

CORPS LEVEL OPERATIONAL ART IN VIETNAM: A STUDY OF II FIELD FORCE COMMANDERS DURING MAJOR NAMED OPERATIONS

A Monograph

by

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ABSTRACT

CORPS LEVEL OPERATIONAL ART IN VIETNAM: A STUDY OF II FIELD FORCE COMMANDERS DURING MAJOR NAMED OPERATIONS, by Major Douglas F. Baker, Jr., 77 pages.

This monograph explores two major U.S. operations and the reaction to one enemy offensive, in order to explore evidence of U.S. operational art in Vietnam. For the purpose of this study, the operational level is identified as the corps headquarters responsible for nesting Military Assistance Command–Vietnam's (MACV) military guidance, the strategic direction issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the national government's aims with the tactical maneuver of subordinate divisions and battalions. During the Vietnam War, the Field Force served as the equivalent of the corps headquarters. The three case studies analyzed are all drawn from II Field Force during the period 1967 to 1971. These case studies are OPERATION CEDAR FALLS/JUNCTION CITY (1967), the 1970 U.S. incursion into Cambodia under OPERATION TOAN THANG, and II Field Force's reaction to the Tet offensive (1968). Through the analysis of the case studies, the question of operational art existing at the corps level during the Vietnam War is addressed, as is the identification of successful or unsuccessful leadership and staff practices faced in an asymmetric conflict.

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ACRONYMS

AAR	After Action Review
ACR	Armored Cavalry Regiment
APC	Armored Personnel Carrier
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
BG	Brigadier General
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
COSVN	Communist Office South Vietnam
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
FANK	Khmer National Armed Forces
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
KIA	Killed in Action
LTG	Lieutenant General
MAAGV	Military Advisory Assistance Group Vietnam
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MG	Major General
MTOE	Modified Table of Organization and Equipment
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NLF	National Liberation Front
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PLAF	Peoples Liberation Armed Forces
QRF	Quick Reaction Force
ROAD	Reorganization Objective Army Division
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
RFPF	Regional Force Police Force

RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
VC	Viet Cong

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INTRODUCTION

The Vietnam War has been a much studied and written about topic over the last several decades. Despite the attention the war receives, the focus of research appears to be either in the form of an in-depth study of tactical actions, or at the opposite end of the spectrum, an analysis of strategy at the national or theater level. Little is written about the operational art or artist responsible for linking the strategic vision with tactical action. The purpose of this monograph is to explore three case studies consisting of two major U.S. operations and the reaction to one enemy offensive, in order to explore the practice of U.S. operational art in Vietnam. For the purpose of this study, the operational level is identified as the corps headquarters, due to it being the agency responsible for nesting Military Assistance Command–Vietnam's (MACV) military guidance, the strategic direction issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the national government's aims with the tactical maneuver of subordinate divisions and battalions. While operational level of war and operational art are not to be understood as synonymous, the corps headquarters provides a good vantage point for an analysis based on the concept of operational art. During the Vietnam War, the Field Force served as the equivalent of the corps headquarters. The three case studies analyzed are all drawn from II Field Force during the period 1967 to 1971. These case studies are OPERATION CEDAR FALLS/JUNCTION CITY (1967) the II Field Force reaction to the 1968 Tet offensive, and the 1970 U.S. incursion into Cambodia under OPERATION TOAN THANG. While not an exhaustive series of case studies, these operations provide a useful point of departure for an analysis of operational art in Vietnam.

This analysis utilizes primary sources in the form of after action reviews, general officer debriefs, oral histories, and various government documents pertaining to the operations conducted by II U.S. Field Force are used. Current and previous U.S. Army publications defining operational art and corps level doctrine are also used to establish the criteria for evaluation of the

proposed case studies. U.S. Army historical works pertaining to MACV and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) are used to develop the historical context for this study. Secondary sources will provide additional information on the commanders, operations, or periods covered.

In order to assess the corps commanders and operations detailed in the case studies, the term operational art must be defined. The current definition of the operational level of war is discussed according to the 2012 U.S. Army ADP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, as well as an explanation of the operational equivalent level of war as defined by the 1961 Reorganization Objective Army Divisions (ROAD) doctrine. Once a common understanding of operational art is established, the strategic context that preceded the commitment of ground forces to Vietnam in 1965 is presented. Lastly, a description of the purpose and battle space occupied by II Field Force to include friendly subordinate units and general enemy activity in zone is provided. By establishing an understanding of the historical background, physical terrain, and a clear definition of the criteria to be used for this analysis, one can determine how the II Field Force commanders attempted to tie strategic guidance to tactical actions as demonstrated during the selected named operations.

Operational art is currently viewed by the U.S. Army as integrating the Clausewitzian concepts of ends, ways, and means across the levels war, specifically through the use of the tactical means to achieve a strategic end.¹ The 2012 ADP 3-0 further explains this concept by stating, “Operational art is the pursuit of strategic objectives in whole or in part through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose.” The manual goes on to state that the operational level of war is not tied to a specific unit designation or level of command due to the decentralized nature of conflict. An example is the current war in Afghanistan.² For the purpose

¹Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0, Change 1, *Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2011), C1 7-1.

²Department of the Army, Field Manual ADP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*

of this monograph, the operational level of war will normally reside at the corps level. The corps is generally where the commander and staff officers attempt to nest the guidance and goals established by their superiors at the strategic level, in the form of national policy and theater strategy, with the engagements and battles executed by their subordinates at the tactical level. This nesting is conveyed through the planning of campaigns and major combat operations and is conducted to ensure that victory on the battlefield directly translates to progress towards accomplishing the strategic end state. The elements of operational art consist of terms such as end state conditions, objectives, center of gravity, decisive points, desired effects, method of approach, lines of operation, reach, simultaneity, depth, phasing, tempo, culmination point, and finally, risk.³ Through a broad conceptualization of general actions which produce conditions describing the desired end state, and through the use of the previously listed elements of operational art, the subordinate unit receives an understanding of how the mission will be conducted, supported, and focused.⁴ This guidance provides the tactical commander with the realization of when the mission has been accomplished or when assets have been exhausted that may prevent a further pursuit of strategic goals.

Through the analysis of the case studies listed above, the question of operational art existing at the corps level during the Vietnam War is addressed, as is the identification of successful or unsuccessful staff practices that are applicable today. The results of this study suggest recommendations on staff organization, adjustments, or techniques useful for future conflicts.

(Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2012.), 9.

³Ibid., 7-25.

⁴Ibid.

BACKGROUND

During the Truman administration, the U.S. provided considerable military and financial support to France's war with the Vietminh in their former colony of Indochina. Following the 1954 Geneva conference, both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations provided continued assistance to South Vietnam. In the period of 1954 thru 1963, U.S. military support was provided to Vietnam through the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG). Initially MAAG served as technical advisors, ensuring the proper use of U.S. provided equipment. As the assistance continued, advisors were assigned to Vietnamese tactical formations down to the Battalion level. The dramatic increase in U.S. advisors during the Kennedy administration contributed to friction between Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge and General Paul Harkins, the MAAG director. The relationship between the U.S. ambassador and military commanders in Vietnam can best be described by the tension caused over which organization would ultimately control operations. The manifestation of this tension became evident in the conflict over which headquarters pacification efforts should be subordinate. Deteriorating relations between Ambassador Henry Cabot lodge and General Paul Harkins intensified, coming to a head in 1963, compounded by effects of the Buddhist crisis of 1961 and the deteriorating Diem regime. General Harkins identified the need to replace the advisory based MAAGV as the lead command and control structure with the combat focused MACV to consolidate command and control functions and provide the capability to handle increased troop numbers.⁵ This change can also be viewed as General Harkins' attempting to militarize operations in Vietnam in order to prevent his having to report to the Ambassador. General Harkins' recommendation to implement MACV foreshadowed the will to escalate the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The rift between civilian and military leadership continued, although to a lesser degree, under General Harkins' replacement, General Westmoreland. As the

⁵Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: the Joint Command In The Years of Escalation, 1962-1967* (Washington, D.C.: The United States Army, Center of Military History, 2006), 125.

MACV commander, General Westmoreland gained a compromise during the Honolulu Conference by maintaining oversight on the central pacification committee. This solidified the unity of effort between the U.S. military, ARVN and civilian agencies as evident in the HOP TAC program.⁶ From 1964 until 1965 Ambassador Maxwell Taylor's skeptical yet permissive views on the introduction of division size U.S. units facilitated cooperation with MACV in providing a unified approach to initial troop requests and employment in the central high lands.⁷ The return of Lodge as President Johnson's ambassador to Vietnam from 1966 to 1968, witnessed cooperation in efforts to stabilize the Saigon government with continued friction over the conduct of pacification. Despite the friction, the presence of combat troops as the prime means of security resulted in MACV's active participation in pacification efforts out of sheer necessity. This de-facto involvement led to the eventual placement of the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) as a subordinate agency to MACV.⁸

To understand how the U.S. transitioned from a 23,000 man advisory effort to engaging in combat operations, the political dynamics of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations must be addressed. In the U.S., a rift developed in the relationship between the military and the elected civilian officials. Robert McNamara, emboldened by the successful outcome of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, de-emphasized the guidance provided by the military in favor of the judgment of the civilian leadership. This resulted in the administration developing large portions of the military strategy for the initial conduct of operations in Vietnam without the counsel of senior military advisors such as the JCS.⁹ To increase the relevance of the JCS, General Wheeler, the

⁶Cosmas, 145.

⁷Ibid., 216.

⁸Ibid., 242.

⁹H. R. McMasters, *Dereliction of Duty, Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint*

Chairman of the JCS, favored consensus amongst the service chiefs on proposals in order to consolidate strength when dealing with the administration. A united vote of the JCS improved the chances of influencing the administration rather than forfeiting the decision to the all too willing civilian officials. It was in this environment that the JCS provided advice on escalation in Vietnam.¹⁰ This rift remained evident in the strategic policy for Vietnam, as outlined in October 1965 by President Johnson's Assistant Secretary of State, William Bundy, the chairman of the committee to examine U.S interest and objectives in Vietnam, described the aims of operations being:

To protect the US reputation as a counter subversion guarantor, to avoid the domino effect In Southeast Asia, keep the Republic of Vietnam out of red hands, and to emerge from crisis without considerable taint from methods.¹¹

Bundy's approach outlined the general aims for operations in Vietnam without assessing threat or environmental impacts. True to form, the JCS were the last group briefed on these findings, receiving guidance from the Secretary of Defense to develop military options based on those results. This constrictive guidance and lack of latitude resulted in options with limited tangible end states.¹² In response to increased attacks on U.S. air bases in South Vietnam and the bombing campaign falling short of its desired effects, options generated by the administration's Whiz Kids or civilian advisors inherited from the Kennedy administration established the initial frame for the introduction of ground forces to Vietnam.¹³ President Johnson found himself caught

Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led To Vietnam (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 30.

¹⁰Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The Twenty Five Year War* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1984), 35.

¹¹McMasters, 184.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Joseph A. Califano, "The McNamara I Knew," *The Washington Post*, 7 July 2009, <http://articles.washingtonpost.com> (accessed 5 October 2012), The term Whiz Kid refers to young

between public opposition to the bombing of North Vietnam and U.S. aircraft losses, the recommendation of the JCS to commit division sized ground forces, and his policy goals of limiting the evolving crisis on the ground to South Vietnam to prevent a possible escalation with China or the Soviet Union. In response to the recent terrorist attacks, Johnson informed General Wheeler that the objective was to kill more Viet Cong while managing the public support.¹⁴

In attempting to balance the already ongoing air strike operations with anticipated ground commitment options, Robert H. Johnson of the State Department's Policy Planning Council stated that the mission of ground forces in Vietnam would not be to defeat the enemy; instead, they would function much as the bombing campaign had, to further pressure the North Vietnamese government through their presence. The desired end state of this pressure would be the North's willingness to conduct negotiations prompted by the demonstration of U.S. resolve.¹⁵ This narrative distorted the exact role ground forces were expected to conduct and restricted the perception of how they would be conducted to accomplish the strategic aims. Once again, the politicians conducted planning sessions for the employment of ground forces to Vietnam without considering input from the JCS.¹⁶ President Johnson authorized the commitment of ground forces due to the limited success of the Republic of Vietnam's government and its military to oppose the Communist forces in the south. This perceived failure combined with Communist attacks on U.S. naval vessels and later air fields, formed the justification of Johnson's decision to commit ground

intellectuals affiliated with the RAND Corporation and recruited by the Kennedy administration to modernize the U.S. Department of Defense by implementing a statistics based management approach. Whiz kid originated from a group of former World War II U.S. Air Force officers who became Ford Motor Company executives in the late 1940's The most notable of which was Robert McNamara.

¹⁴McMasters, 266-270.

¹⁵Ibid., 203.

¹⁶Historical Division of the Joint Secretariat, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, Part II 1968-1968* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 1980), 17-20, 17-25.

forces under the August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The initial request for U.S. Marine forces to secure key airfields opened the door for the MACV commander, General Westmoreland, to request 44 maneuver battalions including international support from the militaries of Australia and the Republic of South Korea. Westmoreland understood the constraints imposed upon MACV by the elected officials. The conflict in Vietnam was an extension of the Cold War, with its prosecution governed by the fear of drawing Communist China and the Soviet Union into a regional and eventual global conflict. In light of those fears, Westmoreland determined that a protracted attritional war focused on the enemy's means to fight would be his only option. In undertaking this endeavor, he realized that measuring success or progress towards the end state criteria would be difficult.¹⁷ The mission of U.S. forces deployed to Vietnam would be focused on the main force fight against Viet Cong battalions and infiltrated units of the People's Liberation Army of Vietnam (PAVN). The ARVN, South Vietnamese police, and provincial militia units would provide security to the population in and around the urbanized coast, placing the host nation in the lead in pacification. In assessing the situation in Vietnam, General Westmoreland characterized the "dual nature of threat, the main force were the bully boys trying to tear down the house that is Vietnam with crow bars, the insurgency and the political cadre were termites undermining the government."¹⁸

Given these conditions, the JCS and General Westmoreland set about determining how to array forces in Vietnam. However, a revised command and control structure was never created to support this increased force package. Instead, the maneuver units fell in on the existing advisory framework. This required large units with a search and destroy mindset to operate within a

¹⁷William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York, NY: DeCapo Paperbacks, 1976), 145-153.

¹⁸Philip B. Davison, *Vietnam At War: The History:1946-1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press,1988), 353.

construct designed for advisory and support duties. The overall strategic concept of the war further compounded this issue for maneuver commanders. Unclear remnants from the advisory mission included the requirement to provide general support to the ARVN forces and prevent the government of Vietnam from collapsing. These were both nebulous concepts for an infantry brigade designed to close with and destroy an opposing force.¹⁹

The Army America sent to Vietnam was a product of the Cold War. Institutionally, the Army was prepared to counter the Soviet Union as a symmetrical threat with its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies. The contingency of fighting a lesser conventional proxy war as it had in Korea was also very much a reality. Additional factors such as contending with the possibility of operating on a nuclear battlefield led to a period of experimentation with new doctrine, divisional structures and technologies.

In attempting to define the operational level of war as practiced by the U.S. Army in Vietnam, one must begin with the preceding doctrine that created it. The pentomic division and its successor, the ROAD division, portrayed the nature of command relationships in a flexible or non-permanent manner based on its tailorable nature. This prevented the establishment of true combined arms maneuver units until they were task organized for a particular mission. The regimental headquarters also ceased to exist as a tactical formation, instead performing administrative functions for the newly instituted tactical organization, the brigade. Various maneuver companies would then be placed under a brigade headquarters for a particular mission.²⁰ Once organized, the division transmitted operational goals to the two subordinate battle groups (brigades) who in turn relayed guidance down to the company formations in the

¹⁹Cosmas, 219.

²⁰John J. McGrath, *The Brigade: Its History and Employment in The US Army* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2004), 61.

form of battle orders. These orders defined the objectives to be accomplished. The pentomic division, designed to function independently and survive on either the atomic or conventional battlefields, suffered from a lack of adaptability for operations other than large-scale combat.²¹ In an attempt to enhance lethality by increasing the base to increments of five regiments rather than three, the divisions became too robust. This adoption of the regimental system of five sub-units was modeled on the organization of the airborne divisions of the Second World War reflecting the airborne lineage of ranking U.S. Army generals.²² The pentomic division also removed an echelon between the brigade and company level by deleting the battalion. This act increased the brigade battle groups' span of control from seven to ten companies while decreasing opportunities for field grade officers to gain valuable command experience in positions between company and brigade.²³ The pentomic structure of 1957, would be applied to any potential future conflict with the Soviets in Europe. This being said, the framework applied to a linear and contiguous battlefield that placed the corps and divisions operating along a fluid front with a defined rear and forward area. The linear conventional battle can be typified by the majority of the command guidance flowing from theater or army level, filtered through subordinate organizations until the mission reached the division or battalion engaged in the actual fighting. The feedback mechanism took the form of situational reports and estimates as well as friendly and enemy battle damage assessments. The evolving threat from Warsaw Pact forces and the addition of sponsored proxy conflicts caused President John F. Kennedy to call for a force

²¹Johnathan M. House, *Toward Combined Arms Warfare: A Survey of 20th-Century Tactics, Doctrine, and Organization* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: United States Army Combat Studies Institute, 1984), 155.

²²McGrath, 59.

²³Romana Danysh and John K. Mahon, "Regular Army, ROAD and Flexible Response," 29 June 2001, <http://www.history.army.mil/books/lineage/M-F/chapter11.htm> (accessed 17 August 2012), 2.

capable of a more flexible response. This call spawned the ROAD design of 1960-61 that sought to increase the Army's ability to react to a varying degree of threats through restructuring. President Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara accepted the Army's shift to ROAD as being compatible with improving military options for the President. This effort retained aspects of the regimental combat team used during the Second World War in which the regiment created a common command and control base under the division. This allowed for the mixing of armored and mechanized units assigned to the division to be tailorable in true combined arms fashion to meet the existing threat. In the new ROAD Division, the battalion became the basic building block assigned under brigades acting as administrative headquarters and providing supervision of the battalions during tactical operations.²⁴ Along the same general concept as the pentomic division, ROAD divisions, consisting of brigades and battalions offered greater flexibility as well as greater command and control through a smaller more capable package. The emphasis that the ROAD program placed on flexibility and mobility also led to the innovative concept of air mobility. The Howze Board, created by Secretary of Defense McNamara tested the feasibility of integrating the helicopter as a mobility enhancer for maneuver units. This board tested and structured the experimental airmobile force through the fusing of the traditional combat arms of infantry and artillery with the helicopter creating airmobile doctrine and tables of unit organization. The air assault division, created in 1963, experienced continued refinement through its employment in Vietnam with successful results throughout the conflict.²⁵ ROAD's overall success, relied on its flexibility allowing for a plug and play style of employment, attaching and in some cases, deploying individual brigades as needed. The brigade would go on to become the decisive formation of the Vietnam War. The only impediment associated with this

²⁴Danysh and Mahon, 4.

²⁵Ibid., 18.

flexibility became the non-permanent command relationships and its emphasis on administrative over tactical command of the division headquarters.²⁶

The field manuals and doctrinal resources supporting the ROAD program did not specifically define the term “operational art.” This term was not adopted by the U.S. Army until the 1980s. This is not to say however that operational art did not exist conceptually in the 1960s. The U.S. Army field manual governing divisions and corps, FM 100-15, *Larger Units*, outlined the concept of a corps receiving direction from a higher theater army headquarters; then through internal staff processes, applying the factors of available assets, terrain, and enemy considerations, resulting in the development of a plan. This plan fused the higher headquarters’ requirements with the realities of the battlefield into a mission that subordinate tactical units could execute.²⁷ The historical context of the 1960s must be taken into consideration when discussing this subject as the majority of doctrine dealt with conducting a symmetrical fight with the Soviet Union or a like trained and equipped, proxy nation. The purpose of such a conventional action was the defeat, through annihilation or attrition, of a threat using varying degrees of force. The translation of that goal across the levels of war remained enemy focused in contrast to the realities of irregular or hybrid warfare as manifested in Vietnam. Viewed through ex-post facto analysis, the Vietnam War required complex assessments and feedback, refined at the lower tactical levels and sharing equal importance with the actual mission orders generated at the higher levels of command. This feedback mechanism was not clearly defined in doctrine. Having described the doctrinal frame preceding and during the case study period, the situation in Vietnam must next be addressed to understand the environment in which that doctrine was applied.

²⁶McGrath, 65-67.

²⁷Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-15, *Larger Units, Theater, Army-Corps* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 1968), 3-13.

From 1954 until his overthrow and murder in 1963, South Vietnam was led by Ngo Dinh Diem. Attempts made by the Diem administration to extend governance and security beyond the urban areas failed to produce sufficient results in defeating Communist activity, in spite of receiving \$222 million dollars in U.S. aid and support from the military advisor program under Military Assistance Advisory Group–Vietnam (MAAG-V). By 1964, 23,000 advisors were deployed to South Vietnam now operating under the MACV headquarters.²⁸ Despite this effort, between 1960 and 1965 the situation in South Vietnam continued to rapidly deteriorate.

Widespread corruption and a failure to share a common aim for the conflict against the Communist forces became a source of contention between U.S. and the Republic of Vietnam government. U.S. support allowed the South Vietnamese government to survive and for Diem to continue to direct the war, paying little credence to U.S. political and senior military advice.²⁹ To the average Vietnamese, U.S support of the Diem government appeared to be a continuation of French imperialism, replacing the French with American neocolonial overlords. Diem represented the urban, affluent, Catholic, minority, much the same as the disassociated Mandarins or French appointed Vietnamese officials of the nineteenth century who had almost nothing in common with the Buddhist agrarian population.³⁰ The 1963 coup removed President Diem and his administration from the equation and created turmoil in South Vietnam, allowing Communist forces to solidify their hold on the countryside. The ousting of Diem resulted in a parade of incompetent and corrupt individuals assuming the presidency of South Vietnam complicating U.S. efforts to tie security programs to a legitimate government.³¹ In 1964, U.S. MACV

²⁸Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1984), 284.

²⁹Richard A Hunt, *Pacification, the American Struggle for Vietnamese Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 210.

³⁰Karnow, 255.

³¹*Ibid.*, 353.

implemented “Will to Victory” or the oil spot program in which security would spread outward from a series of pro-government villages protected by local and national forces. This security effort executed by the South Vietnamese military with little political oversight, suffered from the ARVN’s fixation on finding and destroying the enemy as learned from their American counterparts instead of focusing on protecting the population from the Communists.

The U.S. commitment to Vietnam initially focused on the corps headquarters as the command and control structure under MACV. These headquarters would not be joint in staffing; however, they would include attached liaison officers from sister services to facilitate synchronization between the branches. The U.S. Army Corps headquarters regions were designated Field Forces to prevent confusion with the ARVN Corps with which the U.S. forces would be coordinating and cooperating. This also raised concerns as to which nation was in charge, South Vietnam or the U.S., since both nations were assigned terrain and conducted both independent and joint operations within the assigned battle space.³²

General Westmoreland activated II Field Force on 15 March 1965. The strategic positioning of the II Field Force headquarters in Long Binh with close proximity to Saigon facilitated interface with the South Vietnamese military, South Vietnamese government, and U.S. government agencies located in the capital. The II Field Force area of operations encompassed the 11 provinces surrounding Saigon, mirroring the ARVN Military Region III. It extended north to the I Field Force area of operations controlled by U.S. II Corps situated in the central highlands. II Field Force shared its southern boundary with IV Corps that controlled the Mekong River Delta region. II Field Force’s geography extended west to the Cambodian border and east to the South China Sea. II Field Force’s battle space contained the Viet Cong sanctuaries of the Iron Triangle and Hobo Woods located to the north and west of Saigon, as well as the exit points

³²Karnow, 247.



Figure 1. II Field Force Area of Operations

Source: Source: George L. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive October 1966 to October 1967: The United States Army in Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1994), 19.



Figure 2. Communist Area of Operations

Source: George L. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive October 1966 to October 1967: The United States Army in Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1994), 20.

of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the west of Saigon in the vicinity of Tay Ninh and An Loc. To the enemy, the region occupied by II Field Force represented their eventual military and political objective or center of gravity. Control of the region provided access to the densely populated urban centers, the capital of the opposition government, and the rich rice production belt of the South.³³

Following the separation of North and South Vietnam, the Communist government in Hanoi divided South Vietnam into 10 military regions resembling the battlefield architecture that existed in the north. A headquarters organization charged with supporting the guerilla and main force units in the south was also created. The Central Office in South Vietnam (COSVN) became that command organization responsible for the dissemination of the Politburo's agenda in the south.³⁴ COSVN's subordinate logistics headquarters, Group 599, provided general logistics support for the autonomous units of the PAVN and the Peoples Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF).³⁵ In the Saigon province, Hanoi designated five separate zones of operations in addition to the Saigon Gia Din special zone centered on the national capital. Further subdivision of these zones within the II Field Forces area of operations was the B-2 front, situated between Saigon and the Cambodian border. The designation and composition of Communist units operating in the battle space of II Field Force's fluxuated throughout its tenure, however the main actors consisted of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 8th, and 9th PAVN Battalions, the 9th Viet Cong Division, and 165th and 272nd Viet Cong Regiments.³⁶

³³James R. Arnold, *TET Offensive 1968, Turning Point In Vietnam, US Army Order of Battle of the Vietnam War* (London, England: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1990), 18.

³⁴The executive organization in most Communist governments is the Political Bureau generally referred to as the Politburo.

³⁵Cosmas, 70-73.

³⁶Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, Novato,

The composition of II Field Force fluctuated throughout its operational life span as well. Typically, it included three divisions, reinforced with individual regiments and support elements. Subordinate units assigned under the corps level headquarters of II Field Force during the war included the 1st, 9th, and 25th Infantry Divisions, both the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), the 173rd Airborne Brigade, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and the 12th Combat Aviation Group. International forces assigned to II Field Force included the 1st Australian Mechanized Task Force and the Royal Thai Army Volunteer Force. II Field Force redeployed to the U.S. in 1971 for inactivation, ending six years of combat operations.³⁷

The three men who commanded II Field Force in the case studies were Jonathan Seaman, Frederick Weyand, and Michael Davison. All three commanders were commissioned during the late interwar period between 1934 and 1939. Two were products of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and one received his commission from ROTC. Two of the officers came from military families where their fathers were general officers, and all three men elected to serve in combat arms. All three attended intermediate level education at Ft. Leavenworth prior to being baptized by fire as field grade officers during the Second World War. All three men severed on regimental thru corps level staffs with two commanding battalions in WWII and one in Korea. Battle experience of the three includes Africa, Italy, France, Germany, the China Burma India Theater, and the Pacific Theater. All three commanders received an early exposure to the value of intelligence while serving as corps and theater level intelligence officers. During the Cold War, the officers completed their division level command in Germany and Vietnam, with Davison and

1986), 46, 89-99 and Joseph A. McChristian, *The Role of Military Intelligence, 1965-1967: Vietnam Studies* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1994), 119-125.

³⁷Cosmas, 319.

Seaman commanding divisions in II Field Force prior to their assuming corps command.³⁸ These men played instrumental roles in translating Westmoreland's theater strategic guidance into combat operations studied in the following sections.

OPERATIONS CEDAR FALLS AND JUNCTION CITY, 1967

II Field Force headquarters developed plans for OPERATIONS CEDAR FALLS and JUNCTION CITY in early 1966. These operations were meant to employ the recent increase in U.S. combat power to counter the emerging Communist threat activity in the II Field Force area of operations. In the aftermath of these two operations, American involvement in Vietnam would shift from counter insurgency to a true combined arms conflict.³⁹ LTG Jonathan Seaman, the commander of II Field Force from 1966 to 1967, led his staff to produce a series of operations that embodied the elements of operational art.⁴⁰ This was accomplished by nesting the intent and guidance of the MACV commander, General Westmoreland, with the U.S tactical capabilities to counter the Communist threat originating from sanctuaries within the II Field Force area of operations. LTG Seaman maneuvered his divisions in an indirect manner, targeting the Communist force projection and lodgment areas as a method to dislocate the Viet Cong efforts

³⁸U.S. Army Center of Military History, "Biography for LTG Michael Davison," <http://www.history.army.mil> (accessed 4 January 2013); U.S. Army Center of Military History, "Biography for LTG Jonathan Seaman," <http://www.history.army.mil> (accessed 4 January 2013); and U.S. Army Center of Military History, "Biography for LTG Frederick Weyand," <http://www.history.army.mil> (accessed 4 January 2013).

³⁹Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 191.

⁴⁰Formative assignments and experience played a large role in shaping the II Field Force commander. LTG Seaman possessed considerable insight in regards to both the terrain and the enemy, having served as the Commander of the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam from 1965 through 1966. LTG Seaman's experience as an artilleryman in the Second World War in both the European and Pacific theaters, combined with his duty in postwar Germany, fostered his appreciation for the capabilities of mechanized formations as well as the value of reconnaissance and artillery support that would become critical aspects of his command.

and thus deny their ability to significantly influence the Saigon area. Sanctuary denial operations incorporating division and larger forces, served as a means to an end for II Field Force. Said another way, initial large unit operations would set the conditions for future small unit decentralized operations. Although limited by the U.S. national policy to those sanctuaries within Vietnam, despite evidence of sanctuary areas in Cambodia, disruption and destruction of the Communist logistic system would buy time for pacification and enable the future dispersion of U.S. forces, effectively doing more with less over a larger area.⁴¹ Through intensive reconnaissance efforts, II Field Force identified Communist sanctuary areas, logistic supply villages and the associated road and river networks used by the enemy to target the population and security forces in the capital. LTG Seaman's staff engaged in the simultaneous planning of operations that allowed the commander greater flexibility in the arranging specific operations based on enemy actions. This flexibility enabled LTG Seaman to establish a tempo that provided sustained pressure on the enemy during the fall of 1966 until the spring of 1967. Through successful logistic planning, II Field Force provided the logistic support to the corps that enabled both depth of operations and duration.

The period between 1964 and 1966 had witnessed the buildup of regular and Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam. Units of the 9th Viet Cong division, consisting of the 101st PAVN, 272nd PAVN, 271st Viet Cong, 273rd Viet Cong, and the 70th Security Regiment had operated in War Zone C north of Saigon since 1966. The division's composition included approximately 8,000 combat soldiers with an estimated 3,000 command and support personnel not including support rendered by the civilian population.⁴² COSVN or the political manifestation of the

⁴¹George L. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive; October 1966 to October 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1998), 113.

⁴²U.S. Army, Adjutant General's Office, *Operational Report-Lessons Learned II Field Force Quarterly Report ending 30 April 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of

Communist government in the south also increased their activities and reach in the Saigon area. The objective of these organizations was the destruction of ARVN units and the de-legitimization of the Saigon government. By 1964, despite the efforts of the U.S. advisors, the Communist forces were gaining the advantage. The establishment of lodgments or sanctuaries in the south from which Communist forces could operate with freedom of maneuver became a critical factor for enemy success. One of the most vital of these sanctuaries became known as the Iron Triangle, a densely wooded area 13 miles north of Saigon. The Iron Triangle's southern point was denoted by the confluence of the Thi Tinh and Saigon Rivers with the northern points stretching between Ben Suc and Ben Cat. Highway 13, connecting the Cambodian border to Saigon, paralleled the eastern portion of Iron Triangle. Geographically this position afforded the enemy access to both road and river transportation routes in addition to being a distribution point for supplies exiting the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Cambodia to units in the south. The 9th Viet Cong Division exclusively utilized this area as a secure training and staging area for operations in and around Saigon.⁴³

By 1965, U.S. forces conducted combat operations at brigade or lower levels. As U.S. troop levels in Vietnam increased, larger operations became possible as well as necessary, as Communist forces in the south also increased. The U.S. military view of sanctuary denial in 1965 and 1966 focused on the physical terrain as well the population within that area. This mind set led to the intentional depopulation of problem areas, increasing urbanization in South Vietnam with the flow of displaced rural populations into the cities.⁴⁴

the Army, 1967), 13-14.

⁴³Bernard W. Rogers, *Cedar Falls-Junction City: A Turning Point. Vietnam Studies* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 1989), 5-8.

⁴⁴Karnow, 454.

One of the largest early operations, OPERATION ATTLEBORO, conducted from September through November of 1966, represented an early success in the employment of multiple brigades in sanctuary denial operations. This would influence future decisions regarding the employment of large unit operations. OPERATION ATTLEBORO centered on the 196th Infantry Brigade conducting aggressive search and destroy operations northeast of Tay Ninh. During these operations, the brigade utilized air assaults to maintain surprise, keeping the enemy off balance. The quick tempo at which this operation was conducted resulted in the seizure of numerous supply and support infrastructure facilities such as tunnel complexes and weapons caches with limited enemy contact.⁴⁵ As the operation progressed and major enemy supply bases were discovered, the Viet Cong committed battalion-sized units in an attempt to counter the American success. This escalation caused LTG Seaman to attach additional combat power. This resulted in OPERATION ATTLEBORO morphing into a larger mission, growing to include forces from four U.S. divisions and several ARVN brigades. As of November 1966, OPERATION ATTLEBORO was the largest operation yet conducted in Vietnam. The initial tactical success of this operation would validate large-scale maneuvers at the operational level against an irregular enemy.⁴⁶

From the Communist perspective, General Giap saw OPERATION ATTELBORO as a failure of western military strategy due to conduct of large operations without decisive impacts on enemy combat formations. Although temporarily depriving the Communists of support, Giap's forces maintained freedom of maneuver, displacing until the U.S. forces departed the area. Giap also cited the U.S. tendency to focus on the military aspect of operations while ignoring diplomatic and civilian concerns. Giap claimed that large search and destroy operations had a

⁴⁵Karnow, 10.

⁴⁶Ibid., 12.

minimal impact on North Vietnam's efforts in the south, and the pacification program did not resonate with the southern population. The so-called U.S. victories served only to validate the Communist approach in South Vietnam.⁴⁷

The impact of OPERATION ATTLEBORO drew notice at the strategic level. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's continued pressure on MACV for results in Vietnam prompted General Westmoreland to instruct LTG Seaman to conduct additional operations in War Zone C on a larger scale.⁴⁸ Despite its perceived failures due to limited contact with Communist main force units, OPERATION ATTLEBORO reinforced General Westmoreland's conviction of the validity of operations of increased scale. Together with his Chief of Staff, LTG Harold K. Johnson, General Westmoreland devised the concept of targeting large enemy formations in an attempt to expunge them from the population setting the conditions for pacification operations to take root.⁴⁹ MACV's shift in priority from clear and hold operations to large-scale enemy focused missions is evident by the guidance General Westmoreland provided to LTG Seaman regarding OPERATION CEDAR FALLS. General Westmoreland directed II Field Force to operate on both the east and west bank of the Saigon River to contain and destroy the Communist forces within the sanctuary area.⁵⁰

LTG Seaman and his staff began simultaneously planning OPERATION JUNCTION CITY and OPERATION CEDAR FALLS during the late fall of 1966, taking into account the broad strategic guidance provided by MACV. Despite the order initially briefed to General

⁴⁷Nguyen Vo Giap, *The Military Art of Peoples War; The Selected Writings of General Vo Nguyen Giap*, ed. Rusesell Stetter (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 150.

⁴⁸Giap, 15.

⁴⁹Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2006), 371.

⁵⁰Rogers, 17.

Westmoreland, OPERATION CEDAR FALLS would take place first in January 1967, followed by OPERATION JUNCTION CITY to be conducted in the spring. The revised timing of these operations became tied to the anticipated arrival of the 9th Infantry Division. The additional combat power was identified as a requirement needed to assume steady state operations throughout the II Field Force battle space. The developing enemy situation in proximity to Saigon also prompted LTG Seaman to recommend OPERATION CEDAR FALLS occur first.⁵¹ Friendly forces conducting OPERATIONS CEDAR FALLS and JUNCTION CITY included the 1st Infantry Division reinforced by the 173rd Airborne Brigade; 1st Brigade, 9th Infantry Division; 35th ARVN Rangers; the 3rd Squadron, 1st Cavalry ARVN; and Task Force Alpha composed of Marines from the RVN 1st and 5th Battalions. The 25th Infantry Division was reinforced with the 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, the 196th Infantry Brigade (LI), and an armor company from the 9th Infantry Division.⁵² For the first time in Vietnam, U.S. strengths of multi division combined arms operations were to be leveraged against Communist sanctuaries.

Empowering subordinate units to identify and interpret Communist activity became a key to success for U.S. forces in Vietnam. As a result, MACV placed a premium on intelligence collection as evident in General Westmoreland's support for long-range reconnaissance patrol schools and brigade- level ranger detachments.⁵³ II Field Force likewise placed a tremendous emphasis on intelligence collection, creating a II Field Force specific intelligence collection plan that provided detailed analysis and distribution of the intelligence gathered by U.S. and ARVN agencies. This revised collection plan also established a program to control the numerous sources

⁵¹Rogers, 19.

⁵²Department of the Army, *Operational Report- Lessons Learned II Field Force Quarterly Report ending 30 April 1967*, 25.

⁵³Birtle, 377.

and informants used by the Corps. II Field Force utilized all available assets including human, sensor, and imagery to determine the activities and patterns established in order to determine enemy capabilities and potential objectives. During the winter and spring of 1966-1967, II Field Force assigned its corps artillery brigade the responsibility for a visual reconnaissance program that included the aerial observation of areas not observed by maneuver units, encompassing an estimated 13,000 square kilometers of battle space.⁵⁴ Frequent interaction with Brigadier General (BG) Joseph A. McChristen, the MACV J-2, provided LTG Seaman with superior situational awareness regarding the threat activity in and around Saigon, known by II Field Force as Warzone C. BG McChristen's intensive intelligence gathering efforts in the 1966 OPERATION RENDEZVOUS provided accurate assessments of enemy sanctuaries ranging from the Iron Triangle 30 kilometers north of Saigon to Cambodia at egress points of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. OPERATION RENDEZVOUS not only produced vital intelligence but also created the required systems to gather, analyze and distribute that information. BG McChristen leveraged these assets to include field exploitation teams, aerial collection assets, and the combined Vietnamese, U.S. staffed Combined Military Interrogation Center. The support from MACV not only provided maneuver battalions with field teams that provided analysis on captured documents within hours, but reported to MACV, further refining a Vietnam wide intelligence data bank.⁵⁵ This intelligence helped II Field Force to determine the location of the Viet Cong COSVN regional headquarters within the Iron Triangle. The identification of the enemy headquarters and the magnitude of Communist activity in Saigon's backyard resulted in OPERATION CEDAR FALLS preceding

⁵⁴Department of the Army, *Lessons Learned II Field Force Artillery, Quarterly Assessment for the period ending January 31, 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 1967), 5.

⁵⁵McChristian, 35, 115-117. Of note is the divergence in retrospect between BG McChristian and LTG Seaman as to who decided the order of execution for Cedar Falls and Junction City.

OPERATION JUNCTION CITY. The destruction of the regional headquarters became one of the key tasks to be accomplished during the operation.⁵⁶

LTG Seaman's previous concepts for operations focused on isolation, containment, and destruction of enemy forces in a rapid hammer and anvil action. OPERATION CEDAR FALLS shared this common formula being conducted in two phases with phase one being the isolation of the Iron Triangle, and phase two being the penetration of the enemy sanctuary and destruction of the Viet Cong forces within.⁵⁷ The blending of seek and destroy operations with the relocation of the civilian population from contested or outright pro- Communist villages presented a unique example of the fusing of combat operations with pacification efforts. Refugee statistics and relocation numbers were a critical MACV metric left over from variations of the pre-1966 Strategic Hamlet Program.⁵⁸ MACV believed that the numbers of displaced individuals and those willing to relocate indicated the level of control the Communists exhibited in the rural countryside. In theory, if the Regional Force Police Force (RFPF) could adequately secure an area, then the population, being ancestrally tied to the land, would not move. Only a severe deficit in security would incite displacement.⁵⁹ MACV's information requirements combined with II Field Force's desire to turn the Iron Triangle into a free fire area devoid of a civilian population elevated the priority of the pacification aspect of this operation. The relocation endeavor would require tremendous coordination with the ARVN forces conducted primarily through their U.S. advisors as well as with direct coordination with John Paul Van, the director of the Office of Civil

⁵⁶Rogers, 19.

⁵⁷Ibid., 23.

⁵⁸The unpopular Strategic Hamlet Program initiated by the South Vietnamese Government in 1961, attempted to isolate rural peasants from Communist guerrillas by consolidating and resettling populations in a defended and sometimes fortified village.

⁵⁹Krepinevich, 225.

Operations for III Corps, the predecessor of the Office of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development.⁶⁰ The operation assumed risk with the relocation of civilians in that construction of a new hamlet and the stocking of supplies could not occur until after the operation began in order to maintain its secrecy. For the relocation operations, LTG Seaman sought the assistance of the ARVN III Corps in an effort to further the legitimization of ARVN security forces amongst the population. III Corps would also share in responsibilities for the cordon operations.

OPERATION CEDAR FALLS not only validated corps level operations to MACV, but also validated the employment of armor against an irregular threat.⁶¹ Building on LTG Seaman's experience with mechanized forces in Vietnam while serving as the commander of the 1st Infantry Division in 1966, armored personnel carriers and the recently arrived tank units would play a key role in the operation. Through the combination of airmobile, dismounted, and mechanized forces, II Field Force could leverage speed and lethality to exert continuous pressure on the enemy. The plan capitalized on the armored vehicle's speed and protection to quickly establish the cordon around the Iron Triangle while providing the ability to react to intense enemy counter attacks. Despite General Westmoreland's previous decree of no tanks in the jungle, an emerging yet unorthodox technique called jungle busting became prevalent. This technique enabled tanks to penetrate and divide the interior of the triangle, dislocating the enemy formations and leaving them vulnerable to the U.S. infantry clearing operations. The shock provided by the use of armored vehicles in terrain previously thought to be inaccessible dealt a tremendous blow to enemy morale.⁶²

⁶⁰U.S. Army, Adjutant General's Office, *After Action Review for OPERATION CEDAR FALLS, II Field Force* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 1967), 5.

⁶¹Don Starry, *Armored Combat In Vietnam* (New York, NY: Arno Press Inc., 1980), 93.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 93-95.

The operation began with the 25th Infantry Division as the main effort of phase one, forming the anvil with the task of containing the enemy along the southwest border of the triangle and halting river traffic moving south on the Saigon River. The 1st Infantry Division would conduct OPERATION NIAGARA FALLS, a deception operation along Highway 13, then attack west acting as the hammer to destroy the Viet Cong. Prior to the start of the main operation, the 25th Infantry Division tasked the 196th Infantry Brigade to conduct a deception operation, OPERATION FITCHBURG, in the vicinity of Tay Ninh. The location was in proximity to previously executed OPERATION ATTELBORO in an attempt to disguise the intended objective of II Field Force. The two divisions conducted deception operations elsewhere in the battle space to draw the attention of the enemy away from the Iron Triangle while masking the movement of forces occupying positions at key locations in order to emplace the cordon.

OPERATION CEDAR FALLS began on 7 January 1967, with the II Field Force tactical operations center co-located with the main headquarters at Long Binh. The II Field Force staff faced the complicated communication and synchronization challenge of communicating with ARVN units assigned and attached under their command. In addition to U.S. Army 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions with logistic, aviation, artillery, and engineer attachments, joint forces included support from the 7th Air Force, and 3rd Tactical Fighter Wing, and combined forces from the ARVN 5th Infantry Division, RVN Navy 3rd Riverine Company, and 30th River Assault Group.⁶³

The first objective was the village of Ben Suc, a well-established and fortified logistic hub for the Viet Cong in their efforts to influence the Saigon area. Despite Ben Suc's military

⁶³Starry, 24.

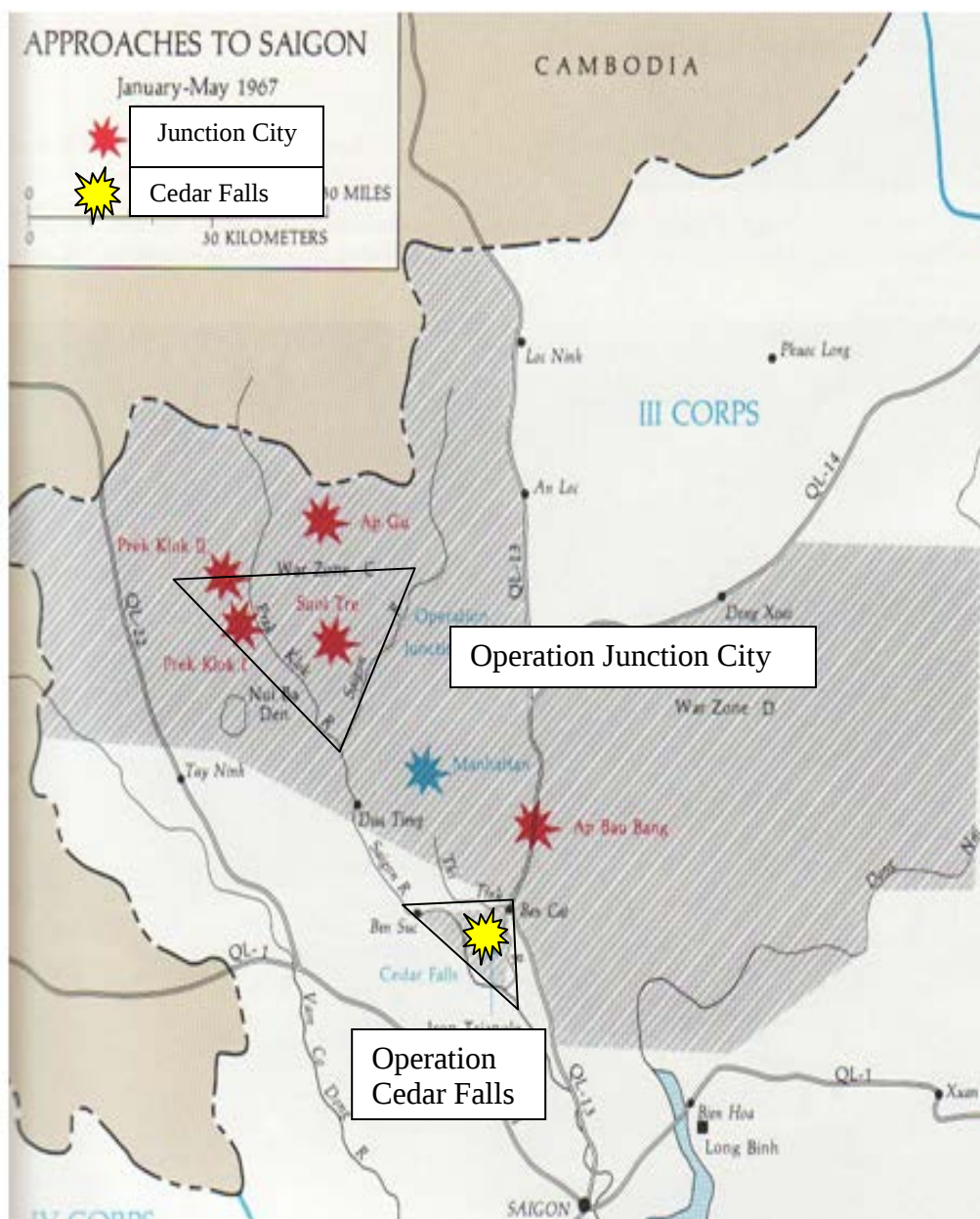


Figure 3. Map of the Cedar Falls/Junction City Area

Source: Bernard W. Rogers *Cedar Falls – Junction City: A Turning Point. Vietnam Studies* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, Vietnam Studies, 1989), 87.

importance, II Field Force placed restrictions on the use of pre-air assault indirect and aerial rocket fires within the village to maintain the element of surprise and limit collateral damage in

anticipation for the relocation operations.⁶⁴ The effective echeloning of forces allowed for the rapid isolation of the village, securing the site to allow search and resettlement operations to occur while preventing the enemy from reacting. The operation yielded large quantities of supplies and intelligence, effectively severing the enemy lines of communications and supply in the area. II Field Force maintained the flexibility to react to the issues that arose from the need to maintain secrecy resulting in limited preparations being made for the evacuation of the villagers. This was assumed risk at the start of the operations and easily mitigated through coordination through the civilian agencies and ARVN forces to minimize the duration and hardships of the population caused by the move. At completion of the operation 5,987 villagers and their belongings were successfully relocated temporarily to Phu Cuong and eventually, onto resettlement locations within the span of a few months. Despite the physical success of the relocation, the resettlement served to further distance the rural population from the Saigon government as well as illustrate the strained relations between the U.S. military, U.S. civilian aid organizations, and the South Vietnamese Government.⁶⁵

The hammer swing maneuver resulted in tremendous success. Using the results of the intelligence collection plan, II Field Force possessed the ability to accurately align U.S. forces with objectives, enabling the seizure of large stockpiles of supplies and intelligence materials including the Viet Cong communication codes for the 4th District. By 11 January, LTG Seaman adjusted the rapid tempo of operations, directing methodical thorough searches of assigned areas. This increased the duration of OPERATION CEDAR FALLS to sixteen total days, accomplishing the commander's intent.⁶⁶ The successful synchronization of operations prevented

⁶⁴MacGarrigle, 99-101.

⁶⁵Ibid., 106.

⁶⁶Starry, 51.

the Viet Cong from mounting a coherent defense. Most of the contacts resulted from small groups at platoon size or smaller attempting to evacuate the area. The operation also demonstrated the flexibility of the U.S. forces through their ability to simultaneously conduct search and destroy missions while also pursuing the pacification objectives by conducting Medical Civic Action Programs, (MEDCAP) and other population centric missions.⁶⁷

The mobility provided by airmobile and mechanized forces allowed brigade commanders to immediately react to intelligence gathered and analyzed at an objective. This ability increased the amount of caches discovered and enemy material confiscated or destroyed while maintaining constant pressure on an enemy who was trapped within the cordon. The search conducted by the 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment uncovered a substantial tunnel complex. The exploitation of the tunnel network required a temporary boundary extension with the adjacent 196th Infantry Brigade, due to its size. Based on the documents recovered during the search of the complex, LTG Seaman believed the brigade had located the Viet Cong Regional Headquarters further disrupting enemy activity in the Saigon area.⁶⁸

II Field Force also made extensive use of Psychological Operations field teams to exploit the shock dealt to the enemy by overwhelming high tempo operations. Information operations through leaflets and human interaction sought an indirect approach to defeating the enemy by promoting reconciliation-based programs like Chieu Hoi, contributing to over 500 Viet Cong surrendering. At the conclusion of nineteen days of continuous operations, CEDAR FALLS produced 750 enemy dead, 280 prisoners of war, 3,700 tons of rice confiscated and a multitude of weapons, ammunition, medical supplies and uniforms captured. More importantly the Communist physical infrastructure and command and control mechanism were severely damaged.

⁶⁷Starry, 53 and MacGarrigle, 105-107.

⁶⁸MacGarrigle, 111-112.

U. S. losses consisted of 72 soldiers killed and 337 wounded. LTG Seaman attributed the low casualties and lack of enemy defense to the speed and surprise gained through coordination and synchronization. Maximizing the initial surprise through deception efforts and the rapid cordon and penetration, II Field Force maintained the initiative throughout the operation. In slightly over two weeks, II Field Force denied the enemy the ability to conduct, sustain, or control large-scale offensive operations, disrupting their activities for months. The Viet Cong were forced to establish lodgments closer to the Cambodian border to enhance their security at the loss of proximity to Saigon. The operation also solidified the systems II Field Force relied on to coordinate large operations with ARVN forces as well as civilian agencies.⁶⁹

The concept for OPERATION JUNCTION CITY began with General Westmoreland's guidance to LTG Seaman to conduct a large multi-divisional operation in January 1967, which would include an airborne drop with the purpose of demonstrating U.S. freedom of maneuver while also denying the enemy safe haven in War Zone C between Ben Cat and the Cambodian border. Much like OPERATION CEDAR FALLS, deception operations would mask the troop movements as well as disguise the intended objective. The II Field Force staff generated a plan with the objections of engaging to destroy the 9th Viet Cong Division and 101st PAVN Regiment, destroy COSVN headquarters, destroy enemy base camps, and support infrastructure. Intelligence gained from the II Field Force collection plan in addition to intelligence gathered from OPERATION CEDAR FALLS was extensively used in the planning of OPERATION JUNCTION CITY. The area of operations can best be defined as being a 50 by 80 square kilometer area bordered by Cambodia in the north, Highway 13 in the east and the southern boundary running east west from Ben Cat to Tay Ninh.⁷⁰ LTG Seaman's concept was a two-phase

⁶⁹McChristian, 123-125.

⁷⁰G. C. Lorenz, J. H. Wilbanks, D. H. Petraeus, P. A. Stuart , B. L. Crittenden, and D. P.

operation to be conducted in cooperation with ARVN forces. Phase one would focus on establishing the conditions within the battle space for the destruction of enemy forces. This entailed the establishment of a horseshoe shaped cordon around enemy sanctuaries. Phase two entailed the clearing of the space between the horseshoe through ground and airmobile assaults.⁷¹ A critical issue that arose due to the increased distance from Saigon became the conditions of the road networks and the required deconfliction of march orders to prevent congestion with maneuver and logistics units moving into the operational area in addition to retrograde traffic for damaged equipment.⁷² As in CEDAR FALLS, the 25th Infantry Division with the 173rd Airborne Brigade would establish the cordon in the west, while the 1st Infantry Division established its cordon in the north. Once conditions were set and the area isolated, one brigade from the 25th Infantry Division and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment positioned on the southern edge of the cordon would attack north, clearing the area within the cordon. Four ARVN battalions would also support II Field Force in the establishment of the cordon.⁷³

The deception operation conducted in the western edge of the battle space captured large quantities of Viet Cong supplies as well as secured landing zones and blocked enemy exfiltration routes into Cambodia. Most importantly, the successful accomplishment of OPERATION GADSON positioned U.S. forces for the start of OPERATION JUNCTION CITY. Intelligence gathered from the deception efforts confirmed the presence of a large enemy force with support, training, and staging areas.

George, *Operation Junction City Vietnam 1967: Battle Book* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1983), 10.

⁷¹Rogers, 87.

⁷²U.S. Army, Adjutant General's Office, *AAR, 25th Infantry Division After Action Report (Logistical) on Operation Junction City* (San Francisco, CA: Headquarters 25th Division Support Command, April 1967), 4.

⁷³Rogers, 86.

OPERATION JUNCTION CITY commenced on 22 February 1967 with the II Field Force Tactical Action Center (TAC) establishing operations forward in Dau Tieng with the main remaining at Long Binh.⁷⁴ It is important to recognize that although this operation entailed enormous quantities of combat power, II Field Force retained additional requirements such as providing brigades in support of pacification programs like the Revolutionary Development Operations. The initial maneuvers of this operation required the rapid insertion of forces by both air and ground to establish a cordon to contain the enemy. As per MACV's instructions, the 173rd Airborne Brigade conducted a parachute insertion to maintain surprise and establish key blocking positions on likely enemy egress routes. Once the area was cordoned, the attack north began. Much as in OPERATION CEDAR FALLS, LTG Seaman established the tempo by directing a deliberate search of the area. This operation resulted in sporadic enemy contact. The exception occurred when 3rd Battalion, 271st Viet Cong Regiment, attempted to defend its base camp surrounding a company from 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division that was relieved by an adjacent unit.⁷⁵ The operation also captured vast stocks of enemy uniforms, weapons, and ammunition. Extensive base camps were discovered and destroyed as were COSVN propaganda facilities including printing presses, photo labs. II Field Force assessed that the destruction of these facilities critically affected the Communist political effort in South Vietnam. The first phase of the operation resulted in over 835 enemy killed with 15 captured. At this point in the battle, LTG Seaman was replaced by LTG Palmer who continued operations in accordance with the initial plan.⁷⁶ At its close, the actions of OPERATION JUNCTION CITY destroyed 3 PAVN and VC

⁷⁴Rogers, 97.

⁷⁵Ibid., 98-108.

⁷⁶Ibid., 123. LTG Seaman completed his one-year assignment as the II Field Force Commander (March 1966 Until February 1967) At that point, he had spent two years in Vietnam, the first as Commander of the 1st Infantry Division, deploying his unit into country in July 1965

regiments with the remainder of Communist forces withdrawing to Cambodia. Despite inflicting a blow to Communist morale in South Vietnam, the operations did little to break the Communist hold on the countryside.⁷⁷

Although OPERATIONS ATTLEBORO, CEDAR FALLS, and JUNCTION CITY were tremendously successful in denying the enemy sanctuaries and sustenance, the U.S. intelligence assessments on the duration of the operational effects proved incorrect. The resolve of the Communist forces in the south became evident in their reoccupation of cleared areas in as little as four months.⁷⁸ Difficulties in sanctuary denial operations arose from the limited depth of the battlefield between Saigon and Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia. The restricted terrain and proximity to the international border represented a high speed enemy avenue of approach that could not be permanently secured by the U.S. or ARVN forces. Despite the short-term success in clearing support zones or destroying Communist supplies, large unit operations were costly to U.S. units in resources and resulted only in short duration gains.⁷⁹ This symptomatic fix could never be decisive in nature as the terrain prevented the enemy from being completely isolated, allowing the Communists to disengage when the losses became too high. Their adaptive nature found PAVN units quickly learning the conditions when to engage and when not to engage U.S. and ARVN forces. The increased elusive nature of the enemy contrasted with the escalation of

and commanding it until March 1966. Following his return to the United States in March 1967, LTG Seaman assumed command of the 1st U.S. Army located in Ft. Meade MD.

⁷⁷James H. Wilbanks, *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 4-5.

⁷⁸The operations were labeled a success initially by corps and division AARs in addition to U.S. Army directed historical studies, immediately following their execution. Current sources dispute this claim due to the operations being focused on conventional definitions of success with conventional metrics such as terrain secured, enemy killed, or weapons captured, rather than being population centric as seen in the modern prosecution of a COIN conflict.

⁷⁹Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The Twenty Five Year War* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1984), 60- 61.

U.S. efforts in division and larger operations. From the U.S. perspective, OPERATION JUNCTION CITY would mark the transition point from COIN to what General Westmoreland described as a mid- intensity conflict.⁸⁰

OPERATIONS CEDAR FALLS and JUNCTION CITY effectively demonstrated the translation of political or strategic level guidance to the operational level planning with tactical execution. The vague guidance expressed by General Westmoreland defined the threat from the MACV perspective and identified the need at the tactical level to defeat that threat. To facilitate actions at the operational level, General Westmoreland offered his assistance in the form of the allocation of resources. It was LTG Seaman and the staff of the II Field Force who were able to use MACV's systems for intelligence gathering and analysis to correctly align available combat power against threats and objectives. This allowed II Field Force to accomplish the strategic goals of neutralizing the enemy threat north of Saigon, and engage in cooperation with ARVN forces, while continuing pacification initiatives. The staff was then able to synchronize operations and maintain the element of surprise to disrupt and unbalance the enemy while echeloning friendly forces to sustain the tempo and allowing for mutually supportive maneuvers keeping constant pressure on the enemy. Lastly, II Field Force possessed the ability to solve complex problems through the use of technology or the adaptive employment of weapon systems. This capacity is evident through the example of airmobile and mechanized operations being used to rapidly reposition U.S. forces on the battlefield as well as relocating civilian populations by airlift. The use of sensors and human sources to establish and track enemy and civilian patterns in addition to psychological operations teams to exploit or react to developing situations provided the commander with a better understanding of his area of operations. LTG Seaman utilized his previous experience in the tactical fight as the 1st Infantry Division commander during a 1966

⁸⁰Kerpinevich, 190-193.

tour in Vietnam to aid in his decision making as a corps commander. This explains his ability to accomplish the mission with minimal guidance and considerable latitude in execution. The established relationship LTG Seaman enjoyed with his commander General Westmoreland was evident by the limited descriptive guidance he received. LTG Seaman also had unimpeded access to General Westmoreland and his staff combined with Westmoreland's frequent circulation during the planning of the operation, ensuring the II Field Force plan was nested with his intent. The degree of trust between commander and subordinate was also evident through General Westmoreland's rapid acceptance of LTG Seaman's recommendation in regards to sequencing operations within the campaign.

In providing a concept and intent to his subordinates, LTG Seaman provided clear guidance with specified objectives and key tasks. Understanding the fight, LTG Seaman proved his ability to conduct large scale operations, with clearly defined enemy focused success criteria, allowing his subordinate commanders the freedom to conduct operations as the situation unfolded. Although not specified in any of the documentation, it appears that LTG Seaman effectively allocated resources to support his division commanders, setting the conditions or providing his subordinates the tools for success.

THE TET OFFENSIVE, 1968

Analysis of the 1968 Tet Offensive differs from the two additional operations used as case studies in this monograph in that the initiative belonged to the Communist forces in the execution of a planned offensive. U.S. and ARVN forces, being largely surprised by the magnitude of the offensive, responded with small units fighting in a reactionary manor until the Field Force and MACV commands could develop the situation and gain understanding of the scope of the attacks to effectively support the tactical fight.

The North Vietnamese Politburo began the final planning for a large-scale offensive during the summer of 1967, in a Hanoi meeting with top Communist political and military officials. General Nguyen Chi Thanh is credited as the architect of the Tet Offensive. Thanh envisioned the attack as a general offensive, igniting a simultaneous popular uprising in the south. Although this concept had been discussed for some time, the Politburo determined that the conditions were not adequate until late 1967 to support its successful execution. The Politburo made four key planning assumptions in developing the framework for the Tet Offensive. First, it assumed that the southern population would rally to the Communist cause, turning against the Americans, who were considered to be occupiers. The Politburo also assumed that ARVN forces would flee in the face of a large offensive. Lastly, the assumption was that an aggressive tempo of attacks and an uprising would cause a rapid U.S. withdrawal. All four assumptions would eventually prove false for the Communists resulting in the offensive's overall failure.⁸¹ General Vo Nguyen Giap initially opposed the timing of the offensive, preferring the adoption of a safer defensive strategy of continued attrition rather than attempting to force a decisive victory. Following the death of General Thanh in a U.S. bombing raid while on an inspection tour of Communist forces in the south, General Giap assumed command of the offensive despite his reservations.⁸² Strategically, the offensive would not be decisive in nature against the Americans, but rather a renewed effort to break the U.S. will through attrition, leaving the South Vietnamese government devoid of U.S. support with its population united under their Communist liberators. The planning, staging, and logistic efforts began in earnest during the fall with the main attacks

⁸¹James S. Robbins, *This Time We Win: Revisiting The Tet Offensive* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2010), 68.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 75.

templated to occur during the lunar new year holiday of Tet.⁸³ North Vietnamese plans revolved around the diversionary attack to isolate the III Marine Expeditionary Force's base at Khesanh with four PAVN Divisions creating the American version of the French defeat at Dienbienphu. Once the diversionary attack was under way, the PAVN and Viet Cong would conduct simultaneous attacks on forty-six urban centers and military installations in South Vietnam.⁸⁴

The strategic context in which the Tet Offensive occurred could not have been more politically adverse for the U.S. President Johnson, based on the success of operations in 1967, sought to de-escalate the conflict. The political narrative of success in Vietnam as told by the U.S. government offered proof of positive results, showing the American public progress toward an eventual termination of the war. The televised results of the offensive however, showed a dramatic shift in war transitioning from limiting fighting in the rural countryside to all out assaults on the cities of South Vietnam, countering the government's narrative of success. This disparity served to widen the rift between the population and national actors in the U.S., irrevocably weakening the will of the population. At the time of the attack, the U.S. government's energies focused on dealing with the developing crisis with North Korea over the capture of the USS *Pueblo* and its crew.⁸⁵ In Vietnam, the U.S. appeared to enjoy a moment of stasis due to the success of MACV from 1966 until 1967. Positive results from large operations like the 1st Cavalry Division's success in defeating a superior force in the I Drang Valley, and II Field

⁸³Karnow, 551.

⁸⁴Arnold, 13.

⁸⁵U.S. Naval Historical Center, "*USS Pueblo* (AGER-2)," <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-p/ager2.htm> (accessed 20 March 2013). On 23 January 1968, while off Wonsan, North Korea, the *USS Pueblo*, an intelligence gathering vessel was attacked by North Korean naval forces and seized. One crewmember was killed in the assault and the other 82 men on board were taken prisoner. The North Koreans claimed the ship had violated their territorial waters. After 11 months in captivity, the *USS Pueblo's* crew was repatriated while the ship remained in North Korea possession, exhibited as a war prize.

Force's conduct of OPERATION CEDAR FALLS and JUNCTION CITY prompted the Johnson administration to focus on future plans on redeployment and war termination.⁸⁶ U.S. intelligence efforts could not identify the rising storm that would be the Tet Offensive due to the 21 January Communist siege of Khe Sanh. The worsening situation of the besieged Marine outpost was erroneously identified as the North's main effort rather than a diversionary tactic.⁸⁷ This incorrect focus magnified the shock value of the 30 January 1968 Communist attacks throughout the country, shattering the administration's continued optimistic view of the war's future conduct.⁸⁸

On the eve of the Tet Offensive, II Field Force consisted of the following units: 1st Infantry Division minus the 1st Battalion 16th Infantry Regiment and reinforced with the 5th Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment (Mechanized) and partnered with the 5th ARVN Division. The 9th Infantry Division reinforced with 1st Battalion 16th Infantry Regiment and the Royal Thai Volunteer Regiment partnered with their ARVN counterpart, the 7th ARVN Division. The 25th Infantry Division reinforced with 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Mobile) and their ARVN counterpart the 25th ARVN Division. Additional units directly under II Field Force Command included the 199th Infantry Brigade, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, the Capital Military Assistance Command and lastly, the 1st Australian Task Force.⁸⁹ Tet would pit 35

⁸⁶Kerpinevich, 192.

⁸⁷Wilbanks, 30-31.

⁸⁸Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time For War, The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 259.

⁸⁹Department of the Army, *Operational Lessons Learned, II Field Force Vietnam. Period ending 31 October 1968* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 1968), 24-31.

PAVN and Viet Cong Battalions against 53 U.S. battalions and their ARVN allies. Although outnumbered, the Communist forces maintained the advantage of surprise.⁹⁰

Throughout the fall of 1967, LTG Frederick Weyand, the II Field Force Commander, concentrated his divisions on continued clearing operations west of Saigon along the Cambodian border. During the Second World War, LTG Weyand had served as the Assistant Chief of Staff of Intelligence for the China Burma India theater of operations.⁹¹ This intelligence background aided in his correctly identifying the indicators of a Communist attack on Saigon.⁹² Although sanctuary areas were previously cleared by U.S. and ARVN forces, the Communists quickly reoccupied the urban centers, establishing safe houses and caches in preparation for the upcoming offensive. The observed decrease in enemy activity and movement of Viet Cong forces from rural areas to centers of population prompted LTG Weyand to request that General Westmoreland allow him to reposition his forces.⁹³ Based on the January 1968 indicators of an impending attack, the II Field Force's focus shifted from the interdiction of enemy units and material in infiltration areas along the Cambodian border to the defense of centers of population within III Corps Tactical

⁹⁰Wilbanks, 29.

⁹¹U.S. Pacific Command, "Former Commanders," http://www.usarpac.army.mil/history/cgbios/cg_veyand.asp (accessed 20 March 2013): LTC Frederick C. Weyand was commissioned as an artillery officer in 1938 through ROTC from the University of California. He served as the Assistant Intelligence Chief of Staff in the China-Burma-India Theater in World War II. After transferring to the Infantry branch during the Korean War, he commanded a battalion in the 7th Infantry Regiment in five battle campaigns and served as the G-3 of the 3rd Infantry Division. LTG Weyand graduated from the National War College in 1957. He then assumed command of the 3rd Battle Group, 6th Infantry in Germany from 1958-1959. He commanded the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii from 1964-66, deploying the division to Vietnam until 1967. LTG Weyand served as the Deputy Commanding General of II Field Force in March 1967 assuming command of the corps in May 1967.

⁹²Robbins, 111.

⁹³Department of the Army, *Operational Lessons Learned, II Field Force Vietnam. Period ending 31 October 1968*, 53.

Zone, specifically around Saigon. Anticipating the main Communist objective being Saigon, LTG Weyand repositioned twenty-seven U.S. battalions within forty kilometers of the city to support the ARVN divisions recently charged with its defense. Additionally, twenty-two U.S. battalions remained dispersed beyond the forty-kilometer “Saigon Circle” to react to any Viet Cong attacks.⁹⁴ II Field Force analysis of premature Viet Cong attacks in the I Field Force area of operations convinced LTG Weyand that the Communist forces would violate the Tet cease-fire agreement and conduct attacks in and around Saigon. In response to this intelligence, LTG Weyand elevated the alert posture of II Field Force units in preparation for an impending attack.⁹⁵

On the night of 29 January 1968, Communist forces attacked six main targets in the Saigon area with thirty-five battalions. Targets included the National Broadcasting radio station, the U.S. Embassy, the Headquarters of the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff, the Headquarters of the Vietnamese Navy, the U.S. Air Base at Tan Son Nhut, and the Presidential Palace.⁹⁶ Although taken by surprise, the repositioning of U.S. forces as well as attempts to limit or recall ARVN units on leave increased the ability to react expeditiously countering the Communist attacks. This rapid reaction prevented PAVN and Viet Cong forces from establishing too firm of a foothold in Saigon. The II Field Force Headquarters, working with the ARVN II Corps Commander, General Tran Do, synchronized the organization and commitment of forces to the fight as they became available.

Aside from smaller attacks on the government buildings in Saigon, the enemy main effort targeted the combined U.S. and ARVN base at Tan Son Nhut. The 9th Viet Cong Division utilized caches of weapons and staging areas in factories across the street from the base from

⁹⁴Starry, 115.

⁹⁵Robbins, 120.

⁹⁶Arnold, 41.

which to launch the attack and penetrate the base defenses. Communist objectives on the base included command and control structures, high-ranking individuals, and stocks of heavy weapons. The Viet Cong assault force contained armor and artillery specialists with the intent of turning captured ARVN equipment against the defenders.⁹⁷

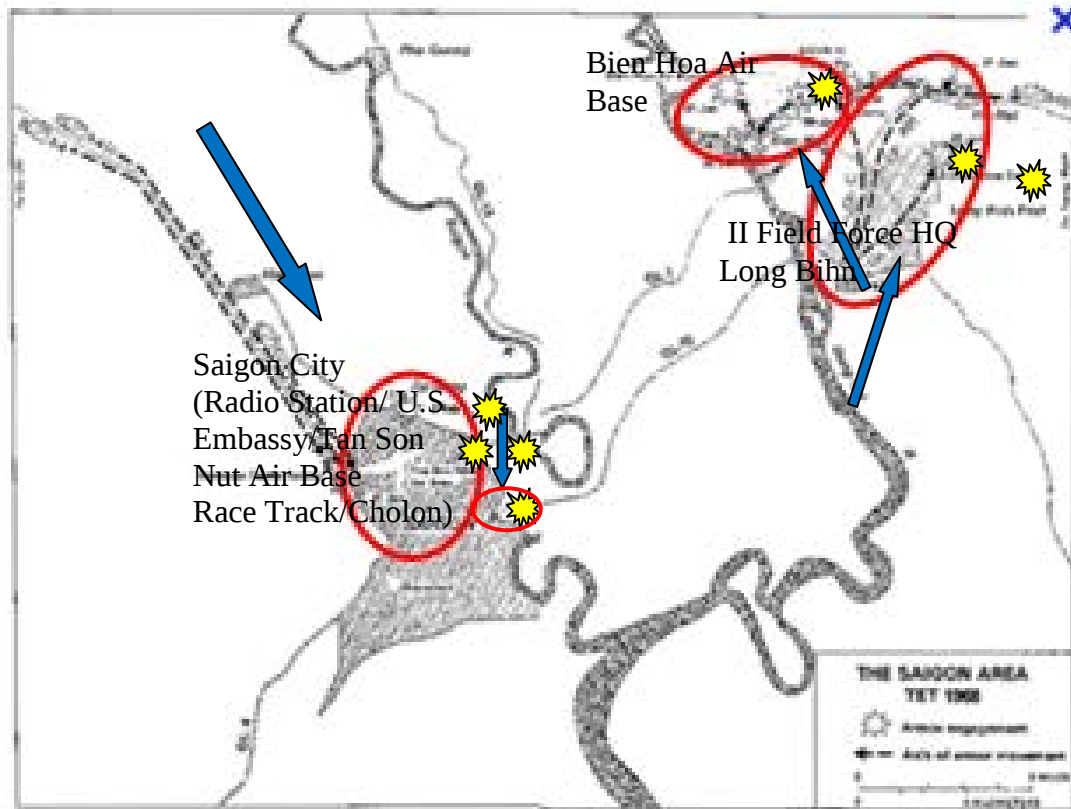


Figure 4. Map of Saigon during Tet, 1968

Source: Donn A. Starry, "Mounted Combat In Vietnam," <http://www.history.army.mil/books/Vietnam/mounted/chapter5.htm> 117. (accessed 1 February 2013).

Shortly after the attack began on the U.S. embassy, LTG Weyand in the II Field Force operations center coordinated support for multiple U.S. Marine, Air Force, Army, ARVN, and

⁹⁷Robbins, 139.

National Police defensive operations across the city.⁹⁸ Within three hours, LTG Weyand possessed enough situational awareness to commit the 25th Mechanized Infantry Division as robust quick reaction forces tasked to break the Communist assault and drive the Viet Cong division out of the base and into the city. The 5th ARVN Rangers along with the units from the 25th Mechanized Infantry cleared the Viet Cong headquarters located in the Saigon Race Track area. U.S. and ARVN units contained the retreating Viet Cong fighters in the Cholon neighborhood of Saigon, preventing their escape. Cholon witnessed several days of intense fighting with the Viet Cong defenders mounting several vicious counterattacks which failed to create a breakout.⁹⁹ Following coordination with Saigon authorities to evacuate the civilian population the arduous task of clearing the slum began. By 10 February, half of the neighborhood had been demolished with all Viet Cong killed or captured.¹⁰⁰

Following the initial attacks and subsequent operations to secure Saigon, LTG Weyand commented that he believed the Communist objective was more psychological due to the limited ability the Viet Cong units had to exploit or retain any early gains.¹⁰¹ Despite any psychological or moral victories, the Tet Offensive failed militarily for the Communists. In roughly one-month's time, the Viet Cong suffered irreversible damage, ceasing to exist as a fighting force. Tet solidified the ability of U.S. forces to react quickly overcoming the initial shock of an attack as well as demonstrating the resolve of the South Vietnamese forces to defend their country. Although operations in II Field Force area of responsibility were mainly tactical in nature, the Tet Offensive demonstrated the benefit of accurately anticipating the enemy's actions and objectives.

⁹⁸Robbins, 136.

⁹⁹Wilbanks, 39.

¹⁰⁰Robbins, 140.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 179.

Anticipation of the enemy by LTG Weyand led to the rearrangement of forces to react to the impending assault. This allowed the commander to enjoy greater freedom of action in countering the threat. From the perspective of a corps level staff, having pre-established channels of communication both internally and externally with joint and host nation forces allowed for the situation to be rapidly developed and for critical assets and support to be allocated to best support operations. An example of enhanced communications is seen in the validation of the pile on tactic that required immediate response once a sizeable enemy formation was located to fix and exploit success through the rapid synchronization and repositioning of combat forces.¹⁰²

In the long term, failure to anticipate the number of displaced civilians appeared to be a significant shortfall of the corps staff. Only when the magnitude of the offensive became realized in the spring of 1968 did II Field Force respond through close coordination with CORDS in the form of relocation and resettlement cadre teams. The positive outcome of resettlement efforts manifested itself through knowledge gained in additional interaction with the rural municipal leadership allowing II Field Force to identify the village rather than the hamlet as the nexus of communal life resulting in a reframing of the U.S. approach to population centric operations.¹⁰³

Although a victory at the tactical and operational level, Tet would mark the end of a presidency with Johnson refusing to seek a second term. The public reaction fueled by media coverage illicited an initial pro-military response from the civilian population which turned into despair in the late spring compounded by the worsening situation at Khe Sanh. The post-Tet situation in Vietnam also prompted the request for more forces by General Westmoreland. General Wheeler and President Johnson recognized the need for more troops while realizing how an increased military commitment would adversely affect the U.S. population's perception of the

¹⁰²Department of the Army, *Operational Lessons Learned, II Field Force Vietnam. Period ending 31 October 1968*, 51.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 41-45.

conflict.¹⁰⁴ The Tet Offensive clearly represents a tactical operation that had a dramatic strategic impact. Although Tet did not accomplish the military objectives sought by the Communists, it did influence the American will through the failure of the administration to legitimize the nature of the conflict. Through improper management of the public's expectations, no degree of tactical or operational success could repair the rift between the public and the national powers. 1968 would serve as the turning point in the conflict in which the time horizon for support began a steady contraction.

CAMBODIAN INCURSION, 1970

The U.S. 1970 incursion into Cambodia represents a unique situation given the delicate political and strategic context in which it occurred. This campaign demonstrates the direct linkage of national aims issued at the strategic level, driving tactical execution through the application of operational art. The Cambodian Campaign also captures the challenges experienced at the operational level through planning a complex campaign in condensed time periods. In analyzing this campaign, it is important to outline the strategic and operational environment beginning in the months following the 1968 Tet Offensive, up to the U.S. strategy of Vietnamization and phased withdrawal of U.S. units in 1970. The North Vietnamese shift from an insurgency to hybrid warfare also requires explanation to enhance the framing of the situation.¹⁰⁵ Lastly, after

¹⁰⁴Wilbanks, 69-70.

¹⁰⁵Hybrid Threat "A hybrid threat is the diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, and/or Criminal elements all unified to achieve mutually benefitting effects. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0, *The Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2008), Glossary-7. The destruction of the VC and failure to incite an uprising during Tet limited the Communist ability to continue irregular or guerilla operations and still accomplish its aims in the south. The increased proficiency of ARVN forces and the success of the Ho Chi Minh Trail to transport conventional war materials south facilitated the shift in the Communist Strategy witnessing a return of large regular Formations in addition to armored vehicles post 1968. This transition from irregular to hybrid and eventual regular war would be complete in the 1972, Communist Eastertide Offensive.

providing a detailed description of II Field Forces operations, a critical assessment will be conducted to identify the aspects of operational art as applied during this campaign.

Following the 1968 Tet and 1969 Mini Tet Offensives, the U.S. and Republic of Vietnam Forces enjoyed the tactical success of destroying the Communist irregular forces in South Vietnam as an effective fighting force. These defeats allowed for the shift in focus from large unit search and destroy operations to an increase in a pacification and security role. The year 1968 also witnessed an American presidential election and a tremendous shift in U.S. popular support for the war in Vietnam. Although a tactical victory, Tet became the watershed event causing tremendous distrust and limited tolerance of the government's expansion of the war by the population. The shift in national will contributed to Richard M. Nixon being elected as president under the promise of de-escalation and the eventual withdrawal from Vietnam. The political change resulted in an increased focus on the policy of Vietnamization or the training and preparation for the Vietnamese government to eventually assume overall responsibility for its own defense. The improved post-Tet security situation in Vietnam enabled General Creighton Abrams, the new MACV commander, to focus military efforts on pacification rather than search and destroy missions in accordance with the president's directive. To facilitate the unified U.S., ARVN partnership, MACV provided revised battlefield architecture in the form of the Combat Tactical Zone (CTZ). The CTZs aligned the current Field Forces or U.S. Corps level headquarters to their ARVN Corps counterparts to facilitate partnerships. In the II Field Force area of operations, LTG Julian Ewell, the U.S. II Field Force commander, was paired with LTG Do Cao Tri, the ARVN III Corps Commander. This partnership extended down to the battalion and company leadership in subordinate units producing promising results in improved proficiency. At higher echelons however, this mentor relationship met with limited success and strained

partnerships due to most ARVN generals being political appointees rather than promoted by merit.¹⁰⁶

In contrast to the limited ARVN success, North Vietnamese forces struggled with the implementation of a new strategic vision and the logistics required to support continued operations in the south. The decimation of the Viet Cong during Tet combined with large casualties sustained by PAVN battalions, and loss of logistic support materials in South Vietnam resulted in a culmination point for the North. This loss of initiative by the Communists served to buy time for the South Vietnamese government to increase its capability in the face of declining U.S. combat forces. The loss of sanctuaries and freedom of maneuver in the south caused North Vietnamese leadership to increase its staging areas on the Cambodian side of the South Vietnamese border. Orders intercepted during an early operation in Cambodia instructed Communist forces to break contact and evade U.S. and ARVN units in order to preserve the force for future operations.¹⁰⁷ The weak and corrupt nature of the Cambodian government facilitated Communist infiltration and the establishment of sanctuaries throughout the porous border region.¹⁰⁸ These staging areas and the logistic bases received a constant influx of materials from the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Aggressive U.S. and ARVN operations impeded the effective distribution of these resources to Communist forces within South Vietnam. The U.S. efforts to stem this flow through Air Force bombing had a limited effect. To ensure sufficient numbers reached the southern sanctuaries, Hanoi expended considerable effort to improve and enlarge the trail network, increasing the flow of materials south. The evaporation of North Vietnam's sea resupply

¹⁰⁶John M. Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign: The 1970 Offensive and America's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2005), 50.

¹⁰⁷Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of Americas Last Years In Vietnam* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Books, 1999), 202.

¹⁰⁸Birtle, 305.

route through Cambodian ports due to political efforts by the U.S. served to increase traffic on the trail as the sole line of supply south. As the flow of supplies and replacements increased on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the ability to distribute those materials decreased from 1968 thru 1969, leading to the expansion of border base areas.¹⁰⁹ By 1970 an estimated 4,000 tons of material is estimated to have traveled down the Ho-Chi Minh Trail with between 40,000 and 60,000 PAVN soldiers present in Cambodia. The magnitude of North Vietnamese involvement in Cambodia combined with instability resulting from an internal Cambodian military coup, increased the U.S. government's fear of Cambodia becoming a Communist proxy of Hanoi and staging area on the national level for PAVN operations.¹¹⁰

Following the Tet Offensive, U.S. theater level focus shifted to a strategy combined logistic denial. This shift is evident through the MACV and the Republic of Vietnam Joint Chiefs of Staff joint campaign objectives of 1970, which identified severing the Communist logistic system as a key task. According to this campaign plan, the division of labor had the South Vietnamese National Police and local defense forces conducting pacification operations amongst the population while the U.S, allies, and ARVN forces focused on locating and destroying enemy units, basing, and logistics. These objectives were directly tied to MACV's intelligence, identifying Hanoi's build up of forces for an anticipated offensive against Saigon.¹¹¹

The U.S. government implemented multiple restrictions regarding cross border operations, hindering the interdiction of the enemy sanctuaries. At the strategic level, Cambodian neutrality, which was respected by the U.S. and ignored by the North Vietnamese government,

¹⁰⁹Shaw, 19.

¹¹⁰James A. Wilbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost its War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 70.

¹¹¹Shaw, 18.

prevented an outright assault on PAVN bases. Due to the U.S. government's fear of escalating the conflict beyond the regional level these restrictions were imposed on South Vietnamese forces as well. The American population's desire for an end to the war and Nixon's de-escalation policy contradicted the opening of a campaign outside of the borders of Vietnam. In reality however, the assessment of ARVN capabilities proved that additional time was required in order to increase their capacity to stave off the anticipated Communist invasion. To provide this time, Hanoi's capacity to mount large offensive operations had to be destroyed. As a means to an end, President Nixon determined that the war required expansion in the short term in order to establish the desired conditions for a U.S. withdraw in the long term.¹¹² The President's decision to conduct operations against Cambodian sanctuaries in 1970 represented the fulfillment of MACVs recommendations since 1968.

In late 1969, President Nixon authorized operation MENU, the bombing of targets inside Cambodia. This bombing initiative coincided with internal turmoil within Cambodia where National Forces (FANK) engaged in combat with Cambodian Communist guerillas and the North Vietnamese Army. These events also served to open improved diplomatic relations with the U.S., facilitating future interborder operations. In response to MENU, MACV began concurrent planning for ground operations inside Cambodia. Initially MACV's concept envisioned ARVN units conducting short duration operations within Cambodia with U.S. units in a supporting role remaining in Vietnam. The extensive size of sanctuaries and potential for massed formations of PAVN forces in the border area identified resulted in assuming substantial risk due to the limited operational durability of the ARVN forces that prevented the execution of this course of action.

The 1970 Cambodian Campaign can be viewed as the continued evolution of counter-sanctuary operations in Vietnam. Beginning in 1967, U.S. and Vietnamese forces began sanctuary

¹¹²Shaw, 23.

denial operations in the immediate Saigon area. These operations continued until 1969, clearing large areas east towards the Cambodian border. General Abrams authorized the planning of cross border operations targeting sanctuaries in the vicinity of the outlets of the Ho Chi-Mihn Trail by mid-1969. This window for operations coincided with the assessment of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff that by 1970, ARVN units would be at their fullest combat strength based on the external influx of modernized equipment and an increase of unit personal strength.¹¹³ From the II Field Force perspective of the operational environment in 1970, sanctuary denial operations became static due to the inability to engage the enemy across the Cambodian border. The Cambodian operations represented a regaining of the initiative through mobility.¹¹⁴ These projected operations focused on the III Corps areas known as the "Fish Hook" in the north and the "Parrots Beak" in the south. OPERATION TOAN THANG 41 or TOTAL VICTORY 41 represented the second incursion of South Vietnamese forces into Cambodia. Conducted from 14 thru 17 April, TOAN THANG 41, targeted PAVN base areas within the area known as the "Angels Wings." Four U.S. battalions from the 25th Infantry Division supported the ARVN operation by establishing blocking positions on the Vietnamese side of the international border. The operation resulted in ARVN forces killing 415 PAVN soldiers and capturing 99 tons of rice with minimal losses incurred to friendly forces. Although the success of this operation was due to the ARVN attacking logistics areas rather than Communist troop concentrations, it demonstrated ARVN ability to conduct short duration operations with U.S. support.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968-1973* (Washington, D.C.: United States Army, Center of Military History, 2006), 122.

¹¹⁴Department of the Army, *Senior Officer Debriefing Report: LTG Michael S. Davison, II Field Force Vietnam, Third Regional Assistance Command, Period 15 April 70-thru 26 May 71* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 1971) 5-6.

¹¹⁵Shaw, 35.

Based on the success of OPERATION TOAN THANG 41, President Thieu authorized larger ARVN incursions into Cambodia to be conducted with continued support from the U.S. Numerous operations would be conducted simultaneously from the Mekong Delta to the highlands. In II Field Force's area of operation, this guidance resulted in OPERATION TOAN THANG 42. Conducted from 29 to 30 April with the purpose of clearing the "Parrots Beak" including a second operation in the "Angels Wing." OPERATION TOAN THANG 42's second objective sought cooperation with FANK or pro-Cambodian government forces for a rescue of ethnic Vietnamese being held by Communist forces in the regional capital of Savy Riegn. Although a success, OPERATION TOAN THANG 42 demonstrated some gaps in ARVN proficiency. A major issue identified was the weakness of ARVN armor and mechanized formations largely due to the pre-1968 political instability of South Vietnam. This instability had resulted in ARVN armor being utilized in the cities to protect the government, earning them the title of "Coupe Troops."¹¹⁶ An attempt to rectify this deficiency is evident through the Dong Tien program, established between the II Field Force Commander and the III ARVN Corps Commander in 1969 pairing U.S. with ARVN units to elevate ARVN capacity through mentorship. TOAN THANG 41 and 42 proved the merit of Dong Tien; however as of 1970, the ARVN required additional time and continued partnership.

The ARVN success in the TOAN THANG operations combined with the political situation resulted in the Nixon administration approving U.S. ground operations in Cambodia. Despite the proactive efforts of General Ewell's staff to produce a base plan for such an operation, the concept for the campaign was not passed on to General Davison when he assumed command of II Field Force. The loss of continuity caused by the one-year rotational system and individual replacement policy added to the disruption caused by the change of command. This

¹¹⁶Starry, 49.

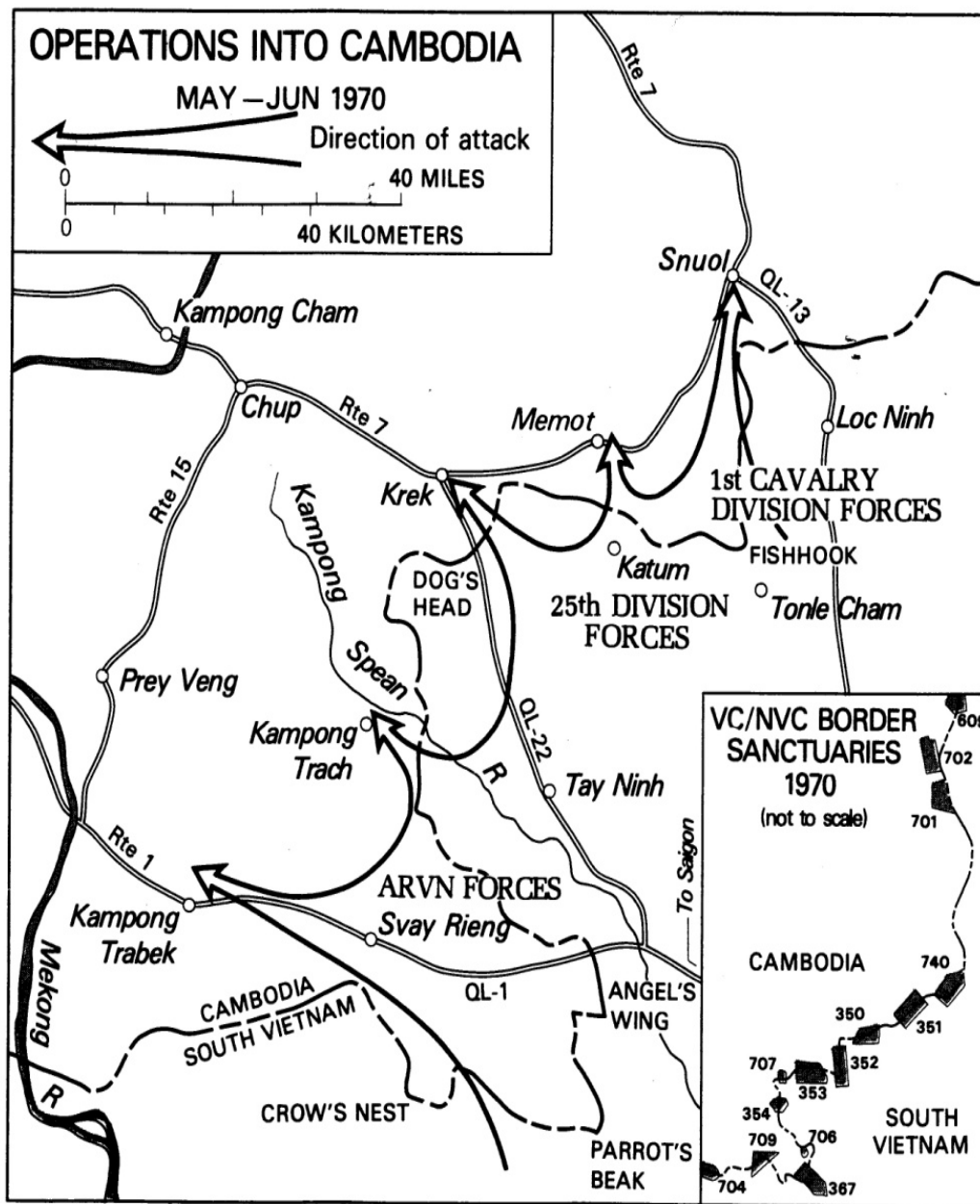


Figure 5. Cambodian Operations, 1970

Source: Don Starry, *Armored Combat In Vietnam* (New York, NY: Arno Press Inc., 1980), 170.

disruption affected Davison's corps staff, as they had to start from scratch when ordered to plan an attack into the "Fishhook" area of the Cambodian Border in 72 hours. Despite the condensed

timeline, the concept for OPERATION TOAN THANG 43 received approval from General Abrams on 26 April with the attack beginning on 1 May. Prior to execution, LTG Davison, being an advocate of detailed intelligence preparation, coordinated with General Tri, the ARVN Commander for OPERATIONS TOAN THANG 41 and 42 to acquire information regarding the PAVN base camps in his area of operations. General Davison also relied heavily on the intelligence collected from the Cambodian border by MACV from 1969 and 1970.¹¹⁷ Despite the quality of the intelligence, LTG Davison realized it got his subordinate units into the general area. However, it still required the soldier on the ground to fully develop the situation.¹¹⁸ LTG Ewell's prior division command experience in Vietnam as the 9th Infantry Division Commander in the Mekong Delta region provided him an advantage over LTG Davison whose previous assignment to Pacific Command hindered his tactical experience in Vietnam.¹¹⁹ This assignment did however present LTG Davison with the overall strategic view of the conflict in Vietnam while also strengthening his relationship with General Abrams.¹²⁰ LTG Davison did have a wealth of knowledge and experience serving as a division commander in Germany in addition to numerous

¹¹⁷Department of the Army, *Senior Officer Debriefing Report: LTG Michael S. Davison, II Field Force Vietnam third Regional Assistance Command, Period 15 April 70-thru 26 May 71*, 5.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁹COL Douglas H. Farmer and LTC Dale K. Brudvig, *Senior Officer Debrief Program, Oral History Transcripts of LTG Michael Davison* (Carlisle, PA: United States Army, Center of Military History, 1976), 1-34. Commissioned as a cavalry officer from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1939, Davison spent his company grade years at various posts in the United States. During the Second World War, he served as a staff officer in the War Department and as the G-2 for the 45th Infantry Division in the African and Italian theaters. Davison commanded the 1st Battalion, 179th Infantry Division in Italy and France. LTG Davison finished the war on the VI Corps staff serving as the G-2 and G-3. Following the War, Davison served in the plans section for Army Ground Forces, Commander of the 18th Mechanized Cavalry Squadron, and West Point. After graduating from the National War College in 1958, Davison Commanded 3rd Armored Division in Germany, going on to serve as the chief of Staff for V Corps and USPACOM. LTG Davison assumed command of II Field Force in 1970.

¹²⁰Shaw, 42.

staff assignments at the corps level. When asked about the differences between serving on a corps staff as the G-3 Operations Officer during the Second World War or Chief of Staff of V Corps in Germany as compared to commanding the II Field Force in Vietnam, General Davison stated that it was the role of the commander and the focus of the staff. In the corps headquarters, during a symmetrical conflict, the commander and staff focused on the tactical actions of subordinate units. The corps commander led his units in a direct leadership role. In Vietnam, according to Davison, the corps commander managed the battle, allocating resources indirectly to enable subordinate commanders to accomplish the mission, as well as focusing corps reconnaissance and collection assets to drive targeting and future operations.

At the start of operations in Cambodia, II Field Force consisted of the 1st Cavalry Division, 25th Infantry Division, the 199th Infantry Brigade, 3rd Brigade 9th Infantry Division, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, the 1st Australian Task Force, the Royal Thai Volunteer Army Forces partnered with the 5th, 18th, and 25th ARVN Infantry Divisions. The ARVN and allied forces were arrayed against mainforce divisions of the 5th, 7th and 9th under and the COSVN headquarters operating in the border region between Vietnam and Cambodia.¹²¹

The U.S. Cambodian Campaign's concept sought to expand on the previous ARVN successes while maintaining the tempo of previous attacks with the increased combat power of the American military. OPERATIONS THOAN THANG 43 and 44 had 1st Cavalry Division and the 25th Infantry Division respectively with their ARVN counterparts attacking PAVN sanctuaries in Cambodia from Kampong along Route 1 in the south to Snuol in vicinity of Route 7 in the north. The breadth of the attack measured approximately 80 miles encompassing PAVN bases areas, 367, 706, 354, 707, and 353 including the major logistical hub at Snuol. LTG

¹²¹Department of the Army, *Senior Officer Debriefing Report: LTG Michael S. Davison, II Field Force Vietnam Third Regional Assistance Command, Period 15 April 70-thru 26 May 71*, 15-19.

Davison exercised a large degree of latitude with his division commanders' synchronizing major movements along the front, while allowing Major General Elvy Roberts of the 1st Cavalry and Edward Bautz of the 25th Infantry to plan and execute operations within his guidance. II Field Force synchronized the artillery, air support, additional logistic, and intelligence resources in support of the division attacks. ARVN forces continued attacking west on Route 1 in the "Angels Wings" focusing the enemy on operations in the south while the U.S. main effort, the 1st Cavalry Division, under the assistant division commander, Brigadier General Robert Shoemaker, attacked in the north into the "Fishhook" to eliminate enemy forces and equipment.¹²² The 1st Cavalry Division maintained the aggressive tempo established by LTG Davison by seizing ground to the rear of enemy formations. This maneuver fixed PAVN forces by acting as the anvil while armored cavalry units like the 11th ACR attacked toward them as the hammer to destroy the enemy. The 1st Cavalry Division encountered stiff resistance in and around the city of Snoul, which once captured, yielded a PAVN truck park complete with a fleet of trucks and large a maintenance facility that serviced Communist convoys as they exited the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Once confiscated, the trucks provided the combined ARVN units with the means to remove equipment from the numerous base camps cleared during the operation.¹²³ The 1st Cavalry Division also captured the largely abandoned headquarters complex of the PAVN forces south of Snoul. Although not an identified objective at the corps level, President Nixon added the capture of the PAVN Headquarters as one of the U.S. objectives after the start of the operation. This proved to be a fatal flaw politically; when the Army failed to capture the Communist headquarters personnel, the entire operation became viewed as a failure. Exploiting their initial

¹²²Starry, 171.

¹²³Shaw, 175.

success the 1st Cavalry Division continued its attack west under OPERATION TOAN THANG 45, however it lost momentum due to the monsoons impeding mobility.

The 25th Infantry Division participated as a shaping operation in the Cambodian Campaign through the execution of OPERATION TOAN THANG 44. Initially tasked with securing the 1st Cavalry Division flank, the 25th Infantry Division received orders to plan for immediate attacks on cross border base areas due to Nixon's decision to expand operations. In the spring of 1970, the 25th Infantry Division conducted an economy of force mission with their ARVN counterparts in the vicinity of Tay Ninh. The limited mission set was a result of redeploying battalions to the U.S. as part of the withdrawal of forces. OPERATION TOAN THANG 44 focused the 25th Infantry Division on attacking PAVN sanctuaries in the "Dogs Head" area of Cambodia while continuing to perform security duties inside Vietnam. LTG Davison issued MG Edward Bautz his order verbally citing three objectives for the 25th Infantry and providing additional forces with corps helicopter assets to facilitate mission accomplishment. The conduct of TOAN THANG 44 relied on decentralized execution on the part of the maneuver units in their relationship with corps in addition to tremendous coordination and support between the divisions to prevent exposed seams between units. A key lesson learned by observing Task Force Shoemaker of the 1st Cavalry Division came in the area of command and control. The hastily assembled task force with its ad-hoc staff suffered from organizational pains associated with forming a new staff. The 25th Infantry Division utilized their existing staff organizations to mitigate the identified point of friction.¹²⁴

After destroying numerous PAVN base camps, the 25th Infantry Division attempted to locate and destroy the COSVN headquarters; however, the Communists apparently evacuated the

¹²⁴Department of the Army, *Senior Officer Debriefing Report: LTG Michael S. Davison, II Field Force Vietnam Third Regional Assistance Command, Period 15 April 70-thru 26 May 71*, 7.

area as early as March, leaving only a limited staff to organize operations within the border region. As U.S. forces culminated and began the retrograde back to Vietnam, III Corps had the Air Force conduct saturation bombing with B-52 strikes on PAVN base areas. These strikes focused on areas not fully exploited or projected to be re-occupied by Communist forces immediately following the departure of U.S. or ARVN forces.¹²⁵ U.S. operations in Cambodia concluded at the end of June with the onset of the monsoons and presidential orders for the U.S. to withdraw to Vietnam.¹²⁶ Although not destroyed, Communist forces were significantly delayed in any near term operations against South Vietnamese urban centers. At its conclusion, the Cambodian Campaign can best be described as a large spoiling attack that prevented a near term Communist invasion and set the conditions for ARVN to continue increasing its capacity for self-defense.

From the operational perspective, the Cambodian Campaign is a study in anticipation and trust of subordinate commanders. Although not initially ordered to do so, MACV had planned for possible operations in Cambodia, pressuring the administration for approval since 1968.¹²⁷ This anticipation of requirements on a whole transcended the strategic level manifesting at the corps and division level. Despite this long planning horizon, failure to brief the new II Field Force commander on the concept resulted in plan having to be entirely regenerated. Despite anticipation in planning, friction became evident in execution as the maneuver divisions transitioned from static to mobile warfare. This friction was mitigated through prior planning; identifying points of contention and effectively managing lift and haul assets to support subordinate elements.¹²⁸

¹²⁵Shaw, 160.

¹²⁶Ibid., 125.

¹²⁷Schulzinger, 285.

¹²⁸Department of the Army, *Senior Officer Debriefing Report: LTG Michael S. Davison*,

Regardless of points of friction prior to the start of the operations, anticipation and sound planning facilitated the prepositioning of combat units in proximity to their cross border objectives maximizing shock through surprise and tempo to disrupt COSVN sanctuaries.¹²⁹

Throughout the campaign, II Field Force maintained a steady vision of what future operations would be required to achieve the strategic goal, allocating resources or continuing to build the intelligence picture to support such operations. Anticipation drove the 25th Infantry Division to conduct contingency planning for operations within Cambodia, paying particular attention to 1st Cavalry Division's TOAN THANG 43 for lessons learned in anticipation of their turn to participate in the campaign. LTG Davison set the tempo for the duration of the campaign by exploiting the operational success of TOAN THANG 42 with quickly planned division attacks reliant on the mobility of U.S. forces. In expecting rapid execution from his subordinate units after receiving the order, LTG Davison focused his guidance on objectives and intent, leaving the concept or execution for his division commanders to determine. This latitude provided the right amount of focus and freedom of action, facilitating the expeditious execution of operations, resulting in success in their overall success. The corps focus on managing assets, particularly in the field of logistics, afforded the division's tremendous depth of operations as evident in deep penetrations into the PAVN base areas.

The overall results of two months of operations in Cambodia served as a tactical success with U.S. and ARVN forces killing 12,354 PAVN soldiers and destroying 8,000 bunkers.¹³⁰ The large quantity of ammunition and support materials including medical supplies and rice destroyed or confiscated succeeded in denying the Communists the means to conduct an invasion of the

II Field Force Vietnam third Regional Assistance Command, Period 15 April 70-thru 26 May 71, 6.

¹²⁹Ibid., 7.

¹³⁰Schulzinger, 158.

South in the near future.¹³¹ Operationally, this campaign proved that although initial gains had been made in the ARVN capability and proficiency, the South Vietnamese military still did not possess the capacity to operate independent of U.S. assistance. This failure to manage expectations in ARVN ability and the inability to destroy the COSVN headquarters served to disenfranchise the U.S. population from the government. This last fact became painfully obvious to the American public through the media coverage of the offensive depicting an expanding war in a supposed time of de-escalation. The political and strategic backlash of operations in Cambodia sparked increased civil unrest with the American population, manifesting itself in nationwide college protests, some of which were met with violent reactions such as the protests at Kent State University. The dissatisfaction of the population over the conduct of the war and the perceived abuses of executive power became evident through congressional efforts to limit the president's power through legislation such as the Cooper Church Amendment. This amendment revoked presidential powers granted under the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution preventing future operations in Cambodia or Laos.¹³² The Cambodian campaign effectively demonstrates the power of the will of the people as the American center of gravity for the Vietnam War. Although operationally and tactically successful as well as strategically and politically nested with the U.S. exit strategy, the campaign failed in respects to the president's approach, expectation management, and its presentation to the American Population. The Cambodian Campaign delegitimized the U.S. military strategy in Vietnam causing a loss of faith in the government by the population. This adverse attitude combined with the perception of military results falling short of those projected in regards to the capability of the forces of South Vietnam came to be another massive step toward the eventual culmination of U.S. efforts in Vietnam.

¹³¹Schulzinger, 286.

¹³²Karnow, 626.

CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of the operations conducted under the command of LTGs Weyand, Seaman, and Davison, it is evident that a deliberate attempt to sequence actions in time, space, and purpose occurred in II Field Force. Although the term “operational art” did not enter U.S. Army doctrine until 1986, the concept behind the term operational art has been clearly demonstrated at the corps level in Vietnam. Through coordination and the understanding of the operational environment, Field Force commanders translated the strategic guidance received by MACV into tactical operations in order to achieve the theater level goals. The unique environment presented by the hybrid threat in Vietnam forced the role of the corps commander to evolve. This evolution diverged from the type of direct command witnessed a decade and a half earlier in Korea to a new role where the Field Force commander’s prime responsibility became planning the operation and sequencing them in the overall campaign plan. Direct command in Vietnam resided at the division and battalion level in the conduct of the tactical fight. Prior to the start of an operation, the corps commander focused on the analysis of the enemy situation and the conduct of shaping operations to establish the conditions for the successful execution of the large unit operations. Once the battle began, the corps commander became the manager of vital assets such as helicopters, artillery or reconnaissance. In weighting the main effort with additional combat power or applying assets as the situation developed, the corps commander could remain focused on his end state, maintain understanding of the larger operation without becoming engrossed in the tactical fight. This separation afforded by the position of indirect control, allowed the corps commander to exploit opportunities as they arose or react to the changing enemy situation while remaining nested with the strategic aims. Unfortunately, these lessons were captured in the doctrine produced following the end of U.S. involvement Vietnam. The focus returned to a large-scale conventional fight against the Soviet Union in Europe framing the

asymmetric experience in Vietnam as the exception rather than the rule for future conflicts. This trend is evident in the doctrine that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as seen in forward defense and Air Land Battle. The concept of the corps commander as the overall manager or synchronizer rather than direct commander would re-emerge on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan becoming the standard for corps level control in an asymmetric environment.

In studying the practice of operational art in Vietnam, patterns have emerged from each of the case studies indicating successful command and staff practices. The first theme that resonates through both operations and the Tet Offensive is the value the commanders placed on intelligence. The key to the successful use of this intelligence can be seen in the priority given to the establishing of networks in which intelligence could be collected and transmitted into and out of the corps headquarters. II Field Force established and maintained a combat zone specific collection plan at the corps level from 1966 until 1971, integrating with division and battalion collection efforts and drawing as well as sending intelligence and analysis higher to MACV. This network also applied laterally to adjacent Field Forces creating a common operating picture. The weight intelligence carried in the corps headquarters is a direct result of the experience each commander acquired in prior conflicts as battalion commanders and staff officers.

The second theme identified in this analysis is the importance the corps commanders placed on relationships. The trust and personal relations can be observed in all three field force commanders' interactions with Generals Westmoreland and Abrams. Mutual trust and the understanding of a common vision is apparent, translated in the latitude General Westmoreland afforded to his corps commanders and reciprocally the latitude the corps commanders extended to their tactical commanders. The concept of developing relationships is also demonstrated through the numerous liaison officers (LNOs) positioned in sister service headquarters, ARVN counterparts, U.S. Advisors, allied forces, and non-governmental agencies within II Field Forces area of operations. Although the hierarchy did not always exist to support combined and joint

operations in the Field Force, the identification of a gap in communications resulted in the creation of a LNO position and a network to address it.

The last trend evident in all three case studies is that of anticipation. All three commanders possessed the ability to accurately interpret enemy indicators and either exploit the opportunity or reposition forces to counter the threat. This attribute is gained mostly through experience in that the commanders were seasoned officers with prior combat experience in the Second World War and Vietnam. Anticipation translated into action requires an efficient staff and the trust in subordinate leaders as detailed above.

Having analyzed three case studies of the leadership of II Field Force in Vietnam, substantial evidence has been presented demonstrating the successful practice of operational art at the corps level. The superior caliber and capabilities of the individuals selected to serve as corps commanders in Vietnam have also been documented in this study. In overcoming the challenges associated with corps command in the prosecution of a hybrid war, LTGs Weyand, Seaman, and Davison have demonstrated the attributes that serve as examples for future generations of operational artists in the conduct of war in an uncertain environment.

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