200 yards off the road. This split responsibility caused many problems; for example, when truck parks were discovered some distance from the road, they could not be struck until the embassy approved. The area from the 17th parallel at Tchepone (which lay astride Route #9) south to the Cambodian border was designated Tiger Hound. COMUSMACV considered this area an extension of the battlefield in South Vietnam, and obtained permission from CINCPAC to place it under his jurisdiction. In 1966, both areas were finally treated as a single element of the interdiction campaign.

All flights except armed reconnaissance missions were under the control of forward air controllers (FACs). The FAC was a constant source of intelligence which was funneled into the ABCCC (the C-130 Airborne Command and Control Center). The strike forces under the ABCCC followed the same basic procedures whether they came from Thailand, South Vietnam, or USN Task Force 77. Aircraft entering the strike area would call the ABCCC, which would then assign the strike aircraft to a FAC in that area; the FAC would control the specific strike and report the results to the ABCCC. The ABCCC was in contact with 7th Air Force, which maintained a running status of available strike aircraft and could divert additional planes to the ABCCC on short notice. The USAF also used a C-130 ABCCC for night operations in Laos.

j. New Technology

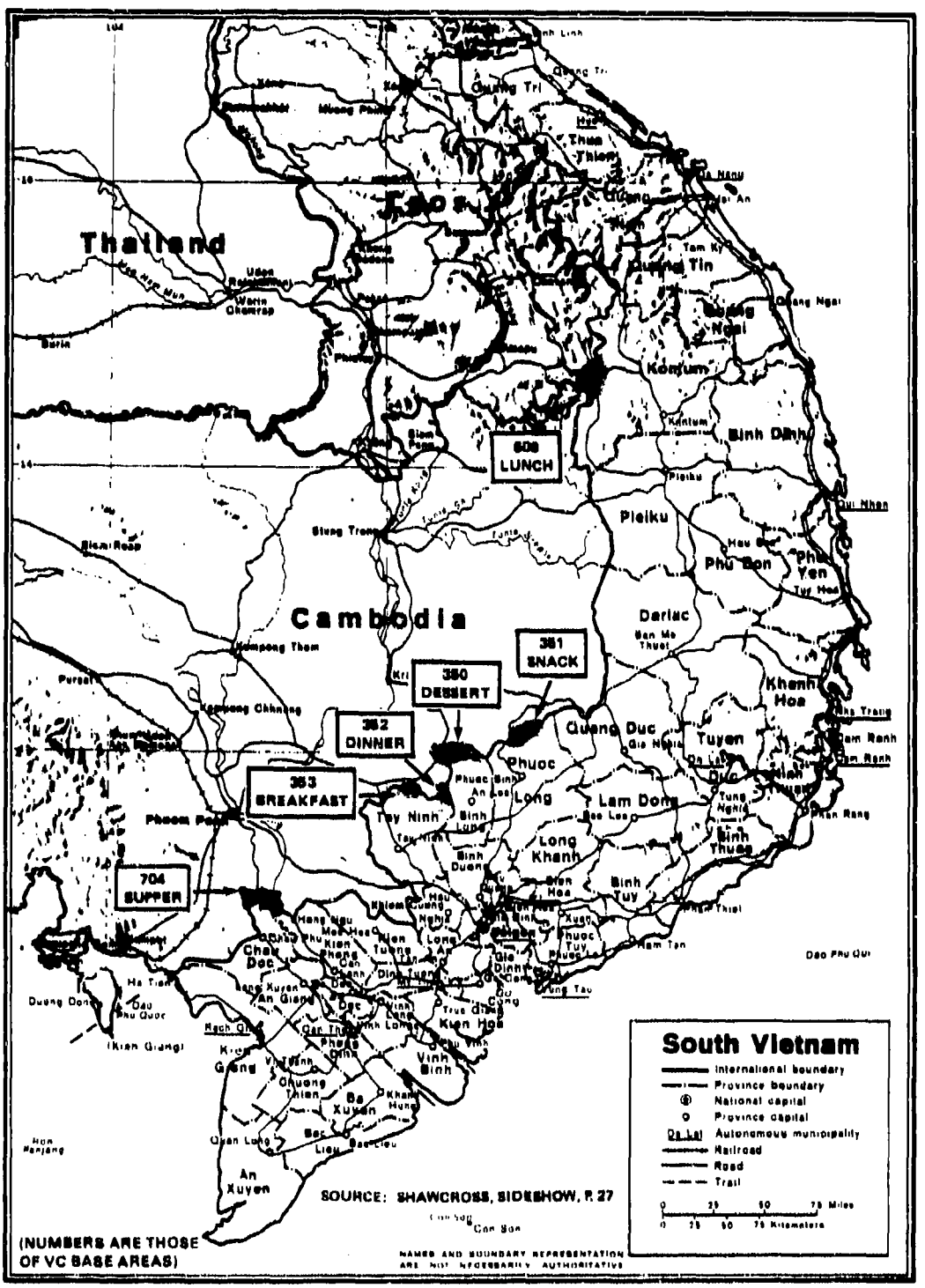
The interdiction effort spawned many innovative ideas and weapons programs which were put into use in southern Laos. Their major goal was to improve the interdiction capability under conditions of darkness or bad weather. The USAF Shed Light program served to develop LLLTV (low-light-level television), FLIR (forward-looking infrared radar), and incorporation of a GMTI (ground moving target indicator) into airborne radar systems.88/ The Igloo White program, (see Chapter 9, "Intelligence") brought sensor systems to a new high level of technology, and was tied into a sophisticated air strike system by the late 1960s. Also driven by the interdiction program was development of the AC-130 gunship, described as "the best truck-killing weapon in the war."89/

According to observers, the most significant advancements were in precision-guided munitions (PGMs). These so-called "smart weapons" included laser-guided and electro-optically guided bombs, and were first employed in Laos by the USAF in 1968. They were later used against North Vietnam with telling effect in 1972. These PGMs significantly increased the ratio of targets destroyed per number of weapons employed, and also reduced the net costs of the air war in terms of required fuel, aircraft, and crews.

2. The Air War in Cambodia

a. Enemy Sanctuaries

From the early 1960s until 1969, NVA/VC troops occupied areas in eastern Cambodia which served as sanctuaries and base areas. According to former Secretary of State Kissinger, well over 100,000 enemy troops were lodged in these areas during those years, and the enemy had stockpiled "tens of thousands of tons" of supplies there. In the late 1960s, the enemy launched devastating attacks from eastern Cambodia into South Vietnam.90/ The enemy forces were concentrated in several base areas along the Cambodia/RVN border (see Map 6-5). All of these base areas were integral parts of the enemy's military machine. The largest of these were Base Area 609, astride the tri-border area of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, and Base Area 704, concentrated along the Cambodia-South Vietnam



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SOURCE: Shawcross, Sideshow, p. 27

Map 6-5. Menu Operations in 1969

border near the Bassac and Mekong Rivers. Base Area 609 in the north was "fed" by the supply line from the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and Base Area 704 received supplies largely through the ports of Sihanoukville and Ream.

Unlike the early US concern with the ground war in Laos and the subsequent concern over events in South Vietnam, US officials had generally neglected events in Cambodia in the mid-1960s. Nonetheless, US military planners had long been aware that the enemy took advantage of whatever sanctuaries were available.

Before the US initiated bombing of Cambodia in early 1969, some high-altitude reconnaissance missions were flown under the Giant Dragon program, and low-altitude aerial surveys were conducted under the code name of Dorsal Fin. In addition, some US troops led covert reconnaissance forays into Cambodia under the code names Operation Salem House and Operation Daniel Boone.91/ As a result of air and ground reconnaissance efforts, US planners had a fairly clear picture of enemy forces in the sanctuaries by early 1969.

Secretary of State Kissinger stated that US bombing of enemy sanctuaries was triggered by the NVA offensive against cities in South Vietnam, which violated the 1968 understanding in which the US halted the bombing of the DRV. Top US policy makers viewed these aerial attacks on the enemy sanctuaries as a substitute for bombing of North Vietnam.

b. Interdiction

Shortly after Richard Nixon assumed the presidency, General Abrams requested a B-52 attack on an enemy base camp inside Cambodia (on February 9, 1969). The request (originally for a one-time B-52 operation to destroy the suspected COSVN base) was approved by the president several weeks later, and initial B-52 operations over Cambodia were flown the next day, March 18, against Base Area 353 (code-named Breakfast). Subsequently, the entire B-52/Cambodia program was given the code-name of Menu. The operation was kept secret, on a strict "need-to-know" basis, to protect the position of Prince Sihanouk. Sihanouk had indicated approval of the raids and was caught in a delicate political balancing act between the North

Vietnamese and the US. Even the Secretary of the Air Force, Dr. Robert Seamans, and Air Force Chief of Staff, General John Ryan, were not apprised of the attacks.92/ It was not until the New York Times reported the raids on May 9, 1969, that the Menu operations became known to the American public.

In response to the demands of strict security, the military devised an intricate system of "dual reporting." After a normal briefing on targets in Vietnam, B-52 pilots and navigators were told privately to expect the ground controllers (located at MSQ-77 Skyspot radar stations in Vietnam) to direct them to drop their bombs on a set of coordinates that were different from those they had just received. It was not a wide diversion for the B-52s, as the cover targets in South Vietnam usually were selected so the bombers could simply fly another few miles into Cambodia. After the bombs were released, the B-52s radio operator (who was also supposed to remain unaware of the Cambodia targets) called to report the mission had been accomplished, and the intelligence division (also uncleared) entered the South Vietnamese coordinates on the post strike report. Thus, B-52 missions in Cambodia entered the records as having occurred in Vietnam.93/ Back channel messages provided the correct data to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the information of those who were cleared to know.

The major operational question of B-52 operations is the accuracy of such bombing attacks. On balance, it appears that bombs were usually dropped in the intended "boxes", but several factors could combine to cause them to miss the enemy targets. The MSQ-77 Skyspot tracking radar lacked precision accuracy, and B-52s flew far too high to actually see their targets. In addition, the enemy had by now devised several methods to mislead US strike planners as to his actual location. It should be remembered that Arc Light operations were flown against "area" targets rather than "point" targets.

There is little doubt that the enemy's border sanctuaries were no longer inviolate after the Menu program began. According to one description, "each plane load dropped into an area, or "box", about half a

mile wide by two miles long, and as each bomb fell, it threw up a fountain of earth, trees, and bodies, until the air above the targets was thick with dust and debris, and the ground itself flashed with explosions and fire."94/

c. Tactical Strikes

Menu was perhaps the most controversial, but not the only US air interdiction program in Cambodia. Operation Patio involved US tactical aviation forces in support of the incursion into Cambodia of April 1970. Some 156 tactical sorties were flown up to 18 miles deep into Cambodia. The Patio reports were given a secure cover in the same way as Menu reports because US military planners did not have clear-cut authority to use tactical airpower in Cambodia.

Operation Freedom Deal, which followed and lasted from May 1970 to August 1973, consisted of strikes directed against the communist forces or bases in northeast Cambodia which threatened the Lon Nol government.

The US air campaign in Cambodia continued and intensified into the 1970s. In 1970, for example, some eight percent (8%) of US combat sorties were flown in Cambodia; this figure rose to fourteen percent (14%) in 1971 (a total of 61,000 B-52 and tactical strike sorties).95/

The US Embassy in Phnom Penh and the 7th Air Force coordinated an intensive air war during this period. In the expanded Freedom Deal area (the eastern half of Cambodia) B-52 missions were controlled and targets were selected by the 7th Air Force in Saigon. West of the Mekong River, B-52 strikes could be requested by the Cambodian government.

Much of the tactical bombing was controlled by American FACs, who coordinated with Cambodian troops on the ground. These troops, known as FAGs (Forward Air Guides) carried FM radios on which they could speak to either the FACs or pilots of strike aircraft. Together, the American FACs and Cambodian FAGs actually controlled many battles; the American FAC could see the ground situation and frequently gave instructions and encouragement to the Cambodian ground commander through the FAG.

Problems arose, however, after communists captured some radio sets and asked pilots to bomb government positions.96/

In early 1971, USAF tactical aircraft and Army helicopter gunships assumed the mission of guarding convoys sailing up the Mekong. This drew instant protests from the US Navy, which wanted its own planes involved as well. The USAF claimed that "sufficient air assets were available" and refused to allow the Navy in. But the Air Force had also assumed prime responsibility for keeping Cambodian roads open. NVA attacks on the roads grew so heavy that the Air Force was compelled to divert planes from river convoys, and Navy aircraft were finally called upon. All the services, plus the VNAF, expanded air operations throughout the country until 1973.

d. Last B-52 Bombing

The last phase of B-52 bombing of Cambodia occurred in 1973. (See Map 6-6) When the Paris Peace Agreement prevented US bombing of North Vietnam, the operations of the 7th Air Force were switched back to Cambodia. Again, B-52 operations were afforded top priority by the White House, and the 1973 operations were an extension of a trend toward greater use of these bombers in Southeast Asia since 1968. In that year, B-52s accounted for 3.5 percent of all US sorties; by 1972, their share had risen to 9 percent.97/ US planners were generally buoyed at the dramatic results which B-52 operations had achieved during Linebacker II operations. (President Nixon wanted to send 100 more B-52s to Southeast Asia, but was informed that there was no adequate base for them.)

B-52 Arc Light operations expanded throughout 1973 in response to the expanded scope of ground combat. Arc Light targets in January and February were centered largely around the Kompong Cham-Kratie axis near the RVN border. By March, the Arc Light "boxes" had marched as far north as the Cambodia-Laos border and as far south as the coastline on the Gulf of Thailand. By June, B-52 operations had extended throughout central Cambodia.98/ Operations by B52 and tactical aircraft in Cambodia continued until August 1973, when the US Congress declared a halt to these attacks.

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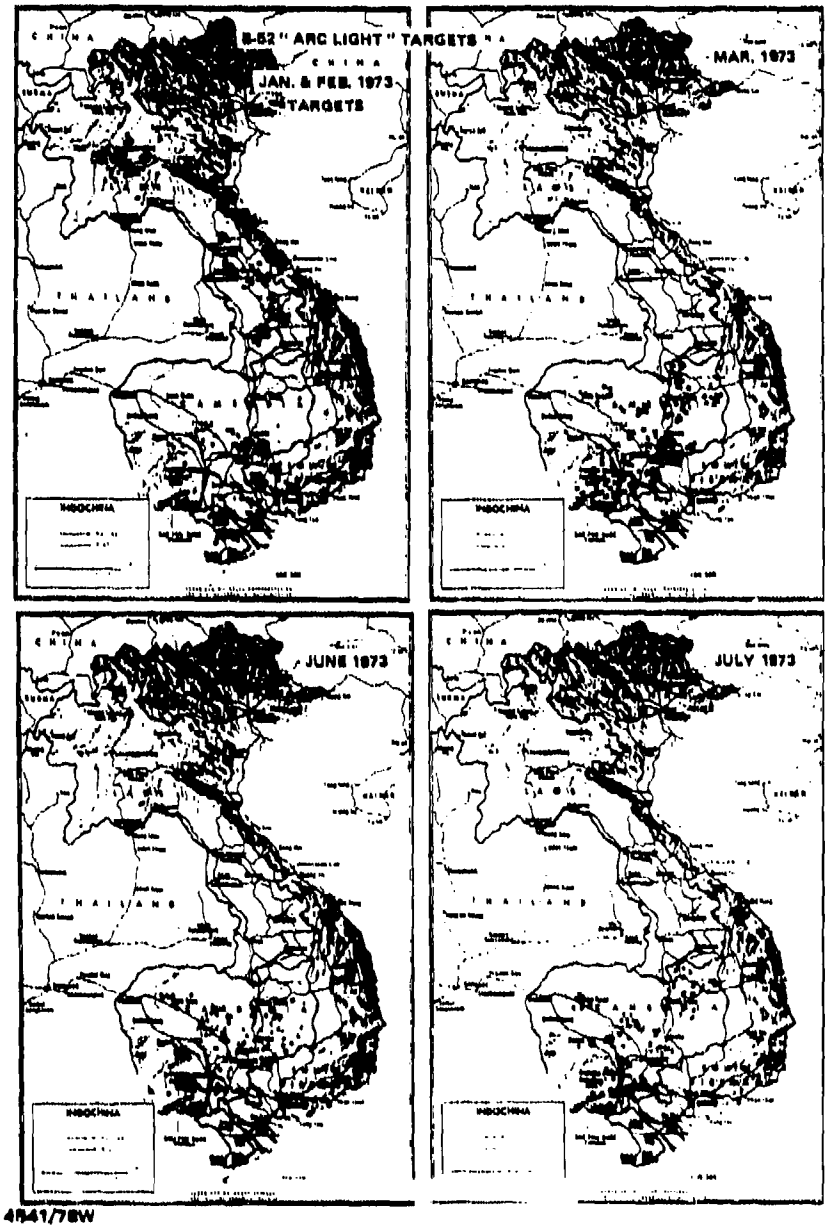
B-52 OPERATIONS

AFTER THE PARIS PEACE AGREEMENT (JANUARY 1973), B-52 STRIKES STOPPED OVER NORTH VIETNAM, SOUTH VIETNAM, AND LAOS, BUT INCREASED MARKEDLY IN CAMBODIA.



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SOURCE: Shawcross, Sideshow

Map 6-6. B-52 Diplomacy

3. The Air War in North Vietnam (DRV)

a. Bombing of the North, 1960s

The interdiction campaign in North Vietnam was the heart of the air strategy. Its purpose was to destroy equipment and supplies and to disrupt, delay, and harass the movement of men, equipment, and supplies to the battlefield in South Vietnam. The interdiction campaign was an interrelated operation incorporating strikes on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos and on lines of communication (LOC's) in northern Laos, attacks against roads, trails, and bivouac areas in South Vietnam, and the bombing of North Vietnam.

North Vietnam represented "The Rear" and was the base for command and control of enemy forces in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Bombing the railroads leading into the DRV from China and closing the ports, mainly Haiphong, would have struck the enemy's vital resupply at the most vulnerable point.99/ That was not done until 1972.

USN strike aircraft flew the first air attacks on North Vietnam in August 1964, in retaliation to the Tonkin Gulf incident. The US strategy was one of "tit for tat," and the retaliatory attacks were gradually escalated depending on enemy activities. In November 1964 General Maxwell Taylor requested that US aircraft be permitted to interdict lines of communication in Laos.

The next step in "gradual escalation" was to increase pressure by striking additional targets. Air strikes were to be conducted above the DMZ, and would move gradually northward if the North Vietnamese continued their aggression in the South.

Because of significant command-relations problems between the air services, it was necessary to partition the DRV into "route packages" (see Map 6-7) which were assigned separately to USAF and Navy aircraft. The Navy's areas were RP II, III, IV, and VIB, and the Air Force flew missions in RP I, V, and VIA. This arrangement was totally inflexible, but was one way of accommodating both the USAF aircraft in Thailand and carrier-based Navy planes in the Gulf of Tonkin. In addition, USMC

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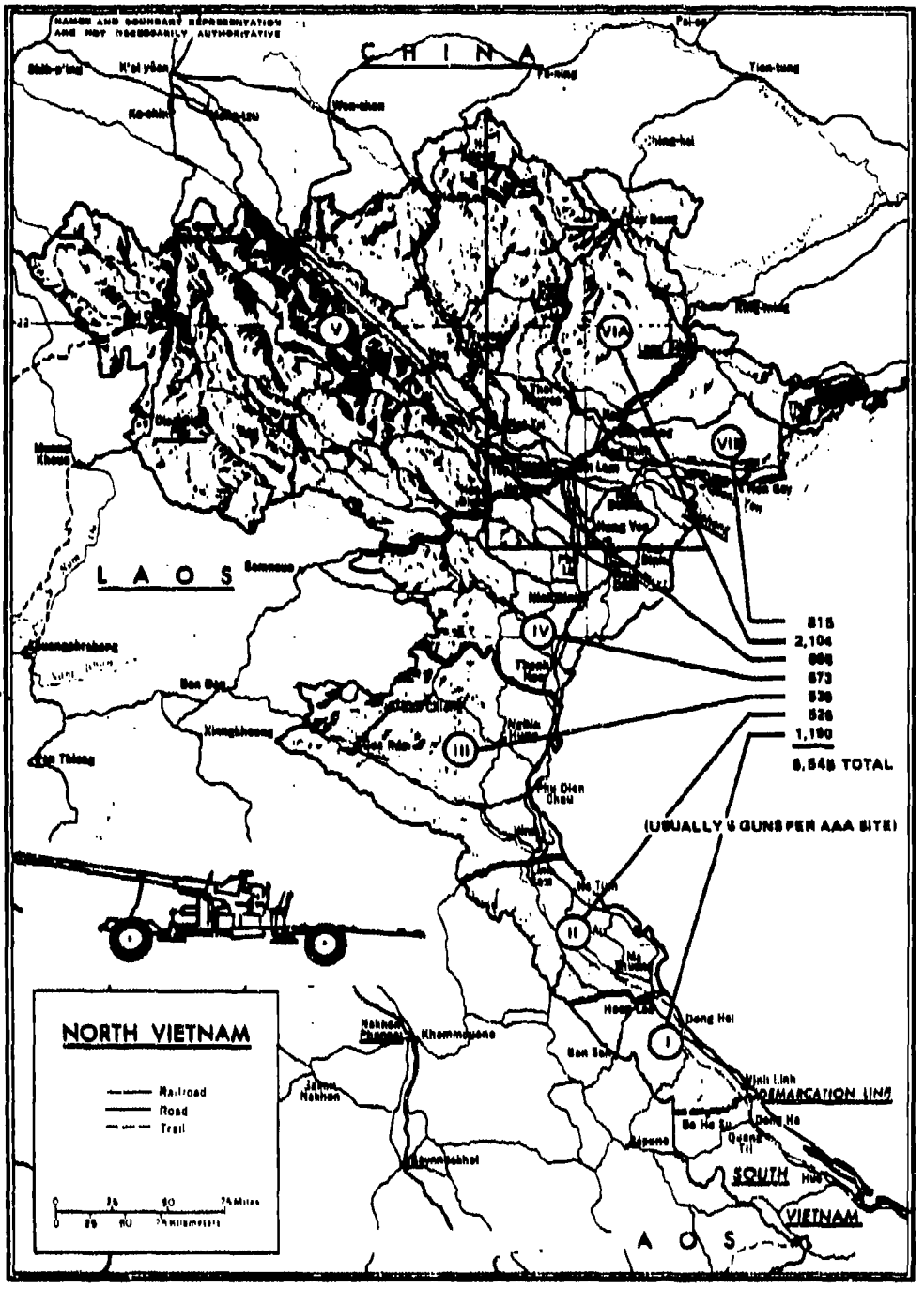

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SOURCE: Momyer, Airpower in Three Wars

Map 6-7. DRV Antiaircraft and the Route Packages, 1967

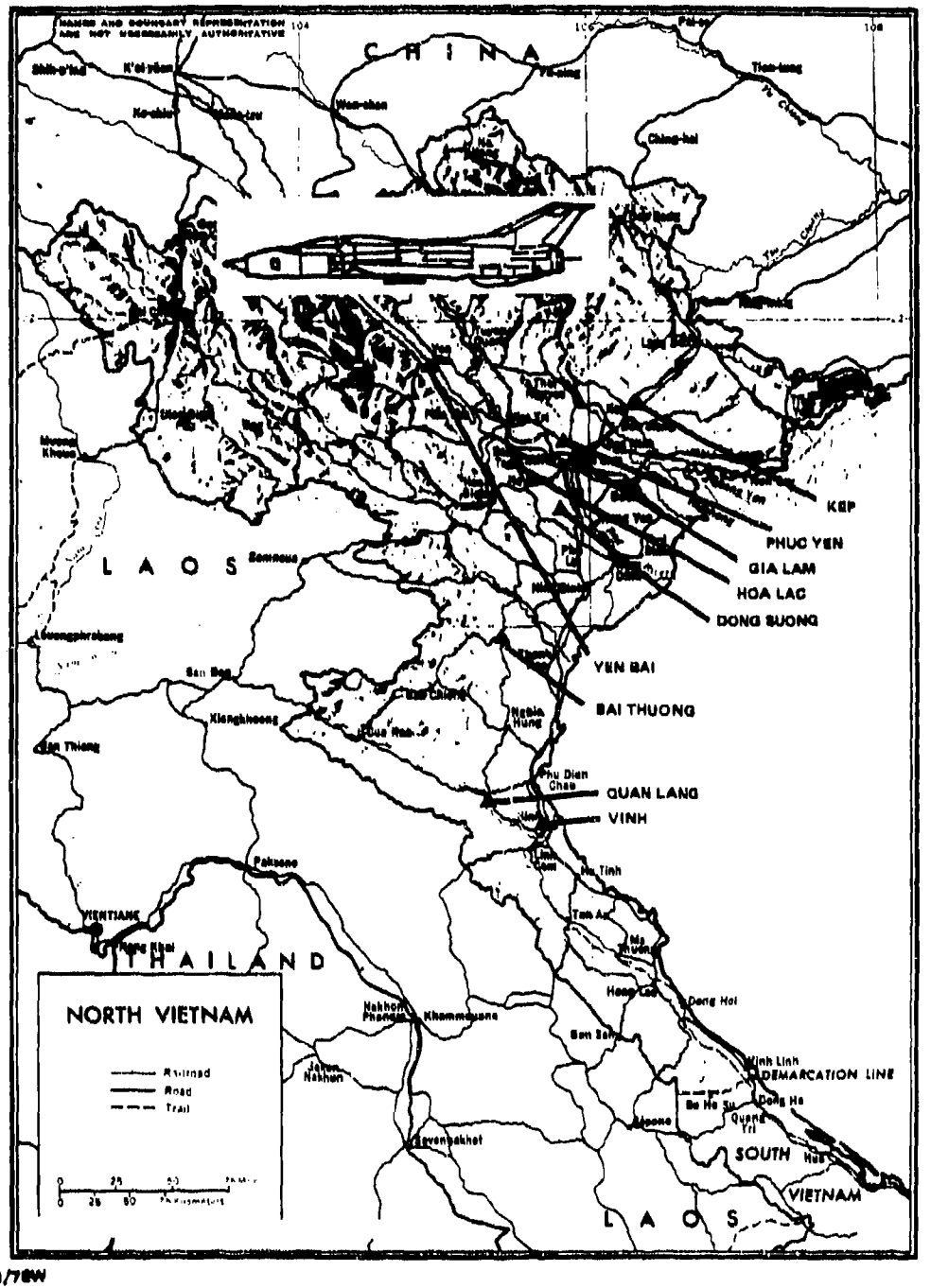
DaNang-based 1st MAW strike aircraft would fly missions in the southern part of RP I above the DMZ.

Operation Rolling Thunder was authorized to hit targets below the 19th parallel.100/ Transportation facilities were high on the target priority list (see map). The absence of open terrain and natural choke points made it difficult to find and destroy significant quantities of supplies and equipment, and they continued flowing south.

North Vietnam continued to build up its air defense system in the mid-1960s with Soviet-supplied SAMs, AAA guns, and MIG-17/21 fighters. (See Maps 6-8 and 6-9) Air defenses were concentrated in the area around Hanoi, eventually making the North Vietnamese capital one of the most heavily-defended cities in the world by the late 1960s. US fighters were usually able to handle the MIGs on an individual basis. At first, US planes downed four MIGs for every one lost in air-to-air combat, but this ratio dropped to two to one when the DRV beefed up its ground-based defenses (AAA and SAMs).101/ Increasing proficiency of enemy pilots also helped to lower this ratio.

By 1966, airpower was beginning to achieve some impact on the enemy's logistic system. In June, US policy makers authorized aircraft to strike oil storage facilities and gradually increase pressure on North Vietnam by attacking closer to vital power centers. While these attacks served to signal US determination, they did not deliver any crippling blows to the DRV.

Washington selected the strikes on fixed targets, determined the quantity of interdiction bombing, and firmly established the restricted zones and limits to the air war. In general, the success or failure of the air war could be attributed to Washington, and especially to the President and his Secretary of Defense. The chain of command for the airwar against the DRV ran from 7th Air Force and carrier Task Force 77, through CINCPAC, then the JCS, and on to the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, and the President's National Security Advisor. Final targeting decisions were made at the celebrated "Tuesday Lunch" meetings.102/ A target -- whatever its actual military value -- would be approved only if a strike on it would



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SOURCE: Momyer, Airpower in Three Wars, p. 142

Map 6-8. DRV Major Operating Airfields (6,000'+)

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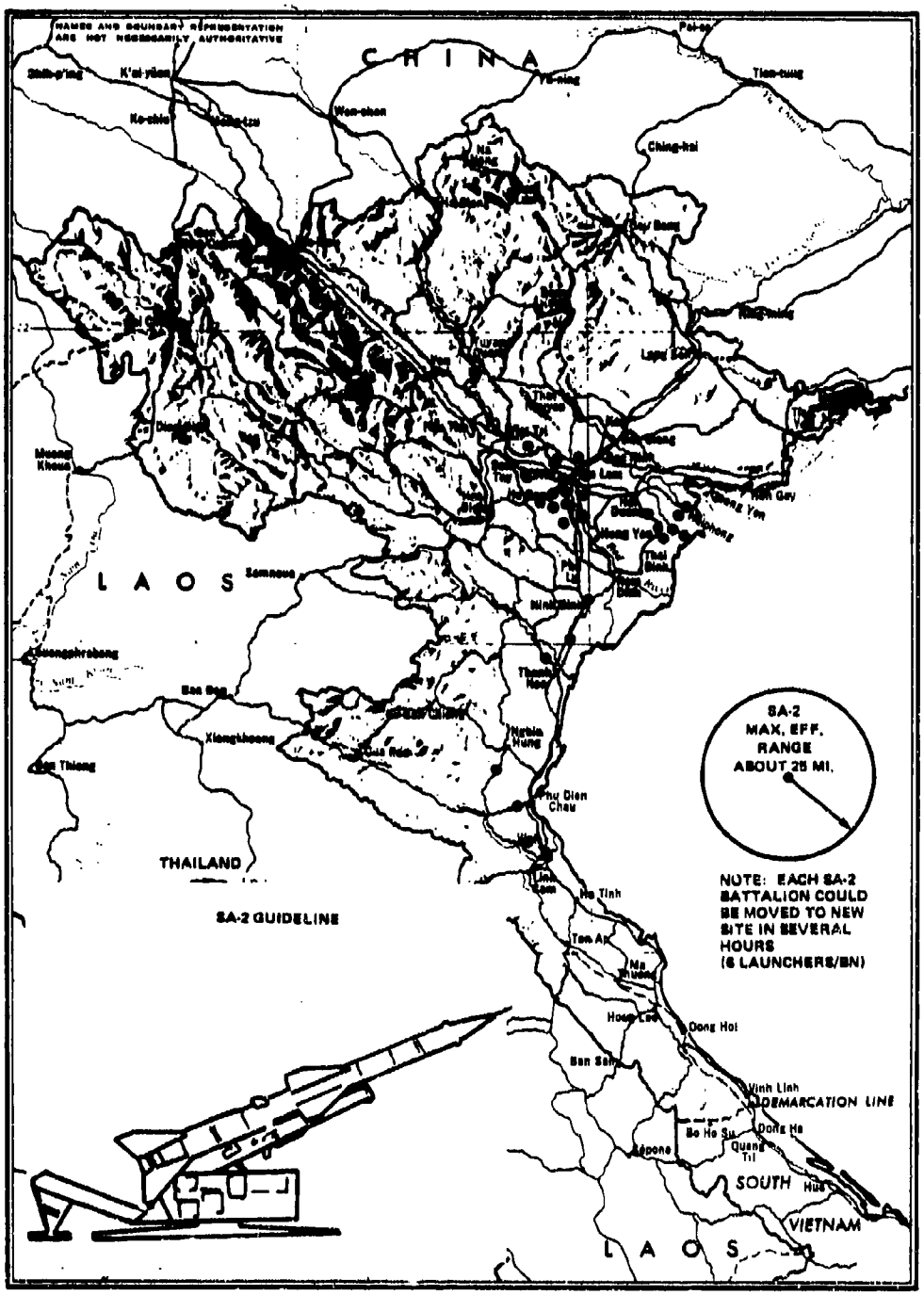

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SOURCE: Momyer, Airpower in Three Wars, p. 124

Map 6-9. Approximate Locations DRV SA-2 Battalions, April 1969

not violate restrictions laid down by the President, cause many civilian casualties, or escalate the war. A number of high-value targets remained off the target list. By employing airpower in this incremental manner, a fully effective interdiction program could not be achieved.

Through 1966 and 1967 the ground campaign in South Vietnam was the main element of the US strategy. Airpower in support of this strategy concentrated on three tasks: reduce the flow and increase the cost of infiltration; raise the morale of the South Vietnamese (in late 1964 and 1965); and convince the North Vietnamese that they would pay a very high price for their aggression in the South. However, even after more targets were released by Washington above the 20th parallel, attacks against high-value targets (such as Haiphong harbor) which might have helped achieve the US objectives were never authorized. Thus, the desired effect of stemming the infiltration into South Vietnam did not occur. (See Figure 6-3.)

The bombing of North Vietnam above the 20th parallel was halted in April 1968, even though the Tet Offensive gave clear evidence that the North Vietnamese had no intention of negotiating peace and there was no noticeable decrease in the NVA/VC efforts in the South. In October 1968, President Johnson decided to halt all bombing of the DRV. See Table 6-1 for data on damage claims by US air forces. Interdiction continued in Laos and reconnaissance flights were permitted over North Vietnam. These reconnaissance flights revealed an increase in the buildup of supplies and the preparation for a major offensive. US and VNAF sorties in Laos rose from 136,000 in 1968 to 242,000 the next year.103/

b. Linebacker I & II and the End

Public opinion in the United States became ever more vocal against the war in Southeast Asia. In late 1969, gradual withdrawal of US ground forces was underway, and the administration resolved to provide the South Vietnamese the time and resources to go it alone. US airpower was maintained at a level required to protect departing US troops and support the South Vietnamese. The North Vietnamese, however, had used the bombing halt to prepare a major offensive. They built airfields south of the 20th parallel and moved AAA, SAMs, and MIGs into this area.

IF:	THEN:
• Air attacker has a proficient day-attack capability	• Enemy may move at night.
• Air attacker has a proficient night-attack capability	• Enemy may move in bad weather.
• Air attacks destroy the infiltration trail system in some areas.	• Enemy may repair damage quickly.
• Air attacker increases number of sorties.	• Enemy may beef up AAA/SAM defenses along the route.
• Air attacker mounts a thorough interdiction effort.	• Enemy may rely less on trucks, more on bicycles and human porters.
• Air attacker mounts a thorough interdiction effort.	• Enemy may use new supply routes (such as port of Sihanoukville in Cambodia).
• Air attacker mounts a thorough interdiction effort.	• Enemy may adjust the level and style of fighting to accommodate the changed supply situation.

SOURCE: Numerous Unclassified Sources

Figure 6-3. Lessons Learned About Interdiction vs. Infiltration

TABLE 6-1. NORTH VIETNAM ELEMENT SUMMARIES (1966, 1967, FIRST HALF 1968)

Target Category	1966 Destr	1966 Dam	1966 Total D+D	1967 Destr	1967 Dam	1967 Total D+D	First Half 1968 Destr	First Half 1968 Dam	First Half 1968 Total D+D	To Destr
AAA/AW sites	493	479	972	450	1,479	1,929	143	333	476	1,086
SAM Sites	18	83	101	33	196	229	14	76	90	65
Communi cations sites	38	57	95	19	121	140	18	70	88	75
Military Areas	118	434	552	194	614	808	25	142	167	337
POL Areas	3,903	578	4,481	2	130	132	34	180	214	3,939
Staging/ Supply Area	76	1,065	1,141	27	1,545	1,572	54	479	533	157
Buildings	4,941	3,363	8,304	2,354	1,193	3,547	532	232	764	7,827
LOC's	1,359	6,390	7,749	813	5,684	6,497	199	2,533	2,732	2,371
Ports	24	98	122	13	75	88	3	10	13	40
Power Plants	0	6	6	2	28	30	1	5	6	3
Railroad Yards	10	119	129	3	176	179	0	6	6	13
Motor Vehicles	2,067	2,017	4,084	2,929	2,658	5,587	2,234	2,470	4,704	7,230
Railroad Vehicles	1,095	1,219	2,314	1,077	1,434	2,511	139	209	348	2,311
Water Vehicles	3,590	5,810	9,500	4,396	7,367	11,763	1,200	1,515	2,715	9,286
TOTAL	17,832	21,718	39,550	12,312	22,700	35,012	4,596	8,260	12,856	34,740

Note: Some fixed targets were restruck numerous times and damage to them may be reported above more than once.

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SOURCE: Comptroller, Office of the Secretary of Defense; sortie data in Thayer, Journal of Defense Research, Fall 1975; loss data in Air War in Indochina

The fighter escort of US reconnaissance aircraft was increased.104/ Initially, escort fighters were authorized to attack only AAA and SAMs, but US planners later granted authorization for escort planes to strike other targets: supply points, airfields, and bivouac areas. Further expansion of such strikes continued through 1971. The overall effectiveness of this air strategy must be measured against the fact that in March 1972 the NVA launched a full-scale offensive across the DMZ into South Vietnam (the so-called Easter Offensive), with approximately 400 armored vehicles, 122mm and 130mm artillery, antitank missiles, and SA-7s.

The priority of airpower was shifted to the support of South Vietnamese ground forces. The air offensive was diverted in almost all areas of the RVN. Airlift made a significant contribution by delivering arms, ammunition, POL, and food under intensive fire. Air units, including B-52s, were returned to Southeast Asia to cope with the Easter Offensive and to prepare for a major aerial offensive against North Vietnam.

By this time, American patience with the North Vietnamese was severely strained. However, US airpower still had not been permitted to deliver the knockout blow against the North. The US continued to be portrayed by those opposed to the war as a merciless "Goliath" for its bombing in Southeast Asia. The revelations of bombing in Laos and Cambodia further served to demean the American image in the eyes of many in the US and abroad. In addition, the bombing of the North had imposed a hostage situation on the US since several hundred airmen had become POWs or were MIA. This situation raised the question of whether or not the limited results of interdiction were worth the cost of hundreds of airmen killed and captured and billions of dollars worth of aircraft destroyed (For Aircraft Losses, See Tables 6-2 and 6-3.)

In May, Operation Linebacker I began. (See Figure 6-4 for an overview of B-52 operations.) It started with the mining of Haiphong and coastal ports, followed quickly by the bombing of 94 targets above the 20th parallel. The strategy was to mine harbors and destroy marshalling yards and key points along railroads to isolate North Vietnam from external support. The assumed effectiveness of Linebacker I was such that the

TABLE 6-2. US HELICOPTER SORTIES AND LOSSES 1966-1971

SORTIES
(IN THOUSANDS)

	1961-1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
HELICOPTER								
ATTACK		332	627	862	915	799	417	3,952
ASSAULT		672	1,151	1,687	1,826	1,467	744	7,547
CARGO		289	546	819	798	690	406	3,548
OTHER	___	1,700	3,112	4,050	4,902	4,608	2,646	21,098
TOTAL	N/A	2,993	5,516	7,418	8,441	7,564	4,213	36,145

LOSSES*

HELICOPTER								
NVN	3	1	4	2	-	-	-	10
SVN	106	123	260	495	459	393	230	2,066
OTHER**	166	197	400	511	589	419	284	2,566
TOTAL	275	321	664	1,008	1,048	812	514	4,642

SOURCE: Comptroller, Office Of The Secretary Of Defense, In Air War In Indochina Tables 6 and SS-10, pp. 267-272; 283.

* HELICOPTER LOSSES APPEAR TO BE BASED ON HELICOPTERS SHOT DOWN OR CRASHED. IN FACT, SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS OF SUCH AIRCRAFT WERE RECOVERED, REPAIRED, AND RETURNED TO SERVICE, UNLIKE MOST DOWNED FIXED-WING AIRCRAFT.

** "OTHERS" INCLUDES LOSSES TO HOSTILE FIRE IN LAOS THROUGH 1969 IN ADDITION TO NON-HOSTILE LOSSES.

TABLE 6-3. US FIXED WING SORTIES AND LOSSES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA 1965-1972

(IN THOUSANDS)

SORTIES

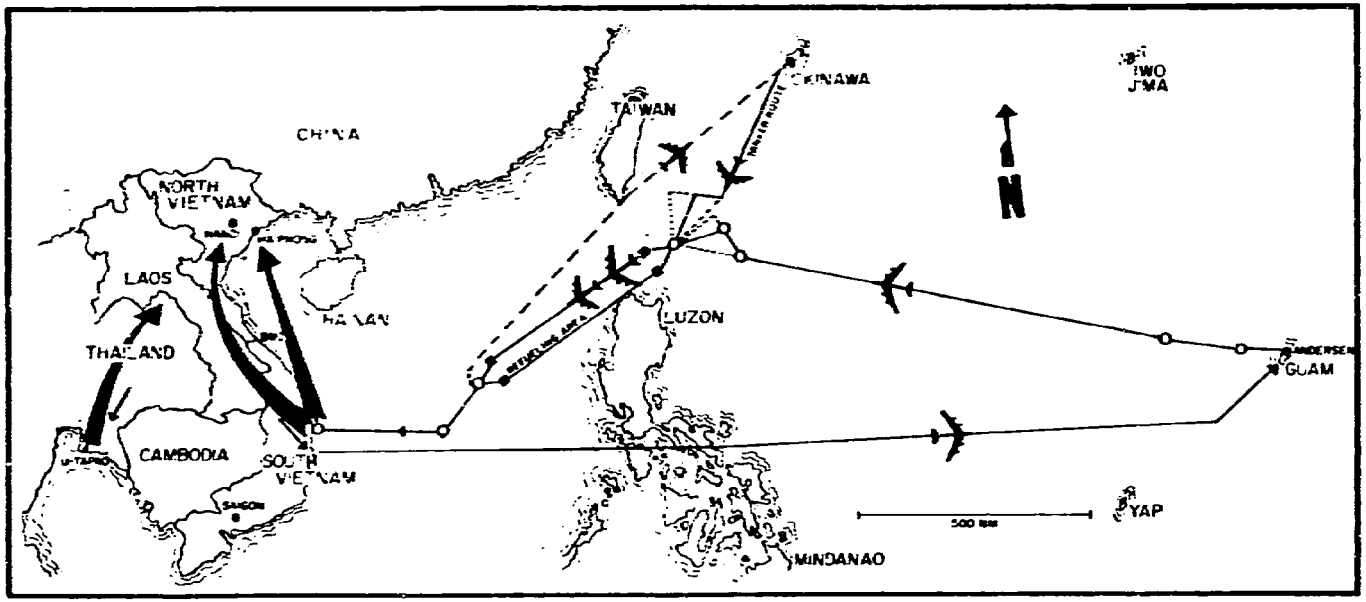
	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	Total
TACTICAL A/C	103	254	320	372	300	193	122	167	1,831
B-52	1	5	10	21	19	15	13	28	140
OTHER COMBAT TACTICAL A/C SORTIES	54	135	177	197	217	177	125	116	1,198
	158	394	507	590	536	385	260	311	3,169

LOSSES

FIXED-WING									
NVN	N/A	280	326	141	2	4	6	N/A	759
SVN	N/A	69	73	107	68	29	17	N/A	363
OTHER	N/A	285	329	409	396	228	120	N/A	1,767
TOTAL		634	728	657	466	261	143		2,389

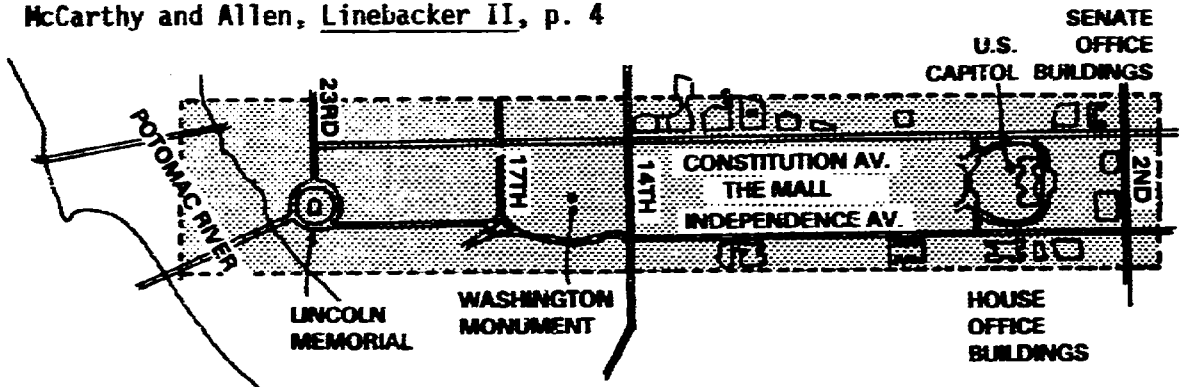
NOTE: VNAF FLEW 311,000 COMBAT SORTIES DURING THIS PERIOD, BRINGING THE TOTAL FIXED-WING COMBAT SORTIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA TO 3,480,000.

SOURCE: Comptroller, Office Of The Secretary Of Defense. Sortie Data In Thayer, Journal Of Defense Research, Fall 1975. Loss Data In Air War In Inochina.



A FLIGHT OF SIX B-52'S COULD DROP ABOUT 150 TONS OF BOMBS IN AN AREA ONE-HALF MILE WIDE AND THREE MILES LONG WITHIN A PERIOD OF SEVERAL SECONDS. THE PATTERN COULD STRADDLE CONSTITUTION AND INDEPENDENCE AVENUES IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA FROM THE POTOMAC RIVER TO THE US CAPITOL.

SOURCE: McCarthy and Allen, Linebacker II, p. 4



SOURCE: ALVF, p. 25

Figure 6-4. B-52 Operations at a Glance

bombing was halted in October 1972, with the US expecting that the DRV leadership would consummate the negotiations.

The North Vietnamese evidently interpreted the US bombing halt as a sign of weakness, and they were not seriously interested in negotiating a settlement to the war. However, that was a miscalculation on their part, and US strategy was altered to wage an intensive air campaign against North Vietnam.

The strategy was to concentrate all forms of airpower to strike at vital targets throughout the DRV, causing maximum disruption of the enemy's economic sector and military machine. On December 18, 1972, Operation Linebacker II began with strikes by B-52s and tactical air forces: The Air Campaign lasted for eleven days.105/

The B-52s conducted strikes at night, supported by fighter combat air patrols, EW aircraft, and strikes by F-111s. USN and USAF tactical air forces also carried out strikes during daylight. Many new technologies were employed such as terrain-following radar, laser guided bombs, new chaff dispensers, LORAN for weather strikes, and sophisticated command and control. In all, tactical forces flew 2,123 sorties and the B-52s flew 729 sorties. Bomb damage assessment revealed 1,600 military structures damaged or destroyed, 500 rail interdictions, 372 pieces of rolling stock damaged or destroyed, three million gallons of petroleum products (about one-fourth of the DRV reserves) destroyed, an estimated 80% of electrical power production capability destroyed, and numerous instances of damage to airfields, open storage stockpiles, missile launchers, and radar and communications facilities. No specific measurement was made of losses of industrial facilities, disruption of surface travel, and communications.

The employment of airpower against high-value targets finally produced the disruption, shock, and disorganization which US planners desired.106/ For the first time, US airpower was free to strike at the heart of North Vietnam in a campaign which was largely planned by the military rather than by officials in Washington far removed from the theater. The DRV could not continue to sustain the tremendous pounding being inflicted by Linebacker II strikes; their SAM inventory had been

expended and their strategic rear now lay open to devastation. But the DRV's leaders also recognized that US ground forces were already gone from RVN and US public attitudes would not be likely to support a reintroduction of combat forces in RVN. Agreeing to a cease-fire, then, gave them relief from air attack, a guarantee of US withdrawal, and time to prepare and equip their forces for the final assault against the GVN and RVNAF.

c. The Cost in the North

Aviation personnel shot down over North Vietnam during hostilities numbered almost 1,400 of whom 204 were rescued, and 472 were POWs who returned after the January 1973 cease-fire. The remainder were killed, missing, or died in captivity.107/ The heavy cost -- more than 700 airmen failed to return, and about 970 aircraft were lost at a probable cost of more than 1.9 billion dollars 108/ -- raises a legitimate question concerning the worth of, or justification for, the interdiction of North Vietnam, particularly under the US's self-imposed ground rules. (Linebacker II in December 1972 was not interdiction; it was a punitive operation on a strategic scale to punish the DRV and force that government to conclude the war.) See Table 6-4 for a summary of the major air campaigns conducted during the Second Indochina War.

F. MEANING FOR THE FUTURE 109/

1. Application to Europe

The lessons learned in Southeast Asia relative to the use of airpower have brought forth many questions on the kind of air forces required in the future, especially in Europe.

Perhaps the biggest difference between Vietnam and any air campaign that would be fought in Europe is the expected sophistication and density of Warsaw Pact air defenses compared with those which the North Vietnamese employed (see Figure 6-5). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the USSR developed a family of mobile surface-to-air missiles -- the SA-4, SA-6, SA-8, and SA-9 -- which entered the Soviet inventory but were not used in Vietnam. In recognition of US close air support capabilities and

THEATER	OPERATION	OBJECTIVE	TARGET AREA	DURATI
NORTH VIETNAM	FLAMING DART	TACAIR REPRISAL FOR ENEMY ATTACKS ON US BASES IN SVN	SOUTHERN PANHANDLE OF DHV	FEBRUARY 65
NORTH VIETNAM	ROLLING THUNDER	RAISE MORALE OF GVN, INTERDICT FLOW OF SUPPLIES, PENALIZE DRV	DRV, WITH EXCEPTION OF RESTRICTED ZONES	MARCH 65-OCTOBER
NORTH VIETNAM	LINEBACKER I	FORCEFUL RESPONSE TO EASTER OFFENSIVE BY INTERDICTION	DRV	MAY 72-OCTOBER 72
NORTH VIETNAM	LINEBACKER II	STRIKE AT HEART OF DRV TO FORCE NORTH VIETNAMESE TO RESUME PEACE TALKS.	DRV	DECEMBER 72
LAOS	BARREL ROLL	SUPPORT OF RLG FORCES AND MEO "SECRET ARMY" (GEN. VANG PAO)	NORTHERN LAOS	DECEMBER 64-APRIL
LAOS	STEEL TIGER	INTERDICT TROOP AND SUPPLY MOVEMENT	SOUTH-CENTRAL LAOTIAN PANHANDLE NEXT TO DRV BORDER	APRIL 65-1973
LAOS	TIGER HOUND	INTERDICT TROOP AND SUPPLY MOVEMENT	SOUTHERN LAOTION PAN-HANDLE NEXT TO SVN BORDER	DECEMBER 65-1966
LAOS	POPEYE	WEATHER MODIFICATION BY CLOUD SEEDING (INCREASE RAINFALL) TO DEGRADE MOVEMENT	DRV (UNTIL NOVEMBER 1968) NORTHERN LAOS (MOSTLY 1968-71) SOUTHERN LAOS (1971-72)	MARCH 67-JULY 72
LAOS	IGLOO WHITE	DETECT AND QUICKLY INTERDICT FLOW OF ENEMY TROOPS AND SUPPLIES	LAOS, HO CHI MINH TRAIL	LATE 1967-1972
LAOS	COMMANDO HUNT	DESTROY ENEMY SUPPLIES, TIE DOWN ENEMY MANPOWER, TEST EFFECTIVENESS OF SENSOR SYSTEM	LAOS, HO CHI MINH TRAIL	NOVEMBER 68-MAR
LAOS	GOOD LUCK	STRIKE NVA/PATHET LAO FORCES THREATENING VANG PAO'S "SECRET ARMY"	LAOS, PLAINE DES JARRES (PDJ)	FEBRUARY 70-APRIL
LAOS	LAM SON 719	GROUND INTERDICTION BY ARVN, SUPPORTED BY US AIRPOWER	PANHANDLE OF SOUTHERN LAOS, CENTERED AROUND TCHEPONE (ROUTE 9)	FEBRUARY-APRIL 7
SOUTHEAST ASIA	ARC LIGHT	LONG-TERM EFFORT TO STRIKE AT ENEMY TARGETS	SVN (FROM JUNE 65), LAOS (FROM DEC 65) DHV (FROM APR 65), CAMBODIA (FROM MAR 69)	JUNE 65-AUGUST 73
CAMBODIA	MENU	BOMB NVA/VC BASES IN SANCTUARY AREAS	EASTERN CAMBODIA, TO A DEPTH OF 5 MI FROM SVN BORDER	MARCH 69-MAY 70
CAMBODIA	PATIO	SUPPORT US GROUND INCURSION AND AUGMENT MENU OPERATIONS	US AIRCRAFT AUTHORIZED TO STRIKE 18 mi DEEP INTO CAMBODIA FROM SVN BORDER	APRIL-MAY 70
CAMBODIA	FREEDOM DEAL	STRIKES AGAINST ENEMY FORCES WHICH THREATENED THE LON NOL GOVERNMENT	EAST OF MEKONG RIVER IN NORTHEAST CAMBODIA, BUT LATER EXPANDED SOUTHWARD AND WESTWARD	MAY 70-AUGUST 73
SOUTH VIETNAM	NEUTRALIZE	INTEGRATE GROUND FIRE, AIR STRIKES, AND NAVAL FIRE ON ENEMY	CON THIEN, JUST SOUTH OF DMZ	SEPTEMBER-OCTOB
SOUTH VIETNAM	NIAGARA	JOINT AIR CAMPAIGN TO STRIKE ENEMY FORCES THREATENING USMC BASE	KHE SANH, JUST SOUTH OF DMZ	JANUARY-MARCH 6
SOUTH VIETNAM	PEGASUS	BREAKTHROUGH OF ENEMY POSITIONS AND RELIEVE USMC BASE	KHE SANH, JUST SOUTH OF DMZ	APRIL 68

4541/75W

SOURCE: BDM Research and A

TABLE 6-4. US AIR OPERATIONS

PRECEDING PAGE BLANK-NOT FILMED

T AREA	DURATION	AIRCRAFT	# STRIKE SORTIES	SOURCE
DLE OF DRV	FEBRUARY 65	TACAIR (USN, VNAF)	FEW	GRAVEL, PENTAGON PAPERS, VOL. 3, pp-302-303
ON OF RESTRICTED	MARCH 65-OCTOBER 68	TACAIR (USAF, USN, USMC)	304,000 TOTAL	USAF IN SEA, AWI
	MAY 72-OCTOBER 72	TACAIR (USAF, USN, USMC), B-52s	MANY, EXACT NUMBER UNCERTAIN	USAF IN SEA, AWI
	DECEMBER 72	B-52s, TACAIR (USAF, USN, USMC)	2,123 TACAIR, 729 B-52	McCARTHY & ALLISON, LINEBACKER II DRENKOWSKI, "OPERATION LINEBACKER II, BOF
	DECEMBER 64-APRIL 73	TACAIR (RLAF T-28s, THEN USAF AIRCRAFT)	MANY, EXACT NUMBER UNCERTAIN; ABOUT 75,000 IN 1968	AWI; NYT MAGAZINE ARTICLE OCT 29, 1972
OTIAN TO	APRIL 65-1973	TACAIR (USAF, USN)	31,500 + BETWEEN APRIL 65 AND MARCH 72	USAF IN SEA, p. 106
PAN-W BORDER	DECEMBER 65-1968	TACAIR (USAF, RLAF, ARMY FACs)	MANY, EXACT NUMBER UNCERTAIN; 384 USAF SORTIES IN DECEMBER 65	USAF IN SEA, p. 106
BER 1968) OSTLY 1968-71) 971-72)	MARCH 67-JULY 72	UNKOWN	2,802 TOTAL; ABOUT 435 ANNUALLY	SCHEMMER, THE RAID pp 94-96
TRAIL	LATE 1967-1972	TACAIR, TO DISPENSE SENSORS, RELAY SIGNALS, STRIKE ENEMY	MANY, EXACT NUMBER UNCERTAIN	USAF IN SEA, p. 106; NUMEROUS UNCLASS. SOURCES
TRAIL	NOVEMBER 68-MARCH 72	TACAIR (USAF, USN, USMC)	IN COMMANDO HUNT I, 4,700 TACAIR SORTIES IN OCT. 68, 12,800 IN NOV 68, 15,100 IN DEC 68	USAF IN SEA
	FEBRUARY 70-APRIL 73	B-52s	2,518 TOTAL	AWI, P. 79, USAF IN SEA, p. 160
UTHERN LAOS, TCHEPONE (ROUTE 9)	FEBRUARY-APRIL 71	TACAIR (USAF, USN, USMC) B-52s, MANY US ARMY HELOS	8,000 + TACAIR, 1,358 B-52	USAF IN SEA, BDM INTERVIEW W/GEN. MOMYER
, LAOS (FROM APR 68), AR 68)	JUNE 68-AUGUST 73	B-52s, KC-135 TANKERS TO REFUEL	126,615 TOTAL (56% IN SVN, 27% IN LAOS, 12% IN CAMBODIA, 5% IN DRV)	USAF IN SEA; AWI; SHAWCROSS, SIDESHOW
, TO A DEPTH OF 5 MI	MARCH 69-MAY 70	B-52s, KC-135 TANKERS TO REFUEL	3,630 TOTAL	SHAWCROSS, SIDESHOW
BRIZED INTO N BORDER	APRIL-MAY 70	TACAIR (USAF, VNAF)	156	SHAWCROSS, SIDESHOW
VER IN NORTHEAST ER EXPANDED STWARD	MAY 70-AUGUST 73	TACAIR (USAF, USN, VNAF)	6,000+ IN FIRST 6 MONTHS	USAF IN SEA; SHAWCROSS, SIDESHOW
TH OF DMZ	SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 67	TACAIR AND B-52s	MANY, EXACT NUMBER UNCERTAIN	USAF IN SEA, p-156
TH OF DMZ	JANUARY-MARCH 68	TACAIR AND B-52s	2,707 TOTAL B-52 SORTIES, ABOUT 100 TACAIR SORTIES PER DAY	USAF IN SEA, pp. 156-157
TH OF DMZ	APRIL 68	1st CAV DIV (MOBILE) HELICOPTERS	MANY, EXACT NUMBER UNCERTAIN	USAF IN SEA, p. 157

RCE: BDM Research and Analysis

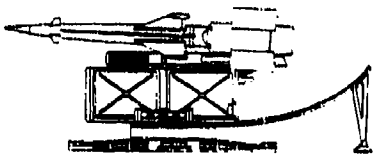
6-63/64

6-4. US AIR OPERATIONS IN INDOCHINA

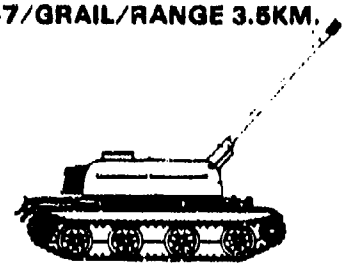
S-60/RANGE, 6000M.

ZU-23/RANGE, 2500M.

SA-7/GRAIL/RANGE 3.5KM.

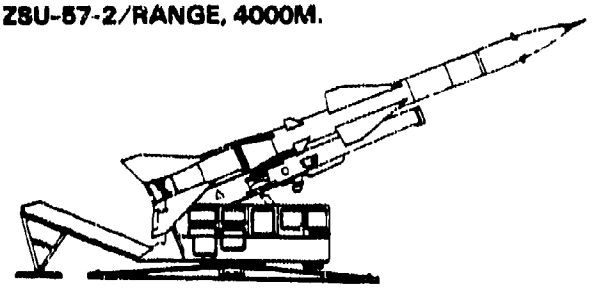


SA-3/GOA/RANGE, 6-22KM.

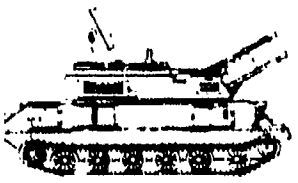


ZSU-57-2/RANGE, 4000M.

ZPU-4/RANGE, 1400M.



SA-2/GUIDELINE/RANGE, 45KM.



ZSU-23-4/RANGE, 1000M.

THE AIR DEFENSE ENVIRONMENT IN THE DRV WAS LETHAL TO US AIRCRAFT, PRIMARILY DUE TO THREE FACTORS:

MASS--THOUSANDS OF AAA GUNS AND DOZENS OF SA-2 UNITS WHICH GREW IN DENSITY AS THE WAR CONTINUED.

MOBILITY—THE ABILITY TO RELOCATE QUICKLY TO ALTERNATE SITES.

MIX—OVERLAPPING PROTECTION OF HIGH-VALUE TARGETS BY SEVERAL DIFFERENT AIR DEFENSE SYSTEMS.

4541/79W

Figure 6-5. Principal North Vietnamese Air Defense Systems

new aircraft such as the A-10, AH-1S, and AH-64, the Soviets have emphasized development of weapons to defend against aircraft and helicopters operating near the FEBA. Moreover, Warsaw Pact forces fly more advanced fighter-interceptors, such as the MIG-23 FLOGGER, than were available to the North Vietnamese.

US forces, at the same time, would employ a more sophisticated array of fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, and new aerial munitions against Pact forces than were available in Vietnam. What cannot be denied is that enemy defenses in Central Europe are bound to raise the cost and complexity of US air operations, as the tactics and weapons employed by both Pact and NATO forces have become increasingly sophisticated.

On the other hand it may be easier for US aviation forces to find the enemy in Europe than it was in Vietnam. Soviet tank units, for example, cannot blend in with population or easily hide under a jungle canopy the same way the enemy forces were able to do in Vietnam. Compared with the Vietnam experience, there should be little question in Europe as to the location of the enemy's forces and the axis of his advance, although the ECM environment, weather, and deception must be taken into consideration. In all probability, FACs could not be used at least with impunity, since dense enemy defenses would prevent them and other strike aircraft from loitering over the battlefield.

Another significant comparison of Europe and Vietnam relates to the US allies. The VNAF never presented much of a threat to enemy forces, as it lacked high-performance strike aircraft and generally did not make effective use of what planes it had. By comparison, NATO air forces are fielding an increasingly impressive array of strike aircraft.

2. Airpower in a Limited War

Given the number of possible scenarios for limited war in different parts of the globe, it is difficult to establish even broad generalizations about the applicability of airpower. However, many of the "lessons learned" in the concluding part of this subsection are, it would appear, directly applicable to most types of limited war. Beyond this, it is possible to examine some other local situations to gain additional insights

into the employment of airpower in a limited conventional conflict. Perhaps the most useful data base comes from the American experience in Korea and the Israeli experiences in wars in 1967 and 1973.

a. Korea 110/

The US air war in Korea resembled the Indochina air war in many respects. Although able to work in conditions of near-total air superiority, the USAF in Korea chafed under limitations on the use of airpower, such as political restrictions on bombing sources of war supplies in China. In addition, the American military were frustrated by the enemy's ability to move necessary supplies to the front despite strenuous air interdiction. The enemy forces were highly elusive and their communications were not overly vulnerable to this form of attack. Interdiction sorties comprised 48 percent of all US missions flown, and the flow of supplies to the front lines was cut sharply but not below the level required by enemy infantry.

According to a study prepared by the RAND Corporation, the USAF interdiction program in Korea "all seemed to follow the same cycle: initial success and then defeat by enemy countermeasures."111/ The limitations on the effectiveness of interdiction campaigns were traced primarily to the low supply requirements of the North Korean and Chinese troops. A North Korean or Chinese division, of 10,000 men, for example, needed only 48 tons of supplies per day, allowing "some stockpiling," compared with 500 tons per day required for a 16,000-man US division. The enemy traveled at night and used a redundant, difficult-to-find network of bridges. According to the RAND study, the single most effective technique in keeping Chinese supplies moving was the ability to repair bomb damage in minimum time.

A special-purpose interdiction program of 1952-53 had some parallels with the Linebacker operations of 1972. Air Force, Navy, and Marine aircraft mounted massive attacks against North Korea's hydroelectric system, factories, barracks, and airfields, and some 23,000 gallons of napalm were dumped on Pyongyang. Air Force sorties were directed against the rail network in January 1953. USAF B-29 operations in Korea were

applied in force, as were B-52s in Vietnam. In May 1953, bombers struck the irrigation dam system, flooding the main road and communication system north of Pyongyang. Fifteen additional dams were not struck, but the threat of further strikes and flooding may have influenced the North Koreans and Chinese to sign the armistice in July 1953.

The effectiveness of close air support was never in dispute. Close air support partially offset the Army's lack of sufficient artillery during the first weeks of war. American infantry commanders defending the Pusan perimeter, for example, were certain that close air support made it possible for UN infantry to survive.

b. The Middle East War of 1967 112/

During the 1967 war, airpower was used brilliantly, quickly, and decisively. Israeli pilots approached their targets from unexpected axes, flew under the engagement altitudes of the SA-2 missiles, and delivered their ordnance on airfields with near-precision accuracy. Initial Israeli airstrikes wiped out most of the Arab air forces in the opening day of hostilities, and ensured that the Israeli Defense forces (IDF) ground forces would operate throughout the six-day war with little concern for enemy air strikes. Israeli aircraft continued to pound Arab military targets, and provided close air support to IDF ground commanders when required to do so. Israeli performance during this war clearly emphasizes the need for employing surprise when planning air strikes, wherever they may occur in the theater of conflict.

c. The Middle East War of 1973 113/

As numerous studies have pointed out, the Israeli air force had a much more difficult time in 1973. By this time, the Arabs dispersed and protected their aircraft, and their air defense units had been reequipped with SA-3, SA-6, and SA-7 missiles, as well as several types of AAA guns. The Arabs used these weapons to down more than 100 Israeli aircraft throughout the war, with most of the Israeli losses occurring in the first days of the conflict. During the first hours of combat, the Israeli air force was unable to penetrate the dense, overlapping defenses which

guarded the bridges across the Suez Canal. Later, Israeli ground commanders expected the type of close air support they received in 1967, but did not get it. As in past wars, the Arab air forces did not present Israeli pilots with a serious threat. As the war continued, the Israelis refined their tactics and aircraft loss rates dropped. (In the same manner, US air forces' loss ratios over the DRV dropped from 1965 to 1967 as new tactics were introduced and new ECM gear was added.) One of the more successful combined tactics was the employment of ground units to overrun SAM sites, thereby establishing corridors for aircraft to penetrate.

d. The Prime Role for Airpower in Counterinsurgency

There is a role for airpower in every type of armed conflict, but in counterinsurgency there is only so much that aviation forces can be expected to do. In two cases in which the insurgency has been defeated (Malaya and the Philippines), the role of airpower was limited, by US standards. On the other hand, airpower was used extensively in the Algerian civil war by French forces, but the Algerian rebels won out in the end. Likewise, Soviet forces in Afghanistan have recently resorted to airpower in increasing degrees to counter the Moslem insurgency there, but the Soviets were no closer to winning at the end of 1979 than they were a year earlier.

e. Malaya 114/

The fundamental British strategy was physically to separate the guerrillas from the remainder of the population. This made it relatively easy to use airpower against the insurgents. The British approach was not to eliminate the insurgents by airpower alone, but rather to keep them on the run in order for the ground forces to kill or capture them. Throughout the conflict, the British had strict rules of air-to ground engagement and were restrained in dropping ordnance. British planes dropped only 33,000 tons of ordnance during the entire 10-year counterinsurgency effort. The vast differences between the situation the British faced in Malaya and that which US planners faced in Vietnam should be noted, for the Malayan theater of operations was a peninsula, which could be sealed off with relative ease. Perhaps the most fundamental lessons

learned -- from the standpoint of airpower -- is that the British realized that effective counterinsurgency operations were possible only with true coordination of air units with ground forces, and that the local population could be alienated by unwarranted bombing.

f. Philippines 115/

As in the case of Malaysia, airpower was used in support of, but not separate from, the ground forces. The Philippine air force had little combat role in the campaign, as the country's leadership recognized that guerrilla forces could not be easily identified from the air. Airpower was used primarily for reconnaissance, air supply, communications, and for psychological operations. Offensive aerial operations were bound by strict rules of engagement, with care taken to avoid civilian casualties. The lessons learned from the Philippine experience are similar to those from the counterinsurgency in Malaya.

g. Algeria 116/

French forces in Algeria used airpower extensively in a variety of roles, but could not fundamentally alter the situation on the ground which weighed increasingly on the side of the rebels. The French air force, augmented by army aviation and navy planes, flew as many as 10,000 sorties per month by 1958. Most sorties operated in conjunction with ground forces rather than on independent offensive actions, and the primary task of aviation was reconnaissance. Helicopters were used for troop transport, medical evacuation, reconnaissance, and liaison. One rebel source stated that "Every time one of the French units is in trouble, numerous air detachments fly to its aid at the request of the local headquarters."117/ The French flew a number of ground-attack missions as well, and had certain advantages (in terms of desert terrain and a sealed border with neighboring Tunisia and Morocco) which US pilots did not enjoy in Vietnam. As in Vietnam, the French created specified secured areas for the population as well as the equivalent of free fire zones (zones interdites) in which pilots could fire on any suspected enemy target. In summary, airpower was able to assist the ground forces in many ways, but it was not a

decisive weapon militarily, and it could not gain a political victory. The Algerian war was lost in Paris.

h. Afghanistan 118/

The Soviets are continuing to apply ground and airpower in counterinsurgency operations against Moslem guerrillas in Afghanistan. As the fighting continues, the results remain uncertain, but the implications bear especially close watching. The Soviets and their Afghan government allies have employed fighter-bombers and MI-24 helicopter gunships in attempts to wipe out the antigovernment guerrillas. Primarily, the fighter-bombers (SU-7 FITTER A) have been employed in the countryside, with MI-24 helicopter gunships used in urban fighting in Kabul and in some provinces as well. Some sources have reported the Soviet employment of air-delivered chemical weapons against the guerrillas in the countryside. Fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, and armor give the Soviets and the Afghan government a technical superiority over the rebels in much the same way that US weapons gave the allies a technical edge over the NVA and VC. Military men, according to one account, believe that this superiority means the end of the rebellion, but others believe that the rebels probably will retreat into the mountainous terrain, where Soviet airpower can do little, and wage a hit-and-run war against the government. The critical factor is that rebel forces appear to be determined to continue fighting no matter what new weapons the Soviets introduce. (April 1980).

i. Application to Africa and the Middle East 119/

Should US aviation forces be called on for combat in Africa, they could face an air defense environment in some areas which would resemble that in South Vietnam in the early 1970s. Specifically, many African guerrilla forces employ the SA-7 and various small-caliber AAA guns. As most of these groups are trained by the Cubans, East Germans, or Soviets, it is likely that US aviation forces would face an enemy who is well-trained in the application of limited air defense capabilities. Moreover, the enemy's capabilities in passive defense -- specifically CC&D -- should not be overlooked. Should US forces be called upon in the later stages of a conflict, they could well face more capable air defense weapons

such as mobile SAMs or the ZSU-23-4. In addition, some African capitals are defended by SA-2s, SA-3s, or both systems. It is unlikely that US aviation forces would be seriously opposed by any airborne threat in Africa unless the Soviets made an unprecedented commitment of combat aircraft and sent along their aircrews or those of their allies. In general, air defense crews can operate abroad with a much lower profile than can pilots (whose voice communications are often subject to intercept).

Should US aviation forces participate in combat in the Middle East, they could encounter an air defense environment similar to that which Israel faced in 1973 (depending on the exact location). Many of the Arab states have large quantities of Soviet-built SAMs, and Soviet training of these missile crews is thorough. Moreover, it is possible that Soviet crews could actually be manning some antiaircraft units, as in the case of the 1970 "war of attrition" in Egypt. Even if the conflict were to begin in a relatively remote part of the Middle East, such as the area of the Persian Gulf, the Soviets could move in ground-based air defense assets, if not Soviet aircraft and/or Soviet aircrews. Thus, such a conflict could quickly become highly "sophisticated" -- and possibly get out of hand.

G. ANALYTICAL SUMMARY AND INSIGHTS

1. The French Period

During the First Indochina War, French airpower was used primarily in close support, contrary to the desires of French aviators who urged that strategic interdiction receive priority. In response to the limited French interdiction, the Viet Minh dispersed, moved mainly at night, and learned to mobilize civilian laborers to repair bomb damage to LOCs. That experience, coupled with the counterinterdiction lessons learned and practiced in Korea by their Chinese allies, helped the DRV to formulate the basic defensive strategy that worked so successfully against the US interdiction of North Vietnam from 1965 through 1968.

2. Fractionalized Command and Gradualism

There was no single air war and no single US air commander during the Second Indochina War.

Presidential insistence on a deliberate policy of gradualism failed to threaten the DRV seriously and enabled the DRV incrementally to develop and refine one of the most effective air defense networks in the world. That combination contributed significantly to the inordinate US losses suffered over North Vietnam. In addition, the president personally approved the targets to be struck in North Vietnam while prohibiting strikes against other targets. There is no reason to believe that future presidents will be any different; when a chief executive perceives the possibility that any given military action might precipitate a larger war, he will undoubtedly personally monitor that action and any related actions.

CINCPAC ran much of the air war in North Vietnam, subject to presidential license, and he did so through his component commanders CINCPACAF and CINCPACFLT. Those headquarters were too far removed from the scene to function optimally and they had myriad duties to perform other than conducting an air war against the DRV, Pathet Lao, and later the Khmer Rouge. Additionally, the air attacks against the DRV were too restrained (by the president) at a time when technology was not sufficiently advanced to make the limited on-again off-again effort successful.

Failure to form a unified Southeast Asia command resulted in each nation of Indochina being treated as a separate entity, thereby giving the resident US ambassadors unique military authority and fractionalizing command and control. The ambassador to Laos had the final word on air strikes in northern Laos and competed for air assets to apply in that area. Yet his staff was not competent to deal with the major air planning and air control requirements implicit in the extensive air operations required in Laos. That problem was further exacerbated by the CIA's role and influence in Laos -- for better or for worse.

At SAC and USAF insistence, SAC B-52 aircraft were never placed under the operational control of CINCPAC, CINCPACAF, 7th/13th Air Force, or

COMUSMACV. SAC units were in a supporting role with the SAC staffs doing the operational planning. Similarly, USAF tactical aircraft not based in RVN remained under 13th Air Force operational control. The Navy also refused to place its TF77 carriers and their aircraft under the operational control of COMUSMACV, keeping them in a supporting role. These same kinds of command relationships can be expected in future operations unless a single unified command, in being or specifically created, is given the tri-Department, four-Service assets. It should be noted that currently (Feb 1980), of the six unified commands, only EUCOM has all three departmental components, Air Force, Army and Naval.

Marine Corps aviation assets remained under the operational control of the CG III MAF (CG 1st MAW) throughout hostilities. In early 1968 the MACV Deputy for Air/Air Component Commander was designated single manager of air assets, but there was little change in the actual procedures or allocation of assets. As late as 1979 a unified commander raised the problem of single management of his earmarked air assets, specifically USMC units, showing that the problems associated with integration of Marine aviation within a multi-Service Command still need resolution.

3. On the Brighter Side - SAR

The search and rescue (SAR) operations in Indochina evolved into one of the most effective of such ventures in history. SAR aircraft were part of major air strike operations, and immediate requests received the highest priority of response. About 51% of all airmen shot down in Indochina were rescued. The techniques developed and the reputation for excellence that emerged contributed markedly to morale. Equipment such as beepers and emergency radios and SAR tactics were highly developed and provide a sound basis for further development for future hostilities.

4. A Matter of Image

The picture of a US Goliath fighting a DRV David was initially fostered partly by war critics and partly by the reality that air power, as used during the period 1961-1968, was not appropriate for the task of defeating the guerrilla infrastructure, which remained a key factor until

after Tet '68. Much of the air power was counterproductive in the guerrilla and other combat environments within RVN, and its often incautious use created refugees who either sided with the VC or became wards of the GVN. Military gains by air or ground power do not necessarily represent political gains, and in a counterinsurgency the political side of the coin is the more important. In the international arena it was the air attacks more than any other factor that drew condemnation, though media and critics alike usually failed to acknowledge VC mortar and rocket attacks on populated areas or VC coercion and atrocities in the countryside. Despite assurances to Thieu that the US would intervene swiftly and decisively in the event the DRV violated the January 1973 cease-fire, the US failed to respond with air power in Phuoc Long Province in late 1974 and the die was cast. VNAF, which had eliminated one sixth of its squadrons due to US aid cutbacks, was unable to prevent loss of the province capital in January 1975. In the ensuing four months the limited air power of VNAF, lacking ECM aircraft and smart bombs, could not provide ARVN with the kind and intensity of air support that they had received earlier from the US air forces. The composition of VNAF had been dictated by the US and the concept for air support in defense of RVN was based more on use of the powerful and diversified US air arms than in the lightly equipped Vietnamese Air Force. Failure of the US air forces to participate made it possible for North Vietnamese forces to destroy RVNAF quickly.

5. The Growing Importance of Air Power

Within RVN, air power was most demonstrably effective when the enemy had the initiative and was on the offensive with main force units; otherwise, the enemy kept "off the skyline," avoided heavy, direct confrontations, and relied on relatively effective active and passive defense measures. The allied air forces were unable to exert control of the battlefield except on the few occasions after the PAVN had re-equipped with modern gear and initiated major attacks, such as at Khe Sanh, Quang Tri, etc.

In this context, reliance on air power increased significantly as the US began to withdraw troops. The enemy's modernization program made him considerably more vulnerable to air attack, and air became the primary

weapon. Unfortunately, RVNAF, too, came to rely on it and ultimately GVN's survival depended on it.

6. Out-of-Country Operations

Out-of-Country operations consumed about half of all of the US/VNAF sorties flown in Southeast Asia.

- PARAGRAPH DELETED.

- Interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the Lao Panhandle: Despite the proved capability of the various gun platforms to kill trucks at night on the Trail, the US interdiction effort spanning eight years was costly but unimpressive, and it had no decisive long-term effect. The enemy in RVN probably got most of his supplies, especially food, from indigenous sources in RVN (estimated at 70 percent) and clearly was able to move enough supplies down the trail to feed his bearers, stock the way stations and dumps, establish supply caches, and support his troops. Although some notable interruptions of his logistic activities did occur, the Cambodian incursion and Lam Son 719 for example, they were only temporary set backs.

The massive air effort against the Trail failed to put a significant dent in that supply operation, but it exacted a very heavy toll of US airmen and aircraft. Those operations illustrated the value of sanctuaries and the need for physical denial of key LOCs and bases by properly equipped and supported ground combat troops. It is unlikely that use of smart bombs (had they been available earlier) would have made any substantial difference. Trucks moving at night with a proper tactical interval, good

evasion/concealment techniques, and a growing and sophisticated air defense system would not have been attrited seriously for very long.

- Air support in Cambodia: These operations were begun secretly without opposition from Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The bombing was inconclusive. In conducting the secret war, actual targets in Cambodia were reported as being in RVN. Despite the apparently good reasons of military security and international relations for providing a cover story for air operations in Cambodia, much of the public and certainly the administration's critics considered that effort to be deceptive.

When Lon Nol took over and the US/ARVN invasion took place, air support operations were restricted to specific areas along the RVN/Cambodian border and east of the Mekong. Air operations were generally effective in support of the invasion. Closure of Sihanoukville (Kompong Som) by Lon Nol and seizure or destruction of many PAVN/PLAF supply dumps, however, were the principal factors that forced a slow down in communist ground combat activity in MR III and IV. Conversely, public and congressional awareness of the operations in Cambodia caused further restrictions to be placed on the administration's conduct of the war. Although air support was largely instrumental in keeping Lon Nol in office, in the end it was not decisive in Cambodia, but it was not used properly, mainly because of political sensitivities.

- Air operations in North Vietnam: These operations have already been discussed at length. In summary, the air-to-air combat situation initially reflected a two-to-one advantage by US air forces over the DRV's MIGs. That advantage was increased to 12-to-1 by means of a new training program, engagement simulation.

Techniques for defeating enemy AAA and SAM defenses became highly sophisticated as the war progressed and the US gained exceptionally valuable experience in that form of warfare. So, too, did the DRV and USSR, the latter having supplied the air defense weapons, technicians, and training.

Interdiction in the North, and elsewhere was generally ineffective. The logistic entry points which served the DRV included the two rail lines from China and the port of Haiphong in the North and Sihanoukville in the South. These key areas were inviolable for much of the war, due to presidential restrictions. Once supplies, materiel and equipment debouched from the entry points and scattered along numerous well-defended LOCs, their vulnerability decreased geometrically. Further, communist bloc aid was estimated to be two to three times as much as the DRV required to support its operations in and out of country and there appeared to be no limit on what they would supply.

7. Interdiction

Widespread and sporadic interdiction is generally not productive. Interdiction should be a sustained combined arms effort. Ground force action or threats are needed to cause the enemy to expand needed ammunition and supplies. Meanwhile air and artillery fires should interdict LOCs to prevent or limit delivery of additional supplies. Finally a combined arms attack should enable the ground component to seize and then hold the objective. If these ingredients are not coordinated, interdiction serves little purpose.

The argument that considerable manpower is needed to circumvent an interdiction program, and that otherwise that manpower would be in the army fighting against us, does not necessarily hold water. (See Chapter 4 "Mobilization" of Volume I, The Enemy of this study.) Many of the porters, coolies, and laborers used on the Ho Chi Minh Trail were probably not suitable for front line combat. The DRV needed to mobilize all of its people in a national crusade, and, to a degree, the ability to funnel excess manpower into seemingly useful and necessary tasks could have been a bonus. Since the DRV did not appear to suffer any crippling shortage of manpower for what it wanted to do, the personnel commitment in response to US interdiction was immaterial. A very similar situation had existed during the Korean War.

Had additional air assets been committed to augment the already massive interdiction effort in southern Laos, it probably would not have

made any appreciable difference in the conduct or outcome of the war, but US pilot casualties and aircraft losses would surely have been greater.

8. Some Observations

It would appear that a substantial part of the 1965-1968 air effort in North Vietnam could have been diverted, except that no other region could have made any better use of it under the existing ground rules. Therefore, perhaps much of the air effort was not productive, some of it was counterproductive, and a lower order of air operations might have reduced the losses of airmen and aircraft without materially affecting the war within RVN.

A wealth of airpower was available and it enjoyed relative freedom of action. Air superiority was maintained. The combat environment was conducive to lavish use of US firepower, and many "lessons" concerning the use of firepower seem to have been gleaned. Many of those "lessons" are either faulty to begin with or are not applicable to a bigger war against a more modern and larger opponent. Indeed, many such "lessons" are likely inappropriate in a counterinsurgency situation or a limited war. Mobile SAMs, to include the SA-7, did not make their appearance in the South until late in the war. Therefore, only limited experience has been acquired by airmen operating in that environment. The next war will surely be different, and even barefooted natives may be expected to have and to use such weapons as the SA-7. In a major war, the electronic battlefield will have little resemblence to what occurred in Southeast Asia.

A final observation. Except for Linebacker II, US air operations in North Vietnam were not sufficiently effective to warrant the losses of airmen and aircraft suffered. The transfer of that air effort to support operations in South Vietnam would only have created a greater imbalance in the South than that which existed. Except for isolated cases, close air support was available to US commanders whenever and wherever needed. True, ARVN did not enjoy quite the same degree of air support, but there is no indication that any major battles were lost solely because of inadequate air support for ARVN except in 1974 and 1975. Because of the great numbers and variety of fire support available, it was used on the slightest pretext. As a consequence, it tended to be counterproductive. At a minimum,

it was wasteful. Progress in the war was measured by statistics, so the more H&I rounds fired, the more bombs dropped, the more fire missions and sorties--often in free fire zones and more than half of it not observed--the greater the progress. If anything, too much air and ground fire power was used in RVN throughout the US presence; lavish firepower upset the balance between fire and movement but did save US lives in the short run. Unfortunately, too little was available after the US withdrew.

H. LESSONS

Air power is used most effectively when the theater of operations is assigned to a single unified commander who is provided with a clear-cut mission and the tri-Departmental assets needed to carry out his mission. Dividing the air responsibilities among several commands not only attenuates the effectiveness of air power, but it also tends to fractionalize the intelligence structure, thereby depriving many commanders of important information.

Rules of engagement (ROE) are essential; they set necessary limits on combat commanders to assure that the fighting remains within certain prescribed bounds. Presidents of the United States can be expected to establish or review major ROE in most crises and combat situations. To influence those ROE from being overly restrictive, the military must present compelling arguments, and, therefore, must thoroughly understand the political-military, socio-economic, and cultural situations. Development of and adherence to ROE are simplified in a single unified command.

Interdiction of a local area of the battlefield with air and ground fire power, supported by good all-source intelligence, can be accomplished successfully for extended periods, assuming that air superiority can be maintained and that it is a combined arms effort. Interdiction of a theater of operations in an insurgency situation is not likely to succeed unless it strikes at the external sources of support or the ports of entry, but it is likely to cost more in men and machines than the limited attrition is worth. As smart bombs enter the inventory to improve interdiction

capabilities, new air defense weapons arrive to offset that technological advance. The rationale that a massive interdiction effort forces the enemy to commit more man and more supplies to deliver the minimum essential support to his combat forces is generally accurate but probably not decisive. If the interdiction is very costly and still does not effectively shut down or limit the enemy's logistic effort, then the interdiction goals should be reevaluated.

In a counterinsurgency situation, there can be too much air and ground firepower used against the insurgents. Available assets tend to be used, whether or not their use is necessary; in counterinsurgency this is wasteful and often counterproductive. Excessive use of firepower kills innocents, creates refugees, drives others into the enemy's camp, and draws down severe criticism from enemies, neutrals, and often from friends.

-- Provision must be made for greater-than-anticipated amounts of precision air-to-ground weaponry (such as laser-guided and electro-optically guided munitions) and support equipment (such as ECM pods) in even a "small" war. US planners must assume that the enemy will introduce sophisticated air defense weapons at a rapid pace, and should make plans beforehand to offset possible high attrition rates.

-- There is continuing need for aircraft which are suited for counterinsurgency missions and for limited warfare so long as US doctrine calls for American involvement in such type of warfare. In this regard, US forces would be well advised to maintain an adequate stock of aircraft which meet the following requirements: (a) simple to operate and maintain; (b) relatively inexpensive, in order to deploy them in sufficient numbers; (c) good all-weather and night capabilities; (d) able to withstand hits from small-caliber ground fire. In effect, what is required is a mix of aircraft with sophisticated "black box" equipment and the World War II-era "low, slow flyers" which can effectively terrorize and demoralize the enemy.

-- Decision makers must have realistic expectations of what airpower can and cannot do in a given theater. For example, there are few readily identifiable situations in which aircraft can be expected to kill a large percentage of enemy troops in the field. (One made-to-order example is that of the French Jaguar ground-attack aircraft in Africa, which have successfully interdicted enemy columns in both Chad and the Western Sahara; in both cases, the terrain has favored the air attacker.)

-- Planners and policymakers must employ reliable and credible units of measure to determine the success of an air campaign. If anything, the Vietnam air war proved that tons of ordnance delivered or numbers of sorties are not effective measures of who is winning. Furthermore, the number of enemy bridges destroyed or lines of communication interdicted is equally meaningless if these measures ignore the enemy's repair capabilities, or his cleverness in deceiving observers.

-- Duplicity or appearances of duplicity should be avoided in military reporting. News of the secret bombing in Cambodia aroused a storm of indignation and resulted in a serious loss of military credibility in some circles. If a regular military operation is worth doing, it should enjoy reasonable protection under the appropriate security classification. Cover stories for all but closely held covert operations are likely to leak quickly and cause a serious erosion of confidence.

-- The use of airpower must be fully coordinated with and supportive of the employment of other elements of national power in planning and executing both grand and military strategies.

-- An important, if not always pivotal, consideration is that the employment of airpower to achieve US political objectives will inevitably generate POWs and MIAs as well as psychological propaganda opportunities for a clever opponent.

CHAPTER 6 ENDNOTES

1. W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell, Col., USAF, The Lessons of Vietnam (New York: Crane, Rissak and Company, 1977), p. 125.

2. Attributed to President Coolidge after the Army and Navy each began to develop its own aviation in the 1920s.

3. See Chapter 11, Volume VI (Book 2) for a discussion of command and control of air assets.

4. This section is based largely on the research performed by MG Richard Cross, USAF (Ret.) of The BDM Corporation, who was formerly Chief of Operations for the Seventh Air Force in Vietnam.

5. Comment by the lieutenant colonel commanding French Army aviation in the Far East ground forces, cited in Commander in Chief Far East, Lessons of the War in Indochina (Saigon: May 31, 1955), Volume 2, p. 291. Translation from the French by V. J. Croizat, Colonel USMC (Ret.) for United States Air Force Project, Rand. Memorandum RM-5271-PR May 1967 (DS 550. FY V.2). Hereafter this translation will be referred to as French Lessons Learned.

6. French Lessons Learned, pp. 342-346.

7. Ibid., p. 347.

8. Ibid., p. 299. The brief chapter on helicopters, pp. 299-305, provides a succinct picture of early helicopter combat operations.

9. Ibid., pp. 336-338.

10. Carl Berger, ed. The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1977), pp. 7-8. Hereafter cited as USAF in SEA.

11. Guenter Lewy, America in Vietnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 7; Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change (New York: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 340-350.

12. Study by (French) Army Forces, North Vietnam, on air support in North Vietnam. The quoted paragraph is introduced by this statement: "In short, a periodic review of our air capabilities was required, and the battle of Dien Bien Phu clearly demonstrates the contrast between what we thought we could still accomplish, and what our aviation was actually capable of doing." French Lessons Learned, p. 333.

13. USAF in SEA. Pages 309-319 give a good account of the status of the VNAF throughout the war. MG Cross also provided considerable background information on this treatment of the VNAF.

14. Nguyen Cao Ky, Twenty Years and Twenty Days (New York: Stein and Day, Publishers, 1976), pp. 18-19. General Ky also described his early association with CIA officer William Colby, 1960-1962, when VNAF aircraft were dropping agents into North Vietnam (pp. 23-27).

15. USAF in SEA, pp. 8-9.

16. Ibid., p. 9.

17. BG James Lawton Collins, Jr., The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950-1972, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1975), pp. 36-38 describes some of the early difficulties experienced by VNAF: incomplete pre-mission briefings, inability to communicate with US aircraft because of different equipment (until 1962), and the language barrier. General Collins adds, "During the third quarter of calendar year 1962, air support flown by Vietnamese pilots was described by the U.S. helicopter personnel as inadequate, inaccurate, uncoordinated, and useless."

18. USAF in SEA, pp. 309-319 provides the data contained in this section.

19. For an account of air operations during the Easter Offensive, 1972, see Major A. J. C. Lavalle, ed., Airpower and the 1972 Spring Invasion, USAF Southeast Asia Monograph Series, Volume II, Monograph 3.

20. "The Military Balance, 1978-79 . . . Other Asian Countries and Australia," Air Force, December 1978, p. 105.

21. Stephen T. Hosmer; Konrad Kellen; Brian M. Jenkins, The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders. A report prepared for Historian, Office of the Secretary of Defense (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, December 1978), p. 72. The statement was made by a high-ranking Vietnamese officer, not otherwise identified.

22. General John W. Vogt, USAF (Ret.). General Vogt was DEPCOMUSMACV and CG 7th Air Force during this period. Interview at The BDM Corporation 30 November 1978.

23. Research by MG Cross. See also Adm. U.S.G. Sharp, Strategy for Defeat (San Rafael, California and London, England: Presidio Press, 1978), pp. 85-104 for a thorough discussion of the "creeping approach" to the bombing of North Vietnam.

24. Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson commented that December 1964 - January 1965 was the turning point. The GVN had been informed that the US would bomb North Vietnam if the GVN "got its stuff together." Ambassadors Maxwell Taylor and U. Alexis Johnson felt that the South would fold unless the North was bombed, and bombing appeared to be a flexible--not irrevocable--option. President Lyndon Johnson did not want to commence

bombing until US dependents were evacuated from RVN. The VC raid on Pleiku took place when McGeorge Bundy was in country; dependents were evacuated and the bombing commenced, courtesy of USAF units operating out of Da Nang. Protection of the USAF base made it seem logical to introduce AAA units, and a USMC light antiaircraft missile (LAAM) battalion was brought into Da Nang. Their security was a matter of concern, and the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade entered Da Nang. The ground combat force buildup began; according to Ambassador Johnson, each step was logical in its own right. BDM study team interviews with Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson at The BDM Corporation on 13 September 1978.

25. Sharp, Strategy for Defeat, pp. 85-104.

26. While serving on the International Security Affairs (ISA) staff of The Department of Defense in 1962-64, General John Vogt, USAF, got together Secretary McNamara's first air target list. The targets were picked by the secretary of state, the NSC staff, and the president..."on the basis of, what would the traffic bear? Not, will it win the war, but, what will the political opponents say?" Comments by General John W. Vogt, USAF (Ret.) during The BDM Senior Review Panel Meeting, 13 February 1979.

27. William W. Momyer, General, USAF (Ret.), Air Power in Three Wars (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1978) pp. 18-19.

28. Department of Defense, United States - Vietnam Relations 1945-1967, book 4 of 12 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1971), p. IV, 7. Hereafter cited as DOD US/VN Relations. The 94 targets included 82 fixed targets and 12 railroads.

29. Interview with General John Vogt, 30 November 1978, at The BDM Corporation.

30. William C. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1976), pp. 342-345; also see Momyer, pp. 284-287.

31. LTG John J. Tolson, USA Airmobility 1961-1971. Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1971), pp. 104-108. General Tolson's book is one of the most authoritative Army accounts of the development of the airmobile concept.

32. Research by MG Cross. See also Raphael Littauer and Norman Uphoff, eds. The Air War in Indochina (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), pp. 52-55. Hereafter cited as Air War.

33. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Systems Analysis, A Systems Anaysis View of the Vietnam War: 1965-1972, Volume V, The Air War. The data presented here in the BDM study incorporates only the comments and analyses germane to the issue at hand and only that in which both

OASD/SA and USAF agree. Other data in which there is disagreement, such as response times for strip alert and diverted aircraft, or which does not contribute to an appreciation of the close air support function in RVN is omitted here. The excellent systems analysis data and the rebuttals, some very good and some misleading, deserve careful reading.

34. Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, US Army, Reference for Proposal (RFP), DAAG39-77-R-9307, Part II - Section F, Descriptions/ Specifications, page F6. This document specifies the tasks and subtasks to be addressed in "A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam."

35. BDM study team discussions with several BDM staff personnel who served in RVN in command and staff capacities.

36. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 342.

37. Ibid., p. 344.

38. Interview with General William W. Momyer, USAF (Ret), former Commander of the US 7th Air Force, at the BDM Corporation, on 21 September 1979.

39. Ibid.

40. Research by MG Cross. See also Air War, pp. 18-19. Other sources such as USAF in SEA refer to interdiction in the context of specific countries.

41. Conversely, on many occasions the enemy had advance warning of impending B-52 strikes. General John Vogt remarked that communist trawlers off Guam radioed Hanoi every time B-52s took off from Andersen AFB on Guam and that enemy radars picked up the bombers 150 miles out. Comments made at The BDM Senior Review Panel meeting on 14 February 1979. Also, among others, a PAVN reconnaissance platoon leader, captured in August 1968, described the B-52 attacks in these terms:

> I know that on the B-52 strikes we normally had advance warning as to where and when they would occur. The warning usually came by a message from division to the regiment and it normally arrived two hours prior to the strike. As I remember the most time we ever had was four hours. One instance [sic] warning arrived just minutes before the air strike and we just made it out of the area when it was hit and demolished.

A monograph of 2LT Nguyen Van Thong, Platoon Leader, Recon Co., 320th Regt. 1st NVA Division. Written by Major Billy J. Biberstein, Commanding Officer, 13th Military History Detachment from interviews of Lt Thong, interrogation reports, I FFORCEV G2 Daily INTSUMS and the paper

paper, "A day in the life of an NVA soldier in South Vietnam," prepared by I FFORCEV G2 Section.

42. Research by MG Cross. See also USAF in SEA, pp. 169-186.

43. USAF in SEA, pp. 187-199.

44. USAF in SEA, pp. 175-183. Many of the transport pilots who supported these operations were unsung heroes, according to several accounts.

45. Cecil Brownlow, "Reconnaissance Wings Face New Strains," Aviation Week & Space Technology, October 1968. (Exact date of article and page numbers cannot be recovered, but article is available at BDM/Washington).

46. USAF in SEA has a good discussion of the various reconnaissance programs, in Chapter XII, "Tactical Reconnaissance," pp. 211-221.

47. Comment by BG Donald D. Blackburn, US Army (Ret.), General Blackburn directed SOG operations in Indochina 1965-1966 and at one point briefed COMUSMACV and the DEPCOMUS for Air on the targets his photo interpreter had indentified. The General commented, "Why they were not hit is still to be answered." Interviewed at The BDM Corporation, October 1979.

48. USAF in SEA, p. 243. A thorough treatment of the SAR effort is offered in Chapter XIV, "Air Rescue," pp. 235-243. The cost to SAR units was 71 rescuemen killed and 45 aircraft destroyed. Also, see US Congress, House, Americans Missing in Southeast Asia. Final Report of the Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia, 94th Cong, 2d Sess., December 13, 1976, pp. 150-156.

49. USAF in SEA, pp. 236-237.

50. Roy Bonds, ed., The Vietnam War. The Illustrated History of the Conflict in Southeast Asia (New York: Crown Publishers, 1979), pp. 40-41. Subsequently referred to here as The Vietnam War.

51. Robbins, Air America, passim. The AA pilots were eager to fly SAR missions, for AA pilots were paid according to the number of missions they flew. It appears that many of them--particularly helicopter pilots--took particular delight in the most dangerous types of missions.

52. USAF in SEA, pp. 242-243.

53. Numerous unclassified sources, including accounts by former VC/NVA troops, indicate that certain types of aircraft and weapons should be avoided.

54. Air War, p. 54.

55. Harrison Salisbury, Behind the lines-Hanoi (NY: Quadrangle Books, 1967), passim. Salisbury was taken in by his North Vietnamese hosts, and this book contributed greatly to the "David and Goliath" theme. The book presents a perceptive view of the enemy's will to fight on indefinitely, but Salisbury made some naive observations as to the true character of the enemy.

56. Interview with General William W. Momyer, USAF (Ret.), the former commander of the 7th Air Force, at BDM/Washington on September 21, 1979. Gen. Momyer here refers to the Linebacker II operations of December 1972. MG Richard Cross and Gen. John W. Vogt, both USAF (Ret.) also pointed out that Linebacker II brought the DRV to the Table in Paris.

57. Interview on October 18, 1979, with Thomas A. Ware, Colonel US Army (Ret.) of The BDM Corporation, who served with the US Army in Vietnam and has written several historical articles for US military journals.

58. Symposium on close air support at Langley AFB, VA in July 1976, sponsored by the American Defense Preparedness Association (ADPA).

59. This conclusion is based on numerous classified and unclassified studies by The BDM Corporation and other research institutes. Even the new Soviet ground-attack aircraft such as the SU-19 Fencer A, the SU-17/20 Fitter C, and the MIG-27 Flogger D are inferior to the F-4 Phantom II and A-10 Thunderbolt II in terms of range/payload capabilities and avionics.

60. Sen. Mike Gravel, Pentagon Papers, Volume 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 280.

61. Air War, pp. 45-46. The study was performed by the Jason Division of IDA (Institute for Defense Analysis) and submitted in December 1967.

62. Ware interview.

63. Air War, p. 67.

64. Bonds, ed., The Vietnam War, rear dust jacket of book.

65. USAF in SEA, p. 116. See Chapter 4 of this Volume for details of the Ground Combat Actions.

66. Bonds, ed., The Vietnam War, pp. 190, 192. Nguyen Duy Hinh, LAM SON 719, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph, OCMH (McLean Va.: GRC, 1977) p. 168, refers to a deposition by a POW showing that details of the attack along Route 9 were known five months before the ARVN attack was launched.

67. USAF in SEA, p. 115.

68. Ibid., p. 115. Also, Gen. Momyer interview of September 21, 1979. For statistics on sorties and losses, see Nguyen Duy Hinh, LAM SON 719, Chapter VI, pp. 126-140, p. 165. Loss of 108 US helicopters during more than 90,000 sorties gave a loss ratio of one helicopter per 833 sorties. Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, then National Security Advisor to the President, believes that LAM SON 719 delayed the PAVN's planned offensive for several months and caused it to be confined to the area nearest the DRV. See Henry A. Kissinger, The White House Years (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1979), p. 1009.

69. Most of these conclusions are offered in Bonds, ed., The Vietnam War, pp. 192, 194. See also USAF in SEA, pp. 114-117.

70. Air War, p. 67.

71. Bonds, ed., The Vietnam War, pp. 218-224. In addition, see Major A.J.C. Lavalle, Airpower and the 1972 Spring Invasion, USAF Southeast Asia Monograph Series, Vol. II, Monograph 3 (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1976).

72. Christopher Robbins, Air America (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1979), p. 116. This book is by far the most complete account of Air America operations, and is replete with accounts of the conflict in Laos.

73. Seymour M. Hersh, "How we ran the secret air war in Laos," New York Times Magazine, October 29, 1972, p. 19.

74. Robbins, Air America, p. 123.

75. Carl Berger, ed., USAF in SEA, p. 122. It treats the Barrel Roll operations in considerable detail. Combined with other sources (such as press articles of the early 1970s and Air America), a comprehensive account of many sensitive operations in northern Laos may be presented.

76. Benjamin F. Schemmer, The Raid (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 94-95. Details about Operation Popeye have also been made available by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

77. Air War, p. 79. B-52 sorties were flown against targets in the panhandle beginning in 1965 with 18 sorties. In the following years B-52 sorties in Laos totaled: 1966 (647), 1967 (1,713), 1968 (3,377), 1969 (5,567), 1970 (8,500), 1971 (8,850), and 1972 (2,799). Journal of Defense Research Series B: Tactical Warfare Analysis of Vietnam Data, Volume 7B, No. 3 (Fall 1975), Prepared by Battelle Columbus Laboratories for The Advanced Research Projects Agency, Department of Defense, p. 827. Hereafter cited as JDRB.

78. Air War, p. 80.

79. Gen William W. Momyer (USAF, Ret.), in Airpower in Three Wars, has several references to this fact throughout the book. See also Hersh article in NYT Magazine, Supra note 66, and Air War, p. 83.

80. See Momyer, Airpower in Three Wars, in the section which discusses management of air resources in SEA.

81. Air War, p. 84.

82. Ibid., p. 81.

83. Berger, USAF in SEA, pp. 101-119. This section presents a thorough account of the interdiction effort. Also see Chapter 5, Volume I, of this study.

84. Air War, p. 70.

85. Momyer interview.

86. JDRB. See Chapter VIII ("The Air War"), pp. 828-833. This report suggests that the distribution and rates of interdiction sorties in Laos and North Vietnam depended more on the numbers of sorties available than they did on strategy. Tentative conclusions reached were that:

- The VC/NVA in RVN probably received about 70 percent of their supplies from sources inside the country.
- About one-third of all supplies shipped into southern Laos were estimated to have made it into RVN through 1970. The rest was consumed in transit, stockpiled in Laos, or destroyed enroute.
- Air operations probably did not impose critical material costs on North Vietnam, since the USSR and PRC paid for most of the resources destroyed.

87. Two of the best sources for this topic are Momyer, Air Power in Three Wars, and Berger, USAF in SEA.

88. Articles from Aviation Week and Space Technology during the period 1969-1972 are particularly revealing about the incorporation of new technology. Some intelligence analysts believe that such articles provided the enemy with sufficient technical information for them to develop countermeasures.

89. Momyer, Air Power, p. 211.

90. Henry A. Kissinger, letter to The Economist, September 8, 1979, p. 6.

91. William Shawcross, Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. 24. Hereafter cited

as Sideshow. Although most of the BDM study team does not agree with Shawcross' point of view, much of his documentation is very useful.

92. Shawcross, Sideshow, p. 29.

93. Ibid., pp. 30-31.

94. See Air War, p. 56, and a recent USAF account of Linebacker II operations in BG James R. McCarthy and LTC George B. Allison, Linebacker II: A View from the Rock (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University, 1979), p. 3. From the ground level, a B-52 strike is described as an "earthquake" or a "disaster of major proportions."

95. Shawcross, Sideshow, p. 218. Slightly larger figures are shown in JDRB, p. 825 with about 10% of all US/VNAF sorties flown in Cambodia in 1970 (42,000) and 19% (61,000) in 1971.

96. Ibid., pp. 215-216.

97. JDRB p. 825. Also see Shawcross, pp. 218-219.

98. Ibid., pp. 266-267.

99. Many ex-USAF officers are united on this key point. Indeed, a thorough bombing of the Haiphong port facilities and other vital transportation targets undoubtedly would have prevented many of the supplies from ever beginning their journey down the Ho Chi Ninh Trail, where they became much harder to find. This line of reasoning did not register with officials in Washington, who were more concerned with not escalating the war sharply and provoking the Soviets and Chinese.

100. Berger, USAF in SEA, p. 70.

101. Momyer, "The Evolution of Fighter Tactics in SEA," Air Force, July 1973, p. 62. With respect to air-to-air combat in Vietnam, a draft booklet prepared by Headquarters, United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, Analyzing Training Effectiveness, 15 January 1975, pp. 10-11 provides an interesting example of the importance of training:

> An equally dramatic example of enhanced weapon system effectiveness through better training may be seen in the record of the air war over North Vietnam in the period 1965-1973. By and large, the US Air Force and Navy flew aircraft of comparable capabilities. In many cases they operated the same aircraft, armed with the same weapons. During the first four years of air-to-air combat, both the Navy and the Air Force experienced an identical, and disappointingly low, ratio of North

Vietnamese aircraft downed to US losses. During the halt in combat operations over North Vietnam from 1968 to 1970 the Navy launched a training program designed to teach their pilots how to reduce their vulnerabilities in air-to-air combat and how to increase their lethality. The technique employed was engagement simulation, in which the student pilot was pitted against a trained "enemy," operating a distinctive MIG-like aircraft, who did his utmost to "shoot" the student down. When fighting resumed in 1970, Navy pilots, flying the same aircraft but trained by the new technique, achieved a remarkably higher success ratio than had their predecessors of the earlier period. Moreover, they performed six times as well as Air Force pilots, whose training had remained essentially unchanged (it is noteworthy that the USAF has since adopted engagement simulation for the advanced training of its fighter pilots).

The Air War Over North Vietnam: 1965-1973

	Air-to-Air Losses		OVERALL KILL	USAF	USN
YEARS	MIGs	U.S.	RATIO	RATIO	RATIO
1965-1968	110	48	2.29	2.25	2.42
1970-1973	74	27	2.74	2.00	12.50

During the Yom Kippur War 1973 the Israeli Air Force shot down 334 Arab aircraft in air-to-air combat while losing only six. This 56 to 1 kill ratio has been attributed by senior US Air Force analysts primarily to the training programs conducted by the Israeli Air Force, which heavily emphasized engagement simulation.

102. Ralph Stavins; Richard J. Barnet; and Marcus Raskin, Washington Plans an Aggressive War (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 180-189. Despite the polemic title of the book, it contains good data on Washington's management of the air war.

103. Shawcross, Sideshow, p. 93.

104. By the same token, the expansion of the DRV's air defense network warranted increasing numbers of support aircraft to suppress and degrade the performance of SAMs and AAA. In many raids, AAA units were suppressed by cluster bomb units (CBUs); the SAM units were attacked by Shrike or Standard anti-radiation missiles (ARMs)--which homed in on the site's fire control radar--or SAM performance was degraded by

on-board ECM pods. As a result of these innovations, the losses to SAMs dropped progressively.

105. There are two detailed sources which present fascinating details about Linebacker II: McCarthy and Allison's book Linebacker II: A View From The Rock gives the official SAC account of the campaign. Dana Drenkowski offers a view of the campaign from the pilot's perspective: see "Operation Linebacker II" in Soldier of Fortune magazine (Part I in September 1977 and Part II in November 1977). Drenkowski traces the evolution of B-52 tactics from Linebacker I to Linebacker II and claims that SAC's stereotyped tactics and rigid refusal to alter tactics in the first days of Linebacker II caused unnecessary B-52 losses. In all, 15 B-52s were lost during the 11-day operation, 6 on the third day of the campaign. To their credit, SAC planners changed their tactics as the operation continued, and B-52 losses dropped.

106. A final word about bombing of civilian installations is warranted here. Civilian installations, such as the Bach Mai hospital and Gia Lam international airport, were hit by stray bombs dropped by rapidly maneuvering bombers. News media representatives attacked these accidental bombings (which were very close to key military targets) while ignoring the simultaneous deliberate NVA shelling of cities and civilian targets in the South. This double standard affected the morale of US aircrews, which were under severe restrictions designed to limit civilian casualties.

107. MIA Committee, pp. 152-155.

108. Aircraft losses are based on OSD Comptroller, Unclassified Statistics on Southeast Asia, Table 6, March 25, 1971, in Air War, pp. 267-272; Major Lavalle, Airpower and the 1972 Spring Invasion, p. 107; and BG McCarthy and LTC Allison, Linebacker II, pp. 171-173.

109. Due to the interpretive/analytical nature of this subsection, end-notes are not feasible on the scale of those presented in the historical section (the in-country and out-country air wars in Vietnam). Some sourcing is required, however. Data about Central Europe is largely extracted from other studies which BDM and similar research firms have performed. Information on airpower in the Korean war and in counterinsurgency campaigns is extracted from pp. 211-217 in Air War, which is itself well-sourced. Data from the Middle East wars is excerpted from a forthcoming article by the principal author of this chapter on the evolution of Soviet air and air defense forces. The subsection on Africa and the Middle East is based on a brief review of arms shipments to those regions. Data on Third World air defense capabilities can be found in The Military Balance 1979-80, an annual publication of the London International Institute for Strategic Studies.

110. Air War, pp. 206-211.

111. Air War, p. 210.

112. James Hansen, "Historical Development of Soviet Aviation Support and Tactical Air Defense," yet-unpublished two-part article for military journal. This article is partially a result of research The BDM Corporation has performed for other agencies of the US Government.

113. Ibid.

114. Air War, pp. 211-213.

115. Ibid., pp. 213-214.

116. Ibid., pp. 214-217.

117. Ibid., p. 215.

118. Numerous articles in The Washington Post in late 1979.

119. See the 1979-80 Military Balance by The London Institute for Strategic Studies for fairly accurate summaries of air defense holdings of Third World states.

CHAPTER 7

BLUE AND BROWN WATERS

> There is a tendency to think of Vietnam as a land and air war. All too often, the tremendous contribution which our Navy is making is overshadowed by the more dramatic ground clashes or bomb damage reports. We are prone to forget that without the support our Navy gives, those reports might not be so favorable....
>
> The simple fact is that we couldn't be in Vietnam today in the strength we are if it weren't for our Navy and its undisputed use of the seas. In addition to the 68 ships and more than 82,000 Navy men in Vietnam or in the waters offshore, roughly 98% of all materials and supplies used in Southeast Asia come to us by sea transport. This amounts to 800,000 measurement tons per month.
>
> It's true that most of the public attention and much of the credit for success goes to the man in the foxhole or in the cockpit, but one thing is certain--he is there only because he's backed up 100% by the mightiest Navy the world has ever known.
>
> LTG Lewis W. Walt USMC
> "Fire One." Leatherneck (Oct. 1968)

This chapter presents a description and analysis of naval activities, functions and organization during the Vietnam War, and certain events leading up to that war. Although it duplicates in some respects material described elsewhere in the report, it is the only chapter which treats the brown and blue water operations of the US Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard in some detail.

The chapter has been prepared to emphasize the unique aspects of naval activities, their relationship to the land and air activities of the war, and lessons learned from these activities.

A. INTRODUCTION

A unified command structure in the Pacific Ocean area was first implemented during World War II when two unified commands were established: the Pacific Ocean Area command and the Southwest Pacific Area command. 1/ Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz was the first Commander-in-Chief of the former, and General of the Army Douglas MacArthur was the only Commander-in-Chief of the latter. MacArthur's authority was expanded later in the war and he became Commander-in-Chief Far East (CINCFE) and Supreme Commander Allied Powers, the former position being co-equal to the Navy-held position of Commander-in-Chief Pacific Ocean Area, and the latter being an Allied title.

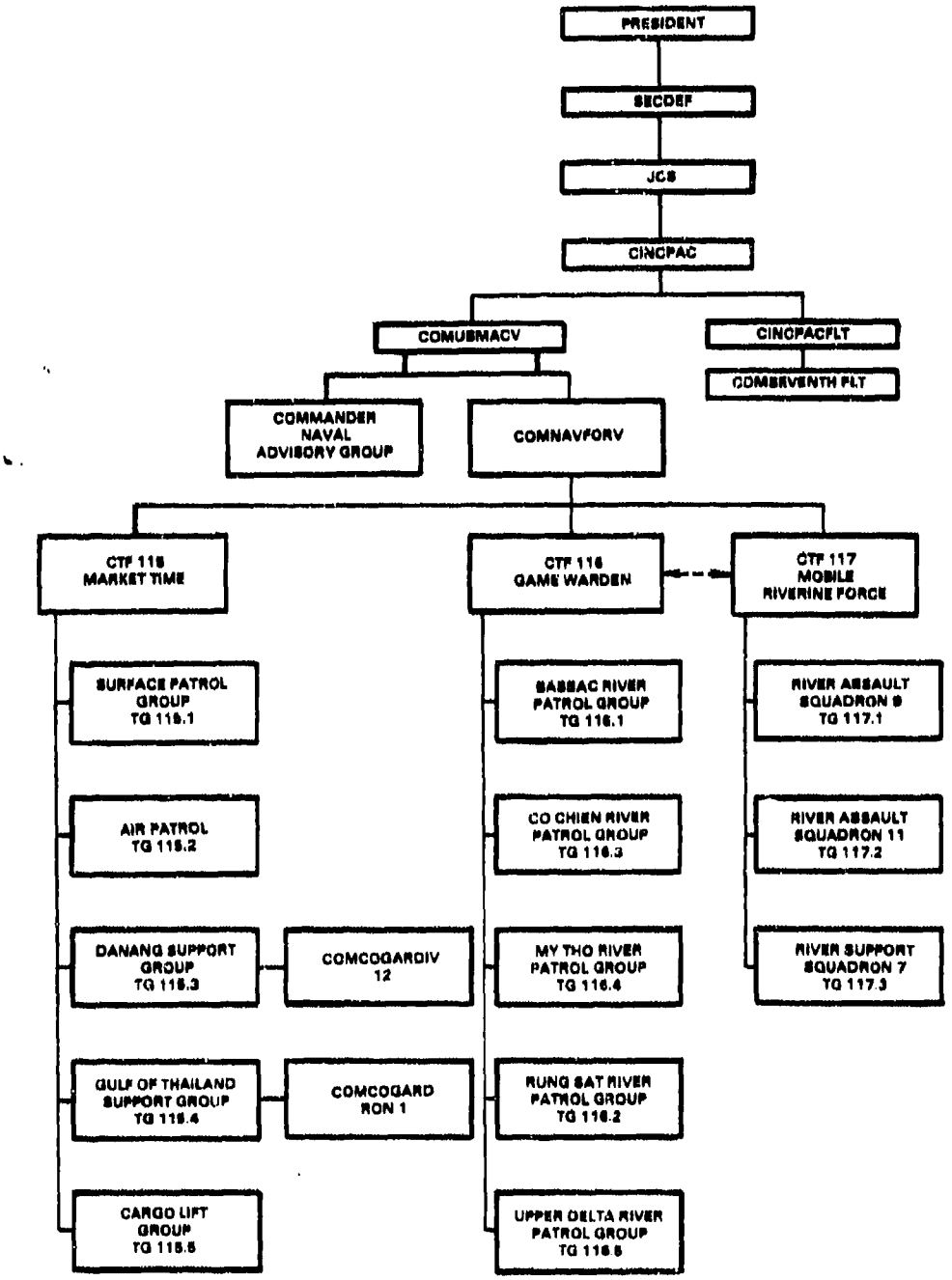
With the creation of the Department of Defense on 1 January 1947 came the reorganization or establishment of unified commands throughout the world. Three Pacific area commands were reorganized or established: Far East Command under General MacArthur, which controlled all US forces in Japan, Korea, the Ryukyu Islands, the Philippines, and the Bonin and Mariana Island groups; Alaska Command (ALCOM); and Pacific Command (PACOM) under Admiral John Towers who was "dual-hatted" as Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT). Adm. Towers controlled all forces and areas in the Pacific not specifically allocated to the other two commands. The chain of command was formally established at this time from the President, as Commander-in-Chief of all US forces, through the Secretary of Defense and Service Secretary to the Service Chief, designated as Executive Agent for the JCS, to the Unified Commander. 2/

When North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel into South Korea on 25 June 1950, the command responsibility for all American forces in the Korean area clearly lay with CINCFE, General MacArthur. When the United Nations committed forces to Korea, MacArthur was made Commander-in-Chief of the UN Command, still retaining his CINCFE title. The war was conducted entirely through these two commands, even after MacArthur's recall, with CINCPAC playing only a supporting role.

In mid-1956 the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed both CINCFE and CINCPAC to begin planning for the transfer of all Far East Command responsibilities to the Pacific Command. On 1 July 1957 this transfer was effected, and the individual services each established component commanders-in-chief and staffs in Hawaii. Shortly thereafter, on 26 October 1957, the Deputy CINCPACFLT assumed all of CINCPACFLT's duties relating to the operation of the fleet, permitting CINCPACFLT, Admiral Felix Stump, to devote all his time to his increased responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief, Pacific. On 13 January 1958 this separation was made official when Admiral Stump formally relinquished command of the Pacific Fleet to Admiral Maurice Curts.

The final step in the Department of Defense command reorganization process took place on 1 January 1959 when the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) directed the military departments to transfer the operational control of their combat and associated logistic and support forces to the unified and specified commanders. The resulting chain of command therefore ran from the President to the Secretary of Defense and through the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the unified and specified commanders. The service secretaries and heads of each service were thereby eliminated from the command structure and assigned only training, administrative, and support responsibilities.

It was this formal command structure that existed throughout the war in Vietnam. The Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), initially established in Vietnam in 1950, and the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), the history and organization of which are described in Chapters 1, 2 and 11 of this volume, were both subordinate to CINCPAC. In 1964, when the MAAG was merged into MACV, the Navy section of the MAAG became the Naval Advisory Group, subordinate to COMUSMACV. In April 1966 the naval component command of MACV was established as Naval Forces Vietnam (NAVFORV). This command took operational control of all US naval forces operating in Vietnamese waters, relieving the Naval Advisory Group of some responsibilities they had assumed in relation to the coastal surveillance force activities known as Operation MARKET TIME. 3/ Figure 7-1 illustrates this command relationship.



4541/78W

Figure 7-1. US Naval Forces in Vietnam

Also illustrated in Figure 7-1 is the command relationship of the US Seventh Fleet to PACOM. COMSEVENTHFLT was directly subordinate to CINCPACFLT who in turn was subordinate to CINCPAC. All off-shore operations conducted by US naval forces in the Southeast Asia theater with the exception of MARKET TIME were performed under the operational control of CINCPACFLT. Direct liaison was maintained between COMSEVENTHFLT and COMUSMACV, but MACV never held operational control of the Seventh Fleet. Individual units of the Seventh Fleet were occasionally "chopped," or their operational control transferred, to NAVFORV, but this was never true of the Seventh Fleet's carrier forces, although COMUSMACV made it clear that he felt this was desirable, particularly with regard to aircraft control.

The command relationships between COMUSMACV and CINCPAC on the one hand and between CINCPACFLT and CINCPAC on the other were clearly defined. The exigencies of the Vietnam conflict, however, soon diminished the roles of both CINCPAC and the JCS in the decision-making chain between the President and COMUSMACV. In effect, COMUSMACV, a designated sub-unified command, acted as a unified command, complete with its own air and navy component commands. CINCPAC acted in a supporting role as it had done for the Far East Command during the Korean War. The specifics of the contributions made to the war effort by both MACV's component naval command, NAVFORV, and CINCPACFLT's supporting assets, COMSEVENTHFLT, will be related in the remainder of this chapter.

B. THE EARLY DAYS

1. The French Influence

Near the close of World War II the US Navy had perhaps the most formidable naval fleet in history. In early January 1945, Task Group 38.2, comprising four carriers, two battleships, six cruisers and 20 destroyers, launched air strikes against Japanese shipping along the Indochinese coast. 4/ The attack was to be termed by Admiral Halsey as "one of the heaviest blows to Japanese shipping of any day of the war." 5/ The

Japanese lost 44 ships including 15 combatant ships and 12 oil tankers, and 112 aircraft. 6/

The strikes of Task Force 38 virtually eliminated sea traffic along the Indochinese coast with the exception of some junk traffic between Haiphong and Saigon, and the Japanese and French in Indochina could not depend on water routes for moving supplies. The seapower developed by the United States in WWII was impressive but the experience gained, the types of ships employed, and the tactics developed would prove ill-suited to the war in Vietnam that was to follow in later years.

In early 1945 the Japanese began to "dispose of French influence in French Indochina" 7/ and by the spring of 1945, French control in the area had been eliminated, removing a barrier to efforts by the Indochinese Communist Party to increase its influence. Conditions in Vietnam deteriorated steadily and by the time of the Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945, the way was open for the Viet Minh under Ho Chi Minh to take the offensive.

The French repeatedly asserted their sovereignty over Indochina and requested in late August that General of the Army MacArthur, Commander in Chief Allied Powers, Southwest Pacific, place Indochina in a single occupation zone under British control, hoping that this would facilitate later French reoccupation. The mission of reoccupying the southern area of French Indochina was assigned to Admiral Mountbatten's Southeast Asia Command. Despite the lack of US support for French reoccupation, the British stated from the beginning of their occupation in Indochina that they intended to assist the French in resuming control of the region as soon as possible. The British planned, with the French, to occupy key locations and then as soon as law and order could be maintained by the French, the British would withdraw. 8/

The French Navy in Vietnam had been left with only a few small units such as armed junks after the Japanese had deposed the Vichy French in March 1945; the French operated these in a clandestine manner. When British and French forces received reinforcements in Saigon in October, the French Navy began to recoup its former strength. The French Naval Brigade

Far East was established in 1945 with its first elements arriving in Saigon on 19 October 1945. 9/ Two river flotillas were later formed, made up of junks, motor sampans, and river launches, to clean out Viet Minh elements from southern Indochina.

In November of 1945 the Naval Infantry River Flotilla, under the command of a French naval officer, Captain Francois Jaubert, was established. This permanent flotilla of small boats and a small self-contained landing force of naval infantry was to become a riverine amphibious force and would develop into the French naval assault divisions (dinassauts). The US Mobile Riverine Force, to be established in 1967, would represent a further development of the dinassaut concept.

On 1 January 1946 the French assumed sole responsibility for maintaining law and order in southern Indochina and by early 1946 the French Army and Navy units were able to install French control over major population centers and lines of communication along the central Vietnamese coast as the result of a series of successful operations. 10/

As some degree of pacification was achieved in southern Indochina, one tactical group of the Naval Brigade was used to support the movement of French troops to relieve withdrawing Chinese troops in the Tonkin (north) region of Indochina. The Tonkin Delta was infested with Viet Minh who were strongly nationalistic and anti-French. The Viet Minh under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap subjected the French to frequent attacks. Finally, on 19 December 1946 a bloody massacre of French inhabitants erupted in Hanoi. Historically, this represented the outbreak of the ensuing eight-year war in Indochina.

Movement by water far exceeded that by land in extensive regions of Indochina. The French Navy used the inland waterways effectively for operational control and logistics; yet a frequent complaint expressed by the French Navy was that the Army officers controlling naval operations seldom used the river forces for strike purposes. One of the major naval recommendations emerging from the French-Viet Minh war was the need for a powerful amphibious corps under a single commander, composed of riverine

craft, sizeable ground forces, and artillery. 11/ The French also recommended the employment of specially constructed craft with greater speed and armament than the WWII landing craft so often used. Mordal, a French naval historian, suggested that the creation of dinassauts "may well have been one of the few worthwhile contributions of the Indochina war to military knowledge." 12/

The French Navy continued a series of amphibious and riverine operations during the period 1947-1949 and by mid-1950 the French naval fleet was comprised of approximately 165 ships and craft including: one light cruiser, seven major auxiliary ships, occasionally a carrier, and the balance was composed of patrol and landing craft, minesweeping units, and utility types. Approximately 40 landing craft and some naval commando units were organized into six dinassauts. French naval power during this period permitted the French to regain control over some key centers, reinsert French forces in Tonkin and extend control over delta and coastal regions. 13/

The US repeatedly resisted French requests for military aid to Indochina in the form of arms, naval ships and craft, munitions and other military equipment. Not until May 1950 did the US approve any aid, but at that time President Truman approved funding for urgently needed items, which began arriving in August 1950. A US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was established in Saigon on 3 August 1950. One LST, six LSSL's and some LCVP's arrived in Saigon in November. Later that same year a US State-Defense Survey Mission headed by Major General Graves B. Erskine, US Marine Corps, visited Vietnam. The mission recommended that American naval aid be concentrated on a build-up of river and coastal forces since no threat to the French in Indochina from the sea was apparent. Specific recommendations of the mission were to influence greatly the broad direction of the US naval program in Vietnam over the next fourteen years.

Commencement of the Korean War brought about a reassessment of the Indochina war on the part of the US. The US concluded that support to the French would benefit US interest in the region and therefore military aid was increased substantially in future months.

2. The Vietnamese Navy Comes Into Being

The State of Vietnam began initial steps toward the development of armed forces in 1949. The Franco-Vietnamese Agreements signed in Paris on 30 December, 1949, stated that the Vietnamese Armed Forces were to include naval forces. Despite several French plans for such forces, very little progress was made. Each plan provided for some form of Vietnamese Navy but budgetary limitations and internal French staff differences prevented any real move toward such an organization. On 6 March 1952, Imperial Ordinance No. 2 was published, officially establishing a Vietnamese naval force. Training was viewed as a formidable problem. In July, a recruit training center was formally opened at Nha Trang. Nine former Merchant Marine officers were trained on board French ships and were assigned to French combat units in October 1952. Sixteen more began training in November 1952 and some candidates were sent to the French Naval Academy in Brest. Enlisted training was a far more serious problem because of a lack of suitable candidates and little was accomplished until late 1952.

On 10 April 1953 the first Vietnamese naval unit, a dinassaut, was activated. The dinassaut consisted of only five landing craft, armed with 50-caliber and 20-millimeter machine guns, to operate in the Mekong Delta. Although partly manned by French cadres and under French command, the craft flew the Vietnamese flag. By October 1954, the Vietnamese Navy consisted of four dinassauts and numbered 1500 officers and men. Overall command of the French Navy and Vietnamese Navy was exercised directly by Commander French Naval Forces Far East. Naval forces in Indochina were divided into three area commands: North, Central and South Vietnam. The area commands were in turn divided into river, coastal and sea forces.

Some success was achieved along the coast in the winter and spring of 1954 as the result of Operation Atlante, part of an offensive initiated by General Henri Navarre, Commander French Armed Forces, Far East. However French forces were being severely challenged in the T'ai highlands of Tonkin at Dien Bien Phu. Steadily increasing enemy pressure on the site and difficulty in providing logistic support made the fighting

at Dien Bien Phu highly critical to the success of the war, and the river fleet assumed even greater importance. The river and canal route between Haiphong and Hanoi became the jugular vein for the supply of Dien Bien Phu. 14/

Largely as a result of the precarious situation at Dien Bien Phu, USN Task Group 70.2, an Attack Carrier Striking Group was ordered to proceed on 22 March 1954 from Subic Bay in the Philippines to an operating area 100 miles south of Hainan Island in the Tonkin Gulf with instructions to prepare to support the defenders at Dien Bien Phu. 15/ However, TG 70.2 returned to the Philippines in the second week of April when the likelihood of US intervention decreased.

Dien Bien Phu fell on 7 May 1954 and a cease-fire agreement was signed at Geneva on 20 July 1954. With the end of hostilities the French withdrew to the south of the 17th parallel and the forces of the People's Army of Vietnam to the north of that parallel. French naval power, including occasional carrier strikes, had practically no bearing on the outcome of the battle.

Although it was the stated intention of the French to increase the combat role of the Vietnamese, particularly under the "Navarre Plan", 16/ at the end of the war the Vietnamese Navy was commanded by a French officer, and most other important posts and commands were held by Frenchmen.

3. Operation Passage to Freedom

One of the immediate results of the Geneva Agreement was the movement of French troops and material from North Vietnam, where most of the fighting took place, to South Vietnam. In addition, civilians residing in either zone were to be allowed complete freedom for a period of 300 days after the Agreement to move to the other zone. This resulted in a massive movement of refugees from the communist-dominated North to South Vietnam. The US offered to transport refugees from the North to the South on a humanitarian basis, and on 16 August 1954 the first US Navy transport loaded refugees in Haiphong. The US committed five APAs, two AKAs, two LSDs, two APDs, and four LSTs initially, but it was soon realized that this

number of ships would be totally inadequate to the task. By May of 1955, when the operation was terminated, 74 US Navy ships and 39 MSTS ships had participated, transporting more than 300,000 refugees, nearly 69,000 tons of cargo, and more than 8,000 vehicles.

US vessels participated only in the southward movement of refugees and equipment. Regroupees from the South were transported to North Vietnam by Polish and French ships.

In late 1954 the US MAAG and the French mission were brought together into an Advisory, Training, and Operations Mission (ATOM). Missions for the Vietnamese Navy and Marine Corps were proposed by ATOM consistent with their past experience, but force levels recommended were limited by US-imposed personnel ceilings and were quite inadequate for the missions. Through agreement with the French, Lieutenant General O'Daniel, Chief, MAAG Vietnam was given responsibility for the organization and training of the Vietnamese Armed Forces early in 1955. ATOM was reorganized at that time and renamed TRIM (Training Relations and Instruction Mission). Still another plan for development of the Vietnam Armed Forces (VNAF) was prepared, but like the earlier plan it was severely hampered by the 3,000-man ceiling for the naval forces. In the meantime, the Vietnamese were pressing the US and French for full and independent control of their armed forces.

On 1 July 1955 the French relinquished overall command of the Vietnamese Navy and in August Lieutenant Commander Le Quang My was named Commander in Chief of the Vietnamese Navy. A Sea Force was organized by the Vietnamese in January 1956 with several American advisors assigned to the Saigon naval base to assist the French with training of ship crews. In April 1956, French Naval Forces, Far East was disestablished and the combined US-French TRIM was deactivated. The US MAAG then assumed responsibility for advising the Vietnamese Army but training advisors remained French in the case of the Navy, attached to a reduced French Training Mission.

The steady reduction of French armed forces in Vietnam precipitated a critical shortage of advisory personnel and it was determined that

replacement of the French forces with US military personnel would not violate either the spirit or the letter of the Geneva Accords. Consequently the US announced in late February 1956 a plan to send 350 additional military logistics experts to Vietnam to advise and assist the Vietnamese with equipment left by the French. This group was known as the Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM). (See Chapter 10 of Volume VI, Book 2).

4. The Junk Force

In January 1956 the Vietnamese Navy (VNN) had organized a Sea Force operating in five sea zones, but the difficulties of patrolling the long coastline coupled with the limited capabilities of the VNN - both in personnel and materiel - made the operation less than totally effective. In the spring of that year the Vietnamese presented a plan to the US MAAG to organize a "junk fleet" consisting of fifty civilian-manned, fourteen-ton motorized junks which could act as an auxiliary to the Sea Force and also patrol inshore waters. This concept was not to be implemented, however until some four years later.

The Junk Force, consisting of some 80 sailing junks on patrols near the 17th parallel, commenced operations in 1960. It was paramilitary in nature since it was manned by civilian irregulars but led by the Vietnamese Navy under the direction of some VNN officers. In 1961 and 1962, as the Military Assistance Program for Vietnam was expanded, authorization for the Junk Force was to grow to a total of 644 motorized junks. Despite the expansion of the fleet, its performance was marginal and morale of its personnel was low. The Junk Force was seriously undermanned and some Coastal Groups had less than 50% of authorized strength. At the end of 1963 it consisted of 632 junks and only an average of 40% of the fleet put to sea on any one day. Even these figures were suspect and it was alleged that "combat patrols" were often only short administrative trips. Although VNN officers were assigned, seldom did they accompany the junks to sea. In 1965, at the suggestion of US advisors, the Junk Force was integrated into the Vietnamese Navy in an effort to improve both performance and morale.

5. From Dinassaut to RAGs

Some small increases were made in the Sea Forces in the next few years with overall strength increasing to approximately 3,500 officers and men. However, the other major operational command, the River Forces, had changed little since 1955. By 1960 the River Force consisted of six River Assault Groups (RAGs) which were patterned after the old dinassaut. The RAG, however, did not include a permanently assigned landing force, and operational control had been transferred to Army commanders who employed the river craft principally for logistic purposes. 17/

Due to the dominance of Army control over the Vietnamese Navy as a result of the General Staff organization, River Assault Groups and other Navy forces were poorly utilized. RAGs rarely were used on combat missions and there was a reluctance within the Sea Forces to patrol actively. The Vietnamese Navy suffered during this period from a variety of handicaps: leadership was poor, corruption was evident, status relative to the Army was inferior, and the source of many VNN recruits produced a low-risk attitude toward danger.

The military situation in RVN grew more serious in 1963, but the performance of the Vietnamese Navy continued to be substandard. VNN lacked skilled personnel, modern equipment, good naval leadership, and adequate training. The average availability of Sea Force and River Force units was approximately 50%. The disappointing performance of VNN led to more vigorous participation by the US Navy.

C. VIETNAMESE MARINE CORPS

1. The Reasons Behind the Organization

A Vietnamese Marine Corps was first proposed by Vice Admiral Auboyneau, Commander French Naval Forces, Far East in 1953 when the question was raised as to whether the Army or the Navy should control river assault forces then being organized under the Franco-Vietnamese Agreement of 1949. 18/ The first naval assault division or dinassaut was formed on 10 April 1953 as a unit of the Vietnamese Navy. In February 1954 the

concept of a five-year development plan for the Vietnamese Navy was approved. Personnel of the Navy were designated as Marine Corps personnel to man large river patrol craft and dinassauts, and to form commandos and a one-battalion landing force. The concept of the VNN River Assault Force having been patterned so closely after the French dinassaut, led to the strong tendency for distinguishing the naval operating personnel from the assault divisions. The naval infantry units of the VNN were the French counterpart of the US Marine Corps.

During the Indochina War the French organized a number of specialized formations. These indigenous formations were assigned to the Army but were intended to work with the river and coastal forces of the Navy. In the case of river forces with infantry elements attached, this was particularly important. In addition to the infantry element, each special unit had an amphibious battalion of over 400 men which used Weasels and LVTs. These relationships were formalized by Ngo Dinh Diem on 13 October 1954 in a government decree that created a Marine Corps (VNMC) within the Naval Establishment. With its initial creation the Marine Corps was comprised of a variety of assault forces (River Companies, Landing Battalions, Light Support Companies, Commandos, Naval Assault Divisions) but very little overall cohesiveness or organization. A Marine Corps Headquarters was established on 1 May 1955 making it possible to bring together the varied units into a two-battalion force.

2. Evaluation of the Role of the VNMC

The variation between the eventual VNMC and the earlier French concept raises the question of whether or not the role established for the Marine Corps was correct. The naval assault division concept developed by the French has been referred to as perhaps the most important single tactical innovation to emerge from the First Indochina War. But the French insisted that infantry elements as part of a river force should normally operate with the boat units. The consolidation of Corps units into two battalions, and later a three-battalion regiment, raised some obvious implications as to the way in which the Marine Corps would be employed. Neverthaless, in the final analysis one must conclude that the changes

brought about by US influence and the role assumed by the VNMC were correct and valuable. At the height of one campaign against the Hoa Hao sect, General Le Van Ty, Chief of the Vietnamese General Staff, praised the role of the Vietnamese Navy and Marine Corps, saying: " ... [Vietnamese Navy Units] have played a preponderant and decisive role for the success of the Army. The daring assaults of the marines have increased the value of the Vietnamese Navy." 19/ The river patrol forces with Marine assault troops are credited with saving several provincial capitals during Tet'68, with restoring use of the waterways to the people of South Vietnam and restricting their use by the enemy, and with disrupting and complicating the enemy's logistic efforts, which contributed to a steady deterioration of the logistics base and morale of the Viet Cong.

D. MARKET TIME CLOSES ONE DOOR

1. The Problem

Guerrilla movements have often been closely tied to the sea and inland waterways. They have depended on the sea as a supply route and liaison channel. This was particularly true with arms and supplies landed clandestinely along the coast of Vietnam. In the island maze of Indonchina, waterways provide certain advantages over the classic mountain or jungle base. The waterways may be used as roadways and the multiplicity of supply points works to the advantage of the guerrilla. Supplies, orders, and equipment can come by motorized junk or an innocent-looking sampan that is virtually indistinguishable from other routine water traffic. Coastal swamps, jungle inlets and multiple river systems provide the guerrilla with as much cover as a mountain stronghold, with the added advantage that escape routes are more easily available. Guerrillas and insurgents of all types can be easily mistaken for local fishermen and water tradesmen. Such was the environment in Vietnam in early 1965.

2. The Vietnamese Navy (VNN)

The effectiveness of the Vietnamese Navy in detecting and intercepting enemy infiltration from the sea was questionable. Efforts by US

advisors to improve those operations were largely unsuccessful due to problems inherent in the organization itself. A limited operational role was commenced by US Oceangoing Minesweepers (MSOs) in December 1961 when they joined Vietnamese Navy ships in barrier patrols around the 17th parallel. MSOs were not permitted to intercept suspect shipping since neither the Vietnamese nor US authorities wanted US ships to stop and search South Vietnamese flag vessels. 20/ However the MSOs used their radar to vector Vietnamese naval units to suspicious contacts. Similar operations began in February 1962 in the Gulf of Thailand with US destroyers participating. Neither of these operations seemed to indicate the existence of large scale infiltration from the sea.

In 1964 the North Vietnamese began supplying the PLAF (VC) with standardized weapons on a large scale, with much of the supply believed to be coming from the sea. At the same time a US survey team under Captain P. H. Bucklew, USN, conducted a study 21/ of the infiltration problem. A recommendation of the study was to augment Vietnamese Navy forces with US forces in view of the apparent marginal effectiveness of VNN patrols. This recommendation was not immediately adopted, since it was also recognized that increased sea patrols would not be worthwhile unless inland infiltration routes could also be blocked. 22/

In February 1965, a 100-ft. DRV steel patrol craft was detected in Vung Ro Bay on South Vietnam's central coast by a helicopter pilot on a medical rescue mission VNAF. Air strikes were called for which resulted in the ship going awash in shallow water. Vietnamese Rangers followed up on the strike and determined that the vessel was transporting large quantities of weapons and munitions to an arms cache on the shore nearby. The craft itself was found to be carrying enough arms and supplies to outfit an entire enemy battalion. 23/ The "Vung Ro Incident", as it was later called, clearly verified that the arms caches had been supplied by more than just this shipment, and over some period of time. Performance of the Vietnamese military personnel at Vung Ro was such as to cast renewed doubt on the ability of the Vietnamese to prevent infiltration via the sea without assistance from the US.

3. Operation Market Time: A Plan for Action

As a result of the Vung Ro Incident, a conference was called by General Westmoreland in March to plan a combined US-Vietnamese patrol effort. 24/ Two types of infiltration traffic were considered to exist: coastwise junk traffic that mingled with other legitimate trading craft, and vessels of trawler size or larger which approached Vietnam perpendicular to the coast. The conferees determined that the Vietnamese Navy should be encouraged to be more aggressive and thorough in dealing with the first category of traffic. To deal with the second category it was recommended that a conventional patrol be established by US Navy ships and aircraft. A defensive sea zone was proposed which would extend 40 miles from the coast. A key to the operation was authorization by Vietnam for US naval forces to "stop, board, search, and, if necessary, capture and/or destroy any hostile suspicious craft or vessel found within South Vietnam's territorial and contiguous zone waters." The concept was approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 16 March and set into action that very day, and an organization under Task Force 71 was assigned by the Seventh Fleet. The code name "Market Time" was assigned to the operation on 24 March. Although twenty-eight US Navy ships were participating by the first week of April, it was not until 11 May that the Government of South Vietnam granted formal authorization for US Navy Market Time units to stop, search and seize vessels not clearly engaged in innocent passage inside the territorial waters of the Republic of Vietnam. Search and seizure was also authorized within the contiguous zone (3 to 12 miles from the coast), and search of vessels believed to be South Vietnamese to the seaward of the contiguous zone. US Navy PCFs (Swifts) were added to the Market Time force for close inshore patrolling. In July 1965, twenty-six Coast Guard 82-ft. patrol boats (WPBs) arrived to join Market Time.

Market Time was a joint air-surface operation but its nature was such that the bulk of the operations were conducted by surface craft.

Operational control of Market Time rested with CTF 115, Commander Coastal Surveillance Force, the successor to CTF 71, with coordination of US forces and VNN forces through the various Coastal Surveillance

Centers. 25/ TF 115 operations were divided into nine patrol areas, 30 to 40 miles deep and 80 to 120 miles long, stretching from the 17th parallel to the boundary between Vietnam and Cambodia in the Gulf of Thailand. Normally each patrol area was the responsiblity of a DER or an MSO. Barrier patrols along the 17th parallel and in the Gulf of Thailand were conducted by WPBs of Coast Guard Squadron One.

Search operations consisted of boardings and inspections. In the case of a boarding, a party of two or three persons went on board the suspect vessel to make a complete search of the vessel, its cargo and crew. An inspection normally only entailed a visual examination from alongside and a check of personal ID papers. At first, in the case of boardings and inspections by Coast Guard WPBs, both were done only from the deck of the 82 footer. This provided a stable platform from which to work and a high degree of security, but several disadvantages were noted. 26/ The Coast Guard then began using smaller outboard-powered boats called "skimmers" to make the boardings and inspections when conditions permitted.

The primary mission of Market Time was "to conduct surveillance, gunfire support, visit and search, and other operations as directed along the coast of the Republic of Vietnam in order to assist the Republic of Vietnam in detection and prevention of communist infiltration from the sea." An additional mission was "to improve the Vietnamese Navy's counter-insurgency capabilities and assist Vietnamese and US forces to secure the coastal regions and major rivers in order to defeat the communist insurgency in Vietnam." 27/ To facilitate an ultimate objective of turning over all responsibility for naval operations in Vietnam to the VNN, US Navy operations were coordinated with Vietnamese operations, and facilities for US Navy operations colocated with VNN installations as much as practicable.

Operation Market Time has been judged to have produced significant results and is credited with forcing the enemy to change his logistic operations extensively. In early 1966, it was estimated that the enemy accomplished three-quarters of his resupply by infiltration from the sea. By the end of 1966 this was reduced to an estimated one-tenth of the total

resupply. By late 1967, Market Time craft were stopping and searching about 1500 coastal junks a day. 28/

E. AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULTS

From March 1965 to January 1969, more than fifty amphibious operations were conducted in South Vietnam. Most were conducted by a Seventh Fleet amphibious force known as Amphibious Ready Group/Special Landing Force (ARG/SLF) which had been created in 1960 as a balanced, versatile contingency force to meet requirements throughout the Pacific Command. 29/ Although standardized doctrine (Doctrine for Amphibious Warfare, NWP-22 series) had been developed for such operations, Vietnam presented a number of unique situations which required variance from doctrine. First, it was rare that an amphibious objective area (AOA) could be designated without including sectors occupied by civilians loyal to the Government of Vietnam (GVN). Within the affected zone it was common for unrelated air operations to be conducted under the control of a US and/or a South Vietnamese commander while at the same time civilian air transport operations might also be in progress. The question of security became highly complex in that notification of any of the users of the AOA that an amphibious operation was planned could cause a deviation in traditional use patterns and a strong possibility of a security leak.

In the matter of naval support for amphibious operations, this was provided by CINCPACFLT as requested by COMUSMACV with authority of the Fleet Commander delegated to COMSEVENTHFLT. For this purpose, an "Agreement for US Naval Support Operations in RVN" was executed between CINCPACFLT and COMUSMACV. 30/

Due to the nature of Vietnamese operations, four general types of amphibious operations evolved during the course of experience as shown in Figure 7-2.

Examples of each of these types are: (1) Operation Deckhouse One in June 1966, (2) Operation Beaver Track in July 1967, (3) Operation Double Eagle in January-February 1966, and (4) Operation Blue Marlin in November 1965.

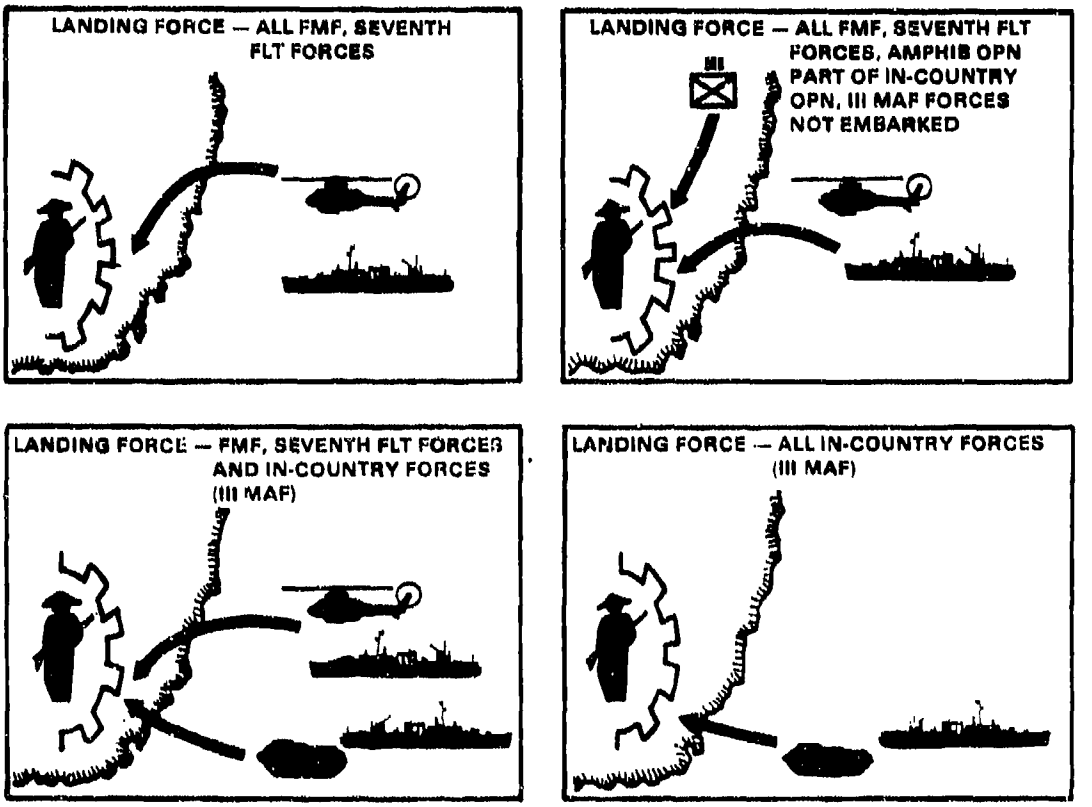


Figure 7-2. Types of Amphibious Operations in Vietnam

NWP-22 proved adequate during the Vietnam conflict but some exceptions and deviations were dictated by the CINCPACFLT/COMUSMACV Agreement. COMUS MACV was accorded extensive control and was allowed to prescribe virtually every important aspect of the employment of amphibious forces.

On 8 March 1965, the first US amphibious operation began with the landing of two battalions of Marines on the beach and airfield at Da Nang together with vehicles and equipment of the landing force. The landing was made without enemy opposition and the beach landing was smoothly conducted. One battalion was airlifted from Okinawa in Marine KC-130s and the airfield at Da Nang became glutted when only 60% of the troops and 25% of the vehicles and equipment had been landed. Operations were suspended until 10 March when they were resumed and completed on 12 March. 31/

One of the first enemy-opposed amphibious operations was Operation Starlite, in which a landing on the beach of Van Tuong Peninsula was coordinated with a helicopter borne assault and a river crossing by LVTs on 18 August 1965. This was the first regimental-sized US battle in Vietnam. The operation was highly successful and by 24 August nearly 1,000 Viet Cong had been killed and an attack on nearby Chu Lai by the VC had probably been prevented. 32/

Operation Blue Marlin in early November 1965 achieved a historic first in that Vietnamese Marines participated in their first combined amphibious landing with the US Marines. The operation was conducted in two phases, both of which were unopposed by the enemy. The sea conditions were marginal for the operation, but both phases were completed without serious incident. The Vietnamese Marines were part of a brigade that had grown from the river landing forces, formed when the French departed in 1954.

On 28 January 1966, Operation Double Eagle began. It was the most ambitious amphibious operation yet tried and required coordination with I Corps, II Corps and the US Army's Field Force Victor. The Amphibious Task Force consisted of three attack transports, one attack cargo ship, three LSTs, two LSDs, an LPH, one cruiser, one destroyer and two auxiliaries. Again in a two-phase operation, the landing was unopposed, but the enemy was engaged some miles west of the beaches as they appeared to be moving out of the immediate target area. 33/

Command relationships in Vietnam were unique in many respects, particularly as the result of joint occupation of a region or even sharing of the same battlefield by US and Vietnamese forces. Operations were sometimes coordinated, sometimes separate, and command relations officially prescribed between the two allies were based on cooperation and coordination. Although such a relationship departs substantially from the principle of unity of command, the relationship worked well in I Corps Tactical Zone 34/ and was probably responsible for the high degree of success of combined amphibious operations in the I Corps Tactical Zone (ICTZ).

Early in January 1967, the Seventh Fleet's Special Landing Force landed 62 miles south of Saigon in Operation Deckhouse V, one of a series of Deckhouse operations that began in June 1965. These operations were directed toward specific tactical situations. Deckhouse V was the first use of US combat troops in the Mekong Delta and the USMC SLF worked in conjunction with two battalions of the VNMC. Intelligence regarding the area was not good and the results were unimpressive. 35/

Twenty-two more amphibious operations were conducted in 1967 and thirteen in 1968 employing the Special Landing Forces. However as time progressed, the operations consisted more and more of helicopter-borne forces than surface craft operations, due to the ability to overfly the beaches to a more favorable battle zone and an increased element of surprise.

1969 amphibious operations began on 13 January with Operation Bold Mariner. 36/ Battalion Landing Teams (BLT) were landed by helo and landing craft south of Chu Lai in the old Starlite battlefield. Bold Mariner was the largest Special Landing Force effort of the war. The operation was joined by the Americal Division in a coordinated operation, Russell Beach, which moved a two-battalion task force onto the peninsula to close off southern exits to the enemy. Soldiers and Marines joined to sweep toward the sea. One BLT was removed by amphibious ships on 24 January and the second followed on 9 February.

The last Special Landing Force operation of the Vietnamese war took place on 7 September 1969 south of An Hoi on Barrier Island. Operation

Defiant Stand, as it was called, was unique in that it was a combined landing with Korean Marines. The operation was similar in many respects to Operation Bold Mariner. 37/

Sixty-two Special Landing Force operations were conducted against the Vietnamese coast between the beginning of 1965 and September 1969. Of this number, fifty-three were in I Corps. The enemy never elected to do more than lightly harass a landing. There were no classic beach assaults and no great flaming battles fought at the water's edge. The most successful operations were those where the SLF had been used as a highly mobile and self-sufficient reserve with which to exploit opportunities developed by on-going, in-country operations. A factor of some importance was the benefit gained by such operations in providing testing and training of Navy and Marine personnel in a combat environment, and preservation of the amphibious art that had been developed so highly in WWII.

One more series of amphibious operations was to take place in conjunction with the enemy's Easter Offensive of 1972, and has been termed "a turning point in the war." 38/ As a result of the surge of the North Vietnam Army (PAVN/NVA) across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) on 1 April 1972, the South Vietnamese Forces north of Hue were subjected to tremendous pressures. The VNMC holding the area fell back to the My Chanh River as a defensive position and held that line. Due to the vulnerability of the VNMC positions, it was decided to land South Vietnamese Marines by US helicopters and landing craft behind the lines of the enemy. Although US amphibious forces had not been used in Vietnam since 1969, a highly coordinated operation was planned using US amphibious forces and aircraft to support the VNMC in the landing. On 13 May 1972, two battalions of Vietnamese Marines were landed by US Marine helicopters. The operation was highly successful and caught the enemy completely by surprise. On 24 May a second and more ambitious operation was conducted with two battalions of Vietnamese Marines landed by helicopter and one battalion by LVTs in a coordinated assault. Two more assaults took place on 29 June and 22 July.

Several new features were employed in these operations to improve their effectiveness. Helicopter assaults were planned to maximize the

number of assault troops that could be placed in the landing zone on a single insertion as compared with the "daisy chain" tactical procedure normally used. Thus about 600 troops could be landed in a single lift with a one-squadron operation, or 1200 troops with two squadrons. In addition, multi-deck operations were employed, which called for the use of all available helicopter spots in the supporting amphibious force. These single-wave operations deprived the enemy of his capability to concentrate artillery and antiaircraft fire on successive assault waves.

With this operation amphibious operations in the Vietnam War were brought to a close.

F. RIVERINE WARFARE: BACK TO OUR CIVIL WAR

1. The Mobile Riverine Concept: A Joint Army/Navy Operation

During the latter part of 1966 much consideration was given to a "Mekong Delta Mobile Afloat Force" which would consist of a highly mobile force of river assault craft and embarked troops. The proposed force would be capable of sustained search and destroy missions in the Mekong Delta and would resemble closely the old French Naval Assault Division known as dinassaut. The concept involved some variation from the dinassaut in that a floating base was visualized, with accommodations for a full Army brigade and associated Navy support elements. Normally it might be expected that US Marines, a force traditionally trained and equipped for amphibious assault operations, would be utilized in such an operation. However, former commitment of the Marines in maximum strength to the I Corps Tactical Zone prevented their use in this proposed force. The 2nd Brigade, US Army 9th Division was selected as the Army element of the afloat force.

The proposal, which originated in discussion between COMUSMACV (COMNAVFORV), began to take shape and on 1 September 1966 the first administrative unit of what was to become the Mobile Riverine Force, River Assault Flotilla One, was commissioned in California. At the same time the US Army's Ninth Division was being formed in Kansas. Liaison between Army and Navy personnel throughout the planning stage was extremely close.

Elements of the new force began arriving in Vietnam in January 1967 and training with the US 9th Infantry Division was commenced. The 2nd Brigade, one of three in the 9th Division, required some reorganization before it was ready to serve as part of the Mobile Riverine Force (MRF). 39/ Heavy, wheeled vehicles were dropped from the three battalions that made up the 2nd Brigade as well as certain heavy weapons that would not be needed on the waterways. The vehicle and weapons operators were retrained as riflemen. The concept called for the entire brigade, including the artillery battalion, to be embarked on the mobile base. The Army favored this concept but a shortage of barracks ships would only permit two of the three battalions and two of the three artillery batteries to be afloat initially and the third battalion and third battery operated from the land base at Dong Tam. Army helicopters which operated with the Mobile Riverine Force came from the 9th Division Aviation Company. Command relations were as shown in Figure 7-3. 40/

Command of the MRF was based on a "joint-command" concept. This was in turn based on a high degree of coordination and cooperation which permitted the flotilla commander and the brigade commander considerable flexibility in attaining effective and workable relationships. A joint operation order was prepared for each operation and signed by the flotilla commander and the brigade commander. Army and Navy responsibilities were clearly delineated by COMUSMACV.

An integral part of MRF operations was the use of the US capability in the air. Waterborne assault was coupled with airborne assault by units of the 2nd Brigade in an attempt to encircle Viet Cong forces.

The Riverine Assault Force was designated Task Force 117 on 12 January and was officially activated on 28 February under operational control of COMNAVFORV and administrative control of COMPHIBPAC. 41/ Original plans called for the force to include four self-propelled barracks ships (APBs), two Landing Craft Repair Ships (ARLs), two Tank Landing Ships (LSTs), and two River Assault Squadrons (RAS) each consisting of 34 converted Landing Craft Mechanized (LCM-6) and 16 Assault Support Patrol Boats (ASPBs). The ASPBs were to be newly constructed.

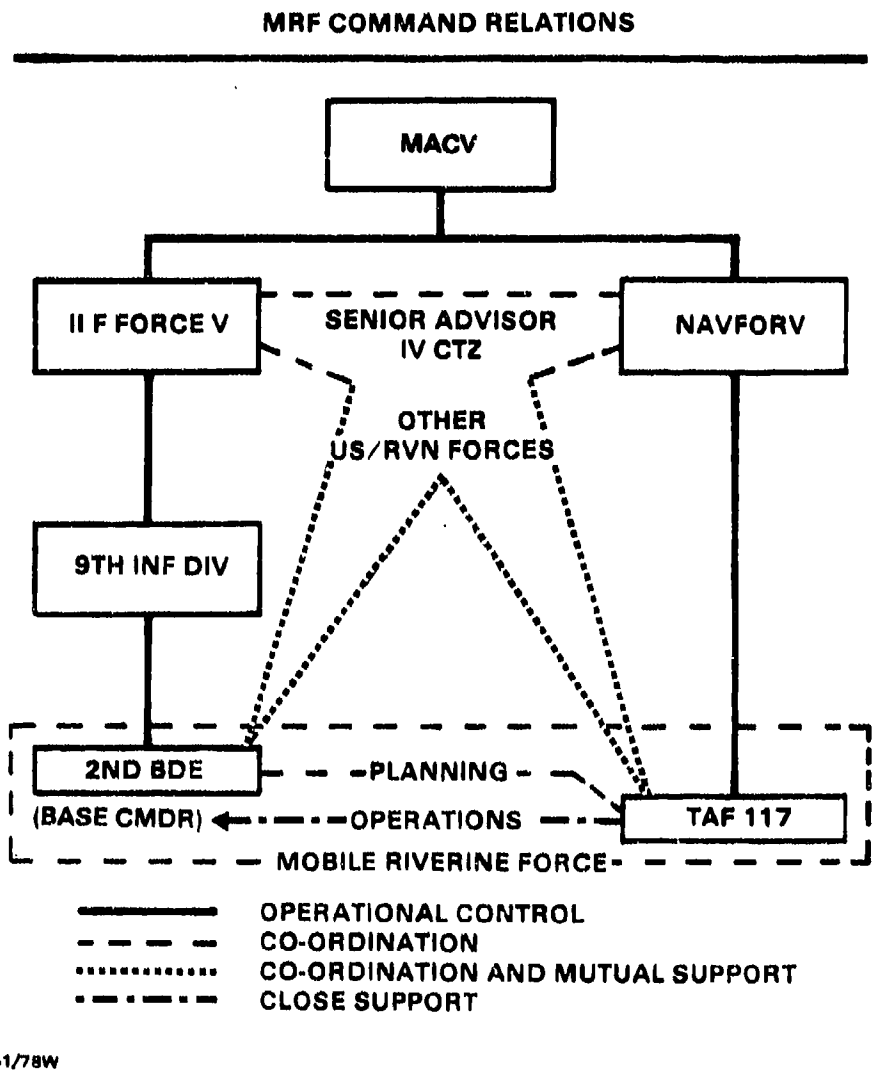


Figure 7-3. MRF Command Relations

The force was based initially at Vung Tau, and early operations were confined to the Rung Sat Special Zone to combat attacks on shipping and minesweepers by the Viet Cong. Due to the influence of the swampy Rung Sat area on the waterways between Saigon and the sea, removal of the enemy from that area was considered critical.

Elements of the second River Assault Squadron arrived at Vung Tau in March, permitting the deployment of the first RAS to the Army base at Dong Tam. Three permanent support ships (one LST and two APBs) were moved to Dong Tam on 1 June. The Riverine Assault Force became fully operational with the receipt of all 68 of the converted LCMs in June and a series of actions was begun with elements of the 9th Infantry Division embarked. River assault craft provided gunfire support, medical evacuation of the wounded, and supply of ammunition in addition to the landing and removal of troops. The Mobile Riverine Force, as the RAF came to be known, had its own floating artillery in the guns of the support ships and the barge-mounted 105 mm howitzers of the 2nd Brigade of the 9th, which were towed along with the base or positioned in advance of operations. The force proved to be highly versatile and mobile, with the ability to move anywhere in the Delta where waters were navigable. The Mobile Riverine Force, conceived in 1966, was considered by MACV to be one of its most important accomplishments of that year.

Although the mobile riverine concept proved highly workable and a final evaluation of MRF operations must be judged successful, several incidents indicated clearly that "cooperation and coordination" were sorely taxed on occasion. 42/

2. Operation Game Warden

The Riverine Assault Force (TF 117) differed substantially from another river operation titled "Operation Game Warden" designated Task Force 116 (River Patrol Force). Like TF 115 (Market Time), TF 116 was an integral part of the Naval Advisory Group. When the Chief Naval Advisory Group (CNAG) was also made COMNAVFORV on 1 April 1966, Game Warden was placed under the new command. 43/

The concept of operations for Game Warden called for ten river patrol boats to operate from shore and floating bases. Initially four LSTs were activated to serve as floating bases in the vicinity of a delta of the Rung Sat river mouth while property for shore bases was procured and the operational and logistic framework was organized. Logistic support came from a new organization, Naval Support Activity Saigon, leaving the Task Force Commander free for operational responsibilities.

Operations were to be based on two-boat patrols of the waterways, with tactics to be determined as local conditions dictated. Task group commanders were permitted to develop their own doctrine and tactics. The original mission of Game Warden was to conduct patrols of the inland waterways, to visit and search, to carry on inshore surveillance, and prevent Viet Cong infiltration, movement and resupply in the Delta and Rung Sat. Contrasted with TF 117 operations, there was no provision for assault troop carrying or support by Game Warden, and Army helicopters were assigned to TF 116 to provide aircraft support. Army pilots were replaced by Navy pilots during the latter half of 1966; however Army UH-1 helos continued to be used by the Navy pilots.

3. Rivers, Canals and the Rung Sat

The sphere of operations of Game Warden included most of the major rivers, canals and waterways of the Mekong Delta although initial operational emphasis was placed on the Rung Sat Special Zone. The Rung Sat was an area of dense foliage and thick swamps which were ideally suited to guerrilla warfare. There is little good land in the area and its strategic importance was almost exclusively due to its proximity to Saigon and the Long Tau channel which carried virtually all of the shipping to Saigon. The area had been a haven to pirates and criminals for hundreds of years, and the Viet Cong established themselves in the Rung Sat to train recruits, make munitions and hospitalize their casualties. By the end of 1966 the Viet Cong was forced to relocate virtually all of their training sites, munitions dumps and hospitals from the area. 44/ The Mekong Delta, too, proved to be a highly fruitful area for river operations but the enemy's strength and activities were far too great for the number of craft assigned

to the area. Resources were repeatedly shifted between the Delta and Rung Sat to permit the TF Commander to react to enemy moves, leaving little opportunity for TF 116 to grasp the initiative. Over the ensuing months Game Warden expanded greatly. Additional PBRs were assigned, Rung Sat patrols were augmented by craft from Market Time, and four MSBs arrived. 1967 brought still more growth and change. The number of PBRs rose to 155, the number of LSTs rose to four, and two non-self-propelled floating bases, an APL and a YRBM, were added.

The first actively employed SEAL (Sea, Air, Land) units in Southeast Asia were deployed in July 1962, serving under the operational control of COMUSMACV and/or COMNAVFORV. In February 1966, Navy SEAL teams were assigned to Game Warden and worked under the operational control of CTF 116. SEAL teams normally operated in small patrols of six to ten men. They were specially trained in counterguerrilla warfare and intelligence gathering. Operations were usually of a covert nature within enemy-held areas. Training in special weapons, underwater demolitions and explosive-ordnance disposal made the SEALS exceptional assets in the Vietnam War. SEAL teams participated in Operation Jackstay, 45/ a major riverine amphibious assault in the Rung Sat Special Zone, and the first UDT/SEAL and Marine operation in Vietnam. SEAL teams were most often "inserted" into and "extracted" from a patrol area under cover of darkness using small, fast boats.

Unlike other river patrol personnel, who normally serve a one-year tour in Vietnam, SEAL members rotated out in six months. However, it was not uncommon for members to return to Vietnam for two or more tours. By the end of 1967, six SEAL teams were operating in Vietnam.

SEAL units performed extraordinarily well under demanding conditions and in high-risk situations. They were highly effective in conducting reconnaissance patrols and in recovering enemy documents, and were particularly noted for the psychological impact their operations had on the Viet Cong. Their contribution to the war effort was well beyond the proportion of their numbers in action. 46/

4. Tested at Tet

The Tet Offensive of 1968, in which the Viet Cong unleashed major attacks on the cities of South Vietnam, placed heavy demands on the US and Vietnam Navies and proved to be the ultimate test of the river forces. Despite the intense activities of Market Time, Game Warden and the Mobile Riverine Force, it became clear that the overall interdiction effort to that time had not been completely effective in view of the large amounts of supplies that were brought into Vietnam to support the offensive. There could be little doubt that much of that material had entered and been distributed in South Vietnam via the waterways. When communist operations were forced off the major rivers by Market Time, Game Warden and the MRF, they merely shifted their operations to smaller waterways.

Two reasons seem apparent for the deficiency in the US/VNN interdiction effort. Until late 1968 the size and capability of the river forces to maintain the kind of naval patrol being demanded was marginal. Operationally and logistically the river forces were handicapped. Secondly, Vietnamese ground force commanders were notably reluctant to commit trooops for conducting aggressive river bank patrols needed to insure safe operations on the restricted waterways.

Even with the appearance of these shortcomings in the waterway interdiction effort, the river forces were given great praise for their participation during the Tet Offensive. In the IV Corps Tactical Zone, the Mobile Riverine Force was the only friendly force that retained the ability to mount sustained and effective counteroffensive operations. It was later credited by General Westmoreland with having "saved the Delta." 47/ The River Patrol Force and the Vietnamese Navy performed commendably as they brought their highly mobile fire power and unquestioned courage to the defense of the besieged cities.

5. The Southeast Asia Lake, Ocean, River and Delta Strategy (Sea Lords) 48/

A long-considered plan to blockade the coast of South Vietnam by an inland naval patrol along the Cambodian border, thereby complementing other interdiction and barrier patrols, was called Sea Lords. Intelligence

data revealed that much enemy material for the III and IV Corps areas entered Cambodia through the port of Sihanoukville. It was taken overland north of the border and brought into South Vietnam via several well-documented infiltration routes. One of Sea Lord's objectives was to prevent the transit of this material at points where it crossed navigable water. A second objective was to prevent the use of certain trans-Delta waterways to the enemy and restore the use of the waterway to friendly forces and peoples. Still a third objective was to keep the enemy off-balance in the region by Market Time incursions into the rivers of the Ca Mau Peninsula.

Task Force 194 was newly created for Sea Lords and assets of Market Time, Game Warden and the MRF were chopped to CTF 194, First Sea Lord, for specific operations. In concept, it was planned that the resources peculiar to each of the river operations commands would form a Brown Water Navy Task Fleet. First Sea Lord would exercise operational control over the resources when they were employed for Sea Lords operations. Four interdiction barriers were established between 2 November 1968 and 2 January 1969: Operations Search Turn, Foul Deck, Giant Slingshot and Barrier Reef. The effect of these barrier patrols on enemy infiltration became immediately apparent with increased fire fights, seizure of large arms caches, and reports of enemy material backing up in the North. In the long term, Sea Lords was particularly effective in preventing the enemy from moving sufficient materials into South Vietnam to sustain any significant action, and in literally starving the enemy forces in the Delta for supplies and ammunition. Given adequate ground support, the shortage of which was a chronic problem in most Vietnamese naval operations, Sea Lords might have become one of the more effective naval interdiction programs.

Market Time raider incursions into the rivers of the Ca Mau Peninsula began later in 1968 in an effort to "pacify" the vital trans-Delta waterways, a second objective of Sea Lords, and to keep the enemy off-balance, a third objective. US Navy Swift boat raids into the Nam Can district on the southernmost tip of the peninsula were highly successful in destroying enemy equipment and in threatening the security of enemy activities. To disrupt the effectiveness of these raids and to improve their

own defensive positions, the Viet Cong constructed heavy barricades across the more important waterways, as well as bunkers and fortifications. In December, Operation Silver Mace was conducted to destroy the barricades. This operation involved the first open sea transit of heavy riverine assault craft which were used to remove the barriers. 49/

Pressure was increasingly applied on the enemy in Nam Can in the early months of 1969, using a variety of forces. SEAL teams, Mobile Strike Forces, Coastal Group junks and tactical strike aircraft were employed with heavy reliance on offshore support ships. These ships, LSTs and ARLs, had to anchor about five miles offshore due to shallow water, thus requiring continuing boat operations which created frequent problems and detracted from the support concept. To correct this deficiency a permanent base was proposed, but the proposal was very poorly received by the Vietnamese and US Advisors in IV Corps Headquarters. As a substitute for a permanent base, a PCF Mobile Advance Tactical Support Base (MATSB) was proposed. Using a complex of 30 by 90 foot Ammi pontoon barges, the MATSB was assembled and moored in the Cua Lon River in the vicinity of Old Nam Can in June 1969. The operation was called Sea Float by the US Forces and Tran Hung Dao III by the Vietnamese. The enemy reacted vigorously and quickly to the presence of the base in their territory by increased mining, ambush of patrols and intense psychological warfare. However their efforts were ineffective and Sea Float in time was a keystone in successful pacification of the area. 50/

6. The Future of Riverine Warfare

Despite some strategic weaknesses, periodic deficiencies, and interrelated command support problems, all of which were corrected by tactical and force-level adjustments, the ability of the Vietnamese and US to cope with enemy infiltration and harrassment would have been severely reduced without riverine operations.

As the war progressed, certain trends in the conduct of riverine and coastal patrol operations became evident. River patrols, which at one time operated cautiously from ships in estuaries, gradually moved inland. In Operation Sea Lords, Task Force 116 was operating routinely near the

Cambodian border, and some considerable distance from the coastline. Action on the larger rivers was shifted onto the smaller rivers, canals and bayous so that control could be established over a greater part of the region and smaller waterways could be made safe for civilian use. River patrol units progressively shifted to mobile afloat bases as opposed to fixed bases ashore. By 1969, only about one third of the bases were onshore as contrasted with nearly nine out of ten in 1967. Although the river patrol units began in a dual role as advisors to the Vietnamese Navy and operators, the advisory role diminished to the point where operations were far more independent by 1969. A particularly significant development in river patrol operations was the shift from a basically defensive posture to one that stressed offensive operations, in which the mission was to seek and destroy enemy forces and facilities.

Although the US employed river patrol operations effectively in more than a dozen armed conflicts over the years, it must be acknowledged that readiness to perform riverine operations in Vietnam was virtually zero at the beginning. Skills and tactics had been neglected. The river assault craft used by the Mobile Riverine Force were largely modified WWII landing craft. Floating support bases were ships and barges withdrawn from a mothballed reserve fleet.

But a new concept and application of sea power emerged from Vietnam. New fighting and support craft appeared, designed with specific operational requirements in mind. New tactics were developed, new strategies employed. New task forces and task elements were assembled that were tailored to the precise needs of an operation or a region. Command relationships were adjusted and modified to ensure effective control of forces under quite different conditions than those normally faced by the Navy.

It has been suggested 51/ that a river patrol nucleus should be maintained by the US Navy to preserve procedures, tactics, and lessons learned; to work toward improving concepts and equipment; and to provide a training and expansion cadre from which the forces to conduct a river patrol campaign at some future time might be built. The accomplishments

and achievements of the river forces in Vietnam would serve to support that suggestion. A modest investment in personnel and equipment would obviate the need to rebuild such a capability from scratch. This might be one of the most valuable lessons to be learned from our Vietnam experience acknowledging that maintenance of such a capability is a matter of priority and of resource availability.

G. RETURN OF THE SEABEES

1. Mobile Construction Battalions

The Seabees were assigned in Vietnam to the Headquarters Support Activity (HSA), Saigon between 1962 and 1966. The Public Works Department of HSA included as many as 200 Seabees just before HSA was phased out in May 1966. 52/ With the phaseout of HSA, scattered Navy elements were placed under the smaller Naval Support Activity (NSA) Saigon. Seabee Technical Assistance Teams (STATS) were also assigned to the US Army Special Forces in July 1962. 53/

In March 1965, landing with the US Marines in Da Nang were Seabees of the Amphibious Construction Battalion One deployed from Yokosuka, Japan. ACB-1 had been in Da Nang as early as April 1964 to place a 200-ton drydock in operation for the Vietnamese Navy. Although Seabees were not needed to make the landings at Da Nang, they remained there for about one month to install fuel systems and accomplish several other construction assignments. Elements of ACB-1 next returned to Vietnam with Marines at Chu Lai in May 1965 to place two causeway piers from the open sea to the beach. Following that operation, Mobile Construction Battalion Ten came ashore to build an expeditionary airfield with aluminum matting. This was the first amphibious landing of a full Seabee battalion since WWII.

The Marines occupied Da Nang, Chu Lai, and Hue-Phu Bai in later months on a semi-permanent basis which was contrary to their normal practice. Since the many construction and support requirements were beyond Marine organic capabilities, the Seabees were mobilized to provide that support. MCB-3 deployed from Guam in May 1965 and MCB-9 from Port Hueneme,

California in June; both came to Da Nang. With the relocation of some battalions and the activation of others in other parts of the world, the total number of Seabee battalions in 1968-69 was twenty one. The maximum number in Vietnam reached twelve early in 1968 and was then reduced to ten by the end of 1968. All were assigned to I Corps and in mid-1968 were located as follows: five in Da Nang, two in Chu Lai, two in Phu Bai, one in Camp Evans north of Hue, one in Quang Tri, and one in Dong Ha.

NSA, Da Nang was established in mid-1965 to provide support urgently needed by the Marines but not within their capability. Defined roles and missions of the various services and commands in Vietnam had not been clarified to provide for this contingency. A CINCPAC order in April 1965 assigned logistic support ashore at Da Nang and Chu Lai to the Navy but the Chief of Naval Operations apparently did not regard this as a permanent situation and opposed attempts by CINCPACFLT to establish a Naval Support Activity at Da Nang as late as 28 May 1965. In an exchange of personal notes between the Commandant, Marine Corps and the Vice Chief of Naval Operations some resolution was achieved and in a message on 5 June 1965 CINCPACFLT charged the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific with providing and arranging for all shoreside support. On 17 July, a Secretary of the Navy Notice established NSA Da Nang, 54/ which was to become one of the principal support bases of the Vietnam War.

The rapid buildup of MCBs resulted in substantial changes to the whole Seabee organizational structure. In peacetime the battalions reported to Commander Naval Construction Battalions, US Pacific Fleet (COMCBPAC) who in turn reported to Commander Service Force, US Pacific Fleet (COMSERVPAC). 55/ While the top structure did not change appreciably, more coordinating groups were formed in Vietnam. The first of these, the 30th Naval Construction Regiment (NCR) was formed in Da Nang in May 1965 to provide operational control over all Seabee battalions in Vietnam. A second NCR was formed at Phu Bai-Gia Le. A brigade was formed with a flag officer as commander reporting to Naval Forces Vietnam in Saigon. Not all Seabees in Vietnam were under the command of the brigade. Public Works and CB Maintenance Unit Seabees reported to NSA, Da Nang and Saigon and

Amphibious Construction Battalion Seabees were part of the Amphibious Force.

2. Seabee Teams

The first deployment of Seabee teams in Vietnam came in 1962 when two teams were sent to the area. At the time, the Vietnamese government was not prepared to accept them and the teams were assigned to work with the US Army's Special Forces building camps in the highlands and along the Cambodian and Laotian borders. 56/ A short time later, teams were deployed to Thailand under the sponsorship of the US Operations Mission (USOM).

When first conceived by COMCBPAC, its was anticipated that Seabees would perform a community development and improvement role for the US Navy in under-developed areas working with and for the populace.

In mid-1963 two additional teams were assigned to Vietnam to work for the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and in 1965 the two original teams previously assigned to Special Forces were placed under the direction of USAID. By the end of 1967 the number of teams in Vietnam had grown to eight and in 1968 a total of fifteen teams was deployed in II, III and IV Corps areas.

While deployed with Special Forces, US Army funds were used and the hiring of laborers was permitted to improve production. Since USAID had no funds for hiring outside labor, Seabees had to depend only on their own personnel, and on materials acquired from USAID warehouse or whatever could be obtained free locally. Although some materials and voluntary labor could be obtained for a local project from the people of the village, this lack of funds limited the work of the Seabees at first. In mid-1967 USAID requested added emphasis on training of Vietnamese nationals and was authorized additional funds for this purpose. Thus able to hire local trainees, Seabee team construction capability was greatly enhanced while at the same time construction skills of the Vietnamese were broadened and improved.

Teams normally were comprised of one Civil Engineer Corps officer, eleven enlisted construction ratings and one medical corpsman, all of whom had probably served one complete tour in Vietnam with a Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (MCB).

Seabee teams had two missions in Vietnam: (1) provide assistance to the Government of Vietnam (GVN) in accomplishing its Revolutionary Development (RD) program throughout the provinces, and (2) train Vietnamese nationals in basic construction skills. Although teams had constructed fairly sizable projects such as earth-fill dams and bridges, the most favorable impact on the people seemed to result from small, quickly completed projects.

The teams were independent of military jurisdiction except under emergency conditions. This prevented them from becoming absorbed by the operating forces or advisory teams, which would be detrimental to their mission accomplishment. One concern regarding the placement of a Seabee team was the amount of enemy activity in the area and the amount of security needed to cope with the activity. Teams did, on occasion, become involved in combat activity. Although teams were often vulnerable to attack by the Viet Cong, only twice did such attacks occur. In one case, Seabee team 1104 was under the operational control of the Army Special Forces at Dong Xoai when the camp was attacked by VC in June 1965. The attack appeared to be a carefully planned, massive assault on the camp by a Viet Cong force of regimental strength. The defenders held out for over twelve hours despite wounds suffered by every member of the US force. When it appeared that the VC were preparing for another attack, the defenders were rescued by helicopter. One Seabee member, Construction Mechanic Third Class Marvin Shields, had performed a number of heroic actions during the attack. Although he died of wounds suffered during the attack, Shields became the first Navy man of the Vietnam War -- and the first Seabee ever - to receive the Medal of Honor. 57/

Trainees for the Seabee construction skills program were normally obtained from three sources: (1) Chieu Hoi, who were former VC members, (2) refugees, and (3) local labor. They were paid the local going wage in the area and would remain in training from four to eight months depending on the particular trade for which they were being trained. By the fall of 1969 the Seabees had trained over 1000 local individuals in construction skills. In addition to construction training, hospital corpsmen trained several individuals in rudimentary medical procedures.

Medical corpsmen were particularly valuable to the Seabee team effort in that they were able not only to care for the health of team members but they set up Medical Civil Action Programs (MEDCAP) to aid the local community in health programs whenever possible.

The Seabees contributed to the Vietnamese War in many different ways and at one time or another provided direct support to every operating command, fixed base and amphibious effort in Vietnam. In addition, the participation of Seabee teams in the pacification program contributed greatly to the success it achieved in most areas in South Vietnam. The assembling, practically overnight, of a tremendous and unprecedented design and construction capability so essential to the placement and continuing support of combat troops in Vietnam must be considered one of the singular achievements of the war.

H. THE BROWN SHOES OF TASK FORCE 77

1. Aerial Bombardment of North Vietnam

An attack on the destroyer Maddox (DD-731) by North Vietnamese torpedo boats on 2 August 1964 was to have a profound and lasting effect on the role the US and its military forces would play in the war in Vietnam. The North Vietnamese attack on Maddox precipitated the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which resulted in the thirty-seven month bombing of North Vietnam by US carrier forces, beginning in February 1965. 58/

The air bombing campaign against North Vietnam was begun, inter alia, to interdict and destroy the war materials and supplies being furnished to the Viet Cong via overland routes from North to South Vietnam. Market Time and Game Warden, were conducted along the South Vietnam coastal areas to prevent infiltration of such materials by water routes.

The air interdiction effort was inhibited from the start by the unpredictability of the weather in the monsoon season of Southeast Asia. 59/ Since Washington exerted considerable influence on the day-to-day conduct of the air war, the ability of the operating forces in the combat theater was often handicapped in reacting to changes in the weather.

The Rolling Thunder air campaign began in March 1965 under strict controls and specific guidance from the highest levels of government. Commanders were told on which day to strike, and in many cases the hour of attack, but National Command Authorities often failed to consider the impact of changing weather conditions. 60/ Close coordination was effected between 2nd Air Division and TF 77 on the scene as the agent in the field representing either PACAF or PACFLT, whichever had been designated by CINCPAC as coordinating authority for any given strike. In time, responsibility was assigned to each Service component for target development, intelligence data collection and target analysis in its own areas.

The effectiveness of the bombing raids was being seriously questioned by several US military commanders, and on 1 April 1965 the President of the United States undertook a policy review of the whole spectrum of actions that might be taken in South and North Vietnam. As a result of the review the President proclaimed in part: 61/

> We should continue roughly the present slowly ascending tempo of Rolling Thunder operations, being prepared to add strikes in response to a higher rate of Viet Cong operations or conceivably to slow the pace in the unlikely event the Viet Cong slacked off sharply for what appeared to be more than a temporary lull.
>
> The target system should continue to avoid the effective ground combat intercept range of MIG aircraft in North Vietnam. We should continue to vary the types of targets, stepping up attacks on lines of communications in the near future and possibly moving in a few weeks to attack some rail lines north and northeast of Hanoi.

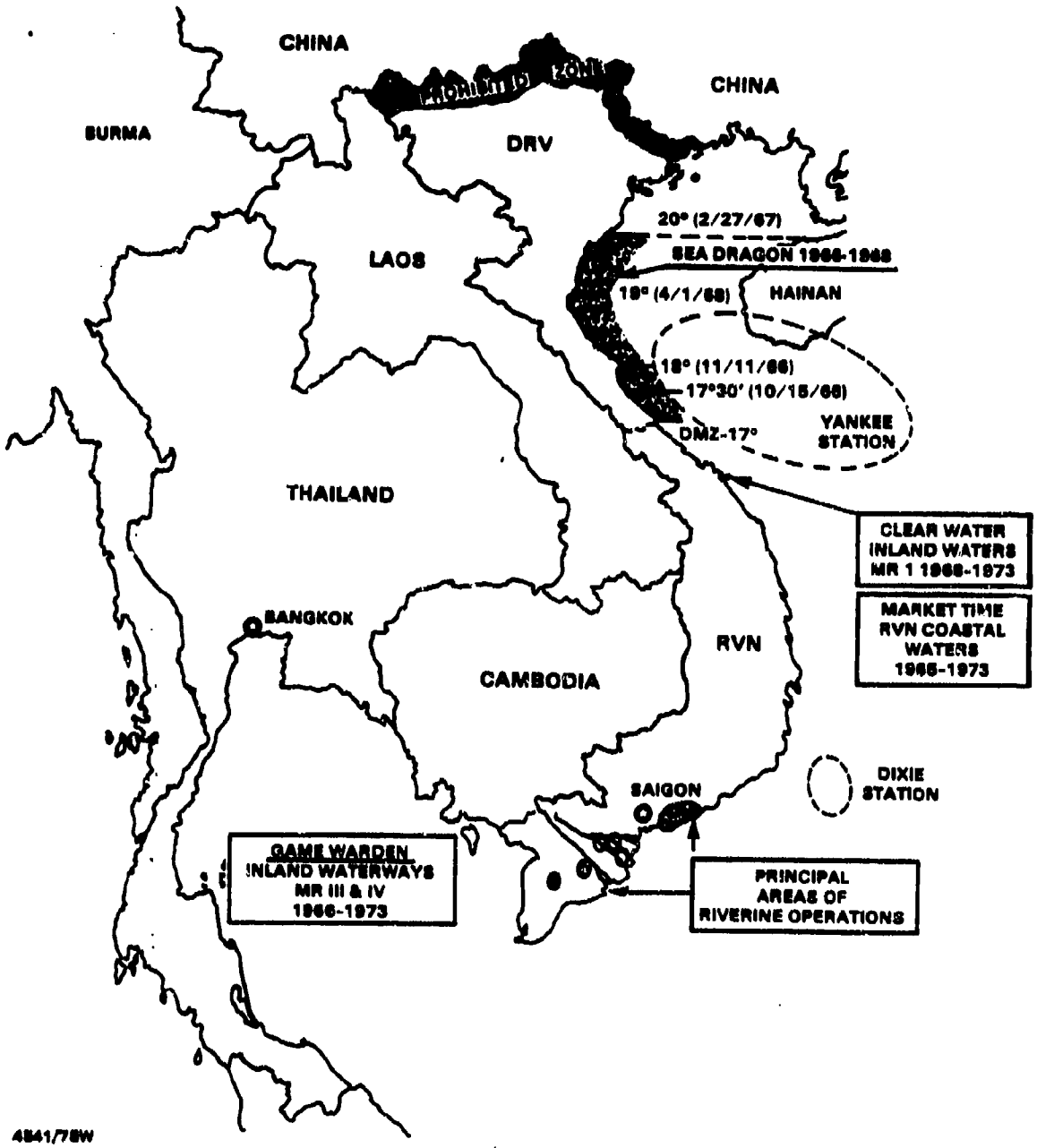
A geographic point in the Gulf of Tonkin was selected as the locus of operations for TF 77 and was given the code name, Yankee Station. Later this point was moved closer to the North Vietnam coast to reduce enroute time for attacking aircraft. Dixie Station was established about 100 miles southeast of Cam Ranh Bay on 16 May by CINCPACFLT message to permit TF 77 pilots to fill still another role in the war. Regular close air support missions against the VC in South Vietnam were flown from one

carrier at Dixie Station. See Map 7-1. In fact, Dixie Station operations were mainly for training before pilots went north to face the significant SAM threat in the North.

2. Tactical Air Control

Tactical air control of Navy Aircraft was exercised by the carriers on Yankee Station for aircraft attacking targets in North Vietnam. This was a critical factor to the success of the attacks due to the potential conflict between attacking flights and between Navy and US Air Force aircraft. The close control of targets, including tactical details, was judged to be excessive in TF 77 bombing operations. 62/ The unpredicability of the weather and the need for flexibility to meet changing tactical conditions caused the interdiction effort to be hampered by the remote control system of targeting that developed.

PACAF had been designated coordinating authority for Rolling Thunder in March 1965, but operational control of carrier forces was specifically excluded. Targets were assigned by CINCPACAF to CINCPACFLT, ensuring that strike forces would not conflict with one another in approaching, attacking, or withdrawing from the target. CINCPACAF found that the authority for coordinating flights as opposed to controlling the theater air activity to be less than satisfactory. In an effort to improve the effectiveness of air operations, he proposed to CTF 77 a time-sharing arrangement for striking North Vietnamese targets south of the 20th parallel. Three-hour periods would be allocated to either TF-77 or Second Air Division, (later 7th Air Force) USAF, for various sectors with assignments planned a week in advance. TF 77 opposed the proposal because the range limitations of Navy strike forces prevented them from reaching distant targets without air refueling. A counter proposal was made by TF 77 that North Vietnam be divided on a north-south axis with TF 77 responsible for the coastal area. Although this would have helped the Navy's range problem, it would not have resulted in effective use of available air power because of the geographic distribution of targets. After considering various methods for coordinating air support, it was decided to divide North Vietnam into a series of route packages. Although the route package



Map 7-1. Naval Operations

system enabled TF 77 to use its own forces more effectively and provided localized control in a single area, the route package system was thought by some 63/ to be fundamentally wrong for the best application of US air power. The route package system was dropped in the summer of 1966 in favor of the assignment of fixed operating areas.

The principle of centralized control of air power in a theater of operations is an issue that has arisen in every conflict in which aircraft were employed by more than one service. The issue was particularly significant in the Korean War (1950-1953) with regard to naval aviation. Even though naval aviation in the Korean War was used to gain and maintain air superiority, interdict the battlefield, and provide close air support, Naval Forces Far East (NAVFE) opposed placing TF 77 under the operational control of the air component commander. 64/ The position of the Navy in the matter was that its forces would support the theater commander, but because of the overriding priority of fleet air defense should not be controlled by him. This is an important distinction from the standpoint of doctrinal directives because JCS publications allow supporting force commanders great freedom. 65/ The Navy argued successfully that their forces could not be restricted to the control of a theater commander but had to be free to engage opposing naval forces in order to carry out their primary mission of sea control. The Strategic Air Command (SAC) uses a similar argument to prevent coming under the operational control of a unified or sub-unified commander. "Coordination Control" was originally established by directive 66/ in Korea and was the mechanism used in Vietnam to attempt to establish a greater degree of centralized tactical air control. Although the original directive was not modified, Far East Air Force Command (FEAF) and NAVFE came to an arrangement by establishing a Joint Operations Center (JOC) in Korea with a naval section assigned. Combat missions were assigned to TF 77 through the naval section in the JOC. The naval section also assigned an officer to the FEAF targeting committee to assist in selecting and recommending targets for naval aircraft. Marine sorties were assigned by the 5th Air force in the daily air combat operations order (FRAG Order), a circumstance that the Marines have since tried assiduously to avoid. 67/

Control of Marine aircraft was also a difficult and emotional problem under the tactical conditions existing in Vietnam. Marine aviation has been justified traditionally on the basis of its role in an amphibious operation, a primary Marine mission. Since Marine aviation's function is predominantly close air support, interdicting the landing areas and maintaining control of the air over the landing area are performed by carrier-based and land-based aircraft. Once the landing area has been secured, the Marines either withdraw or, as a uni-service compinent, revert to the operational control of the Army forces conducting sustained combat operations on land.

Until early 1968, coordination control was accomplished successfully between COMUSMACV and CG III MAF by a memorandum of agreement, but at that time the concept of "single management" was instituted by MACV directive. Although the single management concept (all air resources under control of a single commander and staff) could be applied to Marine aviation on a stronger basis than for Navy aircraft, the reasons for opposing the concept were similar to those expressed by the Navy. There is no doubt that the single management system was an overall improvement in use of air assets as far as MACV was concerned, and the Marines and the Air Force took careful steps to make sure that the system worked. 68/

Thus, while operational control of their resources was never relinquished by the Marines, MACV as a whole received more effective air support, and III MAF continued to receive responsive air support from its own units. Within the system, III MAF had first claim on its own assets so that most Marine air missions supported Marine ground troops and the air support received by Marine ground units was provided mainly by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

The development of the capability to operate attack carriers during all hours of the day and night, despite weather or darkness, is considered one of the major technical accomplishments of the TF 77 operations. Aircraft were launched, vectored to one or more target areas, diverted as the need arose, and recovered on the carrier in conditions that might have been considered nearly impossible previously. 69/

One of the military lessons learned from carrier operations in Vietnam resulted from their use as floating airfields but was not recognized until after five years of operation in the Gulf of Tonkin. Operating from a fixed geographic location fails to take advantage of the carrier's prime advantage, its mobility. Sending aircraft against targets far inland from a geographically-fixed station barely 100 miles off the enemy coast was done habitually during the Vietnam war and was assumed by many to be the primary purpose of attack carriers. Sea-based tactical air was employed to augment land-based tactical air. Unquestionably such use was effective in the circumstances, but hardly did it capitalize on the tactical and strategic value of the aircraft carrier. Admiral Roy L. Johnson, CINCPACFLT, commented on the operation, "Had we faced a serious air threat or submarine threat in the Gulf of Tonkin, we might have gotten in serious trouble by operating near a fixed point.... Task Force 77 could have achieved the same approximate effort against North Vietnam by .... roaming up and down the coast." 70/

Task Force 77 operations taught us another military lesson, or perhaps confirmed a lesson that had been learned in the Korean War. True air interdiction cannot be fully achieved until night and all-weather bombing can be done as accurately and efficiently, and with sustained pressure, as in daylight. Such were the demands of Rolling Thunder, and the early carrier aircraft were less effective in darkness and in the heavy, often torrential rain, low clouds and poor visibility encountered much of the time. Two new carrier-type aircraft brought some improvement in all-weather combat operations: the A-6A Grumman Intruder and the E-2A Grumman Hawkeye. The A-6A was the world's first truly all-weather tactical bomber with a highly sophisticated computerized electronic system. The E-2A early warning aircraft deployed from KITTY HAWK (CVA-63) with her new Naval Tactical Data System (NTDS) provided greatly improved surveillance and automatic tracking and aircraft interception. The A-6As proved their worth in the defense of Khe Sanh with the ability to destroy a target concealed by fog or darkness using on-board equipment. 71/

Tactical air teamwork was high whenever joint operations were involved. Carrier aircraft frequently made ground attacks under the direction of Army or Air Force controllers. Although the primary target areas of carrier-based aircraft were in North Vietnam, weather conditions at primary targets sometimes required diversion to other targets. Such was the case when in February 1968, Task Force 77 aircraft diverted some 2,800 of its 3,672 planned sorties (77%) against enemy targets in northern South Vietnam and parts of Laos. In March approximately 67% of the 4,711 carrier sorties hit targets in these areas. 72/ The Navy air support effort, however, did not always go so smoothly. On some occasions, as their fuel supplies grew low, Navy aircraft were forced to return to their carrier without having dropped their ordnance on targets, due to inability of forward air controllers or radar operators to get around to the circling planes. 73/ The limited endurance of the aircraft after being diverted contributed to their short loiter time.

A final major air campaign to which TF 77 contributed was Linebacker II, an eleven-day intensive bombardment of the Hanoi/Haiphong area, which took place in December 1972. Navy A-6As were used in coordination with B-52s of the Strategic Air Command and F-111s of the Air Force. Six Navy aircraft were lost in the raids, but the shock and destruction that resulted in the raids were significant factors in the decision of the North Vietnamese to accelerate negotiations for a peace settlement.

3. Mine Warfare in Vietnam

As the road and rail systems of North Vietnam were attacked by TF 77 during 1966, the enemy made increasing use of barges and sampans for logistics purposes. 74/ By February of 1967 it had been decided that mining of selected areas of North Vietnam could reduce the potential for waterborne supply of troops on shore. The use of air-delivered mines in selected river areas was determined to be an effective means of accomplishing that objective. The first mines were planted in the mouths of the Song Ca and South Giang (rivers) by A-6A aircraft from the carrier Enterprise. In March, three additional minefields were planted in the mouths of the Song Ma, Kien Giang, and Cua Sot rivers by A-6s from the carrier Kitty

Hawk. The need for very precise drops required the aircraft to make straight-in, low-level passes which in turn necessitated nighttime runs using a radar target.

By mid-April, these five minefields had been planted and were being monitored carefully to assess the effect it would have on the enemy. Later that month, several boats were observed conducting minesweeping operations in the Song Giang river. In May, three sunken boats were noted in the Song Giang. Little, if any, traffic was transiting the mouths of the five rivers that had been mined. Moving of war supplies in the area by water came to an almost complete stop except through the deep water ports of Haiphong, Hon Gai, and Cam Pha, the mining of which was specifically not authorized until five years later.

Finally, in May 1972, Haiphong harbor was mined to prevent the use of the port by ocean shipping. Hon Gai and Cam Pha were also mined at this time. Mines were placed by aircraft, few of which were lost in the planting operation. Mines planted were of the type actuated by magnetic or acoustic influence, or a combination of both. Merchant vessels in the harbor at the time of mine placement were not able to depart the harbor until mines were removed by US minesweeping forces in June 1973.

Preparations for minesweeping operations by US forces were commenced in July 1972, although in truth preparations were begun when the mines were planted, since planning of the mine fields was conducted with the knowledge that the US might also be responsible for the removal. Minesweeping was performed in Operation End Sweep; this was the first time a major task force was established to support a combined surface and airborne sweep in North Vietnamese waters. Commander Mine Warfare Force was made the task force commander under COMSEVENTHFLEET. This organization was unique in that a type commander is seldom an operational commander. Task Force 78 was organized as shown in Figure 7-4.

Operation End Sweep was also the first major employment of airborne mine counter measure forces and techniques by the Marines. The helicopter proved ideal for the minesweeping operation and with little training and minor modifications Marine pilots and helos were a highly

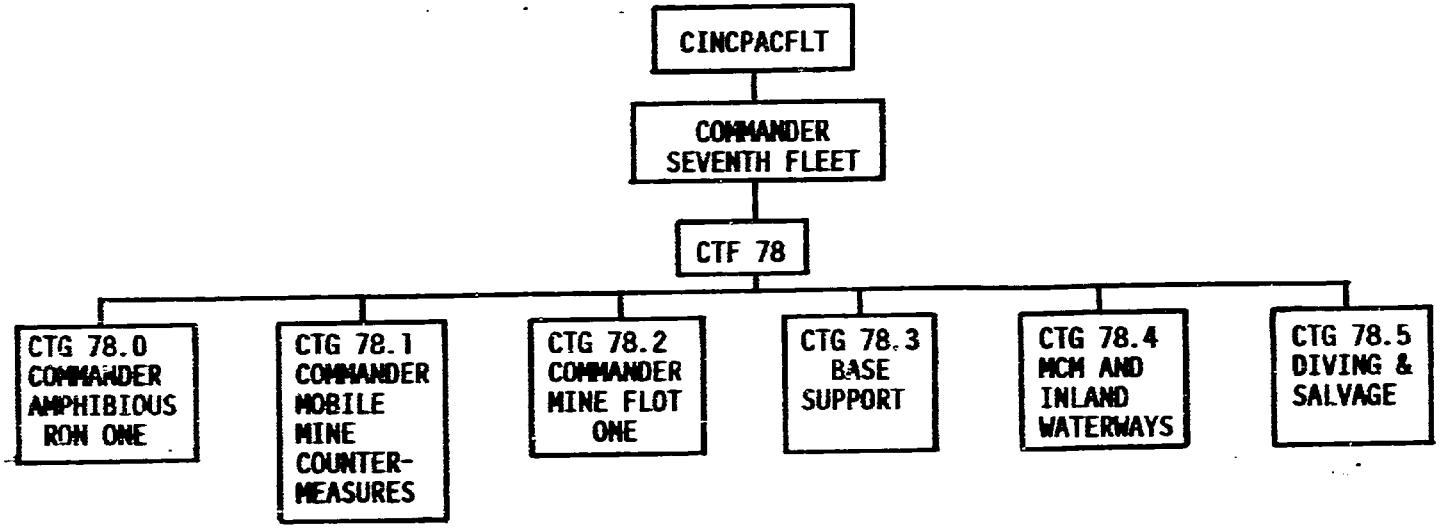


Figure 7-4. Operation End Sweep - Task Force 78 Organization

effective force. The types of mines used were relatively unsophisticated and simpler techniques and equipment could be used for sweeping. Had more complex sweeping gear been required, a Navy mine sweeping squadron was available to tow the more complicated gear. The value of the helicopter as a minesweeper was well demonstrated in Operation End Sweep, but at the same time the need for surface minesweepers was also confirmed.

In reviewing Operation End Sweep, an obvious conclusion that may be drawn is the effectiveness, relative ease of laying, and the economy of the coastal mine campaign. The mining of North Vietnam harbors demonstrated clearly the vulnerability of a country which has little or no mine countermeasure capability and yet is highly dependent on waterborne traffic for logistics. North Vietnamese ocean shipping was paralyzed until the major harbors were cleared of mines by the US. 75/

I. THE CRUISER-DESTROYER FORCE

1. Naval Gunfire Support

US Naval ships were used almost from the start of the Vietnam War for shore bombardment into South Vietnam. Beginning in 1965, operations of US Marines and South Vietnamese troops in coastal areas presented both a need and an opportunity for employment of naval gunfire. Although South Vietnam opposed such action initially, an overriding need developed for US ships to take enemy shore targets under fire. When the South Vietnamese Government finally acceded, cruisers and destroyers of the Seventh Fleet were put on fire-support stations and heavy volumes of 5, 6, and 8-inch gunfire were delivered against specific targets. These were located by friendly forces on shore or by reconnaissance aircraft which assisted in spotting to improve accuracy.

Naval gunfire support was conducted under the operational control of the Seventh Fleet and was closely coordinated with tactical command centers on shore. Direct naval gunfire support was extended to forces of South Vietnam by attachment of shore fire-control parties (SFCP) from Marine units. 76/

Ammunition expenditure on gunfire support missions exceeded expectations. 77/ More rounds were called for where jungle cover was heavy because results were difficult to assess. The number of gunfire support ships off South Vietnam increased as the war went on, and the tempo of operations varied depending on the operations of forces ashore. Seasonal variations also influenced the availability and effectiveness of shore bombardment operations.

Naval gunfire support was so widely used that the supply of naval ammunition became a potential problem in 1965. The differences between fleet ammunition logistics and that of ground forces and land-based aircraft were not always recognized. Fleet logistics require underway replenishment for deployed task units. When the combatant forces and their ammunition allowances were increased solutions to naval gun ammunition shortages became more difficult. Extraordinary actions were sometimes required to ensure adequate stocks of appropriate ammunition and intensive management was required at the operational logistics levels. 78/

Selective designation of targets and accelerated ammunition production kept the problem within manageable limits. By mid-1967, destroyers and cruisers were firing approximately 1,000 rounds a day each, in support of forces ashore.

On 29 September 1968 USS NEW JERSEY (BB-62) arrived in the area and took station off the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The sixteen-inch guns of the ship extended the naval gunfire range to nearly 24 miles inland, with each projectile providing approximately eight times the weight of the 8-inch shells being used by the heavy cruisers. The first NEW JERSEY fire mission for the III Marine Amphibious Force was fired on 30 September when twenty-nine 16-inch shells and 116 5-inch shells were delivered against eight targets north of the DMZ. 79/

Gunfire support in North Vietnamese waters was not permitted until October 1966 when the Seventh Fleet was authorized to attack communist supply craft north of the DMZ. Additional targets for naval gunfire such as air defense radars, coastal batteries and missile sites came under attack from naval ships off the North Vietnam coast.

2. Operation Sea Dragon

Operation Sea Dragon was initiated to interdict the enemy's maritime supply routes north of the DMZ. In November 1966, 230 enemy vessels were sunk by the Seventh Fleet off North Vietnam. As Operation Sea Dragon continued, US ships came within range of North Vietnamese coastal guns. Authorization was granted to fire at those guns in self-defense and to engage the guns in the southern portion of the DRV when their positions became known. The first serious casualty to a US ship engaged in naval gunfire support occurred on 23 December 1966 when USS O'BRIEN (DD-725) was hit. Two men were killed and three wounded by shore fire. The authority to return enemy fire and to conduct interdicting fire had been granted only after considerable delay, indicating the reluctance by Washington to approve any offensive operations against North Vietnam. US ships were authorized to fire shore bombardment in South Vietnam, counter-battery fire north of the DMZ, and interdiction fire to counter the threat of North Vietnamese infiltration into the southern half of the DMZ. Rocket-assisted projectiles (RAP) were developed to increase the range of the 5-inch guns, and eventually SHRIKE missiles were mounted on destroyers for use against shore fire control radars during bombardment missions. 80/

J. LOGISTIC SUPPORT FORCE

The Vietnam military effort depended heavily on the receipt of weapons, vehicles, aircraft, watercraft and other equipment and materials from outside the country, as well as the transportation of personnel and equipment within Vietnam. On no service was this logistic support effort more demanding than on the US Navy.

Many factors complicated the problems of providing support in the expanding Southeast Asian conflict. 81/ Not only was the theater of operation a vast distance from the United States but the quantities of supplies, equipment, material, and munitions far exceeded those required by comparable forces in earlier wars. Only one major deep-draft port, Saigon, was available to US forces at the beginning of the war, and that was

limited in its water depth and pier space. Only one other port, Cam Ranh Bay, with its one small pier, could even accommodate ocean-going ships. Support operations had to be conducted throughout a country harassed by enemy guerrillas, primitive in transportation systems and subjected to monsoonal weather that, at times, made the movement of men and materials virtually impossible.

Total operational and logistic command in the Pacific area was under CINCPAC, who exercised his authority through CINCPACFLT, and in the case of operational control of forces in Vietnam, COMUSMACV. 82/ The build-up of US forces in the Vietnam theater and the increased tempo of combat operations was made possible only by the fact that each Service provided or arranged for its own logistics support. Although common support and common services were established in Vietnam, it took time to develop capabilities for supporting deployments in force.

1. Fleet Support

Normal support of the Pacific Fleet was accomplished by the operational logistic system that was in being and functioning effectively in supporting fleet forces. However during 1965 several problems became apparent that were directly related to Vietnam: (1) increasing Seventh Fleet activity was placing heavy demands on the system, (2) fleet operations in the Pacific were centered about Southeast Asia and logistic support facilities in the area, notably Subic Bay in the Philippines, were seriously inadequate, (3) increasing ammunition requirements were not being met in all cases, particularly with regard to certain types, (4) support to combat forces in the critical I Corps Tactical Zone of Vietnam was becoming increasingly heavy and complex, and (5) Operation Market Time expansion demanded urgent additional support.

In November 1966, Commander Service Force, Pacific (COMSERVPAC) was designated "Principal Logistic Agent" of CINCPACFLT. In addition to his normal responsibilities to provide logistic support to naval forces in the Pacific, to bases under CINCPACFLT, and to other Services as directed, COMSERVPAC was made responsible for supervision and coordination of the planning, conduct and administration of logistic services and supply of material to the Pacific Fleet.

Continuing support of the Seventh Fleet in action off Vietnam became one of the major concerns of the logistic support force. Although the supply of a fleet underway engaged in combat operations was by no means unique, the operations of TF 77 and its varied activities posed special requirements. Air and surface patrols off the Vietnam coast, aerial bombardment of North Vietnam, naval gunfire support of forces on shore, recurring amphibious operations, maintenance of Yankee and Dixie stations, and intermittent salvage and repair operations all imposed heavy demands on the logistic support force. Underway replenishment of ship fuel, aviation gasoline, ammunition, provisions, and stores took on proportions never before experienced in World War II. Figure 7-5 83/ shows a typical fuel replenishment cycle in 1965 and 1966 with Yankee and Dixie stations both manned.

In 1967 carrier striking power had been shifted north to concentrate on North Vietnam, and Dixie station had been disestablished and the pattern of underway replenishment changed to that shown in Figure 7-6. 84/

The introduction of two new types of ships, the fast combat support ship (AOE) and the combat stores ship (AFS); and a new capability, that of vertical replenishment (VERTREP) by helicopter proved extremely valuable in fleet support.

2. Country-Wide Support

The Navy had been assigned logistic responsibilities as "Administrative Agent" to support US MAAG, Vietnam and HSA, Saigon early in the Vietnam War. 85/ But by the end of 1964 this support requirement had grown substantially and there were then 23,310 US military personnel in Vietnam. 86/ Logistic support requirements in Vietnam literally exploded in 1965 with the deployment of combat units starting in March of that year. In September, the US Army First Logistical Command was established and assumed support of Army advisors and organized field units. The Army took over common support in II, III and IV Corps zones on 1 July 1966 but the Navy retained responsibility for I Corps due to the high Marine population. 87/ NSA Da Nang assumed responsibilities for common support

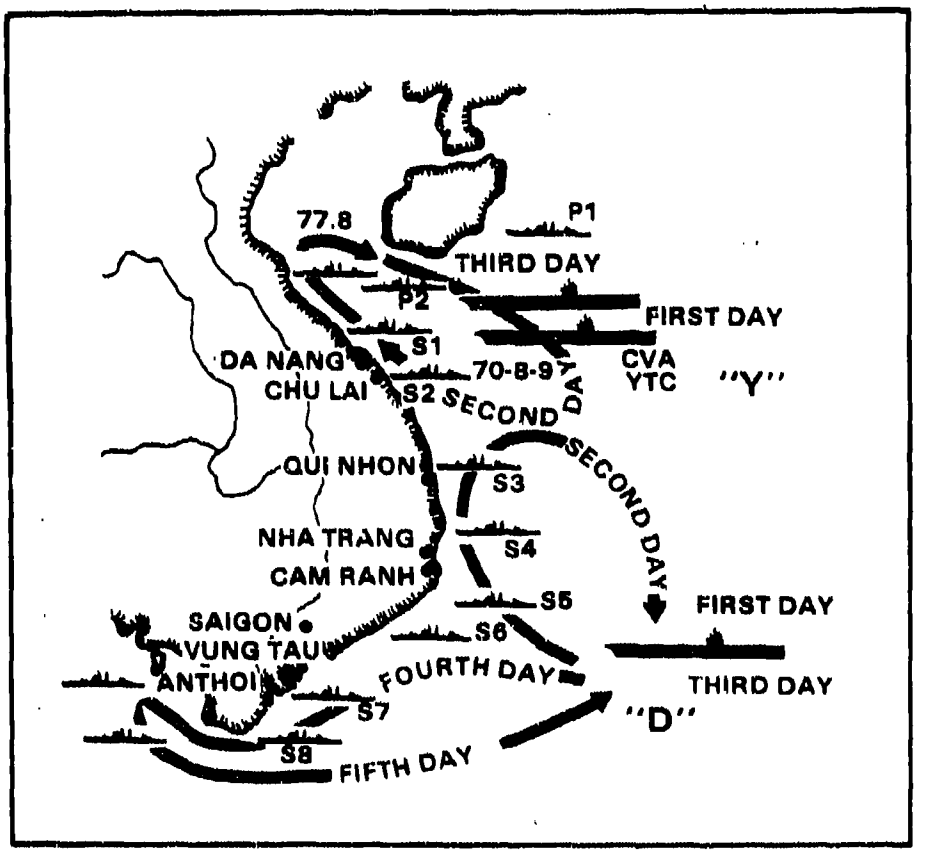


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Figure 7-5. Replenishment Cycles in 1965 and Early 1966

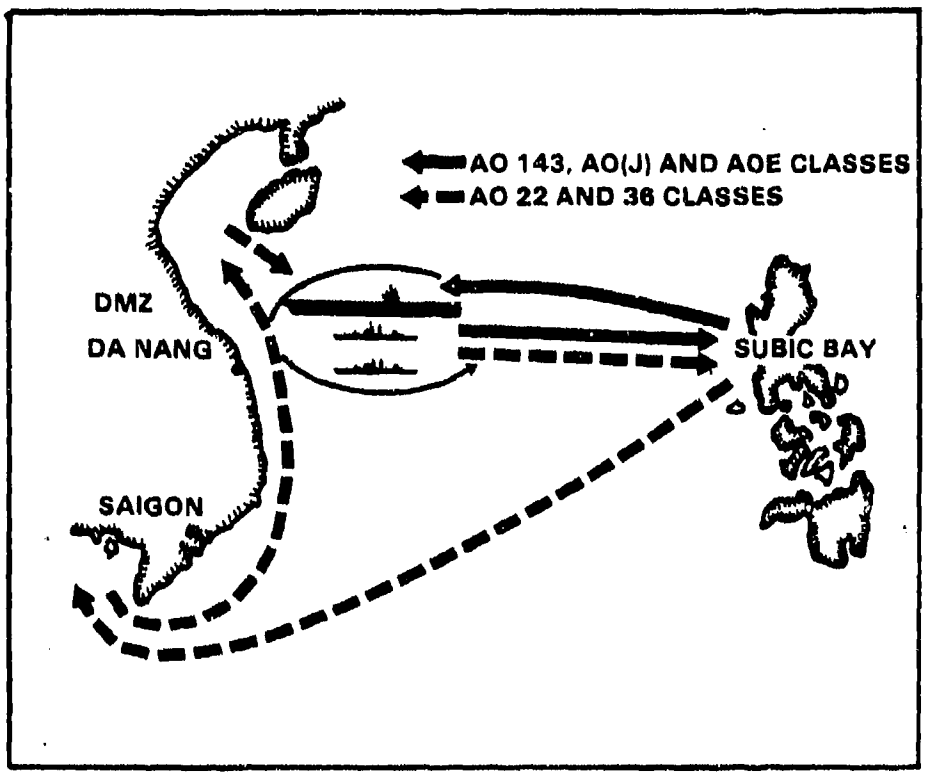

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Figure 7-6. Oiler Underway Replenishment Cycle After June 1967

functions in I Corps on 15 October 1965. In planning for major combat operations, it was anticipated that the Army would take over all common logistic support after a six-month period. (See Chapter 10, Volume VI)

Due to its proximity to North Vietnam, I Corps zone was undoubtedly the most critical tactical zone in South Vietnam and success of combat operations was frequently heavily dependent on the success of logistic effort. Operational logistics in the I Corps Tactical Zone (I CTZ) was performed primarily by NSA Da Nang and the Naval Mobile Construction Battalions. The landing of troops and equipment at Da Nang in March 1965 was an amphibious operation with established responsibility for which the Fleet was organized and prepared. But the advanced base operations that followed had not been provided for in the planning. In general, the Navy was reluctant to assume continuing responsibilities beyond the water's edge but accepted the responsibility in I Corps because the dominant forces in the zone were Navy and Marines.

Port and terminal operations at Da Nang became a serious problem in the months following establishment of the NSA. No deep-draft piers were available and large quantities of ammunition, provisions, and supplies had to be off-loaded from LSTs on the beach, or from ships in the roadstead and brought to shore by ramp craft or lighters. Port congestion was high and unloading delays reached a high of forty days 88/ in late December 1965. In February 1966, Da Nang ran out of cargoes to off-load for about four days and after that congestion was never again a serious problem in the port. In other ports such as Cam Ranh Bay, the Army requested and received assistance from the Navy at Da Nang to relieve unloading problems.

Another serious logistic problem encountered in ICTZ and one of the most critical faced by the Navy in 1965 was the support of Chu Lai. Supply was clearly dependent on the sea and the soft sandy beach, which was exposed to the full sweep of the South China Sea. Causeways and ship-to-shore fuel lines were frequently wiped out by heavy seas. As Market Time and combat operations were stepped up, Chu Lai became an increasingly important base location. Improvements were made step-by-step by the Seabees and by June 1966, Chu Lai was handling almost as much cargo as had

originally been expected for the entire I Corps zone. In April 1967, General Westmoreland deployed Army Task Force Oregon to Chu Lai to free the Marines for another trouble spot.

3. Inshore and Inland Waterway Operations Support

The three coastal and river operations, Market Time, Game Warden and the Mobile Riverine Force, were also largely dependent upon the naval logistic system for ammunition, fuel, supplies and repairs. To provide this support, Commander Task Force 73 was tasked with the direct responsibility. Based on a plan developed by COMSERVPAC, maximum use was made of the existing Service Force logistic system. Continuing support was provided by the Mobile Support Force (TF 73) with backup support from activities at Subic Bay. Common supply support was furnished by HSA, Saigon except in I Corps. NSA, Da Nang was charged with repair support.

Game Warden and the Mobile Riverine Force were supported on the same basis as Market Time. Additional floating supply points were designated to accommodate the different regions affected.

The interfaces of naval logistics with combat units operating in restricted waters were at outlying bases manned by detachments from the NSA, Saigon and Da Nang, and at Service Force ships and craft deployed to Vietnam for mobile support. A large number of these bases was maintained during the course of the war. 89/

4. Seabees and Naval Mobile Construction Battalions

These forces formed a vital part of the logistic support force in the Vietnam War and have been discussed in Section G of this chapter.

The Vietnam War has been described by some as a "logistic war." 90/ The implication is that a highly significant factor in the conduct of the war was the ability to provide the fighting forces with the fuel, ammunition, weapons, vehicles, food, construction materials, spare parts and other miscellaneous items needed to sustain their operation. It must be recognized that logistic support of the Vietnam War was truly a monumental accomplishment. To appreciate fully the scope of the effort, Table 1 attempts to put in perspective two campaigns: one month of under-

way replenishment during the peak of the Okinawa campaign in World War II, and one month of underway replenishment in Vietnam in FY 1967, a typical year.

TABLE 7-1. UNDERWAY REPLENISHMENT COMPARISON

ITEM	WWII	VIETNAM
Ammunition	7,000 short tons	15,000 short tons
Aviation Fuel	221,000 barrels	450,000 barrels
Provisions	2,800 tons	2,699 tons
Mail	1,005,000 lbs	3,400,000 lbs

SOURCE: Hooper, Mobility, Support, Endurance, p. 47.

In FY 1967, over 70 percent of the ship fuel, 95 percent of the jet fuel, virtually all of the aviation gasoline, over 95 percent of the ammunition, 97 percent of the provisions, and over 70 percent of the stores were transferred at sea.

K. SUMMARY ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Vietnamese Army control over the Navy through the Joint General Staff led to poor utilization, minimal interest, and reduced priorities for the VNN. With no naval representation on the JGS, the VNN suffered in terms of funding, personnel priorities, and program support. When US Navy units largely preempted the missions of coastal and river patrolling and river assault operations, the VNN was denied the opportunity to develop necessary capabilities. It should be noted, however, that earlier domination of the fledgling VNN by the French and later by the Army-run JGS had stultified its growth and the VNN was not capable (in 1965 or later) of conducting effective coastal surveillance. US Navy advice and assistance did not succeed in building a self-sufficient VNN.

Even the US was not well prepared militarily or psychologically for the type of war operations that the Vietnam War demanded. Although we had ample documentation of French experience some years earlier, as well as recommendations they had made relative to their own operations, we had neither the proper types or numbers of watercraft needed, nor the trained personnel or tactical procedures to cope with the counterinfiltration effort called for. No single US military organization was trained or equipped to assume the river patrol/river assault mission in Vietnam, although the US had conducted similar operations in virtually every major conflict in which it engaged from the Revolutionary War to World War II. The naval services could have developed a river assault capability. However, the Marines were fully committed to other missions in Vietnam and the Navy lacked craft for, and expertise in, coastal surveillance and river-type operations. To meet the requirements, the Army designated and trained a brigade to perform with the Navy in riverine operations. Valuable time was lost in attaining the needed capability, but the resulting organization proved reasonably effective and performed with distinction. Army helicopters and personnel supported the river assault groups initially, but in time Navy pilots replaced the Army pilots. Army helicopters continued to be used, however, since the helicopters in the Navy inventory were not considered suitable for the mission.

The paucity of helicopter assets made available for riverine support virtually forced reliance on the use of surface craft for operations in the Delta. LTG Krulak notes that the French had a seven knot capability on the water, facing the threat of mines and mortars in the hands of Viet Minh, and suggests that if they had had 1,000 helicopters (they had perhaps five operational ones in 1954), they would have conducted riverine operations differently. He adds, "But we studied slavishly the French operations, although we would be the last to admit it, and we recreated their mistakes in their own image, increasing it by two or three knots here and there plus a little air conditioning." General Krulak added, "I think that we really blew it in the Delta. I think that we've spent literally millions of dollars on a kind of tactical operation that was outmoded when Igor

Sikorski began to think." 91/ In short, before embarking again on a river-based interdiction effort, the entire tactic of riverine operations should be carefully studied with the view of determining the optimum types and mix of air and surface craft that might be employed in a given riverine environment.

Modern US cargo vessels were not completely adaptable to cargo-handling in Vietnam. Off-loading facilities for container ships and Ro-Ro ships were not available during the early stages of the war, and supplies had to be transferred from cargo ships to lighters or landing craft for delivery to shore. (See Chapter 10 in Book 2, "Logistics" for more detailed treatment).

Diversity of control of air activities, particularly between TF77 and the Air Force, presented some handicaps in aerial bombing until 1966 when adoption of a "route package" system of designating target areas greatly alleviated conflicts between Navy and Air Force flight operations. Later designation of target areas for Navy and Air Force on a north-south axis of Vietnam further improved tactical air control. (Note: Air Force officials take a different view and consider the Route Package system to be anachronistic -- a compromise made necessary to accommodate Navy parochialism. They prefer to see the air component commander in a position in which he (a USAF general) has operational control of all air assets -- USAF, Navy, Marine and Army).

Reluctance of the Navy and Marine Corps to relinquish control of their aircraft stems from their different missions and responsibilities, standing operating procedures, and doctrinal mind sets as well as an ingrained resistance to possible loss of their own flexibility and degradation of their roles and missions and associated fiscal (budget) support. Nevertheless, under the unique conditions existing in the Vietnam War, it would appear that a more centralized control of all air operations might have been more beneficial to the total effort. In this context, one overlooked aspect has been the subordination of a Marine Air-Ground component to a Joint Service Force (MACV) which, in theory at least, authorized COMUSMACV to direct his Marine component commander to perform whatever aviation tasks might be needed in the common interest.

The use of marine mines was severely limited in Vietnam despite the recognized effectiveness of mining in restricted waterways and harbors in past wars. It was not until early 1967 that marine mines were used to hinder waterborne resupply by the enemy. Mines were planted selectively by aircraft in the mouths of only five North Vietnamese rivers. Three months later, observations in the areas showed that the movement of war supplies in those areas had come almost to a complete stop. Despite those results, for political reasons, the US failed to employ mines in the major North Vietnamese ports of Haiphong, Hon Gai and Cam Pha until May, 1972. Mining of those harbors was so effective that no ocean vessels transited those ports from the placement of the mines until thirteen months later when the mines were removed by the US Navy. Communist merchant vessels in the harbor at the time of mining had not been able to leave the harbor during the entire period. (Yet they had a 72 hour period of "grace"; why did they sit?)

When it was available, naval gunfire support provided considerable direct support to friendly troops. However, it was less effective in interdicting enemy supply lines. As with aerial bombing, constraints placed by Washington on attacking enemy shore targets diminished the value of naval gunfire in some cases. One of the principal limitations, however, was the decreasing availability of ships with the capability for shore bombardment.

Underway replenishment (UNREP) of the fleet was more common than in the past since ships spent a great proportion of their available time underway, and ports in the immediate area of the war zone could not be used for resupply of fleet units due to limited pier space and higher shipping priorities. As a consequence UNREP was developed almost to a science.

Amphibious operations in RVN introduced a host of new problems which impacted significantly on the doctrine contained in Naval Warfare Publication NWP-22B and required development of a CINCPACFLT/COMUSMACV "Agreement for US Naval Support Operations in RVN." That experience highlighted the need to evaluate amphibious doctrine in the context of new and changing situations, particularly when such operations are conducted against an

elusive enemy in a friendly country in which a US ground forces commander (COMUSMACV) has already been established ashore.

L. LESSONS

In a hostile environment, when aiding and advising naval forces of a smaller and less developed country without its own naval traditions, there is a tendency for the larger nation to do the job itself and, in the long run, to deprive the smaller partner of the evolutionary process necessary to develop the technical skills and master the art inherent in naval warfare.

In concert, the US Army, and Navy have developed useful tactics and techniques for riverine warfare, and that body of data should be kept current and available insofar as priorities and funding permit.

Modern Ro-Ro and Container ships and associated shore-side facilities are required for fast and secure loading and unloading in an expeditionary environment.

The Tactical Air Control System (TACS), or systems, employed in any theater of operations will be determined by the unified (or sub-unified) commander, subject to the guidance or concurrence of the JCS. The differences of opinion between the Navy, the Marines, and the Air Force on operational control of air assets are not likely to be resolved. Except for the naval forces assigned to a unified command, naval forces can be expected to operate in a supporting role with fleet defense as their highest priority. The same supporting relationship should be expected of Strategic Air Command units if they are employed in a tactical role. Operational control of shore-based Marine Corps fixed-wing assets will depend on the nature and duration of the contingency and the command relationships specified by the directing authority for any given operational commitment.

Air-planted marine mines are effective for interdicting inland and coastal waterways and ports, particularly when employed against an enemy

who lacks a sophisticated mine-sweeping capability; retention of this capability requires that the Navy personnel system have the means to identify regular and reserve aviators who have demonstrated skill in sowing minefields during actual operations.

Amphibious operations combining surface and heliborne assault continue to be useful in specialized circumstances. Existing doctrine must be reassessed in each case in a counterinsurgency environment, however, because of constraints that might be imposed by a host government or the senior US commander in the area.

ACRONYMS USED IN CHAPTER 7

AFS	Combat Stores Ship
AKA	Attack Cargo Ship
AOA	Amphibious Objective Area
AOE	Fast Combat Support Ship
APA	Attack Transport
APB	Self-propelled Barracks Ship
APD	High-speed Transport
APL	Barracks Craft Non-self-propelled
ARG/SLF	Amphibious Ready Group/Special Landing Force
ARL	Landing Craft Repair Shop
ASPB	Assault Support Patrol Boat
BLT	Battalion Landing Team
CINCFE	Commander in Chief Far East
CINCPACFLT	Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet
COMCBPAC	Commander Naval Construction Battalions, US Pacific Fleet
COMNAVFORV	Commander Naval Forces Vietnam
COMPHIBPAC	Commander, Amphibious Force, Pacific
COMSERVPAC	Commander Service Force, US Pacific Fleet
CNAG	Chief Naval Advisory Group
CTF	Commander Task Force
DER	Radar Picket Escort Ship
FEAF	Far East Air Forces
HSA	Headquarters Support Activity
JOC	Joint Operation Center
LCM	Landing Craft, Mechanized
LCU	Landing Craft, Utility
LCVP	Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel
LPH	Amphibious Assault Ship (Helicopter)
LSD	Dock Landing Ship
LSM	Landing Ship, Medium

LSSL	Support Landing Ship, Large
LST	Tank Landing Ship
MATSB	Mobile Advance Tactical Support Base
MCB	Mobile Construction Battalion
MEDCAP	Medical Civil Action Program
MRF	Mobile Riverine Force
MSB	Mobile Support Base
MSO	Mine Sweeper, Ocean Going
MSTS	Military Sea Transportation Service
NAVFE	Naval Forces Far East
NCR	Naval Construction Regiment
NSA	Naval Support Activity
PACAF	Pacific Air Forces
PBR	Patrol Boat River
PCF	Patrol Craft (Swift)
RAG	River Assault Group
RAS	River Assault Squadrons
SEAL	Sea, Land, Air (Teams)
SFCP	Shore Fire Control Parties
SLF	Special Landing Force
STAT	Seabee Technical Assistance Teams
TERM	Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission
TRIM	Training Relations and Instruction Mission
USAID	Agency for International Development
USOM	US Operations Mission
VERTREP	Vertical Replenishment
WPB	Coast Guard Patrol Boat
YMS	Auxiliary Motor Mine Sweeper
YRBM	Repair, Berthing and Messing Barge

CHAPTER 7 ENDNOTES

All documents cited as references in this chapter are unclassified sources. To confirm and assure the accuracy of certain data, and to identify additional references that might have been overlooked in the preparation of the unclassified references, considerable research was performed utilizing official classifed reports, summaries, studies and other documents which are in the custody of Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C. BDM acknowledges the assistance of that office in identifying key documents and in elaborating on some of the material covered. Particularly, the assistance of Mr. Edward J. Marolda, Historian, is recognized and appreciated for insights provided with regard to important developments and sequences of events.

The following classified references were thoroughly reviewed:

- History of US Navy Operations in Vietnam - 1964, Volume II, Naval History Division, Feb. 1970 (S).
- History of US Naval Operations in the Vietnam Conflict - 1965-67, Volume III, Parts 1, 2, and 3. Naval History Division, Feb. 1971 (S).
- Naval History Summaries - Monthly Highlights, January 1965 to December 1967, Naval History Division (S).

CHAPTER 7 ENDNOTES

1. The historical development of the Pacific Command is derived primarily from the annual Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command History. These documents are classified overall Top Secret and are available at the Naval Historical Center, Naval History Division Operational Archives, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. The assistance of Dr. Dean Allard, archivist, and Mr. Edward Marolda, who is preparing the second volume in the series The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict, is greatly appreciated.

2. Edwin Bickford Hooper, Dean C. Allard, and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict, Volume I, The Setting of the Stage to 1959 (Washington: Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1976), pp. 381-382, 140. In the 1949 and subsequent amendments to the National Security Act of 1947 the authority of the Secretaries and Service Chiefs was significantly limited, and they were removed from the operational chain of command. Only in their corporate role as members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff do the chiefs have any operational responsibility.

3. Interview with Mr. Edward Marolda, historian, Naval History Division, Washington Navy Yard, 5 December 1979.

4. USN and the VN Conflict, p. 48.

5. Samuel E. Morison, Liberation in the Philippines 1944-1945, Vol. XIII of History of United States Naval Operations in World War II (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1959), pp. 165, 169; Jacques Mordal, The Navy in Indochina, (Paris: Amiot-Dumont, 1953) Trans. Williams & Atkinson, pp. 75-80.

6. TG 38.2 Action Report, ser. 0047 of 26 January 1945.

7. Directive 326 of 28 January 1944 in Imperial Gen. HQ Directive, Vol II, p. 5. The Japanese attacked French troops in Indochina on 9 March 1945 and killed or disarmed many troops. Requests for evacuation to China by the French were not answered by the US. Previous orders from President Roosevelt to refuse aid to the French in Indochina prevented the dropping of any supplies to the French until 18 March when Admiral Leahy authorized aid.

8. Msg, CG US Forces, India-Burma Theater 110926, September 1945.

9. Robert McClintock, "The River War in Indochina," USNI (US Naval Institute) Proceedings, December 1954.

10. Vo Nguyen Giap, The Military Art of People's War: Selected Writings of Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1970), pp. 82-83.

11. Hooper, p. 128.

12. Mordal, The Navy in Indochina, p. 239; Bernard B. Fall, Street Without Joy, p. 44. According to Fall, a French Army Commander indicated, "For the first time, our armed forces have created a flexible, strategic instrument, ... capable of action in every region without .... the bonds of territorial security."

13. The US Navy and the Vietnam Conflict, Vol I, p. 138.

14. McClintock, p. 1311.

15. USN and the VN Conflict, Vol. I, p. 247.

16. USN and the VN Conflict, pp. 207-210. The Navarre Plan was a new aggressive concept for conduct of the Indochina War as developed by General Henri Navarre. The plan is described in some detail in this reference.

17. CDR R. I. Schreadley, USN, "The Naval War in Vietnam, 1950-1970." USNI Proceedings, Naval Review Issue, May 1971, pp. 180-209.

18. Colonel V. J. Croizat, USMC "Vietnamese Naval Forces: Origin of the Species," USNI Proceedings, February 1973, p. 53.

19. NA Saigon, report, 14-56 of 7 February 1956, JN 62-A-2199, Box 80, FRC.

20. Schreadley, p. 185. Interview with Mr. Edward J. Marolda, historian, Naval History Division, Washington, D.C., 19 December 1979. He indicated that in addition to reluctance of the South Vietnamese to authorize US ships to stop and search their flag vessels, the US did not want to assume that much responsibility then for operational involvement. Consequently, it was a desire of both governments that this authority be limited.

21. The Bucklew Report to COMUSMACV, 15 February 1964.

22. Schreadley, p. 186.

23. US Information Service, Special Report. The Evidence at Vung Ro Bay, February 23, 1965.

24. Schreadley, pp. 188. COMUSMACV requested CINCPAC and CINCPACFLT to send representativess to Saigon to plan a combined US-Vietnamese Navy patrol effort. The conference was held 3 March 1965 and in the following week the basic concepts of the patrol operation were worked out. It was the opinion of the conferees that "the best tactic to interdict coastal traffic infiltration would be to assist the Vietnamese Navy to increase the quality and quantity of its searches".

25. VADM E. B. Hooper, USN, Mobility, Support, Endurance (Washington, D.C., Naval History Division, 1972). p. 130. Operational control of Market Time was shifted from Com Seventh Fleet to Chief Naval Advisory Group on 30 July 1965 and TF 115 was formally established on that date. When Chief Naval Advisory Group was also made Commander Naval Forces Vietnam (COMNAVFORV), CTF 115 was placed under that command.

26. According to Lt. J. F. Ebersole, USCG, who served as the Commanding Officer, CGC Point Grace in Coast Guard Division 13 at Cat Lo, Vietnam the Vietnamese were notoriously bad ship handlers and the delay encountered in bringing sampans and junks alongside the WPB reduced the number of boardings in a given area to an unacceptable degree. Also the WPB suffered reduced mobility which precluded a quick response to intercept an evading junk.

27. Schreadley, p. 191.

28. Ibid., p. 270.

29. LCol. P. L. Hilgartner, "Amphibious Doctrine in Vietnam," Marine Corps Gazette, January 1969, p. 29.

30. Ibid., pp. 29-30

31. BG E. H. Simmons, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam, 1965-1966", USNI Proceedings, Naval Review 1968, p. 6. The heavy influx of Marines from Okinawa saturated the airfield facilities and prevented the conduct of normal flight operations. After two days things were back to normal and the airlift continued.

32. Ibid., p. 19.

33. Ibid., p. 27.

34. BG E. H. Simmons USMC, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam, 1967". USNI Proceedings, Naval Review, 1969, p. 116.

35. Ibid., p. 117.

36. BG E. H. Simmons USMC, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam", 1969-1972, USNI Proceedings, Naval Review 1973, p. 199.

37. Ibid., p. 207.

38. MG E. J. Miller, USMC, and RADM W. D. Toole, USN, "Amphibious Forces: The Turning Point," USNI Proceedings, November 1974, p. 28-32.

39. Captain W. C. Wells, USN, "The Riverine Force in Action, 1966-1967," USNI Proceedings, Naval Review 1969, p. 144.

40. Taken from "The Riverine Force in Action, 1966-1967."

41. Schreadley, p. 194.

42. Fulton, Riverine Operations, 1966-1969, pp. 58, 59. The Army was somewhat miffed when the Navy refused to accept a doctrinal manual prepared by the Army. Questions regarding implementation of the MRF concept could not always be easily resolved and had to be referred to higher command. This was apparently a chronic problem with command relationships in Vietnam. See Pages 85-87. On one occasion in September 1968 the MRF was moving down a river in column when it received a few B-40 rounds from the shore by a hamlet. The battalion commander, LTC William Ankley, USA, immediately asked the Navy Commander, who had operational control while afloat, to land the battalion. The commander refused to do so until the column rounded a bend in the river. By that time the enemy could no longer be found. This incident involving a command and control problem was observed and recounted by the MACJ-52, Col. J. A. MacDonald USMC, who was aloft with the 2nd Brigade Commander flying over the MRF at that time.

43. CDR S. A. Swarztrauber, USN, "River Patrol Relearned," USNI Proceedings, Naval Review 1970, p. 125.

44. Ibid., p. 125

45. LCDR R. E. Mumford, USN, "Jackstay: New Dimensions in Amphibious Warfare", USNI Proceedings, Naval Review, 1968.

46. Swarztrauber, p. 143.

47. Schreadley, p. 197.

48. Ibid., p. 199 and Swartztrauber, p. 152.

49. Schreadley, p. 200.

50. Ibid., pp. 202-204.

51. Swarztrauber, p. 157.

52. Capt. C. J. Merdinger, CEC, USN, "Civil Engineers, Seabees, and Bases in Vietnam," USNI Proceedings, Naval Review, May 1970, p. 258.

53. Hooper, p. 14.

54. Ibid., p. 270.

55. Ibid., p. 264.

56. LCdr. A. N. Olsen, CEC, USN, "Teaming Up to Build a Nation," USNI Proceedings, October 1969, p. 35.; Hooper, Mobility, Support, Endurance, p. 14.

57. CDR W. D. Middleton, CEC, USN, "The Seabees at Dong Xoai - A New Kind of Fighting Man," USNI Proceedings, January 1972.

58. VADM M. W. Cagle, USN, "Task Force 77 in Action off Vietnam," USNI Proceedings, Naval Review, 1972, p. 68.

59. Ibid., pp. 68, 94. Monsoon weather was a key factor in the bombing interdiction effort against North Vietnam. Rain and low clouds served to hide enemy gun and missile emplacements and made early detection of missile launching by attacking pilots particularly difficult. US pilots were forced to fly below cloud layers where they were far more vulnerable to enemy fire. Poor flying weather and cloud cover also gave the enemy more opportunity to repair bridges, roads and rail lines to keep the supply lines moving. Due to the system of target selection and attack designation from Washington, the unpredictability of the weather proved to be a serious impediment.

60. Ibid., p. 95.

61. National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) No. 328, 6 April 1965.

62. Cagle, p. 108. The remote control of certain aspects of the Vietnam War gave on-scene commanders considerable problems. Recommendations in the field were not followed. In the early part of the war the kind, size and number of bombs to be dropped, and the number and type of aircraft to carry them were specified by Washington.

63. Gen. W. W. Momyer, USAF, Air Power in Three Wars, (Wash., D.C.: GPO 1978), p. 95. General Momyer called the route package system "a compromise approach to a tough command and control decision, an approach which, however understandable, inevitably prevented a unified, concentrated air effort." He also stated, "Dividing North Vietnam into route packages compartmentalized our air power and reduced its capabilities."

64. Ibid., pp. 57-62.

65. Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF), Joint Chiefs of Staff Publication 2 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1974), p. 56.

66. Korean Conflict, Study No. 71, July 1950, p. 12.

67. LTG Keith B. McCutcheon, USMC, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962-1970", in The Marines in Vietnam 1954-1973, an anthology and annotated bibliography, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, US Marine Corps, p. 174-175. Reprinted from the Naval Review 1971 of the US Naval Institute (pp. 134-135 in Naval Review)

68. Ibid., 177 (p. 137 in Naval Review)

69. Cagle, p. 108.

70. Ibid., p. 107. To a land lubber, the Navy argument is a straw man. There was no appreciable air or naval threat in the Gulf of Tonkin. Had there been, surely the carriers would have remained underway. As it was, use of carriers obviated the need for building additional airfields and eliminated the need for multi-battalion security ashore.

71. Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh, Office of Air Force History (Washington, D.C.: USAF, 1973), p. 60.

72. U.S. Seventh Fleet, Monthly Historical Summary, February 1968, p. 1 and March 1968, p. 1.

73. TG 77.4 Operations Report February 1968 and March 1968.

74. Cagle, p. 95. These craft were abbreviated WBLC (Waterborne logistic craft) in reports and messages and were commonly referred to by pilots and others as "Wiblicks."

75. RADM Brian McCauley, "Operation End Sweep" USNI Proceedings, March 1974, p. 25.

76. Cornelius D. Sullivan; George Fielding Eliot; Gordon D. Gayle; William R. Corson, The Vietnam War: Its Conduct and Higher Direction, Center for Strategic Studies, Georgetown University, p. 59. In May of 1966, ground and naval cooperation reached a new height when a 100-truck convoy was successfully moved along a dangerous stretch of Highway 1 with the USS Oklahoma City "riding shotgun" a short distance offshore. The VC had learned enough about the accuracy and force of naval gunfire to avoid such a direct challenge. It should be noted that the Fleet Marine Forces include Air-Naval Gunfire Liaison Companies (ANGLICO) from which teams are formed for attachment to US Army or Allied units at battalion or higher level to provide tactical air control parties (TACP) and/or shore fire control parties (SFCP).

77. Hooper, p. 243.

78. Ibid., p. 245. The 5"/38 projectiles were provided with point detonating fuses in lieu of antiair fuses. In the first two days of usage off Vietnam, three destroyers experienced low order premature explosions in their barrels. Usage was suspended and the cause was determined. Plastic liners were shipped to the destroyers and allowances were reduced until additional rounds could be modified.

79. BG E. H. Simmons, USMC, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam," 1968, USNI Proceedings, Naval Review 1970, p. 315.

80. Captain John J. Herzog USN (Ret.) who commanded a destroyer task unit, initiated the concept of using SHRIKE missiles aboard destroyers. These antiradiation missiles (ARM) proved invaluable in suppressing radar-controlled shore fire. BDM study team interview with Captain John J. Herzog, 7 December 1979.

81. Hooper, p. 6.

82. Ibid., p. 19. Two complementary chains of command existed in the Pacific: the unified command structure responsible for operational control and Service coordination, and that of the individual Military Services participating. Each service was responsible for the preparation and support of its own forces.

83. Hooper.

84. Hooper

85. Ibid., p. 14.

86. Ibid., p. 14. This number consisted of 14,697 Army advisors, 900 Marines, 6,604 Air Force personnel, and 1,109 Navy personnel, 610 of whom were at HSA Saigon. In addition, some 2,700 US Government civilians and dependents received support to varying degrees.

87. Admiral U.S.G. Sharp USN and General W. C. Westmoreland, USA, Report on the War in Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 55.

88. E. B. Hooper, p. 84. Life magazine, in late December 1965, stated that the average delay in Da Nang was over forty days. Only two ships ever reached that point due to a need to get higher priority cargoes ashore. The highest average delay was less than eighteen days.

89. Ibid., Chapter XII. The bases and their particular function or contribution are described in some detail in the chapter cited.

90. Hooper, p. 4.

91. LTG Victor H. Krulak, USMC (Ret.) Oral History Collection, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, US Marine Corps. Interview 20 June 1970, Series V, pp. 16-17.

CHAPTER 8
UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE

Chapter deleted (pp. 8-1 to 8-31).

Endnotes retained for sourcing.

CHAPTER 8 ENDNOTES

1. John F. Kennedy "Speech before the graduating class at West Point, June 1962," The Public Papers of the President: John F. Kennedy, 1962, Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1963, p. 454.

2. General Lemnitzer quoted by General Yarborough, Address at the Special Forces Association, June 25, 1979, p. 3. General Lemnitzer's comment was made on April 18, 1961, predating the Kennedy quote, but the president had voiced similar views much earlier and so General Lemnitzer's remark is appropriate.

3. Department of Defense, Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms; JCS Pub. 1, Washington, D.C. USG GPO, 1979, p. 361.

4. National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 57, "Paramilitary Operations," 1961. NSAM 57 specifies that in the case of large scale paramilitary operations the Department of Defense would have primary responsibility. This policy evolved out of the Bay of Pigs failure wherein the CIA organized, planned and conducted a major joint military operation.

5. Interview with Col. Roger Pezzelle US Army (Ret.), BDM, McLean, VA, March 4, 1980.

6. Neil Sheehan, Hedrick Smith, E. W. Kenworthy, and Fox Butterfield, The Pentagon Papers, (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 278.

7. W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell, eds., The Lessons of Vietnam, (New York: Crane, Russak & Co., 1977), pp. 14-15. Also see Vol. V, Chapter 2, for discussion of U.S. objectives in Vietnam. It is the latter task, overthrow of the DRV, that might have called for the Special Forces to execute their primary mission, that of organizing insurgencies within North Vietnam.

8. Francis J. Kelly, US Army Special Forces 1961-1971, (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1975), p. 172.

9. General Yarborough, Address at Special Forces Association, June 25, 1979, pp. 3-4; and Thompson and Frizzel, p. 254.

10. Guenter Lewy, America in Vietnam, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 85; Thompson & Frizzel, p. 247.

11. Douglas S. Blaufarb, The Counterinsurgency Era: US Doctrine and Performance 1950 to the Present, (New York: The Free Press, 1977) pp. 52-53. General Maxwell Taylor also commented on President Kennedy's keen interest in getting counterinsurgency moving. Interview with General Maxwell D. Taylor, US Army (Ret), US Air Force Oral History Program, Interview No. 501, 11 January 1972, Declassified 1978.

12. National Security Action Memorandum No. 2, dated Feb 3, 1961.

13. National Security Action Memorandum, No. 28, dated March 9, 1961.

14. Kelly, pp. 5-6.

15. James Lawton Collins, Jr., The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950-1972, (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1975), p. 20.

16. William Colby, Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), pp. 165, 166.

17. Ibid., Colby explains the use of Special Forces personnel as necessary in order to avoid the accusation that the CIA was developing a "private army." Clearly the CIA lacked the numbers of trained personnel to meet the manpower requirements of the CIDG program.

18. Kelly, pp. 28-30.

19. Colby, p. 169.

20. Collins, p. 40.

21. Thompson and Frizzell, pp. 248 & 255, Kelly, p. 12-14.

22. Colby, pp. 169 & 219.

23. Thompson & Frizzel, p. 254. Supra note 4. The Commander in Chief, US Army Pacific, General Collins commented that, "Some of these Special Force fellows were really putting on a show and they were going to do as they damn pleased. And it was getting out of hand, and between them and the CIA, we got that squared away." Obviously General Collins leaned toward the more conventional operations. Interview with General James F. Collins, US Army (Ret), US Army Military History Research Collection, Senior officer's Debriefing Program. US Army War College, October 1975, P. 4-9.

24. Colby, p. 219.

25. Thompson and Frizzell, p. 253.

26. Thompson and Frizzel, p.248.

27. Thompson and Frizzell, pp. 251-253.

28. Kelly, p. 215.

29. Ibid., p. 12; also Thompson & Frizzell, p. 252.

30. General Bruce Palmer, Remarks at the Army War College, May 31, 1977, p. 16.

31. William C. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1976), p. 198.

32. Bernard W. Rogers, Cedar Falls - Junction City: A Turning Point, (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1974), p. 11.

33. Collins, p. 54.

34. Palmer, p. 16.

35. Kelly, p. 108. In September 1968, then-Colonel Harold Arron, CO 5th Special Forces at Nha Trang stated that the job of the Special Forces was to do themselves out of a job. He was in the process of turning over the CIDG camps to the ARVN Special Forces. This comment was made to the MACV J-52.

36. Collins, pp. 74-75.

37. Sir Robert Thompson, "Lessons from the Vietnam War," Report of a Seminar Held at the Royal United Service Institution February 12, 1969, (London: Royal United Service Institution, 1969, p. 2.

38. John D. Howard, "A French Experience in Indochina," Military Review, April 1976, pp. 76-81.

39. Lamar McFadden Prosser, "The Bloody Lessons of Indochina," The Army Combat Forces Journal, June 1955, pp. 24-30.

40. Bernard B. Fall, Street Without Joy: Indochina War, 1946-1955. (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Co., 1961), p. 296.

41. Thomson and Frizzell, p. 255.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., p. 253.

44. Lewy, p. 439; Thompson and Frizzell, p. 255.

45. Blaufarb, p. 214.

46. Colby, pp. 271-272. The US House of Representatives, Committee on Government Operations, US Assistance Program in Vietnam, Hearings, 92d. Cong., 1st sess., July 15 - August 2, 1971, p. 183, shows a total of 20,587 VCI killed from 1968 through May 1971 as a result of Phoenix Operations.

47. Ibid. pp. 233-234.

48. Thomas C. Thayer, How to Analyze a War Without Fronts: Vietnam 1965-1972. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (PA&E), Washington, D.C. Journal of Defense Research, Series B. Tactical Warfare Analysis of Vietnam Data. Volume 7B Number 3, Fall 1975. Prepared by Battelle Columbus Laboratories for ARPA of the DOD. Declassified December 31, 1978, p. 913. Hereafter cited as JDRB.

    At the BDM Vietnam Study Senior Review Panel on February 13, 1979, Ambassador William Colby described the Phoenix program as one designed to develop the political order of battle of the VCI. He believed that the data were kept in the Vietnamese language. The program brought many of the VCI into the open, but Mr. Colby stated that we should have developed the political order of battle much sooner.

49. Lewy, pp. 281-284; Colby, pp. 267-269.

50. Blaufarb, pp. 247-248.

51. Tran Van Don, Our Endless War: Inside Vietnam (San Rafael, Ca.: Presidio Press, 1978), p. 159.

52. JDRB, pp. 913-914.

53. The incumbent MACJ-52 was among those whose duties required a general acquaintance with Phoenix operations, according to a former J-52, Col. J. A. MacDonald, USMC (Ret.).

54. Data on the SEALS is based on discussions on March 10, 1980 with MG Bernard Trainor, USMC, Director, Marine Corps Education Center, formerly SOG operations officer (1965-66) in Danang; Captain Edward Lyon III, USN, OP-372, formerly assistant SOG operations officer to General Traynor; and Commander Richard Marcinko, USN, op-612D, formerly assigned as a SEAL commander with the PRU's. Commander Marcinko served two tours in RVN and later commanded SEAL-2.

55. Tran Van Don, p. 157; Lewy, p. 280.

56. Blaufarb, p. 247.

57. Tran Van Don, p. 159.

58. Lewy, pp. 280-284.

59. Blaufarb, p. 247.

60. Lewy, p. 281. Yet Thayer points out that in the 15 months from January 1970 through March 1971, less than two percent of all VCI put out of action were specifically targeted and killed by Phoenix direct action forces. While that statistic does not completely refute allegations that Phoenix was used as a convenient way to assassinate political enemies, it seems clear that assassinations constituted a very small part of the number of persons killed. JDRB, p. 916.

61. Blaufarb, p. 247; Lewy, pp. 280-284.

62. Colby, p. 276.

63. JDRB, pp. 915, 918.

64. Edward G. Lansdale, MG, USAF, (Ret.), in a letter to Donald D. Blackburn, dated January 18, 1973.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Hedrick Smith, "The Kennedy Years," in Sheehan, The Pentagon Papers, pp. 79-82; and Inter-Departmental Task Force in Vietnam draft Memorandum for the President, April 26, 1961, "A Program of Action to Prevent Communist Domination of South Vietnam." Department of Defense, United States - Vietnam Relations 1945-1967 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1971) Book II, Tab V. B.4. pp. 42-56. Hereafter cited as DOD US/VN Relations. Of the 400 Special Forces troops authorized in the presidential action, only 52 were to be immediately deployed. The overall total of 400, however, provided the basis for ultimate establishment of US Army Special Forces Group (Provisional), Vietnam, which did not actually occur until 1962 when Operations Switchback took effect.

68. BG Edward G. Lansdale, USAF, memorandum to General Maxwell D. Taylor, military advisor to the president, undated but apparently from July 1961, "Resources for Unconventional Warfare, S.E. Asia." Cited in part in Neil Sheehan et al. The Pentagon Papers as Published by the New York Times (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 131. The US National Security Council Planning Board issued a statement of policy, NSC 5612/1, on September 5, 1956, which included a basis for the later UW operations. Among the objectives listed for Vietam was that of weakening the communists of both North and South Vietnam.

69. Sheehan, The Pentagon Papers, pp. 82-83.

70. National Security Action Memorandum No. 52 (NSAM 52) May 11, 1961. DOD US/VN Relations, Book 11, Tab V, B. 4. pp. 136-160. Also see Sheehan, p. 124.

71. William Colby, Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), p. 170.

72. Sheehan, p. 82, and Colby, p. 219. Also see Nguyen Cao Ky, Twenty Years and Twenty Days (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1976), pp. 23-27 for a brief description of the training involved in preparing to drop agents.

73. Colby, p. 220. Colby states that the populace control in North Vietnam was far more tight than that of the Germans and Japanese experienced by OSS in World War II and considered to be preclusive of penetration by those techniques. He provides no indication of the advance preparation of the areas of infiltration or the extent of CIA detailed knowledge of those areas, or the size of the teams used in the infiltration attempts, or other factors of importance in such operations. Conditions, even popular attitude, in North Vietnam in the early 1960's certainly were a far cry from enemy occupied areas in World War II, where sympathy for the foreign enemy could be expected to be practically non-existent. Without a thorough examination of all the factors involved, the ultimate potential for successful clandestine operations in North Vietnam is difficult to assess. However, it is certain that propaganda, using radio broadcasts, leaflet drops and 'deception actions' unsupported by any visible presence on the ground or basis for hope could not realistically be expected to elicit much useful response from a controlled population (which probably believed it was listening to the enemy).

74. Ibid., pp. 219-220.

75. This attitude would be impossible if COMUSMACV were designated COMUSSEASIA, with the proper authority of a theater commander. Had the principles of security been the paramount consideration in some of SOG's organizational arrangements, one could better rationalize the result. But security does not appear to have been the driving factor in much of SOG's organizational arrangement. The driving factors appeared to be political considerations, service prerogatives, and civilian-military "competition."

76. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 107.

77. Interview with BG Donald D. Blackburn, US Army (Ret.), Oct. 1979, at The BDM Corporation. Gen Blackburn was the third SOG commander (1965-1966).

78. Ibid. The Studies and Observations Group appeared on the MACV organization chart as a staff element under the J5 (Plans) initially and later under the J3 (Operations), as a part of its overall cover. Generally, personnel assigned to SOG headquarters were carried on MACV lists, irrespective of their branch of service. At the operational level, in the field, status varied by service. For example, Army personnel, largely from the total Special Forces manpower resources, were carried on the rolls of the 5th Special Forces Group (Abn) as indicated, but detached for duty with sub elements of SOG, where they wore the Green Beret and other trappings of the 5th Special Forces Group, including unit identifications. The units, however, were not in the 5th Special Forces Group (Abn) and the 5th Special Forces Group (Abn) was not in SOG. As a further example, "Tour 365" a release of the USARV Information Office, lists the Congressional Medals of Honor for Army personnel through 1970 and includes 12 persons with unit designations of 5th Special Forces Group (Abn). Five of those shown were actually from SOG (Zabitosky, Sisler, Kendenburg, Howard, and Miller). The Air Force, on the other hand, had the 90th Special Operations Wing, including both fixed-wing (C-130E and C-123) and rotary wing (UH-IN) aircraft supporting SOG on a "dedicated" basis; but the units were not assigned to SOG. The USAF units were assigned to the 7th Air Force and although their assets were used solely in support of SOG, their missions were "fragged" by 7th Air Force based on SOG requests, not orders. To complete the picture a few Navy and Marine Corps personnel were assigned to SOG on an individual basis.

79. Interview with Col. Roger Pezzelle, US Army (Ret.), Oct. 1979, at The BDM Corporation. Colonel Pezzelle was Chief of the Operations and Training Division (OP-30) of SOG in 1971 and later commander of the Ground Studies Group (1971-72). There was at least one important exception to the similarity between SOG/VN relationships and 5th Special Forces/VN relationships -- SOG leaders commanded all camps and combined operations in the field. Thus SOG did not experience many of the problems the 5th Special Forces unit leaders had with counterparts where an advisory relationship existed.

80. Blackburn interview.

81. Neil Sheehan, "The Covert War and Tonkin Gulf: February-August, 1964," in Sheehan, The Pentagon Papers, p. 235.

82. Ibid.

83. Blackburn interview.

84. Sheehan, p. 240.

85. Interview with Commander Robert Terry, US Navy (Ret.), at The BDM Corporation in October 1979. Cdr. Terry was the commander of the US Navy Advisory Detachment, SOG, 1966-1967.

86. Westmoreland, Soldier pp. 108-109.

87. Terry interview.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Department of Defense, "Report on Selected Air and Ground Operations in Cambodia and Laos," 10 September 1973. A Report to the Congress. US ground force personnel participated in 1652 reconnaissance missions during the period September 1965 through February 1971. Over 2,550 helicopter gunships and 4,787 fixed-wing air support sorties were flown in support of those operations. Security considerations required that Laos not be revealed as the area of operations. This report is cited hereafter as DOD Report of Cross-Border Ops. Also Blackburn interview.

91. Interviews with Blackburn and Pezzelle; Westmoreland, Soldier, p. 107.

92. Blackburn interview.

93. DOD Report of Cross-Border Ops, pp. 25-32. The ARVN's Phu Dung operations replaced the US PRAIRIE FIRE cross-border operations in March 1971. The ARVN ground forces received US air support, including nearly 200 reconnaissance missions, 900 helicopter gunships sorties, and 600 tactical air support sorties.

94. General Richard G. Stilwell, US Army (Ret). Former COMUSMACTHAI/CHJUSMAAGTHAI who had responsibility for US military support in Laos (1965-1967), in an interview at The BDM Corporation, 24 September 1979.

95. The SOG cross-border operations were given a number of nicknames over time. They were:

LAOS	CAMBODIA	DMZ
Shining Brass	Daniel Boone	Nickel Steel
Prairie Fire	Salem House	
Phu Dung	Thot Not	

The following tables reflect the magnitude of SOG cross-border operations in Laos and Cambodia:

LAOS

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971-Apr 1972
Missions							
Reconnaissance Team	7	105	187	271	404	422	183
Platoon	0	12	71	56	48	16	13
Multi-Platoon	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
TOTAL	7	117	258	327	452	441	196
Helicopter Gunship Sorties	UNK	130	329	287	689	1116	993
TACAIR Sorties	155	405	1157	635	1016	1419	623
Enemy Prisoners	UNK	12	10	1	0	3	0
Intelligence Reports	21	371	774	410	748	553	175

CAMBODIA

	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971-Apr 1972
Missions					
Reconnaissance Team	99	287	454	550	437
Platoon	0	0	0	16	22
Multi-Platoon	0	0	0	3	9
TOTAL	99	287	454	577	468
Helicopter Gunship Sorties	67	359	398	1548	568
TACAIR Sorties	34	48	0	1239	659
Enemy Prisoners Captured	2	3	4	9	6
Intelligence Reports	297	373	607	485	359

96. Pezzelle interview.

97. Interviews with Blackburn and Terry. General Westmoreland points to DRV's jamming of SOG radio broadcasts as an indication that the broadcasts enjoyed some success. Westmoreland, Soldier, p. 109.

98. Blackburn interview.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid.

101. Pezzelle interview.

102. Ibid.

103. This brief section on the Son Tay raid is based mainly on information provided by BG Donald D. Blackburn, US Army (Ret.) who was the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Admiral Moorer, at the time of the Son Tay raid. The excellent book by Benjamin F. Schemmer, The Raid (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), is the most accurate public account of that raid. Much of Mr. Schemmer's background information was provided by General Blackburn and then-Colonel Edward E. Mayer, Chief of the Special Operations Division of SACSA and later, until his death in July 1979, an Assistant Vice President in The BDM Corporation. During the early stages of preparing this volume, Mr. Mayer vouched for the authenticity of The Raid, as did General Blackburn. It is the best and most authoritative unclassified account of the preparations for and conduct of the Son Tay raid.

104. Schemmer, pp. 263-267.

105. Melvin R. Laird in testimony before the committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, Ninety-First Congress, 2d session, December 13, 1976.

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