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**SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW
SOMETHING BORROWED, SOMETHING BLUE:
THE MARRIAGE OF STRATEGY AND TACTICS
IN VIETNAM**

**A Monograph
by
Major Jack E. Pattison
Infantry**

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**School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
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This monograph concludes that there is evidence of the practice of operational art in Operation Cedar Falls and Junction City. By having fairly sound doctrine as expressed in the 1962 FM 100-5, the linkage of the operational level of war to the tactical level of war was adequate. However, the linkage of the operational level of war to the strategic level of war was lacking. The bottom line was that we conducted operational art in Vietnam, but not very well.

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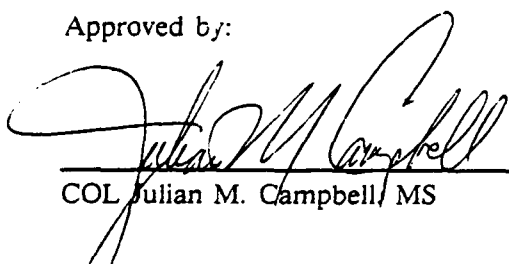
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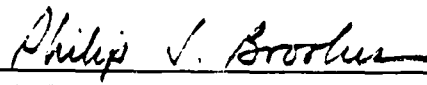
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ABSTRACT

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING BORROWED, SOMETHING BLUE: THE MARRIAGE OF STRATEGY AND TACTICS IN VIETNAM by Major Jack E. Pattison, USA, 53 pages.

This monograph discusses operational art in Vietnam. The research question used to focus this study effort was how did the United States perform in conducting operational art in Vietnam? Since operational art is the vital link between strategy and tactics, this title captures the essence of the monograph.

After a brief introduction, the monograph reviews and analyzes the Army's doctrine for the Vietnam war, FM 100-5 (1962). That doctrine was found to be sound. It was particularly strong in describing unconventional warfare, military operations against irregular forces, situations short of war, the spectrum of war and limited war. It was noticeably weak in describing infiltration and the articulation of theater operations. Current doctrine and contemporary writings were reviewed in order to establish and define operational art and the operational level of war. Criteria for judging or determining evidence of operational art can be found on pages 9, 10, 31 and 32 of that manual. Two major operations of America's involvement in the Vietnam war are reviewed and analyzed in order to distill any evidence of operational art. Operations Cedar Falls and Junction City were selected because they occurred after the major introduction of American ground forces in 1965 and before the American Congress and public support for the war began to wane in 1968.

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I. INTRODUCTION

"We therefore conclude that war does not belong in the realm of arts and sciences; rather it is part of man's social existence."¹

Clausewitz

Why did America fail in Vietnam? Writers, historians, political scientists and others have produced volumes on this subject. It is a subject that spurs impassioned debate in every quarter. Part of this debate within the profession of arms, specifically the United States Army, has centered on the operational level of war. Current U.S. Army doctrine has emphasized and revitalized focus and attention on the operational level of war. The purpose of this monograph is to answer the question: How did the United States perform in conducting operational art in Vietnam?

Operational art is the vital link between a nation's strategy and the tactics employed by its armed forces on the battlefield. It is "the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater...through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations".²

The debate of America's failure in Vietnam spans a wide range of reasons. The politicians tied the military's hands is a common reason often cited. Another reason discussed is that the Vietnam War was an aberrant conflict, and a conflict such as it will not have to be fought in the future. A most interesting reason of late is that America forgot how to

conduct theater operations--what is now called the operational level of war--since the end of World War II and hence, failed to link tactical actions to strategic ends in Vietnam.

This monograph will review and analyze two of the major operations of the Vietnam War in order to identify evidence of operational art. The methodology used here will start by identifying and reviewing the doctrine then and now in order to establish an anchor to the doctrinal base. Those doctrines will be compared and contrasted. The 1962 edition of FM 100-5, Field Service Regulations-Operations, expressed the doctrine for much of the Vietnam War. The change to that manual published in 1964 was really very little, mostly cosmetic. The Army's doctrine remained essentially unchanged. The 1968 edition of FM 100-5 will show some changes to doctrine, but not significant changes.

The two operations analyzed are Cedar Falls (January 1967) and Junction City (February-May 1967). These two operations were selected for a number of reasons. First, they were among the largest operations of the war and were joint and combined actions. Second, they occurred after the introduction of major American combat forces in mid-1965 and after America's first major success on the battlefield, the battle of the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965. And third, these two major operations occurred before the 1968 Tet

offensive, the cataclysmic series of events that turned the American public and Congress against the war.

The standards or criteria used to determine whether those operations were operational art conducted at the operational level of war can be found in the 1986 edition of FM 100-5. Those standards are best expressed as questions: What was the goal? Was it understood? Were there clear decisions about when and where to fight? Was there an understanding of the relationship of means to ends? What military condition must be produced to achieve the goal? Were the actions sequenced? Were sufficient resources applied to accomplish the sequence of actions?

In addition to answering the research question, the corresponding analysis of this research should help identify lessons learned and perhaps some lessons we have not learned. By distilling implications for the future, this research may shed light on conflict that may be likely during the next quarter century and therefore help to prepare the Army for war.

As this analysis begins, it is necessary to establish a common understanding of a few terms used throughout this monograph. Theater is defined in JCS Pub 1 as "the geographic area outside the continental U.S. for which a commander of a unified or specified command has been assigned military responsibility".³ Note here the focus on military responsibility and not the broader area of national

responsibility. In the same publication, theater of operations is referred to as area of operations which is defined as "that portion of an area of war necessary for military operations and for the administration of such operations".⁴ Additionally, there are a number of related phrases that pertain to operations such as: area of influence, area of interest, area of operational interest and area operations.

Campaign is described in the current edition of FM 100-5 (May 1986) as "a series of joint actions designed to attain a strategic objective in a theater of war".⁵ In the same manual, military strategy "is the art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation or alliance to secure policy objectives by the application or threat of force".⁶

Operational art was defined on page ten but further clarification will be useful. Mr. Jim Schneider, the military theorist of the School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, further describes operational art as "the process by which the methods are selected that determine the application and utilization of combat power--the means-to achieve a desired end".⁷ Additionally, Mr. Schneider succinctly points out that "a poorly defined end state will render a meaningful assessment of the nature and magnitude of victory or defeat difficult".⁸ Colonel Ken Carlson's article, "Operational Level or Operational Art?" in Military Review (Oct 87) gave an excellent description using an

analogy. Operational art is to the operational level of war as tennis is to a tennis court. One is an activity (operational art), the other a location (operational level of war).⁹

Let us now set the stage for Cedar Falls and Junction City by reviewing and analyzing the doctrine of the 1960s.

II. DOCTRINE THEN

"Military objectives, as always, are subordinate to national objectives."¹⁰

FM 100-5 (1962)

Obviously, operational art and the operational level of war were not explicitly defined in the 1962 FM 100-5. However, a thorough reading of the manual can certainly leave one with the impression that our doctrine did not ignore linking tactical and strategic actions. The manual repeatedly states the importance of subordinating military objectives to political objectives. The spectrum of war is described in great detail with special emphasis on limited war. The role of U.S. land forces, their employment, and the operational environment is described with clarity. The discussion of the organization of field forces includes a description of theater of war, theater of operations and the army group, field army and corps. Entire chapters of the manual are devoted to unconventional warfare, military

operations against irregular forces, and situations short of war.

The manual states the national objectives of the U.S. "are to ensure its own security and freedom and to establish and maintain worldwide conditions of peace, security and justice".¹¹ Military strategy "directs the development and use of the military means which further national strategy through the direct or indirect application of military power...A nation's military operations must be subordinated to and compatible with its national objectives".¹²

The spectrum of war goes from cold war, employing the elements of national power without the application of military force, to general war which means the unrestricted use of military force. The center of this wide spectrum is called limited war. Limited war is characterized by restraint of the belligerents with regard to one or more of the aspects of the conflict: objectives, weapons, locale, or participants. It does not include the unrestricted application of all resources and the upper limit is not exceeded until one of the belligerents determines his national survival is at stake.¹³ This description of limited war is clear and concise. Based on 1962 published doctrine, the Vietnam War was a limited war.

In discussing military power, the manual reiterates that military power must be subordinate to national policy and goals. In addition to insuring the security of the U.S.,

military power must be designed to deter aggression, defeat aggression, and support both military and non-military programs of the U.S. and her allies.¹⁴

The discussion of employing military force in the 1962 manual is particularly well done. It describes the utility of military force as not being restricted to overt hostilities and includes the threat of the use of force. It further discusses the necessity for flexibility in force design, strategy, doctrine and weapons in order to serve national policy in any contingency at any level of violence. Most importantly, it states that a military operation is futile unless it is directed toward attainment of the objective set for it.¹⁵

Joint and combined operations are described today exactly as they were then. In discussing the nature and role of land forces, the manual states "the U.S. DOD is organized on the premise that the day of separate land, sea, and air warfare is gone forever".¹⁶ Hence, the understanding of "jointness" was evident over a quarter century ago.

"Operational environment" is a term used in the 1962 manual that is not a common phrase today. The operational environment was a composite of the conditions, circumstances and influences which affect the employment of military forces...the major elements include: national objectives, military objectives, physical features of the area of operations, the characteristics and attitudes of its people,

the opposing forces and weapons systems.¹⁷

In discussing the organization of field forces, the manual falls short in clearly articulating theater operations. Although the theater of war and theater of operations definitions are very similar to today's, the discussion of army group, field army and corps is shallow. The manual outlines the army group as being organized to direct the operations of two or more field armies. Its responsibilities are primarily tactical and include allocation of means. The field army directs tactical operations and provides for the administrative support of assigned and attached units. The corps is essentially a large task force.¹⁸ Notice the focus here is clearly on the tactical level of war and there is no discussion of the linkage of ways, means and ends. Nor is there an explicit reference as to how the military means supports the political end.

In discussing support of other government agencies, the discussion focuses on the State Department in situations short of war. In situations short of war and in areas where U.S. forces are deployed in peace time, the State Department would have primary responsibility for political activities and civil affairs policy.¹⁹ Based on our 1962 doctrine, we were engaged in a limited war by 1965 at the latest. The doctrine does not explain how the State Department or other government agencies fit into a limited war scenario.

Infiltration is a subject that is not fully developed in the 1962 manual. It is short and is essentially reduced to attacking the enemy rear by small groups or individuals.²⁰ It is surprising this subject is not more fully developed. Based on the U.S. Army's experience against the Germans in 1918 and again in WWII and against the North Koreans and Chinese during the Korean War, it certainly could have been better defined. This description deals only with the lower end of the tactical level and does not consider the possibility or implications of the operational or strategic dimensions of infiltration performed by the Chinese in 1951 or the North Vietnamese in the 1960s. Defense against infiltration, likewise, is only briefly described as being important because of the dispersed battlefield and is executed by patrols, counter-reconnaissance, obstacles and electronic surveillance.²¹ The whole notion described here appears to be like treating the symptoms of a disease rather than treating the disease.

The unconventional warfare chapter is well written. It describes unconventional warfare as useful when the use of force is limited and as operations that can be directed against the enemy's economy and political factions. The campaign objective may be achieved with minimum conventional forces.²² Unfortunately, countering unconventional warfare gets little attention. The manual simply states that enemy unconventional warfare must be countered with the use of

psychological operations, civil affairs, and the use of combat troops and friendly guerrillas.²³ Guerrilla warfare is described as combat operations in enemy held territory by indigenous forces to reduce the effectiveness, industrial capacity and morale of the enemy. It goes on to describe tactical guerrilla warfare taking place close to the tactical operations of conventional forces and strategic guerrilla warfare taking place deep in enemy territory.²⁴ This subject was not fully developed and was hardly adequate for our war against the Viet Cong within South Vietnam.

The chapter devoted to military operations against irregular forces is excellent. Irregular forces refers to all types of nonconventional forces and operations: guerrilla, insurgent, subversive, resistance, terrorist or revolutionary.²⁵ Once again, the discussion includes the political, psychological and economic dimension of warfare and does not focus solely on the military. The text of the manual covers a number of important issues, for example: "the scope of missions assigned will frequently include political and administrative aspects and objectives not usually considered normal to military operations". It goes on to state "immediate decisive results of operations against irregular forces can seldom be observed. Operations are conducted against a violent, destructive force which presents an elusive target, tends to disperse before superior opposition, then reforms to strike again. There may or may

not be a front or rear in the normal military sense".²⁶ Written in 1962, these words are certainly an accurate description of the American Army's conflict with the Viet Cong that occurred over the subsequent decade.

There are a number of other issues outlined in the 1962 manual such as: foreign troops operating against irregular forces being exploited by propaganda; the necessity of winning the support of the civil population; and the likelihood that destroying the irregular force will not provide a complete solution because the irregular force is often the result and not the cause of problems. These were issues that confronted U.S. commanders during the Vietnam War and will likely confront commanders in limited wars of the future.

Situations short of war are described as incidents of cold war which involve the movement of military force to an area to attain national objectives without involving open hostilities between nations. Examples cited are: encourage a weak and faltering government, stabilize a restless area and deter or thwart aggression.²⁷

This review, discussion and interpretation of the 1962 FM 100-5 was necessary for two reasons. First, it sets the doctrinal stage for discussing and analyzing operations Cedar Falls and Junction City. Second, the manual, for the most part, is a good product. This second point is not widely known or understood. Granted, the manual has weak areas such

as the articulation of theater operations, particularly in how it describes the functions and responsibilities of the army group, field army, and corps. An army corps is hardly just a large task force! Also, the discussion of infiltration and how to prevent infiltration was inadequate. The U.S. discovered that it could not successfully interdict the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese infiltration in the next decade. Conversely, there are a number of strong points about the 1962 manual. It discusses with clarity and in sufficient detail a number of important concepts and issues such as: national strategy and objectives, military strategy, the spectrum of war, limited war, the nature and employment of military power, the importance of the political over the military, unconventional warfare, military operations against irregular forces (particularly well done) and situations short of war.

The change published to the 1962 FM 100-5 in February 1964 is worth noting at this point. This change was very minor, almost cosmetic; it changed "administrative support" to "combat service support" and "command of the air" to "air superiority". Essentially the 1962 doctrine was the Vietnam War doctrine.

In closing the discussion of our 1962 doctrine, the following thought taken from that year's FM 100-5 was particularly insightful. "The hallmark of effective military force is the ability to adapt to the environment in which it

operates, to the enemy it faces, and to the national policy it serves".²⁸

III. DOCTRINE NOW

"All military operations pursue and are governed by political objectives."²⁹

FM 100-5 (1986)

The 1986 edition of FM 100-5 builds on the AirLand Battle Doctrine introduced in 1982. The manual states that operational art translates strategic aims into effective military operations and campaigns. It goes on to state that military strategy is the art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation to secure policy objectives by the application or threat of force...it establishes goals in a theater of war or theater of operations.³⁰ The underlining here is done for an important point. There is not total agreement, or at least unanimity, as to the meanings of these words. Yet a common understanding or agreement is crucial. Goals and objectives are words that appear to be used interchangeably in our doctrine and in contemporary writings about our doctrine; yet they are very different. Strategic aim ought to be an overall vision of how to get to the end state. The current doctrinal meaning of end state is found in FM 100-20, Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict, "the ultimate conditions resulting from a course of events".³¹ A goal is general in nature, not measurable, has

a larger focus and provides direction. An objective is a statement that is achievable, believable and measurable. It is stated in concrete terms and is specific. It certainly would be helpful if our Army agreed on the meanings of these terms.

Operational art involves decisions about when and where to fight and accepting or declining battle. It requires broad vision, anticipation, understanding the relationship of means to ends and effective joint and combined operations. Additionally, our current manual indicates no echelon is solely concerned with operational art but that theater commanders and their chief subordinates plan and direct campaigns.³² Implicit in this meaning is that practice of operational art may not be restricted only to theater level commanders. Others lower in the chain of command may practice operational art. Colonel Carlson's article indicates commanders at the tactical level of war probably do not practice operational art.³³ Hence, we are fairly certain what operational art is; we are just not sure who all is responsible for doing it. Certainly there are enough variables to operational art that make it difficult to draw lines around it or to put it in a sandbox with defined boundaries. Boundaries are there, but they are fluid and permeable. The three questions for the operational artist are a superb way of superimposing some sense of structure to complexity. What military conditions equals achievement of

the goal; what are the sequence of actions necessary; and how should the resources be applied?³⁴

It is important to note that by distinguishing the operational level of war, the design and conduct of campaigns and major operations, our doctrine recognizes there is an area and an activity that forms the linkage of strategy to tactics.³⁵ Understanding this linkage is fundamental to the marriage of strategy to tactics.

Operational planning begins with strategic guidance to a theater commander or the commander's recognition of a mission in an active theater of operations.³⁶ This reinforces the point made earlier about aims, goals and objectives. This guidance ought to come from the top. It is top-down in orientation, not bottom-up! Part of the starting point for campaign planning is strategic aims and guidance.³⁷ This cannot be assumed, nor can it be ignored. It must come from the top and it must be done first. To do otherwise is to invite confusion, complacency and less than a cohesive effort.

National strategy and theater strategy will dictate the ends and means of major operations.³⁸ Colonel Carlson points out that all three levels of war are concerned with means to ends and ways to link the two.³⁹ While this is true, it certainly adds to the degree of difficulty since ways, means and ends require balance to produce the desired effect. This

desired effect is achieved through the systematic exercise of planning and execution of simultaneous or sequenced phases.

Theater operations are further amplified in today's doctrine through the publication and distribution of FM 100-16, Combat Service Support at Echelons Above Corps, and FM 100-20. FM 100-16 identifies and describes a number of functions to be provided by the theater army.⁴⁰ It also states clearly that the theater commander is responsible to the unified commander and that the theater army is the army component of a U.S. unified command in a theater of operations.⁴¹ FM 100-20 discusses in great detail the multiple dimensions of low intensity conflict. It identifies the imperatives of low intensity conflict, the necessary integration of many government agencies in both planning and execution; and once again, highlights the importance of the political objective in military operations. FM 100-20 gives us a doctrinal definition of end state and succinctly points out that in "low intensity conflict, the military leader cannot define the conditions he seeks to achieve in military terms alone, they are also political, economic and social".⁴² This integration of military power with the other elements of national power is rooted in military theory. Writing a century and a half ago, Clausewitz said, "Nor indeed is it sensible to summon soldiers, as many governments do when they are planning a war, and ask them for purely military advice".⁴³

To summarize the review and analysis of today's doctrine, "the term operational art for practical purposes is all but synonymous with theater operations".⁴⁴ The strategic guidance to the theater commander must include aims, resources, restrictions and constraints.⁴⁵ Mr. Schneider's The Theory of Operational Art paper identifies the requisites of effective military action as: selecting correct objectives, executing from a position of relative advantage, the correct apportionment of combat power, and the maintenance of freedom of action. He goes on to state these requisites must be feasible, suitable, and acceptable.⁴⁶ This fits precisely into the discussion earlier about aims, goals and objectives. Quite simply, these requisites of military action must be achievable, believable, and measurable.

Through the years the definitions of theater of war and theater of operations has remained essentially unchanged. Mr. Schneider's example is that a theater of war is to a theater of operations as a football stadium is to a football field.⁴⁷ Theater operations is more clearly articulated in today's doctrine than the 1962 doctrine as evidenced by the recognition of the operational level of war and the practice of operational art. Two diagrams should help express operational art and the operational level of war. The diagram at Annex A (p.41) is taken from a classroom handout provided by the Director, School of Advanced Military Studies

at Fort Leavenworth. One can easily see the operational art practitioner has both campaign planning and execution responsibilities.

The diagram at Annex B (p.42) was developed in the classroom of Seminar Two during academic year 88-89. It was developed during the theory course; the lesson was entitled War and Grand Strategy and includes the thoughts of Jomini.

Annex B shows that the operational level of war and the execution of operational art are complex and diverse in that they must link the tactics of the battlefield to some higher purpose established by the senior leaders of government. The operational art practitioner has design and execution responsibilities for both campaigns and major operations.

IV OPERATION CEDAR FALLS AND OPERATION JUNCTION CITY

"You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours. But even at those odds, you will lose and I will win."⁴⁸

Ho Chi Minh

In analyzing two of the major operations of America's involvement in the Vietnam War, it might be useful to set the stage by reviewing the strategic environment and identifying a few key events that brought us to 1967. A review of the operations will be conducted followed by an analysis using the criteria for operational art found in FM 100-5. This criteria will be posed as a series of questions here and will

be the yardstick, or standard, for measuring operational art. One must keep in mind that it is difficult to apply today's standard to something that happened twenty years ago. Nevertheless, it is a useful methodology to identify evidence, or the lack thereof, of operational art.

By endorsing the Geneva Accords of 1954, President Eisenhower set the course for America's involvement in Vietnam. In his words, we would "assist the government of Vietnam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means..."⁴⁷ It is interesting to note here that President Eisenhower did not mention resisting on the political and diplomatic front. The National Liberation Front, or Viet Cong, was formally established in South Vietnam in 1960. Acts of espionage, subversion and terror increased in the early 1960s. Viet Cong activities increased in size throughout this period from small unit up to regiment and division size by 1964. By 1964 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units began deploying south; and by December 1964 the Viet Cong 9th Division seized a Catholic village, Binh Gia, east of Saigon.⁵⁰ For the Viet Cong and North Vietnam, this marked the beginning of Mao's phase III of revolutionary warfare, the counter-offensive. NVA units were committed in mid 1965 in the central highlands in an attempt to cut South Vietnam in two. This caused the rapid introduction of major U.S. combat forces. The first sizeable engagement between

U.S. and NVA forces occurred in the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965. The U.S. 1st Cavalry Division defeated the enemy regiments and stopped the North Vietnamese offensive.

In 1966 the enemy concentrated his activity north of Saigon, in the areas known as War Zone C, War Zone D, and the Iron Triangle (Annex C, p.43). Admiral Sharp, the Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, whose headquarters was in Honolulu, Hawaii, issued guidance in September 1966 to his subordinates which was essentially to take the war to the north by air and naval means; and in the south, to destroy communist forces and infrastructure and engage in nation building.⁵¹ The Combined Campaign Plan-1967, published by General William C. Westmoreland, Commander, US Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV), outlined a twofold mission. Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) and US/Free World Military Assistance Forces (US/FWMAF) were to defeat VC/NVA forces and extend government of Vietnam control throughout the Republic.⁵² The campaign plan stated explicit tasks for the Commander, II Field Force-Vietnam. Those tasks were to: conduct sustained operations to destroy enemy forces and base areas; conduct operations to support Revolutionary Development; open and secure lines of communication; and assist the RVNAF to protect and control natural resources.⁵³ This is the campaign plan from which the major operations Cedar Falls and Junction City evolved. From mid September through mid November 1966, Operation Attleboro took place in

War Zone C, northeast of Tay Ninh. The operation began as a battalion level search and destroy mission but grew to a joint and combined operation with some 22,000 troops committed under the control of II Field Force (US).⁵⁴ Attleboro was a large scale, multi-organization operation, although it was haphazard in its evolution. Attleboro set the stage for Operation Cedar Falls which occurred from 8-26 January 1967. Operation Cedar Falls took place in an area known as the Iron Triangle, twenty kilometers north of Saigon. Geographically, the triangle is bounded in the east by the north to south flowing Thi Tinh River, in the southwest by the Saigon River flowing from the town of Ben Suc, and in the north by the Thanh Dien Forestry Reserve generally along an imaginary line from Ben Suc in the west to Ben Cat in the east. Each leg of the Triangle is 20 to 25 kilometers in length. The mission of the II Field Force, commanded by LTG Jonathan O. Seaman, was to attack into the Iron Triangle and the Thanh Dien Forestry Reserve in order to destroy enemy forces, infrastructure, installations and the headquarters of the Viet Cong Military Region IV; evacuate civilians from the area for resettlement; and establish a specified strike zone to preclude further use by the Viet Cong.⁵⁵ The principal objective was to destroy the Viet Cong regional headquarters as the Iron Triangle had long been a base area for operations against the capital and the general Saigon area.

The operation was conducted in two phases. Phase I, 5-8 Jan 67, was for positioning units on the flanks of the triangle and conducting an air assault of a brigade sized force into the village of Ben Suc in order to seal it off, search, evacuate the civilian population, and then destroy the village. 8 Jan 67 was D-Day and phase II was initiated. This phase was projected to last from two to three weeks. On D-Day, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment attacked west from Ben Cat towards Ben Suc. Elements of the 1st Infantry Division and 173d Airborne Brigade air assaulted into the Thanh Diem forest to conduct search and destroy operations to kill or capture the enemy, destroy his facilities and evacuate all inhabitants.⁵⁴ The operation was successful. Over 6,000 people were relocated to other parts of South Vietnam and their villages were destroyed, to include Ben Suc.⁵⁷ A massive engineer effort destroyed bunkers and tunnel complexes, and cleared the jungle with dozers, controlled fires and defoliants.

By using the criteria discussed in FM 100-5, we find some evidence of operational art in Operation Cedar Falls. What was the goal? The implicit goal was containment of communism, at least in the "macro" sense; and Admiral Sharp's guidance and General Westmoreland's campaign plan were clear, to destroy the enemy and to help build the nation of South Vietnam. Was the goal understood? Undoubtedly it was, but how to apply military power to pursue the goal is the real

essence of this issue. Were there clear decisions about when and where to fight? Absolutely. The II Field Force established when and where the operation would take place. However, the enemy still had the opportunity, to a degree, to decline battle due to the rugged, compartmented, and forested terrain. Was there an understanding of the relationship of means to ends? The answer to that is harder to demonstrate. Although the operation was successful, there were insufficient U.S. and Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces available to establish a permanent presence in the area thereby denying its use to the enemy. In spite of the air mobility and massive fire power advantages of US and ARVN forces, the enemy remained elusive.

What military condition must be produced to achieve the goal? This is particularly difficult to answer in this case. In general all levels of government must be able to conduct their duties in a terror-free environment free from coercion and subversion and free from outside overt military threats. In the Iron Triangle, this is difficult to measure because the people were relocated in new settlements and their villages destroyed. Obviously, winning the hearts and minds of the local populace was secondary to destroying the enemy.

Were the actions sequenced? Yes. The operation was phased. First it was necessary to secure and block the

geographic area, then seal, search, evacuate and destroy Ben Suc. The next phase was to attack through the triangle and Thanh Dien Forest to destroy the enemy and his base of operations. It is interesting to note that the after action report of Operation Cedar Falls indicated the blocking positions on the flanks of the triangle were to prevent "exfiltration" of the enemy from the area.⁵⁰ Exfiltration was not a doctrinal term of the day but one can logically assume it meant to deny an escape route to the enemy. As indicated earlier, there were insufficient forces to seal off the area. Were there sufficient resources applied to accomplish the sequence of actions? Probably not. The principal mission, destruction of the Military Region IV Viet Cong headquarters, was not accomplished and, because there were insufficient U.S. and ARVN forces to establish a permanent presence, the enemy could not be denied the use of the area. As General Westmoreland wrote in A Soldier Reports, the enemy was forced to move his logistics and base support and training facilities across the border into Cambodia.⁵¹ This action had obvious operational effect. The political decision not to enter Cambodia at this point in the war made a successful military objective elusive.

An analysis of Operation Cedar Falls reveals evidence of the operational art. LTG Seaman planned and conducted a major operation in support of GEN Westmoreland's campaign for 1967.

As Operation Cedar Falls was linked to Operation Attleboro, Operation Junction City was designed to build on the success of Cedar Falls. Junction City took place during the period 22 February through 14 May 1967 in War Zone C, northwest of Saigon. War Zone C's eastern boundary is Route 13 leading north from Ben Cat to the Cambodian border, some sixty kilometers. The southern boundary is a line that runs west-north-west from Ben Cat through Tay Ninh to the Cambodian border. This distance, too, is some sixty kilometers. The western and northern boundary of War Zone C is approximately 110 kilometers of the Cambodia-Vietnam border. This entire area, War Zone C, is northwest of the Iron Triangle. As in Cedar Falls, the responsible headquarters for Operation Junction City was the II Field Force, whose mission was to conduct search and destroy operations in War Zone C to eradicate the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) and VC and NVA installations.⁶⁰ (COSVN was the senior enemy headquarters in all of South Vietnam.) A total of twenty-two U.S. battalions and four ARVN Battalions participated in the operation. Elements of the 173d Airborne Brigade also conducted a parachute assault, the only one of its kind in the war.

Phase I covered the period 22 Feb-17 March 1967 and focused on the northwest portion of War Zone C. The hammer and anvil technique was again used successfully. Forces air assaulted into blocking positions; then a ground force

attacked, forcing the enemy into the blocking force. On D-Day, elements of the 4th Infantry Division, 196th Infantry Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, 1st Infantry Division and 173rd Airborne Brigade established blocking positions and conducted search and destroy operations. Supporting artillery was deployed in fire support bases. In a "macro" sense these units formed an inverted horseshoe with the open end of the horseshoe in the south. On D+1 a brigade from the 25th Infantry Division and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment attacked from south to north in order to destroy enemy forces in the horseshoe. The forces in the blocking positions were to destroy or capture the enemy and prevent the enemy's escape. In the west and north, the Cambodian border was just a few kilometers away. Phase I ended after the 2nd Bde 25th ID and 11th ACR closed on the blocking position forces and thorough search and destroy operations had been conducted by each unit in their area of operation.

Phase II covered the period 18 March-15 April 1967 and focused on the northeast portion of War Zone C. The mission for phase II was the same as for phase I. The forces were shifted to the east and units conducted search and destroy operations in their assigned areas. Fire support bases scattered throughout provided mutually supporting artillery fires. Unlike phase I, the large scale hammer and anvil technique was not used due to different geographical conditions. Phase II came to a close after all units

completed thorough search and destroy operations. During this phase, LTG Bruce Palmer replaced LTG Seaman as the II Field Force Commander.

Phase III covered the period 16 April- 14 May and was actually a sequel as it was not fully planned. During this phase, the effort was reduced from a multidivision effort to a brigade sized effort.⁴¹ Phase III was implemented because of the success in phases I and II and to maintain an effective force in the area. The effective force was essentially a brigade conducting mobile operations throughout War Zone C. Phase III ended when enemy resistance all but disappeared. This was the result of the enemy being killed or captured, escaping across the border, or electing not to fight.

The II Field Force after action report for Junction City indicated the objectives were accomplished to varying degrees. Several enemy base camp areas were destroyed. Major portions of the 9th VC Division and 101st NVA Infantry regiment were destroyed, but the enemy COSVN headquarters survived.⁴² The greatest effect of the entire operation was that it demonstrated to the enemy that the base areas in the remote regions of War Zone C were no longer safe havens; and it demonstrated to the enemy that he could not base main force units with impunity adjacent to major population centers in South Vietnam.

It was interesting to note the OPLAN 3-67 was dated 8 February 1967 with a planned D-Day of 22 February 1967. The OPLAN also indicated, "Coordination with Vietnamese nationals and U.S. Advisors will be initiated on order this headquarters".⁴³ It is not known when this coordination was allowed or if it was tightly controlled for security reasons.

Again, using the criteria outlined in FM 100-5, we find evidence of operational art in Operation Junction City. The answers to the questions of what was the goal and was it understood are the same as for Cedar Falls, discussed on page 22 and 23. Were there clear decisions about when and where to fight? Yes; but because of the great physical size of the area, the enemy could opt to hide or to move across the international border. It was too large an area to seal off completely. Was there an understanding of the relationship of means to ends? Perhaps not. The economic, political and diplomatic elements of national power could have probably been used more effectively. It is interesting to note the enemy timed his counterattacks to coincide with the Honolulu conference held on 20-21 March 1967 when the President of the United States and senior cabinet members were meeting with senior South Vietnamese officials.⁴⁴ Additionally, as was the case in the Iron Triangle with Operation Cedar Falls, the enemy was able to move his logistic support and training areas across the border into Cambodia from where he could operate with impunity. For the U.S., not being permitted to

cross the Cambodian border was a political constraint with arguably decisive military implications. What military conditions must be produced to achieve the goal? As with Cedar Falls, this is difficult to answer. The government must be free to govern without fear of reprisal. This environment was likely not established since much of the enemy military and political structure simply moved across the Cambodian border and continued to operate from there. Were the actions sequenced? Yes, and the last phase of the operation was implemented because of the previous successful phases. Were sufficient resources applied to accomplish the sequence of actions? Probably not. The enemy COSVN headquarters was not captured or destroyed and there were insufficient friendly forces available after the operation to maintain a permanent, effective influence in the area.

An analysis of Operation Junction City reveals evidence of operational art. Junction City could perhaps be argued more forcefully simply because there were more forces employed over a longer time period over a larger geographic area. Nevertheless, as demonstrated here, there is evidence of operational art in both of these major operations.

Major operations are further described in today's doctrinal manual as the coordinating elements of phases of a campaign. One major ground operation will receive priority and constitute the main effort. (In both major operations described here, the preponderance of combat forces in the III

Corps Tactical Zone were committed to the effort.) The commander is to have freedom in designing his own operations and will strive to integrate psychological operations, unconventional warfare and civil-military operations. In conducting major operations, commanders are to conduct aggressive reconnaissance to preserve his own freedom of action and should attack in depth to isolate and defeat the enemy.⁴⁵

Cedar Falls and Junction City satisfy this criteria for being major operations within a larger campaign. By today's standard, the rules of evidence are clear. The Commander, II Field Force, practiced operational art at the lower end of the operational level of war.

So how did the U.S. do at conducting operational art in Vietnam? It appears the answer is we did it but not very well. As portrayed in the diagram at Annex B, operational art done at the lower level, Grand Tactics, the linkage to the tactical level of war, was done with some degree of success as the evidence has shown. But operational art at the upper end, the linkage to the strategic level of war, appears to have been lacking.

V. LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

"Vietnam will trap you in a bottomless military and political swamp."⁶⁶

President de Gaulle to President Kennedy

"A certain grasp of military affairs is vital for those in charge of general policy."⁶⁷

Clausewitz

From this analysis, we can distill a few lessons learned, lessons unlearned and implications for the future. The focus here is obviously at the operational level and the linkages to the strategic level.

Both Operation Cedar Falls and Junction City fit into the campaign plans of MACV. There was linkage of these major operations to the combined campaign plan, clear decisions about when and where to fight, an understanding of the relationship of means to ends, of sequencing of actions and providing resources to accomplish the sequence of actions. Although there may not have been a clear articulation of theater operations, the published FM 100-5 of 1962 was fairly solid doctrine. The manual repeatedly stated the importance of the political dimension over the military. Discussions of limited war, military operations against irregular forces, unconventional warfare, and situations short of war were all well done.

Our AirLand Battle Doctrine of today is anchored to a balance of firepower and maneuver. It restores the emphasis

on the offensive, establishes the intermediate level of war and stresses synergism. It is a solid doctrine and is an expression of how we expect to fight today and in the future. Nevertheless, as expressed by the Director, School of Advanced Military Studies at Fort Leavenworth, doctrine is short lived, particularly in the modern period. It is shaped by a nation's policy and strategy, and is peculiar to societies and nations, and tends to lean towards conservatism and evolutionary change.^{4a} Hence, doctrine must be expressed in a flexible, living document capable of change.

It is worth mentioning here that doctrinal improvement is necessary in the area of infiltration. The U.S. Army's experience against the Germans in both World Wars, against the Chinese and North Koreans in the Korean War, and against the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong in the Vietnam War all demonstrated the need to understand infiltration and how to prevent it or reduce its effects. Surprisingly, the 1962, 1968, and 1986 editions of FM 100-5 all read essentially the same. Infiltration does not occur just at the lower end of the tactical level of war. It does have an operational and maybe even a strategic dimension. While parts of the Ho Chi Minh Trail were dirt paths, parts of it were multiple lane all-surface roads used to transport tons of supplies and hundreds of men. The next edition of FM 100-5 should describe better the full dimension of infiltration.

Mr. Jim Schneider has said that today you cannot concentrate to fight one decisive battle; that you do not have to concentrate to fight. This is a qualitative difference in warfare from the Napoleonic era which gives rise to the whole notion of operational art, the linking of operations.⁶⁹ He has written "the essence of operational art is developing branches and sequels through the depth of the theater of operations."⁷⁰ As indicated earlier, both Cedar Falls and Junction City were major operations designed to advance a campaign plan. Unfortunately, the enemy moved his base of operations across the border into Cambodia where he was relatively safe from attack.

General Westmoreland's campaign options were significantly constrained because of the arbitrary boundaries of the theater of operations. His theater of operations was limited to South Vietnam and did not include Cambodia and Laos. In discussing theater of operations, Clausewitz defines theater of operations as "a sector of the total war area which has protected boundaries and so a certain degree of independence".⁷¹ By defining the theater of operations as only South Vietnam, at least for the ground war, the theater was probably too restrictive.

The likelihood of future conflict falling into the realm of low intensity conflict and limited war is high. This poses a perplexing problem to the practitioner of operational art. In many cases results of low intensity conflict and

limited war are sometimes hard to measure and are long term in nature. This was clearly pointed out in the 1962 FM 100-5 and is expressed in our current doctrinal manuals. What you measure and how you measure success is significant. Mr. Howard Simpson was a member of the State Department for several years and was sent back to Vietnam in early 1964, after a nine year absence, to be an advisor to General Khanh, the South Vietnamese prime minister. He stopped at Honolulu for a high level meeting. All the briefings were given in a positive tone, the figures, diagrams, and charts were all optimistic and demonstrated why we were winning. At the time he thought, "I could have shut my eyes and imagined myself sitting through a briefing at the French High Command in 1953".⁷² In The Army and Vietnam, Major A.F. Krepinevich points out that because of our attempt to maximize Communist losses, we alienated the very people we were there to assist.⁷³ Winning the support of the people is critically important in low intensity conflict and limited war. Limited war will probably mean limited means as well as limited ends. There must be an appropriate balance here to be effective. Additionally limited war will almost always mean limited political and limited public support. Why? Because national survival is not at stake. Hence, how and what is identified as success in low intensity conflict and limited war is vitally important. The limited wars of the recent past and those likely occurrences of the future trace their roots at

least back to the 19th century. As Clausewitz wrote, "Thus it follows that without any inconsistency wars can have all degrees of importance and intensity, ranging from a war of extermination down to simple armed observations".⁷⁴

It is the lack of linkages between the operational and strategic level of war to which our greatest failures as a nation and as an army during the Vietnam War can be traced. In the case here, the linkages are those between GEN Westmoreland and his superiors.

Over the past quarter century we have discovered communism is not monolithic. At the time, however, we believed the evils of all communism emanated from the halls of the Kremlin. Nevertheless, there were indicators and information available in 1968 that certainly points to the fact that China would probably not have intervened had the U.S. carried the ground war to the north. China has always been invaded from the north, never the south. The Great Wall of China was built to protect from aggression out of the north, not the south.

There are significant ethnic differences between the Chinese and Vietnamese and they have been feuding with each other for centuries. In early 1946 Ho Chi Minh briefly supported the French return to the north in order to expel the Chinese, exclaiming emphatically to his critics in Hanoi. "You fools! Don't you realize what it means if the Chinese remain? Don't you remember your history? The last time the

Chinese came they stayed a thousand years!"⁷³ At the Geneva Conference in 1954 Chou En Lai favored a divided Vietnam rather than a unified neighbor in the south.⁷⁴ Mao's cultural revolution in China from 1966 through 1976 caused China to turn inward. The social, economic, political and military chaos caused by the cultural revolution made a foreign adventure at the time extremely unlikely.

I am not advocating that we should have invaded North Vietnam. I am just pointing out that as a nation, we were socio-politically ignorant of Asian affairs. This ignorance may have led to the decision to limit the theater of operations to South Vietnam, specifically excluding Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam thereby reducing the success of major operations such as Operations Cedar Falls and Junction City.

In Thompson and Frizzell's book, The Lessons of Vietnam, General Westmoreland contributed a chapter entitled "A Military War of Attrition" in which he discusses attrition warfare, search and destroy operations and America's graduated response. In this chapter he states, "the political objective was to bring the enemy to the conference table".⁷⁷ We did that in May 1968 for the first time! So, maybe this could be described better as an intermediate objective with the final objective to follow later. The Paris Peace talks would proceed at an almost glacial pace for five years, stalemated over a number of various issues. One requirement held constant by the U.S. over that time span was

the withdrawal of NVA troops from South Vietnam. This was a military requirement. One requirement held constant by the North Vietnamese was the inclusion of the Viet Cong in the political structure of the Saigon regime. This was a political requirement.⁷⁸

In his book, On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context, Colonel Harry Summers has linked the events and actions in Vietnam to the doctrinal base and to the theoretical underpinnings of warfare. In discussing objectives, Colonel Summers stresses "The political objective cannot be merely a platitude, but must be stated in concrete terms".⁷⁹ Putting anything in concrete terms is tough for a politician to do! It is not impossible, but it is rare to find a politician of a democratic society who speaks in concrete terms, using action verbs to form thoughts into sentences that are achievable, believable and measurable. The case in point here is that while bringing the enemy to the conference table may have been part of the political objective, it was not the end in its entirety. As Clausewitz said, "In some cases the political objective will not provide a suitable military objective. In that event another military objective must be adopted that will serve the political purpose and symbolize it in the peace negotiations".⁸⁰ In the case of Vietnam, the military objective was probably not supportive of the political objective in part due to a lack of clarity. The

linkage here between the operational level and strategic level was missing.

The President plays a specific role in linking the strategic level of war to the operational level because he is the senior elected representative of the people and the Commander-in-Chief of the nation's armed forces. By not asking for a declaration of war, not mobilizing the reserves and granting draft deferments for college students the President failed to inspire public support and hence, failed to mobilize our national will. Without the national will as expressed in terms of congressional and public support, the army of a free, democratic nation cannot endure indefinitely the prolonged effects of low intensity conflict or limited war.

The President demonstrated on a number of occasions a lack of understanding of the application of military force to achieve a strategic objective. During the presidential campaign of 1964 he reportedly told members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Just let me get elected and you can have your war".²¹ It was as though he was abrogating part of his duties as President by rejecting responsibility to give sound guidance, provide goals and define specific, measurable political objectives. The insinuation was that military matters are separate and distinct from the political process which runs counter to the Clausewitzian model that war is an

extension of politics. It is; but we as a nation and as an army did not understand that well.

President Johnson demonstrated a certain amount of contempt for the senior uniformed members of the armed forces. He was known to have said the only thing generals know how to do is "bomb and spend"; and when discussing the bombing program, Rolling Thunder, he remarked, "they can't even bomb an outhouse without my approval".⁸²

In March 1965, the President told the Army Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson, to "get things happening. I want some solutions. I want some answers".⁸³ Soon after that, General Johnson told a group of senior generals in Saigon, "Mr. Johnson asked me to come and tell you that I come with a blank check. What do you need to win the war?"⁸⁴ Here again we see the President failing to set the strategic stage, failing to define strategic goals and failing to establish concrete political objectives. These things are necessary preconditions to establishing military objectives. They must come from the top down. Had the Chief had an Organizational Effectiveness Staff Officer on his staff, as the Army had from 1975-1985, that staff officer would probably have coached the Chief to ask the President specific questions, for example: What is the desired end state? What does success look like? How will we know when we are finished? What exactly, Mr. President, do you want done?

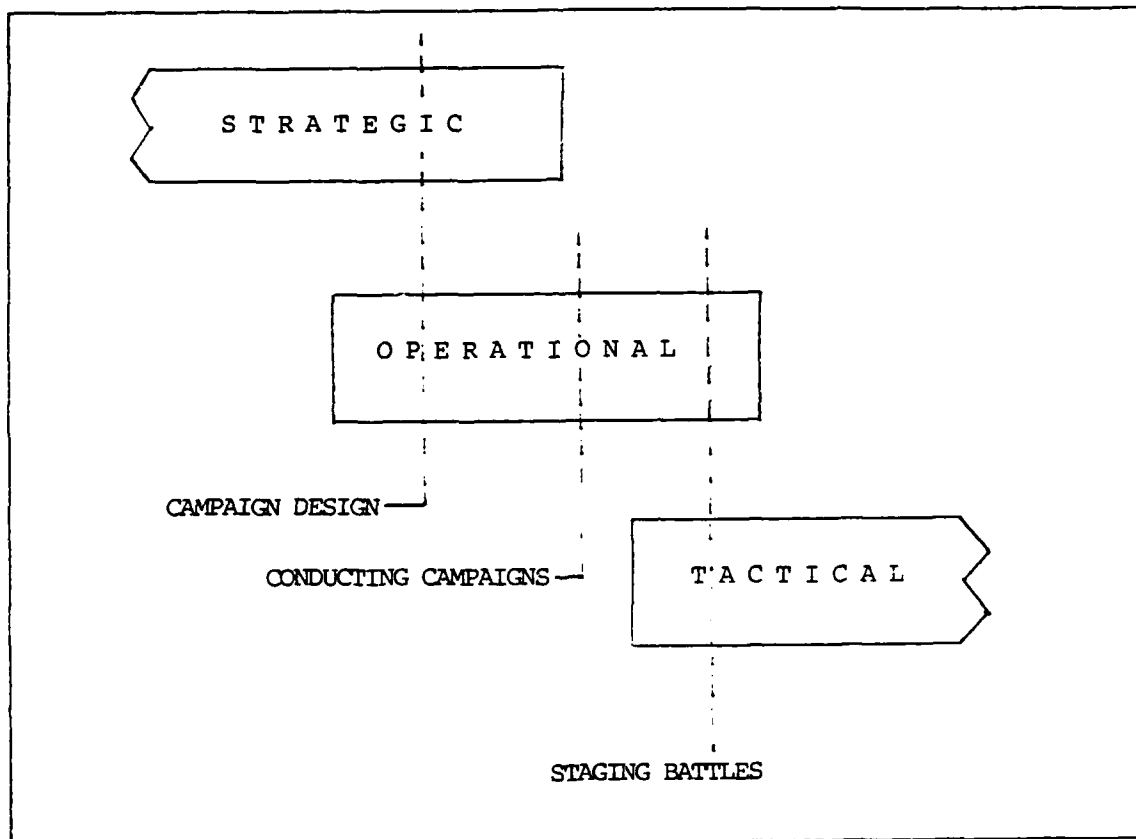
Those kinds of questions needed to be asked then, and will probably need to be asked in the future.

VI. CONCLUSION

"In war the result is never final."⁸³

Clausewitz

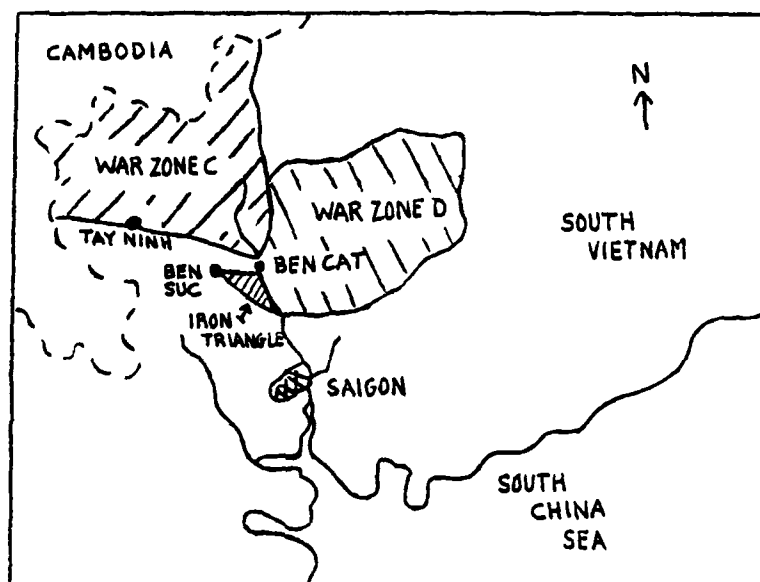
There is evidence of operational art in the Vietnam War. Based on what happened during some of the major operations of that war, Cedar Falls and Junction City, we can distill some of the elements of operational art and the operational level of war. So how did the U.S. conduct operational art in Vietnam? We did it, but not very well. The marriage of strategy and tactics in Vietnam was a weak marriage and ended in divorce. As Colonel Newell astutely pointed out in "The Levels of War" in Army, June 1988, "once the strategic decision to use military force is made, the operational level of war commander must be given an appropriate militarily achievable objective"...."An ill conceived military objective established at the strategic level will make success at the operational level irrelevant regardless of the brilliance with which military commanders execute operational art".⁸⁴ As our nation enters the third century of nationhood in the mature global community of the third millenium, we would do well to heed Colonel Newell's advice.



ANNEX A

	<u>LEVEL</u>	<u>SPACE</u>	<u>TIME</u>
OPERATIONAL LEVEL OF WAR	GRAND STRATEGY	THEATER OF WAR	WAR
	STRATEGY	THEATER OF OPNS	CAMPAIGN
	GRAND TACTICS	POSITION	MAJOR OPERATIONS
	TACTICS	FIELD	ENGAGEMENT
	MINOR TACTICS	POINT	FIGHT

ANNEX B



ANNEX C 87

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