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PROJECT CHECO SOUTHEAST ASIA REPORT

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THE ROLE OF THE USAF
IN SUPPORT OF
SPECIAL ACTIVITIES IN SEA (U)

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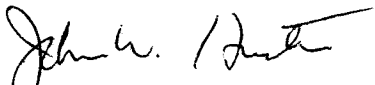
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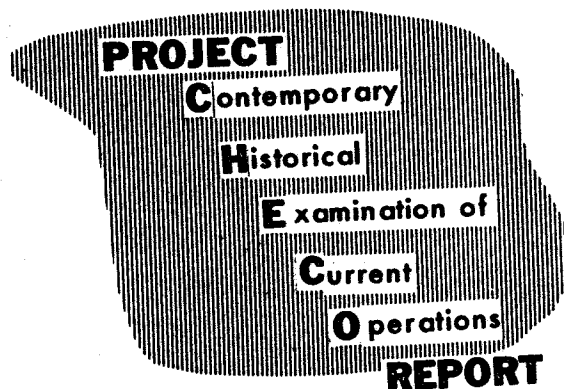
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THE ROLE OF THE USAF IN SUPPORT OF SPECIAL ACTIVITIES IN SEA (U) 1 JULY 1976

CHECO/CORONA HARVEST DIVISION
OPERATIONS ANALYSIS OFFICE
HQ PACAF

Prepared by
CAPTAIN TOM G. ABBEY
Project CHECO 7th AF

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FOREWORD (U)

~~(TS NFD)~~ This report surveys the role of the United States Air Force in support of special activities in Southeast Asia. The term, "special activities," refers to unconventional warfare operations of the United States of a covert and clandestine nature, permitting plausible denial of US sponsorship. This study emphasizes the USAF support rendered to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Studies and Observations Group (MACVSOG, MACSOG, or SOG), which was the principal US agency for the conduct of unconventional warfare against the North Vietnamese from 1964 to 1972. Unilateral covert and clandestine programs of individual Service components and Controlled American Sources (CAS -- overseas elements of the Central Intelligence Agency) are described only to the extent that such programs directly affected MACSOG programs or to lend continuity to the history of US unconventional warfare actions in Southeast Asia.

(U) The purpose of this Project CHECO Report is to depict achievements and problems of US unconventional warfare operations in SEA with a focus on aspects of USAF air support. This report hopefully will aid military planners -- of both conventional and unconventional operations -- in the future application of covert and clandestine actions in times and arenas of interest to the United States Government.

~~(S NFD)~~ Compilation of the history of special operations in Southeast Asia is beset with peculiar problems. Continuity is limited by several factors: (1) The highly classified and sensitive nature of these operations and the stringent "need to know" requirement caused a tendency among operators, particularly during the early MACSOG days, to carry out

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attendant administrative and historical documentation duties on an informal basis if at all. (2) The compartmentation inherent to covert and clandestine organizations militated against centralized filing systems except at the highest levels of authority. (3) Access to many documents was controlled by agencies outside the Department of Defense, such as the White House, State Department, and Central Intelligence Agency. Additionally, documents addressing controversial topics and indicating interservice rivalries were sometimes withheld by the originating Service component. (4) The disposal or destruction of records after prescribed periods of time limited the research material for the early MACSOG days. (5) The 12-month rotation cycle of personnel adversely affected continuity, especially during the accelerated redeployment of American forces from Vietnam.

(U) Although the aforementioned conditions imposed restrictions on the study, numerous individuals at both staff and operational levels provided valuable assistance to the researcher. Personnel on the Joint and Air Force Staffs were instrumental in obtaining authorization and offering guidelines for the study. Individuals at Seventh Air Force, MACSOG, and subordinate operational units were highly cooperative and knowledgeable sources of information. A singularly valuable contribution to this study was the voluminous MACSOG Documentation Study, compiled in 1969 by the Joint Staff. This comprehensive document was indispensable and frequently provided the only source of information available for particular periods of the MACSOG history. The author acknowledges, however, the potential historical bias that can arise from over-reliance on a single reference source.

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(U) Finally, the author recognizes the limitations in the scope and methodology of the Command and Control chapter. More extensive research is needed in this critically important and controversial aspect of special air warfare operations.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION (U)

(U) "...The US Government should immediately stop... the dropping of leaflets and gifts for psychological warfare purposes, the parachuting of rangers from US spy planes coming from aircraft carriers and Laotian territory, the shelling of the demilitarized zone from the south, the violation of the territorial waters of the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] by US battleships and ranger boats, the provocations against and kidnapping of citizens of the DRV, and so forth..."¹

Xuan Thuy, North Vietnams Chief Negotiator at the Paris Peace Talks, 3 October 1968

(U) The demands for cessation of US covert and clandestine activities, as expressed above by a prominent North Vietnamese leader to a Canadian correspondent on 3 October 1968, revealed the impact of these operations on the North Vietnamese leadership. US termination of unconventional warfare (UW) activities and aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam territory were publically said to be requisite conditions for the commencement of negotiations for a Vietnam settlement.

~~(S-NFD)~~ This report describes the program of covert and clandestine activities waged against the North Vietnamese from 1964 to 1972 through a special agency under the Commander of the United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV). The designation of that agency was the Military Assistance Command Studies and Observation Group (MACSOG or SOG -- originally called the Special Operations Group). This study investigates the background, inception, organization, and evolution of MACSOG with particular emphasis on air operations.

~~(S-NFD)~~ After the establishment of MACSOG, the United States Air Force assumed an ever-expanding and increasingly versatile role in support of unconventional warfare operations in Southeast Asia. Although a wide variety of USAF air assets supported SOG operations, aircraft

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used on a dedicated and semi-dedicated basis provided the most significant service. These assets included the UH-1, CH-3, and CH-53 helicopters and specially-configured C-123 and C-130 aircraft. The Air Force also supplied Forward Air Controller (FAC), reconnaissance, logistics and strike aircraft from non-dedicated assets. These assets were indispensable to SOG operations; it is the length of this study and not the importance of their contribution which limits the discussion on these aspects of air support. USAF efforts included insertion, resupply, and extraction of agents and agent teams; tactical air strikes; tactical airlift; visual and photo reconnaissance; airborne radio relay; and psychological warfare (PSYWAR) operations.

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CHAPTER II
BACKGROUND (U)

(U) Clandestine and covert operations became essential governmental instruments in the "cold war" confrontation which emerged after World War II. Operations cloaked in secrecy afforded to a major power the opportunity to effect national policy while minimizing the likelihood of direct conflict with another competing major power. In limited war, the exercise of unconventional warfare tactics presented to a "superpower" additional means and options for realizing national interests at a low risk of nuclear war.

~~(S-NO)~~ The use of covert and clandestine operations in Indochina provided several other advantages to the United States: (1) The United States was able to effect certain policies without overtly violating the Geneva Agreement of 1954, thereby lessening adverse world opinion of US involvement (this advantage was most evident in the early stages of escalation). (2) The United States was able to implement policies through organizational machinery without the close scrutiny of Congress, news media, and American public. (3) The United States Administration had at its disposal an instrument that was highly responsive to policies emanating from Washington. The inherent sensitivity of covert operations necessitated close supervision and cognizance by the highest echelon of governmental authority; therefore, command-and control was less cumbersome than in the conventional military command system. (4) Unconventional warfare doctrine, vis-a-vis conventional military doctrine, offered greater flexibility for exerting pressure on the enemy. Unconventional warfare, by definition, included social, psychological, economic, and political measures.

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United States Unconventional Warfare Policies, 1947-1955 (U)

(U) United States participation in unconventional warfare activities was neither new nor unique to the Indochina War. During the reorganization of the US armed forces following World War II, the National Security Council promulgated numerous directives which defined covert and clandestine actions, granted authorities for their conduct, and established organizational machinery to implement these measures. With the advent of the Kennedy era, general policies on the conduct of UW activities were tailored to the Indochina War.

~~(S-MD)~~ The National Security Act of 1947 established the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as an independent agency responsible for the performance of functions related to intelligence affecting the national security of the United States. During times of peace, the CIA was the primary agency for conducting covert and clandestine actions. National Security Council directives from 1947 to 1954 defined these actions and outlined responsibilities for their conduct among various agencies, particularly with regard to the interface between the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ In 1954 the National Security Council rescinded several previous directives and on 19 August issued Directive 5412. This directive defined covert operations as follows:

"...all activities conducted pursuant to this directive which are so planned and executed that any US government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorized persons and that if uncovered, the US Government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them..."

~~(TS-NFD)~~ A follow-on directive from the National Security Council, NSC Directive 5412/2, provided the basic national authority for UW

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operations as later conducted in Southeast Asia (SEA). It also included a more detailed definition of UW concepts:³

"...propaganda; political action-economic warfare; preventive direct action, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition; escape and evasion and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states or groups including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerrillas or refugee liberation groups; support of indigenous and anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the Free World; deception plans and operations..."

It further stated: "Such operations do not include armed conflict by recognized military forces, espionage and counter-espionage, nor cover and deception for military operations."⁴ The most significant outcome of this directive was the establishment of the Special Group (5412), which was the highest national authority to grant approval and disapproval of all covert operations.

Early American Assistance to Vietnam, 1944-1954 (U)

(U) The exact date of initial American military involvement in Vietnam is not known. Toward the end of World War II, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the predecessor to the CIA, began working actively with resistance groups in Indochina, including the communist-sympathizing Viet Minh guerrillas led by Ho Chi Minh. The obvious purpose of this support was to undermine the Japanese forces occupying mainland Southeast Asia. Although President Roosevelt disapproved proposals to aid resistance groups in Indochina by a decision on 13 October 1944, it is known that Ho Chi Minh visited the OSS Headquarters in Kunming Province of southern China on several occasions in late 1944 and early 1945.⁵ In 1945 President Roosevelt approved the OSS proposal

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to aid the Viet Minh, and by the latter months of the war, American OSS officers were training and, sometimes, actually leading Viet Minh guerrillas.⁶ Thus, the first American military support rendered to the Vietnamese included material aid and unconventional warfare training to the guerrillas who later became the enemy in the Second Indochina War.

(U) When President Roosevelt died in office, US opposition to the return of the French to Indochina diminished; however, faced with more pressing problems in other areas of the world, such as Europe and China, American leaders left only a remnant of Americans in Vietnam and provided but a negligible amount of military aid. The communist takeover of mainland China and deployment of large numbers of Chinese Communist forces along the northern borders of Laos and Vietnam rejuvenated American interest in Southeast Asia. The United States Administration perceived the French-Viet Minh conflict in a new image; it was now a confrontation between the Free World and International Communism.⁷ US interest and aid to the French rose proportionately with US fears of Communist expansion. To counter the threat, the United States established the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) in Saigon in August 1950. From that date until the defeat of the French in May of 1954 at Dien Bien Phu, the United States provided roughly 80 percent of the cost of French military efforts in Indochina.⁸ The United States Air Force provided 1,800 airlift sorties, comprising 13,000 flying hours in aid of the French.

(U) Meanwhile, the Korean War exacerbated US fears of continued communist expansion in Asia and induced heightened reluctance to commit American ground forces without the backing of Allies. Although the French

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were defeated and the resulting armistice prohibited external support to Vietnam, the US reflected its growing concern over Indochina by initiating the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) Pact, which placed the United States squarely in the Southeast Asia picture.⁹

The Threat to South Vietnamese Stability, 1954-1956 (U)

(U) The problems confronting the South Vietnamese regime following the Geneva Agreement did not elicit optimism from the American spectators. President Diem of the southern zone faced the challenges of resettling hundreds of thousands of refugees; controlling an unruly and power-seeking army; engendering nationalism among the relatively autonomous and armed sects of Hao Hao, Cao Dai, and Binh Xuyen; and establishing a stable government capable of coping with communist subversion.

(U) Both of the Vietnamese delegations at Geneva in 1954 expressed dissatisfaction with the settlement; the Viet Minh, in particular, were reluctant to cede territory under their control. Under the supervised cease-fire, most of the Viet Minh military units loyal to Hi Chi Minh moved to the North (reportedly about 120,000 persons). Among this group were carefully selected younger men destined for military training and eventual return to the South. Numerous elite military units did not travel to North Vietnam; instead, they moved to mountainous and jungled areas in the South to establish base areas. Hanoi directed thousands of well-trained and disciplined party members to remain in their native villages in South Vietnam (SVN) to await further orders. Arms and ammunition were cached throughout the countryside.¹⁰

(U) During the crucial period of nation-building there were

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scattered, sporadic incidents of terrorism, harassment, and sabotage; however, many incidents were not attributable directly to the communists. In fact, it is believed that Hanoi generally directed the southern elements to engage only in political action and admonished armed forays. The use of subversive tactics and more active involvement by the North Vietnamese regime became more prevalent by the end of 1956, by which time that regime had established better control over elements of the population in the north, and the alternatives for unification of Vietnam under communism by other means had diminished.¹¹

The Eisenhower Commitment to Vietnam (U)

(U) Officials of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations often cited a letter from President Eisenhower to Premier Diem, dated 23 October 1954, relating to the origin and continuity of US involvement in South Vietnam.¹² This letter implied that American aid was forthcoming. The decision to launch a program of economic and military aid to Diem, no doubt, occurred earlier in a meeting of the National Security Council in August of 1954.¹³

(U) During this period the United States was negotiating in Paris and Saigon to gain permission to train the South Vietnamese Army. In 1955 the United States assumed this responsibility from the French. On May 10, 1955 the White House announced that "at the request of the Government of Vietnam and with the agreement of the Government of France, [the United States] had undertaken responsibility for the training of Vietnamese national armed forces."¹⁴ The French military forces evacuated Saigon on 20 May, 1955.

"(TS-NEP) The aim of US policy was to build a "completely autonomous Vietnamese Army."¹⁵ A Joint Chiefs of Staff study on possible intervention

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in Vietnam revealed US reluctance for any involvement beyond that required for a training mission. The study stated: "Indochina is devoid of decisive military objectives and the allocation of more than token US armed forces in Indochina would be a serious diversion of limited US capabilities."¹⁶

(U) For the most part, US advisors were affected by a "Korean syndrome"; they directed their efforts toward building a conventional army capable of repelling an invasion across the northern border. Nevertheless, US policy-makers recognized the threat of insurgency and sent their most reputed unconventional warfare expert, Col Edward G. Lansdale, to Saigon.

The Lansdale Mission (U)

(U) Colonel Lansdale's invaluable support to the President of the Philippine Government, Magsaysay, in suppression of the Huk rebellion marked him as the most qualified American to aid Diem in consolidating political power and fighting communist subversion. Lansdale's specialty was political-psychological warfare and paramilitary operations.

(U) In June of 1954 Lansdale arrived in Saigon to become the Chief of the Saigon Military Mission (SMM). One of his missions was to establish an organization and program for clandestine and covert actions against the North Vietnamese. These actions were to discredit "an active and intelligent enemy who made full use of legal rights to screen his activities in establishing his stay-behind organization south of the 17th parallel."¹⁷ These actions were similar to those used by the North Vietnamese in South Vietnam.

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(U) Beginning in August, after the SMM was adequately staffed, several clandestine operations commenced against North Vietnam. Paramilitary teams were located in Hanoi, Haiphong, and south of the 17th parallel. Psychological warfare operations included "rumor campaigns" and the distribution of leaflets which propagated themes relating to property ownership, money reform, etc. One specific example of a propaganda theme was the description of Chinese Communist reprisals against Viet Minh villages. Another type of leaflet distributed was a bogus holiday pass. Moreover, in addition to propaganda efforts, the paramilitary teams conducted sabotage, such as contamination of oil supplies. Further, they prepared for a later resistance movement by recruiting indigenous agents and caching paramilitary supplies. By the time the North Vietnamese regime assumed complete control of the North, an unofficial report reviewed the accomplishments of the SMM:

"It had taken a tremendous amount of hard work to beat the Geneva deadline, to locate, select, exfiltrate, and equip the men of these teams and have them in place, ready for actions required against the enemy..."

Further information regarding unconventional warfare activities of the SMM or other US agencies prior to 1960 is sketchy.

(U) During Lansdale's presence in South Vietnam, President Diem's successes in consolidation of power infused optimism among American observers. Although intelligence estimates indicated that the communists were capable of undermining his regime, they had not committed themselves to armed force on a large scale from 1954 to 1956. Beginning in 1957, however, armed encounters between the communists and security forces

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became more widespread. The Viet Minh (Viet Cong) reacted strongly to Diem's renunciation of the elections prescribed by the Geneva Accord, his intensified campaign to eliminate Viet Minh remnants in South Vietnam, and his greater reliance on American economic, military, and political support. By 1959 American officials were alarmed by the situation, and by 1960 they suspected an active role by the Hanoi regime in South Vietnam. The challenge of the sixties was expressed by Senator Kennedy in his presidential campaign: "Now the problems are new and they require new solutions."¹⁹

New Problems (U)

(U) From the end of 1959, through 1960 and 1961, the insurgency intensified and expanded throughout the South Vietnamese countryside. The Viet Cong attacked government positions more frequently and in ever-increasing size. Large rural areas were denied to government officials without substantial armed escort; the populace was becoming sympathetic to the Viet Cong if not indifferent to the Diem regime. To complicate matters, security forces were inept in meeting the challenge. The police, accustomed to handling common law enforcement tasks, left counterinsurgency matters to the army, which in turn conditioned to responding to a conventional military threat, left internal security matters to the police force.²⁰

~~(S-NPD)~~ Official estimates of Viet Cong strength rose proportionately with the alarm felt among both Vietnamese and American officials. From mid-summer 1961 to January 1962, the estimated "hard core" Viet Cong strength jumped from 12,000 to 20-25,000. Because of the reportedly

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high number of enemy casualties, government officials suspected that infiltration from North Vietnam enabled a steady growth in numerical strength of the insurgent body. Reports of captured Chinese Communist weapons added credence to the suspicion of external support to the Viet Cong.

(U) By the end of 1961 North Vietnam had surrounded itself with a "wall of aggressive suspicion."²¹ North Vietnamese were involved in numerous border incidents in Laos and were responsible, to a degree, for a 20-fold increase in Pathet Lao numbers from 1959 to 1961. Relatively solid communist control of the area contiguous to the northwestern South Vietnamese border permitted the development of Viet Cong base and staging areas and a system of infiltration routes commonly referred to as the "Ho Chi Minh Trail."²²

(U) Evidence of Soviet, Chinese, and North Vietnamese support to the Viet Cong, as well as an obvious deterioration of internal security and political stability in South Vietnam, forced a fresh American appraisal of its position in Indochina. In September 1960 the US Ambassador to Saigon apprised President Kennedy that "it may become necessary for the US Government to begin consideration of alternative courses of action and leaders."²³

(U) International developments in early 1961 strengthened American resolve to defend South Vietnam against Communist expansion. In January Krushchev announced Moscow's intention to back "wars of national liberation" around the world.²⁴ Too, the Laotian crisis and Cuban Bay of Pigs fiasco in April caused alarm in Washington. On April 20th, one day after the abortive attempt to invade Cuba, President Kennedy requested

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that the Secretary of Defense appraise the Vietnam situation and recommend actions to prevent communist domination. The Deputy Secretary of Defense submitted a study in response to the presidential request; this study envisioned a greater emphasis on covert and paramilitary operations as well as deployment of additional military and CIA personnel to South Vietnam. This proposal, as modified by the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State, met Kennedy's approval; it signaled the beginning of an ineluctable American commitment to Vietnam in the sixties.

New Solutions (U)

~~(TS-NFD)~~ The Deputy Secretary of Defense's plan, as related in the MACSOG Documentation Study, proposed the following authorities: ²⁵

"...authority to expand positive and counterintelligence operations against communist forces in South Vietnam and against North Vietnam and the use of civilian aircrews of American and other nationality, as appropriate, in addition to Vietnamese in operations against North Vietnam...The US would assist the RVNAF [Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces] to increase border patrol and insurgency suppression capabilities by establishing an effective border intelligence system, by instituting regular aerial surveillance over the entire frontier area, and by applying modern technological area-denial techniques to close the roads and trails along the border..."

The effect of the plan was immediate; the first of US Special Forces Teams arrived in the SVN by the end of May 1961. ²⁶

~~(TS-NFD)~~ In June 1961 National Security Action Memorandums (NSAM's) 55, 56, and 57 expressed the President's support of unconventional warfare operations and his increased reliance on the military establishment for the conduct of covert and paramilitary operations. A summary of these significant NSAMs follows: ²⁷

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(1) NSAM 55 (28 June 1961) described the relationship between the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). It stated that the advice of the JCS, in cold war as well as declared war, was to come to the President unfiltered and direct.

(2) NSAM 56 (28 June 1961) expressed the President's interest in using unconventional warfare operations to meet future requirements. This memorandum requested the Department of Defense (DOD) in conjunction with the Department of State and Central Intelligence Agency, to inventory all paramilitary assets in the US Armed Forces and to consider various areas of the world where implementation of US policy may require indigenous paramilitary forces.

(3) NSAM 57 (28 June 1961) promulgated key policy intended to maximize effectiveness and flexibility in the planning and conduct of UW operations in the context of cold war. It provided the basis for assignment to the DOD of the responsibility for conducting covert and paramilitary operations against North Vietnam. It received considerable comment, particularly from the CIA, as to its applicability and validity. This directive defined paramilitary operations (PM) as those operations in which tactics, requirements in military-type personnel, equipment and training approximate those in conventional military operations. The DOD was to receive the responsibility for conducting overt PM operations, and the CIA was to conduct covert or disavowable PM operations, providing that these operations were within the CIA's capabilities. Any large PM operations, wholly or partly covert, which required significant numbers of militarily-trained personnel, amounts of military equipment which exceeded normal CIA-controlled stocks and/or military experience of the kind and level peculiar to the Armed Services was properly the primary responsibility of the DOD with the CIA in a supporting role. All operations were to be considered on a case-by-case basis to determine the office of primary responsibility. The directive envisioned the establishment of the Strategic Resources Group as the decision-making body for determination of responsibility for operations; however, the Special Group (5412) retained its status. Special Group (5412) was renamed later as the 303 Committee.

~~(TS-NFB)~~ Prior to the promulgation of the aforementioned directives which defined interdepartmental relationships, the Secretary of Defense

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restructured the DOD to streamline the planning, coordination, and conduct of covert and clandestine activities. In February 1961 the Secretary of Defense appointed Brigadier General Lansdale as the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense (ASTD) to handle functions related to (1) Special Group (5412)/303 Committee matters, (2) special defense activities as approved by the Secretary of Defense, and (3) CIA-DOD²⁸ relationships of special interest to the Secretary of Defense.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ Also during February, the Deputy Secretary of Defense requested that a small, secure staff element be established on the Joint Staff to serve as a point of contact between General Lansdale and the JCS. The purpose of the new office was to facilitate coordination between the Office of the Secretary of Defense and various agencies on the Joint Staff and overseas commands. General support responsibilities to the ASTD entailed (1) special logistical support, such as military equipment, airlift, and realty facilities; (2) fabrication of cover stories; (3) planning in connection with support requirements for special operations of an interdepartmental nature; (4) research and coordination pertaining to policy aspects of DOD support for covert actions and special operations.²⁹ By the fall of 1961 misunderstandings about the functions of this staff element, designated the Special Operations Division, were resolved by memorandums from the Secretary of Defense and the ASTD. This clarification of role permitted individual Service³⁰ components to effect direct liaison with the CIA on routine matters.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ In early 1962, the Special Operations Division was transferred en toto from under the Directorate of Plans and Policy and placed directly under the Director of the Joint Staff. It was redesignated

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the Office of the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (OSACSA).

(TS) That reorganization followed upon the heels of the establishment of the Special Group (CI--Counterinsurgency), a top echelon decision-making body with authority similar to that of the Special Group (5412); however, its purview covered overt and declared military actions. The rationale behind the formation of the Special Group (CI) was stated in the MACSOG Documentation Study:³¹

"...It is a means to ensure unity of effort and to use all available resources with maximum effectiveness in preventing and resisting subversive insurgency and related forms of indirect aggression in friendly countries."

As a result of the NSAM of 18 January 1962 which activated the Special Group (CI), there were two direct lines of authority for prosecuting the war in Southeast Asia from Washington: Special Group (5412) monitored covert actions; Special Group (CI) monitored conventional--counterinsurgency--operations.

(U) National decisions leading to increased aid to South Vietnam were bound inextricably to the decisions altering the US command apparatus. By 1 January 1962, the United States had pledged additional aid to the South Vietnamese regime on four separate occasions. The White House released to the public on 15 December 1961 an exchange of letters between Diem and Kennedy. Diem requested "further assistance from the United States if we [South Vietnamese] are to win the war now being waged against us."³² Kennedy pledged: "We shall promptly increase our assistance to your defense effort..."³³ During 1961, there was an enormous increase in numbers of US personnel stationed in Vietnam. To enhance the management

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of the larger force, the United States replaced the MAAG with the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) in February, 1962. American Indochina experts exuded optimism over the sizeable increase and predicted that the war would be won in from one to three years.³⁴

(U) By 1963, however, American policy-makers and military planners in Washington faced a dilemma with regard to the future commitment to South Vietnam; conventional and unconventional military efforts had not diminished the threat, in fact, the position of the South Vietnamese Government had become less tenable. Various meetings of high-level US officials during the year called for an escalation of counterinsurgency efforts and unconventional warfare actions. Operation Plan (OPLAN) 34A emerged from these meetings; it specified an intensified program of clandestine and covert operations against North Vietnam to be administered by a combined Central Intelligence Agency-Department of Defense task force.³⁵

Precursor to OPLAN 34A -- The CAS Program (U)

(U) The Controlled American Source program of covert and clandestine operations in Laos and North Vietnam began, for all practical purposes, in late 1960 and early 1961. The earlier CIA efforts to establish a stay-behind organization after the Geneva Agreement of 1954 had been relatively unsuccessful due to the forced removal of its team from Hanoi in 1955. By the time the United States and South Vietnamese governments recognized the seriousness of the communist threat and extent of external support to the insurgency, the northern regime had established effective population controls over its citizens.³⁶

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~~(TS NFD)~~ From 1961 to 1964 the CAS program underwent several disruptive changes. The initial mission was intelligence collection. The principal mission then became sabotage and harassment operations with intelligence collection as a by-product. In the summer of 1963 emphasis was placed on the insertion of PSYWAR teams. These policy changes, as well as the Geneva Accord in Laos in 1962, severely undermined CAS unconventional warfare efforts. Actual results of CAS agent operations from 1961 to 1964 reflect the scope of the problems: Of the 33 agent teams infiltrated, 19 were lost.³⁷

~~(TS NFD)~~ The two primary means of infiltrating agents were air and sea delivery. Of the 33 successful infiltrations under the CAS UW program, 23 were accomplished by air drops. Three aircraft were lost during these efforts: one Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) C-47, one CIA C-46, and one CIA C-54.³⁸ Acquisition of five C-123 aircraft, specially configured with Electronic Countermeasure Equipment (ECM), considerably enhanced the delivery capability of agent teams into North Vietnam. Controlled American Sources negotiations with the Chinese Air Force (CAF) secured CAF crews for these aircraft, permitting plausible denial of US sponsorship of air operations over North Vietnamese territory.

~~(TS NFD)~~ Numerous problems were associated with air delivery of agents into North Vietnam. The requirement to conduct undercover operations necessitated that missions be flown only during the hours of darkness. Navigational shortcomings further limited the scheduling of missions to only four or five nights out of every month, depending on lunar illumination. Terrain features and weather conditions were important factors in flight planning; overcast weather often obscured drop zones, forcing

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a mission to abort. Resupply of agent teams was considerably more difficult than insertion of agents; a compromised team could lure the aircraft into an enemy trap.

~~(TS-NED)~~ Air Force personnel associated with the CAS program and documents cited in the MACSOG Documentation Study both identified procedural limitations for air operations over North Vietnam. A general criticism was the lack of flexibility in flight planning -- a failure to select alternate routes, identification points, and drop zones. Reluctance to use Danang as a staging base, thus denying aircrews the needed crew rest, was also cited. Further, due to the sensitivity of the operations, pre-flight briefings were withheld until the last minute, allowing insufficient time for study of the flight plan. ³⁹

~~(TS-NED)~~ Controlled American Sources operations in Laos differed markedly from those in North Vietnam. Operations in Laos were without air support. CAS conducted numerous operations of a reconnaissance nature in the area between Attapeu and Tchepone. Its company-sized exploitation-type operations resulted in a high number of friendly casualties. ⁴⁰

~~(TS-NED)~~ CAS operations in Laos and North Vietnam required little USAF support. The Air Force provided a small contingent of personnel, undercover, who aided in flight planning. It also provided logistics, weather forecasting, and aerial reconnaissance support. Training of the Chinese Nationalists aircrews in the C-123 aircraft was, possibly, the major contribution.

OPLAN 34A -- The Combined CIA-DOD Task Force (U)

~~(TS-NED)~~ By the end of 1963, the US Administration was determined to expand the covert and clandestine program against North Vietnam.

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OPLAN 34A reflected this intent, envisioning a scale of activity beyond the capability of the CIA alone.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ The Department of Defense had advocated an expansion and intensification of covert and clandestine actions in SEA as early as 1962. In April, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) recommended covert air strikes against Tchepone (Laos) and Vinh (North Vietnam) to counter infiltration. Concurrently, the Commander-in-Chief of Pacific Command (CINCPAC) forwarded to the JCS his conceptual views of harassing actions against North Vietnam (NVN). This plan, as modified by the JCS, did not meet Special Group (5412) approval.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ In 1963 General Earl G. Wheeler, Chief of Staff of the Army (SA) led a staff visit team to Vietnam to investigate prospects of ending the conflict within a reasonable amount of time. He then briefed the President, recommending that the US intensify UW training for Vietnamese forces and encourage the Vietnamese to conduct raids and sabotage missions against NVN. Wheeler's report led to more specific studies by agencies on the Service and Joint staffs. The most notable study resulting from Wheeler's trip report was an Army study entitled "A Study of the Feasibility of Conducting Limited Military Operations in North Vietnam." ⁴¹ Army planners envisioned a Joint Unconventional Warfare Task Force, which would eclipse the scope of CIA UW operations against North Vietnam.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ This plan was a topic of discussion at conferences held by the Secretary of Defense in the Pacific area in 1963. There emerged a more active role for the DOD in conducting special operations in SEA. The Secretary of Defense directed CINCPAC to prepare specific target folders for covert and paramilitary operations in North Vietnam, and he

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offered assistance to the CIA in accelerating its capabilities. In response to the Secretary of Defense offer, the CAS Station Chief, Saigon requested that additional military personnel be made available. In May 1963, while the request was being considered, the JCS directed CINCPAC to formulate a plan of action for CIA support of the DOD.

~~(TS NFD)~~ During the subsequent months, message traffic between Washington and the field revealed continual high-level discussion of altering the command structure for prosecution of UW actions in SEA. By November some CAS programs had been transferred to MACV. During that month, representatives from the Department of Defense, Department of State, and Central Intelligence Agency discussed DOD/CIA relationships, setting the stage for OPLAN 34A. Specifically, the November meetings called for the transfer from CAS to MACV of all irregular forces in SVN, a joint CAS-MACV operation plan for a 12-month program of intensified operations against North Vietnam, and the transfer of cross-border operations in Laos to MACV auspices effective 1 December 1963. The operations plan developed by CAS Saigon and MACV was completed on 15 December.

~~(TS NFD)~~ The plan outlined the mission of the joint task force as follows:

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"COMUSMACV and Chief of Station, CAS, Saigon will provide necessary advice, assistance, training and material support to enable the RVN to conduct a graduated and intensified program of actions against the DRV which, in conjunction with other military and diplomatic actions in SEA, will lead to a judgment on the part of the DRV leadership that continued direction and support of insurgent activities in the Republic of Vietnam and Laos should cease."

~~(TS NFD)~~ OPLAN 34A specified five types of operations: intelligence collection, psychological operations, political pressure, resistance

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operations, and physical destruction (hit-and-run and aerial attacks). The three possible methods for implementation of the UW programs were: (1) either by CAS or MACV with the second party providing required support, (2) by a joint CAS-MACV command or, (3) by both CAS and MACV, each conducting a portion of the total program.⁴³

~~(TS NED)~~ CINCPAC generally concurred with the plan; he was, however, somewhat apprehensive regarding the effects of the proposed actions on the North Vietnamese leadership. He also expressed fears of possible Chinese intervention.⁴⁴

~~(TS NED)~~ In December 1963, after receiving the OPLAN 34A briefing in Saigon, the Secretary of Defense and Director of Central Intelligence decided to present the plan to the Special Group (5412) for approval. The plan was then presented to the President; he, in turn, established an interdepartmental committee to select from the plan those operations which were feasible and offered the greatest return with minimal risk. Major General Krulak, the Chief of SACSA, chaired this committee. (The Office of the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense was disbanded earlier in 1963.) In evaluating the possible effects of the intensified program, the committee expressed less than total optimism; however, it considered the advantages of selected operations to outweigh the risks.⁴⁵ In January, a joint message from the Department of Defense, Department of State, and Central Intelligence Agency indicated that the committee's recommendations had received presidential approval and were to be executed commencing on 1 January 1964. A joint MACV-CAS task force was to implement OPLAN 34A. Operational control rested with COMUSMACV; overall political control rested with the US Ambassador to Vietnam. The Joint Task Force was to

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provide planning, liaison, logistics, and training to its Vietnamese counterpart.

~~(TS NED)~~ Ambassador Lodge presented a sanitized version of the plan to the South Vietnamese government in January; however, a coup d'etat required that the plan be resubmitted to General Khanh on 3 February. General Khanh's appraisal of the plan was related in conversation with Secretary McNamara, Ambassador Lodge, and General Taylor. The MACSOG
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Documentation Study gave the following account:

"General Khanh agreed that actions designed to exert increased pressure on North Vietnam could be helpful assistance to his effort but that they would be no substitute for successful actions in South Vietnam against the Viet Cong. Further, General Khanh said that his base in South Vietnam was not strong enough for overt operations against North Vietnam but that he would like to redouble covert operations right away."

~~(TS NED)~~ In preparation for execution of the plan, the Secretary of Defense had deployed all necessary equipment and personnel to Saigon to await further instructions. It was envisioned that the personnel assigned in-country, and existing equipment stockpiles, would be sufficient to meet most of the initial requirements. The principal requirement levied on the Air Force was for six specially-modified C-123 aircraft, equipped with ECM, radar detection, and pinpoint navigation equipment. These aircraft were not available until after the activation of MACSOG.
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CHAPTER III THE INSTRUMENT FOR FURTIVE WAR (U)

~~(S-NFB)~~ The formation of MACSOG marked the beginning of a graduated and intensified campaign of covert and clandestine activities under military direction by the United States against North Vietnam. The objective was to dissuade North Vietnamese leaders from waging hostilities against South Vietnam. Obviously, SOG did not achieve this objective within the specified one-year period; after that it continued to conduct covert and clandestine operations in Southeast Asia until 1972, at which time it assumed solely an advisory function.

~~(S-NFB)~~ The effect of MACSOG actions on North Vietnamese leaders and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) is difficult to assess. An evaluation of the impact of these actions is certainly not within the purview of this report; however, an exposition of the organization, evolution, and specific programs of MACSOG is vital to an understanding of the USAF role in unconventional warfare in SEA.

Mission and Objectives (U)

~~(TS-NFB)~~ The MACSOG program was under the close scrutiny of Washington authorities. Hence, its stated mission and objectives necessarily changed, reflecting the vicissitudes of Washington's Vietnam Policy. Other factors affecting the SOG mission were its own capabilities and limitations and the effectiveness of North Vietnamese countermeasures. The final step of the original operation plan, active US support to an armed resistance movement in North Vietnam, was never realized. Even if the US President had approved such an operation, it is doubtful that the movement would

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have been successful in the rigidly controlled, totalitarian North. More
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limited objectives were to:

- Divert North Vietnamese military resources to defense and internal security missions.
- Produce an adverse effect on the North Vietnamese economy.
- Impede the infiltration of military resources to the Republic of Vietnam.
- Create the impression that an active, unified, internal opposition exists in North Vietnam.

~~(TS-NED)~~ Changes to the SOG mission statement in 1965 and 1967 were incorporated to reflect expanded operations in Laos and Cambodia. The latter revision remained basically unchanged until the demise of SOG. In
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abbreviated form, it read:

"[The SOG mission is] to plan and conduct covert/ clandestine operations in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and special operations in South Vietnam, as directed, in such a manner that operations can be plausibly denied by the US and RVN [Republic of Vietnam] governments. These operations are planned and conducted in coordination with various other agencies and with the RVNAF STD [Strategic Technical Directorate -- Vietnamese counterpart to SOG]."

~~(S-NED)~~ In actuality, a major change to the SOG mission resulted from the Presidential decision in November 1968 to cease both bombing and unconventional warfare operations in North Vietnam. (The ban, however, did not apply to radio broadcasts beamed toward the populace of North Vietnam.)

~~(TS-NED)~~ A synopsis of some 50 interviews with MACSOG personnel indicated that the major shortcoming of mission and program statements was the lack of clear and well-defined statements outlining SOG's relationship to other agencies such as the Fifth Special Forces Group, the CIA, and the STD.

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MACSOG Organization (U)

~~(TS NFD)~~ The establishment of MACSOG under the operational control of COMUSMACV on 24 January 1964 did not effect a complete and abrupt transfer from CAS to MACV of responsibility for all unconventional warfare operations in Southeast Asia. CAS continued to conduct some secretive operations unilaterally: for example, the training of Meo tribesmen in Laos and portions of North Vietnam. Within the SOG structure itself, CAS personnel continued to handle some functions through CAS channels. One particular case was the supervision of air operations. CAS retained responsibility for approval and disapproval of air operations until October 1964. In most cases, however, CAS responsibilities diminished when sufficient amounts of DOD paramilitary assets had arrived in the RVN.

~~(TS NFD)~~ According to planning documents, manpower and materiel resources located in South Vietnam were adequate to satisfy initial requirements. Where shortages existed, personnel on temporary duty (TDY) augmented SOG manning. Substantial numbers of US, Vietnamese, and Chinese Nationalist personnel, along with numerous facilities, were transferred to SOG by CAS. The rapid increase in the number of US military personnel assigned to MACSOG, from an initial contingent of six officers and two enlisted men to 144 men by the end of 1964 and to over 400 by 1969, was beset with some problems, especially in the early stages of build-up. The Chief of MACSOG Air Operations alluded to the shortcomings of personnel who replaced CAS officers.

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"...initial selection was based on availability of people with retainability in the theater and with the proper rank... a major problem was the total ignorance of everyone concerned in this type of operation."

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~~(TS NFD)~~ Commensurate with the increase of personnel and addition of programs, the SOG organizational structure proliferated. At the end of 1964 there were five major branches under the Commander (An Army colonel) and the Deputy Commander (a CAS officer): Administrative, Intelligence, Operations, Logistics, and Communications. Additionally, four command elements came under the operational control of the SOG Commander: SOG Flight Detachment, Psychological Operations Group, Long Thanh Training Detachment, and Maritime Operations Group. Staff elements within the Operations Branch of SOG Headquarters exercised staff supervision over the command elements.

~~(TS NFD)~~ The most significant changes to the organization in 1965 were the addition of a Plans Branch to the headquarters element, addition of Medical and Airborne Operations Sections under the Operations Branch, and the redesignation of the CAS officer as the Special Assistant to the Commander. The vacated Deputy Commander space was changed to a military billet. The Flight Detachment at Nha Trang was renamed the Air Operations Group.

~~(TS NFD)~~ Again in 1966, major changes to the SOG organization resulted from the escalation of military efforts against North Vietnam. The increase in air activity, in particular, resulted in internal changes in the Intelligence Branch and the addition of the Joint Personnel recovery Center (JPRC). The JPRC, which provided MACV with the capability for personnel recovery operations subsequent to the termination of Search and Rescue (SAR) efforts, was activated officially on 17 September 1966.

~~(TS NFD)~~ After 1966 there was little change to the SOG organization, other than streamlining lines of authority within SOG Headquarters. Establishment of Command and Control Detachments at Danang, Kontum, and Ban Me

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Thuot facilitated the management of cross-border operations in Laos and Cambodia. Organizational changes relating to the command and control of air assets are discussed in the chapter on air operations.

Programs and Operations (U)

~~(TS NFD)~~ Under the charter of OPLAN 34A SOG executed four types of UW operations against NVN under the Footboy (C) program (the covername for all SOG UW actions against North Vietnam): Maritime Operations - Parboil (C); Psychological Warfare Operations - Humidor (C); Airborne Operations - Timberwork (C); and Air Operations - Midriff (C). Later in 1965 SOG assumed responsibility from the Fifth Special Forces Group for the conduct of cross-border operations in southern Laos: the nickname of this operation was Shining Brass (formerly called Delta under the auspices of the Special Forces Command). Closely associated with the operations in Laos were those conducted in the Demilitarized Zone under the nickname of Nickel Steel. In 1967, SOG commenced cross-border operations in Cambodia under the nickname of Daniel Boone.

Maritime Operations (U)

~~(TS NFD)~~ Parboil (C) Teams, consisting of third country nationals and indigenous personnel, staged out of Danang and covered nearly the entire coastline of North Vietnam. They conducted missions of sabotage and harassment, intelligence collection, and psychological warfare. They were particularly instrumental in disseminating propaganda in support of a fictitious resistance group, the Sacred Sword Patriots' League. Furthermore, Parboil (C) Teams provided the United States command with most of the hard intelligence of the North Vietnamese coastline.

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~~(TS NED)~~ Air support requirements for Maritime Operations were negligible. USAF air assets provided high- and medium-level aerial reconnaissance, and occasionally were on call to assist in the event of an emergency.

Psychological Warfare Operations (U)

~~(TS NED)~~ The MACSOG Documentation Study acclaimed the Humidor (C) operation to be the most successful program against North Vietnam. The numerous North Vietnamese publications and broadcasts which denounced US psychological warfare operations evinced the effectiveness of these operations. Persistent demands for the cessation of such operations prior to the commencement of peace negotiations further underlined Hanoi's fears of the effects of US propaganda. A SACSA study addressed Hanoi's problem in
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countering the Humidor (C) program:

"...Faced with the problem of maintaining control and developing motivation in a closed society under conditions of extreme hardship, the Hanoi regime is sensitive to every perceived threat to its control and motivation of the population. Psychological operations which strike at the spirit and morale of the people are viewed with great concern... The requirement for increased security results in increased diversion of resources to internal security. But, at the same time, the need to exert control at every level of government makes decentralization necessary and this very decentralization places a suspect element, the cadres, in a key position between the masses and central authority. In this dilemma, the government tends to exaggerate every allied action which has a potential impact on these contradictory forces and the resulting frustration is manifested in a series of ad hoc measures to counter allied psychological warfare efforts."

~~(TS NED)~~ The importance attached to psychological warfare by the US command was reflected in a 1967 statement by CINCPAC that the entire Footboy program would be better oriented toward two basic objectives:

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creation of a psychological impact, and development of an intelligence capability. Further, in his view all SOG actions against the NVN should be designed to achieve those two ends.

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~~(TS NFD)~~ SOG used three general categories of psychological warfare operations -- black, gray, and white. Black operations attributed sponsorship to the North Vietnamese or Viet Cong; gray operations made sponsorship undiscernible; and white operations clearly gave the impression of US or South Vietnamese sponsorship. Under all three categories, SOG disseminated a myriad of themes, both strategic and tactical. The former portrayed a better life without communism; the latter aimed at exploiting specific time-sensitive vulnerabilities. Propaganda was disseminated by several means: radio broadcasts; dispatch of black letters; delivery of leaflets, gift kits, and portable radios; and indoctrination of detained NVN citizens. The rapid expansion of the Humidor (C) program is reflected by statistics showing the number of leaflets dispensed over North Vietnam: 67 million leaflets were delivered in 1965, 142 million during the following year, and 271 million during 1967.

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~~(TS NFD)~~ Psychological warfare operations also became an integral part of other SOG operations. Maritime forces distributed propaganda leaflets and gift kits along the NVN coastline and abducted NVN citizens, subjecting them to indoctrination at Paradise Island (near Danang). Teams infiltrating into the Ho Chi Minh Trail Network deposited contaminated ammunition and defective weapons in cache sites in an effort to undermine the NVA confidence in communist war materiel. Too, the Humidor (C) program was particularly integrated with Midriff (C) operations since aerial delivery was the principal means for delivering leaflets.

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Airborne Operations (U)

~~(TS NFD)~~ The Timberwork (C) program entailed the infiltration, reinforcement, resupply, and exfiltration of agents and agent teams. It encountered immense difficulties under both CAS and SOG direction. Evaluations of these operations revealed that they were largely ineffective, and were, in fact, the least successful of the Footboy (C) sub-programs.⁵⁴

~~(TS NFD)~~ When SOG took control of the long-term agent program, 169 agents were located at the training facility, Camp Long Thanh, and 24 agents (4 teams) were located in North Vietnam. In 1964, SOG inserted an additional team and conducted 13 reinforcement/resupply missions. By the end of the year, 59 agents were operating in NVN. They destroyed⁵⁵ three bridges, conducted one ambush, and recruited two agents. Operations were costly: 54 agents were lost and less than 25 percent of the⁵⁶ scheduled reinforcement/resupply missions were completed successfully.

~~(TS NFD)~~ In 1965, SOG infiltrated 2 more teams and successfully completed 22 reinforcement and resupply missions. Teams continued to conduct harassment, destruction, and temporary interdiction missions along Lines of Communication (LOCs); however, with the advent of overt aerial bombing and heightened concern over the buildup of Soviet and Chinese aid to North Vietnam, greater emphasis was placed on intelligence collection and development of a broad intelligence base.

~~(TS NFD)~~ In an attempt to rejuvenate the program, SOG initiated an operation to exfiltrate one of the long-term agent teams. This would allow extensive intelligence debriefing and feedback for the critique of agent training. Furthermore, a successful exfiltration would provide tangible evidence for trainees that exfiltration was possible. In the late

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summer of 1965, SOG directed five members of one team to move overland to Laos, where CAS assets would render assistance for evacuation to Vientiane. Unfortunately, radio contact with the agent team was lost; presumably it was captured by Pathet Lao. Later efforts to recover other long-term agent teams also were ill-fated.

~~(TS NFD)~~ Nevertheless, SOG continued to expand its agent network in North Vietnam in 1966, adding 3 more teams and accomplishing 28 reinforcement and resupply missions. But the resupply effort was not enough. Teams were expending greater effort to ensure their own survival. Some teams were dormant due to the lack of supplies. One team, for example, had not been resupplied since 1962. Even though the introduction of helicopters and high performance aircraft partially alleviated resupply problems, and the newly acquired C-130 Combat Talon aircraft (with sophisticated navigational equipment) also enhanced the SOG aerial delivery capability, appraisal of airborne operations at the end of 1966 led to the development of new airborne concepts. Two concepts implemented during 1967 were the diversionary agent program, under the covername of Forae (C), and the Short Term Roadwatch and Target Acquisition (STRATA) Operation. These enhancements to Airborne Operations were designed to contravene NVN security measures, which were well-coordinated and extensive. The 1967 MACSOG⁵⁷ history stated:

"The NVN government has intensified internal security measures and has employed all available communications media to make the population aware of the presence of SVN 'spy-rangers' in their midst. In-place teams continued to encounter enemy forces and suffer casualties as a result...the pressure now being exerted by the enemy appears to be well organized and employed throughout NVN."

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~~(TS NED)~~ Forae (C) played upon the NVN fear of agent operations, attempting to divert even larger numbers of NVN militia and NVA personnel to internal security functions. The program was not designed to deceive the enemy indefinitely. Even if the North Vietnamese suspected bogus agent drops and resupply missions, they could not ignore the potential threat to internal security.

~~(TS NED)~~ Deception measures included dropping of supplies in areas where no active agent teams were located, parachuting NVA prisoners incriminated with false documents, dropping ice blocks rigged in parachutes, and making radio broadcasts to fictitious teams.

~~(TS NED)~~ The STRATA concept of operations had several advantages over the long-term agent program. Namely, successful exfiltration of agents was more probable. The new concept focused on intelligence collection along lines of communication -- areas of key interest to higher authorities. Data acquisition was more timely.

~~(TS NED)~~ The origin of the STRATA concept dated back to 1965, when SOG proposed the Early Warning Observation Team concept in response to queries from the JCS and CINCPAC regarding the extent of external support to NVN and logistics activity on major LOCs in the NVN panhandle. Concurrent with that proposal, SOG requested and received authority to use helicopters for infiltration. The concept then became workable after the Thai government allowed the transfer of OPLAN 34A agents from fixed-wing aircraft to helicopters at Thai bases.

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~~(TS NED)~~ In January 1967 a COMUSMACV message outlined the STRATA concept of operations. Teams of five to fifteen indigenous personnel

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were to infiltrate Laos or NVN by USAF or RVNAF helicopter, move overland to a base camp in NVN, and perform 15 to 30-day missions to include: installation of seismic devices, installation of wire tap devices, road-watch of critical LOCs, reconnaissance and exact location of suspected enemy locations, and target acquisition for airstrikes. The concept, as approved by the JCS in April, specified a general operating area extending 50 kilometers inside the North Vietnamese border north of the Demilitarized Zone to 19 degrees North. As noted above, USAF helicopters were⁵⁹ authorized to infiltrate the teams.

~~(TS-NFB)~~ SOG conducted two STRATA operations in late 1967, extracting one of the teams after a successful mission. In 1968 SOG inserted 24 teams; only one team was lost in entirety and three teams suffered partial losses. Hence, STRATA team survival rates were considerably higher than⁶⁰ those experienced by long-term agent teams.

~~(TS-NFB)~~ The STRATA operation and most aspects of the Forae (C) operation, as well as the waning long-term agent program, ceased on 1 November 1968. STRATA assets were then transferred to the Laos cross-border operation.

~~(TS-NFB)~~ The relatively poor performance of airborne operations over the years may be explained partially by looking at the various obstacles which were endemic to such an operation. The following factors comprised the major limitations:

1. North Vietnam, under a strong totalitarian regime, was a closed society with efficient anti-subversion machinery.
2. High echelon control and mission approval/disapproval procedures impeded the planning and execution of operations.
3. Diplomatic restrictions, such as the initial limitation

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on overflights of Laotian territory and on the use of Thai facilities, restricted flexible planning of missions.

4. Terrain features and climatical conditions imposed severe difficulties in achieving accurate aerial delivery of agents and supplies.

5. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong apparently had a good intelligence collection system in the vicinity of the Long Thanh training facility and possibly had secured information sources in the South Vietnamese Strategic Technical Directorate.

6. There was not full cooperation between CAS Vientiane and MACSOG.

7. The air defense system of NVN prevented operations in the vicinity of population centers for C-123 and C-130 aircraft.

8. A shortage of air assets limited the number of combat operations and training exercises.

9. Navigational aids on SOG fixed-wing aircraft did not enable pinpoint delivery accuracy in aerial drops over obscured drop zones.

10. The quality of agent personnel increasingly diminished; poor motivation was manifested by high desertion and absentee rates.

11. Heavy cloud cover and other missions of higher priority sometimes denied SOG the necessary aerial photography for mission planning.

Cross-Border Operations in Laos (U)

~~(S NFD)~~ After assuming responsibility for cross-border operations in Laos in October 1965, SOG intensified the operations until 1968. The level of activity was then stable until 1971, when the dearth of military assets, especially air assets, prompted curtailment of these operations.

~~(TS NFD)~~ At the outset of Shining Brass operations in 1965, US active military involvement in Laos was surrounded by secrecy. To conceal this involvement, Washington established stringent political constraints

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which were not removed until after the communists' control of the Laotian panhandle was firmly acknowledged.

~~(TS-NED)~~ The initial Shining Brass operation plan envisioned three phases of activity to be conducted by RVN forces with US support. The objective of the first phase was to acquire short-term tactical intelligence. Phase Two entailed intelligence collection missions of longer duration in combination with limited harassing attacks, including ground direction of air strikes against lucrative targets. During this phase teams were to be resupplied and reinforced by air. The final phase of the program, which was never implemented, called for the development of an active resistance base among the indigenous populace.

~~(TS-NED)~~ In the last two months of 1965, SOG commenced operations in the Shining Brass Area of Operations. Penetrations into Laos were extremely shallow, primarily because the US Ambassador to Laos prohibited the use of helicopters for infiltration. The VNAF possessed a limited number of helicopters which could theoretically be used to support the cross-border program, but their use was subject to the approval of the US Ambassador to Laos. Citing the success of these initial operations and noting the enhancement to be realized by using helicopter support for infiltration and exfiltration of Shining Brass Teams, COMUSMACV requested authority to employ US helicopters for this purpose. He offered specific justification: airborne delivery of teams would improve the security of teams by reducing the distance to be traveled by foot through hostile territory. Too, this type of infiltration would lengthen in-place time and reduce the requirements for aerial resupply. In April 1966 the Department of State and DOD responded favorably, authorizing the US helicopter insertion method.

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~~(TS NFD)~~ Another instrumental decision in 1966 had considerable effect on the evolution of the Shining Brass program: the Secretary of Defense authorized the organization of three battalions of Exploitation Forces (EF) for the execution of Phase Two of the operation plan. These forces, sometimes referred to as reaction forces or "Hornet forces," were capable of rapid engagement of targets developed by smaller reconnaissance teams. Specific missions of the EF battalions included the following: platoon and multi-platoon size elements to conduct reconnaissance-in-force, route interdiction, ambushes and raids; to establish and secure temporary patrol bases to support wide-area reconnaissance team operations; and to provide short-term area denial and cache destruction capabilities.

~~(TS NFD)~~ The Exploitation Forces thus complemented the reconnaissance teams, known as Spike Teams. These smaller teams were trained to perform a myriad of specialized missions, to include area and point reconnaissance, road and river watch, route mining and ambush, prisoner of war capture, bomb damage assessment, ground photography, communication wire tap, hand emplacement of sensor devices, direction of artillery and airstrikes on detected targets, and limited direct ground combat.

~~(TS NFD)~~ The tempo of reconnaissance team operations in Laos increased dramatically in 1966. An average of two operations per month rose to approximately 11 per month by the end of the year. Exploitation Force operations commenced in June and averaged about two each month for the remainder of the year. This expanding trend continued in 1967 as restrictions on the use of helicopters and geographical boundaries were eased. Furthermore, the JCS authorized larger exploitation forces to participate in operations, allowing a combined force of three platoons on any one operation.

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~~(TS-NED)~~ The development of two new concepts in 1967, Muscle Shoals and Search-Locate-Annihilate-Monitor (SLAM), placed greater requirements on the Shining Brass program. The Muscle Shoals program was a DOD-conceived anti-infiltration system, entailing the emplacement of electronic sensors along the Ho Chi Minh Trail by aircraft and ground teams and SLAM was a type of exploitation operation. Reconnaissance teams were to search for and locate the enemy, reaction forces were to exploit the intelligence, and a stay-behind force was to monitor the area after the withdrawal of the exploitation force.

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~~(TS-NED)~~ In 1968 the salient feature of the program (renamed Prairie Fire on 1 March 1967) was the high number of operations conducted in-country versus the number of operations conducted in Laos. Only after the cessation of the Communist Spring-Winter Campaign did SOG resume its primary cross-border mission. During the communist offensive, SOG support to the in-country conventional military forces allowed only 17 percent of the Prairie Fire (PF) efforts to be freed for cross-border operations. Another reason for the diversion of efforts from Laos to South Vietnam was the loss of two Forward Operating Bases -- Khe Sanh and Kham Duc. After the communist threat in South Vietnam diminished during the last three months of the year, SOG directed three-quarters of its PF operations in Laotian territory.

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By this time, however, NVA security elements in Laos had become much more effective in countering Prairie Fire operations, as indicated by shorter stay-times of the teams and more frequent resort to emergency team extractions.

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~~(TS-NED)~~ Actions offsetting these limitations were increased reliance on indigenous personnel and establishment of a launch facility at Nakhon

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Phanom, Thailand. Although the US Ambassador to Laos had disapproved a SOG request to develop a resistance base among indigenous elements, he permitted their use in intelligence collection activities. The support facility at Nakhon Phanom permitted insertion in the Prairie Fire Area of Operations (PFAO) by using western approach routes, lessening the enemy threat to air assets, and enhancing the covertness of PF operations. Additionally, flight paths originating in Thailand vice the central highlands of the RVN were inhibited less frequently by inclement weather conditions.⁶⁷

~~(TS NFD)~~ The addition of another Thai launch facility in 1969 at Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base bettered the flexibility in launching teams into the southern Prairie Fire zone. Concurrently, CAS Vientiane granted permission for Thai-based helicopters to use a refueling and staging site located on the Bolovens Plateau. Another major development during 1969 which reflected the greater emphasis being placed on the southern PFAO, the tri-border area, was the establishment of the Command and Control Detachment at Kontum. These developments were complemented by other innovations, such as the activation of mobile launch teams to accompany reconnaissance and exploitation elements to forward operating bases and to serve as field command elements. Another new effort was the Earth Angel program, whereby SOG used NVA defectors who volunteered to work as agents in Laos and Cambodia. These developments enabled SOG to conduct relatively successful operations throughout 1969 at a tempo comparable to that of 1968 operations. The most notable problem encountered was the shortage⁶⁸ of helicopters; loss rates during the year were inordinately high.

~~(TS NFD)~~ Maintaining the same level of operations in 1970, SOG

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implemented more versatile methods of infiltration to include High Altitude-Low Opening (HALO) drops from C-123s and C-130s. Replacement of the CH-3 helicopter by the CH-53 also enhanced infiltration capabilities. Better cooperation between SOG and American authorities in Laos -- the Embassy and CAS -- resulted in the authority to insert teams outside of the Area of Operations (AO) for overland movement into target areas.

~~(TS NFD)~~ Prairie Fire operations (renamed Phu Dung in 1971) continued at a comparable level in 1971; however, the enemy's improved defensive posture resulted in a reduction of team stay-time by more than one-third. To create new drop and landing zones, SOG relied on the Commando Vault program, whereby C-130 aircraft delivered 15,000-pound bombs which cleared such zones. This method proved to be effective if reconnaissance teams were inserted immediately after the "LZ (landing zone) blow." As during 1970, operations were characterized by greater cooperation between CAS and SOG. This was particularly true in support of Lam Son 719, the ARVN incursion into Laos early in 1971. By that time, US personnel were prohibited from participation in cross-border operations in consonance with JCS message dated 8 February 1971.

~~(TS NFD)~~ Phu Dung operations ceased in 1972 after a steady drawdown of supporting air assets. On 15 May, SOG was deactivated and was redesignated the Strategic Technical Directorate Assistance Team with an advisory staff of 158 personnel.

~~(TS NFD)~~ Numerous study groups at MACV, CINCPAC, and the Pentagon reviewed and evaluated the cross-border efforts in Laos. Their conclusions and recommendations were contradictory. Merits of the program were that SOG teams provided one of the few sources of hard intelligence on the

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Lao-Vietnamese border area and the Demilitarized Zone and that exploitation operations achieved a high kill ratio of enemy forces to friendly forces. The degree of disruption on enemy logistics could not be determined but, undoubtedly, SOG operations caused the diversion of enemy armed forces to provide internal security in the Phu Dung area. The major drawback of the program was its cost. Operations resulted in numerous aircraft losses, especially helicopter losses, and placed heavy demands on a limited number of air assets available in the RVN. A compilation of the alert time of SOG-dedicated air assets during periods when teams were in the field would permit a better estimate of program costs, but these data were not available. Furthermore, study of such data may not have been productive according to the COMUSMACV Ad Hoc Evaluation Group formed in December 1967. The group stated that SOG operations should not be subject to a cost-effectiveness analysis.

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~~(TS-NED)~~ Evaluations revealed that in-country conventional military forces were critical of SOG cross-border operations. One comment from the Ad Hoc Evaluation Group took issue with the focus of the intelligence collection efforts, noting that there should be "greater orientation to satisfy the needs of the Field Forces" (the US Army forces engaged in conventional operations in RVN). The group also alluded to a Seventh Air Force appraisal of the Phu Dung program:

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"According to Seventh Air Force, SOG-produced intelligence has been of minor value to 7AF for the development of tactical air and Arc Light [B-52 strikes] targets. With the exception of a Prairie Fire location of a truck part repair facility in the southeast sector which resulted in an Arc Light, and the provision of initial information of the Santa Fe trail net, information has been limited to minor troop concentrations, trail nets, and storage facilities. It appears, however, that the

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Prairie Fire intelligence contribution to Arc Light targeting is greater than indicated by 7AF representatives."

~~(TS NFD)~~ The overall finding of the Ad Hoc Evaluation Group's review was more favorable to SOG cross-border operations in Laos than the aforementioned Seventh Air Force view. It stated:

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"Prairie Fire operations have been effective and have achieved significant results in harassing and slowing the enemy. They have caused the enemy to shift some of his infiltration routes to areas further from South Vietnam with a consequent increased time for transit and a greater opportunity for tactical air exploitation. Prairie Fire operations have caused the enemy to be concerned for his Lines of Communications and to expend his resources on security that might otherwise be employed in South Vietnam. These operations also have contributed significantly to the targeting of areas for concentrated airstrikes which have been effective. Prairie Fire personnel kills have been significant although the ratio of enemy killed to friendlies killed and missing has not been as high as in-country ratios."

Cross-Border Operations in Cambodia (U)

~~(TS NFD)~~ As early as 1965, COMUSMACV became concerned about the enemy's use of Cambodian territory as a sanctuary and requested authority from Washington to conduct limited US actions against communists up to five kilometers inside the Cambodian border. He proposed the use of specially-trained reconnaissance units comprised of indigenous and US personnel for missions of intelligence collection and verification. Infiltration was envisioned to be by foot or by helicopter. COMUSMACV also advocated the limited use of forward air controller/observation aircraft and tactical fighters.

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~~(TS NFD)~~ In late 1965 and early 1966, planning for cross-bomber operations into Cambodia ensued. In June 1966, the JCS approved a CINCPAC

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recommendation to organize, train, and equip a paramilitary force for these operations. During the remainder of the year, the Fifth Special Forces Group trained the force.

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~~(TS NFD)~~ Pending the outcome of a joint Defense-State-CIA Study Group which was considering diplomatic and psychological initiatives, CINCPAC requested authority from the JCS in April 1967 to conduct limited ground reconnaissance operations in the Cambodian sector of the tri-border region. In May, the JCS approved the proposal, with State Department concurrence, but added stringent restrictions. Coordination procedures ensured strong control from Washington. The size of the teams and number of operations authorized for a given time frame were limited. Helicopters could be used for emergency extractions only. The employment of exploitation forces and tactical airstrikes was prohibited.

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~~(TS NFD)~~ After commencement of Daniel Boone (DB) operations and subsequent review, COMUSMACV requested the removal of some constraints. Although many were lifted, the State Department continued to exert a restraining force in the interest of resuming diplomatic relations with the Cambodian government. The revised operating authorities did, however, allow expansion of the area of operations, permit the use of helicopters for insertion and extraction, and authorize the use of FAC aircraft for Visual Reconnaissance (VR) of target areas and for airborne control of helicopter gunships and trooplift ships during infiltration and exfiltration of reconnaissance teams. A JCS message stated that all FAC flights would be on a mission essential basis and of minimum duration, and reconnaissance flights would be limited to two per Daniel Boone mission. FAC flights over Zone Bravo [the southern sector of the AO] would have to be approved

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on a case-by-case basis at the Washington level.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ By the end of 1967 SOG had launched 99 Reconnaissance Team missions from forward operating bases along the Cambodian border, mostly in the tri-border region. Sixty-three teams successfully penetrated Cambodian territory. The MACV Ad Hoc Evaluation Group assessed the Daniel Boone program as potentially valuable since it was the only ground intelligence effort in Cambodia for MACV use, but it stated that intelligence results had been fragmentary and low-level and not particularly suited to the needs of MACV and the Field Forces. Addressing the use of helicopters, the Group noted the limited quantity of assets. It stated:

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"Daniel Boone was initiated without the provision of helicopter assets specifically for these operations with the resultant drawdown on limited helicopter resources for support of operations in the RVN. Prior to any expansion of DB operations, helicopter resources in addition to those currently in the RVN should be obtained for SOG support."

~~(TS-NFD)~~ Acquisition of additional rotary wing assets engendered rapid expansion of the program. The number of operations doubled in 1968, but, as in the case of Prairie Fire operations, the major effort was directed in-country in reaction to the Communist offensive. After the offensive subsided SOG resumed its primary mission and by the end of September was conducting 95 percent of the Daniel Boone operations in Cambodia. The JCS relaxed some restrictions, but due to the State Department's insistence continued to ban the use of tactical airstrikes and exploitation forces.

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~~(TS-NFD)~~ A particularly interesting development during 1968 was the formation of the Vesuvius Committee in January. This committee, consisting of MACVJ2 and MACSOG representatives, compiled a list of targets of hard intelligence value to demonstrate to the Cambodian Prime Minister,

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Sihanouk, the extensive presence of Vietnamese communists within the boundaries of Cambodia.⁸¹

~~(TS-NFD)~~ In the following year diplomatic relations with the Cambodian government were reopened, enabling SOG to operate under less rigid constraints. Several noteworthy innovations were adopted in conducting the operations such as the first use of helicopter paradrop insertion methods. The program also assumed a new nickname in 1969 -- Salem House.⁸²

~~(TS-NFD)~~ In 1970, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff granted explicit authority for SOG teams to control tactical airstrikes. CINCPAC later authorized the employment of platoon-size exploitation forces. On 20 April, a JCS message approved an expansion of the AO, forming the Air Interdiction Zone (also called Freedom Deal) west of the original AO. The first airstrike in this zone occurred on 24 April when tactical fighters caught 150 communist troops in open terrain. Other significant authorities granted during the year included the following: infiltration of ethnic Cambodians, emplacement of mines in the AO, emplacement of sensors, and the use of artillery against targets of opportunity.⁸³

~~(TS-NFD)~~ After the Allied invasion of Cambodia during the months of May and June, public announcements were binding on the Salem House program. US personnel could no longer accompany reconnaissance teams into Cambodia; Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) personnel assumed the team leadership responsibilities. Furthermore, Washington banned the use of US troop lift helicopters and permitted the use of US helicopter gunships and tactical air assets only when such support was beyond the means of the VNAF.⁸⁴

~~(TS-NFD)~~ Despite the recently imposed constraints, the level of SOG operations in Cambodia remained stable during 1971. Although there was a

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trend toward greater emphasis on interdiction operations, the basic mission remained one of intelligence collection and verification. The previous year's extension of the area of operations allowed more extensive reconnaissance efforts of western waterways. Too, refined infiltration techniques using SOG fixed-wing assets permitted deeper, undetected insertion. The continued high level of operations was attributable, in part, to the acquisition of STRATA assets for Cambodian operations and volunteers from the Cambodian Army. The latter were used in an attempt to develop an indigenous UW capability until they were withdrawn by their Government in October 1971.⁸⁵

~~(TS-NFD)~~ Subsequent to 1971, Thot Not (nickname changed after a compromise of Salem House) operations were not distinguished by new techniques or significant changes in operating authorities. Operations dwindled rapidly due to the paucity of air assets remaining in the RVN in the accelerated phase-down of American military presence.

Personnel Recovery Operations (U)

~~(TS-NFD)~~ The escalating US military activity in SEA resulted in increased numbers of Americans who were falling into enemy hands or being classified as Missing-in-Action (MIA): This gave rise to growing concern among American officials and prompted them to seek ways to recover American prisoners and to resolve the MIA problem. In the summer of 1964, the Prisoner and Detainee Committee of the US Embassy in Saigon recommended to Ambassador Maxwell Taylor that an organization be formed to coordinate personnel recovery operations.⁸⁶ The recommendation was passed through COMUSMACV to MACVJ2, but no concrete action was taken during the next 18

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months. In December 1965, interest in forming a viable personnel recovery organization was rejuvenated at an Escape and Evasion (E&E) Planning Conference at Pacific Command (PACOM) Headquarters. CINCPAC directed COMUSMACV to take action. An Air Force Colonel from Thirteenth Air Force, Col Aderholt, coordinated and formalized the concept with MACVJ5 in May 1966. On 17 September 1966 COMUSMACV officially activated the Joint Personnel Recovery Center. The JPRC also was known as the Recovery Studies element within the SOG organizational structure.

(TS NED) Without delay the JPRC attempted its first recovery operation. Interrogation reports of a Viet Cong rallier and low-level aerial photography pinpointed the location of a prison camp where an American prisoner allegedly was detained. A company-sized unit infiltrated the area and found a bonafide prison camp, but it had been vacated prior to the arrival of the raiding party. These circumstances were repeated throughout the history of the JPRC. Later improvements in concepts and techniques did, however, result in the return of numerous ARVN/RVN personnel.

(TS NED) SOG prisoner recovery activities were not limited to camp raids. Agents were responsible for establishing and monitoring E&E nets. SOG continually monitored Safe Areas for Evasion (SAFE) zones. It also prepositioned air-deliverable survival kits throughout Southeast Asia. It disseminated E&E letters to operational units on a monthly basis to be used by evadees in identifying their locations to overflying aircraft. SOG briefed aircrews about the JPRC mission. It maintained liaison with military and other governmental agencies, particularly with the intelligence community, establishing intelligence collection requirements and ensuring the flow of pertinent information regarding US detainees and evadees to

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the JPRC. In fact, the JPRC became the largest depository for such information in Southeast Asia. Its program was closely interwoven with the psychological warfare program; JPRC personnel assisted in developing a reward program to pay sources of information leading to the recovery of US servicemen detained or missing and to the return of remains of US servicemen. Aerial leaflet drops throughout mainland Southeast Asia provided the primary means for publicizing the reward program.⁸⁹

~~(S-NFD)~~ The most unique capability used by the JPRC for personnel recoveries was the Fulton Recovery System, a system integral to the SOG C-130 Combat Spear aircraft. This system enabled rescue attempts in hostile areas inaccessible to friendly ground forces. This type of operation commenced with the delivery of a special kit by air. The kit contained a harness, nylon line, and balloon assembly. The individual to be recovered would don the harness and release the inflated balloon which extended the line for a C-130 to snatch during a low-level pass over the survivor. When the line was secured in a forked device on the nose of the aircraft, it was reeled into the aircraft.⁹⁰

~~(S-NFD)~~ After encouraging test results of the Fulton system, the JPRC familiarized SEA aircrews with its operation and prepositioned Fulton kits at several locations for subsequent delivery by high performance aircraft in the event a Fulton recovery attempt were to be executed.

~~(TS-NED)~~ The first actual recovery attempt using the Fulton system involved two downed crew members located deep in North Vietnam. Operation Gambler, as it was called, began on 21 May 1967 when F-4 aircraft dropped kits in the vicinity of the survivors. Unfortunately, North Vietnamese security elements recovered the packages, forcing the Combat

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Spear aircraft to abort its pick-up mission. As a consequence of this attempt, SOG expressed the limitations of the Fulton system:

"The Fulton Recovery System has proven to be of doubtful use in the recovery of aircrews downed in hostile environments. If SAR forces are unable to recover downed airmen due to the presence of hostile troops, automatic weapons, antiaircraft artillery, etc., it is extremely unlikely that the use of the Fulton system will succeed where they have failed. The drop of a Fulton kit to a downed aircrew may give away their position, and the amount of time required to retrieve and activate the kit gives hostile forces ample time to locate and capture the aircrew, or prepare an ambush for the Combat Spear HC-130 making the pickup."

~~(TS-NFD)~~ Insertion of ground teams, known as Bright Light Teams, was normally the method used to search for and attempt to recover evadees. These operations were costly however, and the expectation of success was low.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ Raids on Prisoner of War (POW) camps were equally unsuccessful. For example, prior to 1968 the JPRC conducted 16 such raids with one success -- freeing 20 Vietnamese prisoners. Thirteen scheduled raids were cancelled.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ In trying to improve the recovery record, MACV delegated the authority to conduct in-country prisoner recovery operations to the US conventional military forces, i.e., the Field Forces. The decentralization of the planning and conduct of PW recovery operations was designed to quicken the exploitation to perishable intelligence regarding suspected prison sites where Americans were detained.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ Out-of-country POW recovery operations remained under the purview of SOG, and for operations planned for targets in North Vietnam, Washington approval was required on a case-by-case basis. For commando

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raids aimed at POW sites in Laos and Cambodia, extensive coordination with military and governmental agencies often preempted rapid response to time-sensitive intelligence. In raids planned for the Salem House AO, SOG had to coordinate with the JCS, CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and the US Embassies in Saigon and Phnom Penh. For the Prairie Fire AO, it had to clear the operation with COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and the American Embassy in Vientiane. Naturally, these encumbrances resulted in less frequent forays across the border for POW recoveries. A later agreement among SOG, CAS Udorn, and CAS Vientiane in 1969 streamlined coordination procedures: MACV assets were to be used only when CAS assets were inadequate and only under the operational control of CAS Udorn. The new operating procedures did little to ameliorate the situation.

~~(TS NFD)~~ In-country POW raids, free from extensive coordination requirements inherent to cross-border POW recovery operations, experienced an upturn in 1968, largely due to the employment of local forces. Eight out of 32 attempts were profitable, recovering 155 South Vietnamese military and political prisoners. The JPRC assisted in these efforts.⁹³

~~(TS NFD)~~ The favorable trend continued over the next two years. In 1969, 18 raids initiated and conducted by conventional units resulted in the release of 112 allied prisoners. One critically wounded US soldier was recovered, but he died shortly afterward. The JPRC assisted in planning 11 such raids during the year, one of which recovered five ARVN prisoners. During the following year, POW recovery operations rescued 100 South Vietnamese prisoners.⁹⁴

~~(TS NFD)~~ Beginning in 1970, Washington-level policymakers evinced greater concern over POW recovery efforts and resolution of the status of

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the Missing-in-Action. Bright Light operations, particularly Crash Site Inspection operations, received higher priority. COMUSMACV responded to the new pressure by issuing a Bright Light Operation Plan in October 1970. Later, SOG established a tactical operations center under the concept of a Joint Recovery Task Force (JRTF). The purpose of the task force was described in a COMUSMACV message, dated 6 June 1971:

"A Joint Recovery Task Force will be established to conduct primarily out of country and to a lesser extent, in country PW/escapee recovery operations. MACVSOG will provide both the command and control staff and the principal ground element of the JRTF. These US-led and advised elements will be rapidly task organized to meet the requirements of the tactical situation. Required ground reserve forces and air assets will be provided as appropriate by USARF [US Army, Vietnam] and Seventh Air Force from units previously earmarked to support recovery operations."

(Related SOG proposals to reintroduce US ground elements into Laos, to acquire better intelligence, were not approved by the JCS.)

~~(TS)~~ The establishment of the Joint Recovery Task Force, under the operational control of the Chief, MACSOG, received enthusiastic support at CINCPAC and the CAS/SOG Conference at Udorn. Seventh Air Force dissented, however, contending that demands for air assets were excessive under increasingly restrictive headspace levels.

~~(TS NFD)~~ On 15 March 1972, approximately one year after its formation, the JPRC was removed from SOG and placed within MACVJ2. Tasked air resources were returned to the operational control of the Commander, 7AF. Its success in POW recovery attempts during 1971 and 1972 was minimal; 25 POW recovery attempts freed only nine South Vietnamese prisoners. It was not a fitting end to an otherwise more profitable venture in which the JPRC aided in the recovery of 492 South Vietnamese prisoners and the return of 101 bodies of deceased US personnel.

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CHAPTER IV AIR OPERATIONS (U)

~~(S-NED)~~ MACSOG air operations began as a relatively minor effort in 1964 and expanded rapidly until 1970, when dwindling air assets caused the trend to begin to reverse. This unique saga of air warfare finally phased out in 1972. The full extent of the USAF contribution to the SOG UW program cannot be measured accurately. The ample statistics which relate part of the story fail to capture the color of the SOG missions and the men who performed them.

~~(S-NED)~~ The USAF members participating in SOG operations were highly dedicated and well-trained; they operated sophisticated aircraft to support unusual missions. The organization itself was unusual. It was flexible and divorced from standard command and control channels. Cover stories and stringent security procedures wrapped it in a mantle of secrecy.

~~(TS-NED)~~ The First Flight Detachment, the 90th Special Operations Squadron (formerly designated the 15th SOS), and the 20th Special Operations Squadron were three units situated in the RVN which were almost exclusively dedicated to support SOG operations. The respective aircraft of these units were the "Heavy Hook" C-123, "Combat Spear" C-130, and UH-1 helicopter. This chapter focuses on these units and aircraft; Part I covers fixed wing assets and Part II addresses rotary wing assets. Although a discussion of Air Force units not dedicated predominantly to the support of SOG is not included, this does not imply that their contribution was insignificant. The 504th Tactical Air Support Group and the 56th Special Operations Wing contributed immeasurably to the SOG mission by their provision of O-1, O-2, and OV-10 FAC/Observation aircraft, and A-1, CH-3, and

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CH-53 assets. Additionally, tactical fighter aircraft exploited lucrative targets reported by SOG teams and provided close air support during emergency extractions. Fighters also dropped resupply kits to agent teams and Evasion/Survival kits in areas where US evadees were suspected. Reconnaissance aircraft supplied needed photographic and electronic intelligence. Cargo aircraft rendered logistical support. Airborne platforms provided radio relay support.

Part I: Fixed Wing Assets (U)

Heavy Hook Project (U)

~~(TS NFD)~~ In 1963 the Secretary of Defense directed that six C-123 aircraft be modified with special navigational and electronic counter-measure equipment for use in an unconventional warfare role against North Vietnam. The project name was Duck Hook, later renamed Heavy Hook.⁹⁶

~~(TS NFD)~~ First Flight Detachment, located at Nha Trang Air Base, was responsible for the supervision of the Heavy Hook program under the operational control of the Chief, MACSOG. Its first aircraft arrived on 28 June 1964; its first combat mission was flown on 16 December.⁹⁷

~~(TS NFD)~~ First year activities included negotiating contracts, organizing the unit, and developing operating procedures. A small contingent of five USAF officers and four enlisted men, clothed in mufti and identified by fictitious names, began to perform their primary mission: training and supervising Chinese Air Force aircrews. (Only the Chinese crews were authorized to fly combat missions over North Vietnam.) Initially, First Flight personnel were also responsible for administering similar training to Vietnamese Air Force crews; this program, however, never achieved lasting success.

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~~(S NFD)~~ In 1964 the unit encountered several problems which delayed attainment of operational status. Organizational, personnel, and maintenance problems were most prominent. Factors over which First Flight had no control, such as political constraints, inclement weather, enemy countertactics, and aircraft operational limitations, also hampered initial operations.

~~(TS NFD)~~ The unit suffered from the lack of specific guidelines and directives covering its formation. In the haste to organize, higher authorities neglected to task individual Service components to support SOG; hence, SOG experienced difficulty in acquiring the necessary qualified personnel and equipment. OPLAN 34A did not address air operations in detail; it only stated broad requirements for training aircrews in mine-laying and for installing special equipment on six C-123 aircraft. The plan did not specify flying hour and sortie requirements nor related matters upon which a systematic evaluation of the validity of six aircraft could be based. An Air Force officer assigned to SOG elaborated on incipient problems:

"[There was] no clear statement as to who was responsible for providing the...[aircraft]. There was confusion in SOG as to how they were to be configured. What was the method of sanitization and to what extent? To the Air Force, sanitizing the aircraft meant completely removing all identification marks and serial numbers from the aircraft and all of its component parts, black boxes, and so forth, so that nothing on the aircraft could be officially traced to the US. This is an expensive and time-consuming process since the aircraft had to be completely disassembled and reassembled. The decision was then made to merely paint the airplane, and remove tail numbers and main records from the aircraft."

~~(TS NFD)~~ Inexperience in unconventional warfare activities among personnel initially assigned to Air Operations was a major problem in the

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formulative period. An Air Force officer related the problem:

"...none of the original Air Force personnel assigned to MACSOG had any previous background in unconventional warfare operations. This was despite the fact that at Hurlburt the Air Force had a group of personnel trained and experienced in such operations. The result: MACSOG merely continued to do what CAS had been doing without any real change in direction, scope, or effect of the program itself."

Another officer cited the specific shortage of instructor pilots at First Flight Detachment:

"...one of the first problems we encountered was our shortage of instructor pilots for training Chinese crews. We had fighter pilots, but none had been checked out in C-123 aircraft. Consequently, we had to obtain instructor pilots from the Air Force."

~~(TS-NFD)~~ First Flight's unique relationship to higher Air Force authorities created several peculiar organizational problems. Aircraft accident investigation procedures attracted criticism. Since the aircraft were not carried in the Air Force inventory, but because crewmembers were attached to the Air Force, the question arose as to who was responsible to investigate. Standardized procedures were not implemented until after the third aircraft accident. The scope of the problem extended beyond accident investigation standards. Headquarters Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) contended that the initially high non-operational rates were attributable to non-conformance to Air Force standing operating procedures and safety regulations.

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~~(TS-NFD)~~ From the beginning of First Flight, maintenance support became a controversial topic. During 1964 the United States Government and the Government of the Republic of China negotiated at length on maintenance procedures for the Heavy Hook aircraft. Agreement was finally

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reached in November 1964, China Airlines (CAL) was contacted for rear echelon maintenance and USAF was tasked for flightline maintenance. Although the US was reluctant to grant major maintenance responsibilities to CAL, subsequent appraisal of the arrangement revealed that CAL's support was commendable. One SOG member stated: "The maintenance we received from the Chinese was far superior to that we had been receiving from Clark AB." ¹⁰²

~~(TS NFD)~~ Even prior to First Flight's acquisition of the Heavy Hook aircraft, SOG questioned its suitability for the mission. Although the aircraft possessed equipment enabling it to perform low-level, long-range combat missions over hostile and mountainous terrain, SOG requested a replacement aircraft, presumably the C-130, by the close of 1964. The 1964 Command History related this dissatisfaction with the C-123: "The C-123 load capacity, operating range, and inability to fly in adverse weather greatly hampered airborne operations." ¹⁰³ A letter from the Airborne Operations Section, dated 30 December 1964, further alluded to navigational and delivery limitations of the C-123. It stated: ¹⁰⁴

"Reports from in-place teams indicate that resupply bundles are landing too far from drop zones. Distances involved range from 1000 to 3000 meters. Teams spend anywhere from two to seven days locating the bundles because of the rugged terrain and dense vegetation surrounding the drop zones."

~~(TS NFD)~~ Not all factors inhibiting success of air support to agent operations were inherent to the aircraft. Adverse weather conditions and inadequate weather reporting constituted major hindrances to operations. The 1964 Command History noted that "the DRV as a whole has some of the poorest flying weather in the world." ¹⁰⁵ Regarding weather reporting, the first SOG commander said: ¹⁰⁶

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"I stress the importance of weather reporting in this type [airborne] of operation. Once we were able to obtain the benefits of the satellite weather program, we had a fine weather facility and this was a real asset to effective operations."

Training of OPLAN 34A agent teams in basic weather reporting procedures later enhanced the effectiveness of their air support.

~~(TS NFD)~~ Political constraints imposed by higher authorities restricted the overflight of politically sensitive and high threat areas. For example, flight within 20 miles of the Chinese border or within the immediate vicinity of Hanoi was prohibited. The restriction of Heavy Hook flights within the effective range of known Anti-Aircraft Artillery (AAA) and Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) sites became more cumbersome with the proliferation of these sites in reaction to initiation of overt air activity in 1965.

CHINAT and VNAF Training (U)

~~(TS NFD)~~ A Memorandum of Understanding between the United States Government and the Government of the Republic of China (GRC), signed on 19 September 1964, defined the terms and considerations under which Chinese Nationalist (CHINAT) aircrews were to participate in OPLAN 34A activities. Seven Chinese Air Force aircrews were selected in March 1964 to begin training in the Heavy Hook aircraft. They comprised the Thirty-Fourth CAF Squadron, the counterpart organization to First Flight Detachment. After experiencing a delay in the commencement of training because of the wait for proper security clearances, the aircrews attended language training at Lackland Air Force Base (AFB), followed by combat crew training at Hurlburt Field (April to July 1964). Some members attended ECM training

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at Mather AFB. Loadmasters and radio operators received training at Taiwan. The first CAF crew complement arrived at Nha Trang on 16 October 1964; it consisted of two pilots, two navigators, one radio operator, one flight engineer, one Bomber Defense Operator (equivalent to USAF Electronic Warfare Officer), and two loadmasters.

~~(TS NFD)~~ During 1965 First Flight supervised six CAF crews (one of the original seven was withdrawn from the program). Normally, four crews were on-station at Nha Trang and two crews were on crew rotation at Hsin-Chu Air Base, Taiwan. In October First Flight received its first full US aircrew complement.

~~(TS NFD)~~ Although information regarding the initial training program conducted at Nha Trang is sketchy and fragmentary, it must have achieved a degree of success according to the first SOG commander. He cited the improvement of these CAF crews over those previously under the employ of CAS:

"The [CAS] Air Operations were being conducted by CHINAT crews, who, when they transferred to MACSOG, refused to work for the military. Consequently, MACSOG never had a successful operation by the CHINAT crews who were in the employ of CIA at that time. It took us several months to train our own CHINAT crews and to run successful air operations."

An Air Force colonel in charge of the SOG Air Section, however, stated that although the first CAF crew to arrive at Nha Trang was outstanding, there was a deterioration in caliber of later arrivals. Shuffling of crew members allowed First Flight to salvage some qualified crews. An interview with the aforementioned individual casts more light on the problem:

"...we had to go into a complete retraining cycle. First, we had to fly the crews through some current programs until they were able to handle the airplane, make weather landings, and fly at night. Following this, we found

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out that the crews were unable to perform the mission as we believed it should be flown. Our mission required a low-altitude night contour flying for seven or eight hours through the valleys below the peaks of hills to stay out of the enemy GCI [Ground Control Intercept] coverage. They had to fly visually and they had to fly by the light of the moon. It was a very difficult mission and the people were not really prepared for it... we proceeded to requalify the Chinese. Our method of indoctrinating them into the mission was to develop a series of courses in SVN through the mountains which would simulate as much as possible the type of terrain they would be flying in in North Vietnam."

~~(TS-NFD)~~ As the CHINAT flying training progressed, most American counterparts lauded the CHINAT performance. Only a few minor problems persisted, such as a growing reluctance to fly dangerous missions and frequent requests for leave to Taiwan. One SOG officer commented:

"The Chinese C-123 crews were well-disciplined and were given proficiency training frequently. They were highly professional. Though the Chinese crews flew the 34A missions only during the light of the moon, we used them for psychological operations missions during the dark of the moon. As North Vietnamese air defenses built up, the Chinese became more and more reluctant to fly missions over North Vietnam; consequently, for Psyops missions we obtained approval for the use of American C-123 crews."

The last commander of First Flight Detachment, who had nearly four years of association with the unit, stated that the CAF crews were regarded as a real source of expertise and continuity for First Flight Detachment. When asked what was the major lesson learned from the First Flight operation, he responded with: "the ability of the USAF to work closely with a foreign country's air force in accomplishing a mission."

~~(TS-NFD)~~ Concurrent with the acquisition and training of CHINAT aircrews, and arising from the same dissatisfaction with aircrews previously used in the CAS program, SOG drafted a plan to train six VNAF aircrews. Vietnamese, like the Chinese, had flown for CAS. The decision to select

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and train Vietnamese aircrews was supported by the following rationale, as
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stated by the SOG Chief of Air Operations:

"...We went to the Vietnamese aircrews with two thoughts in mind. First, to get rid of the CAS Chinese aircrews; secondly, to be able to train, retain and control the Vietnamese aircrews better than in the case of the Chinese. Starting out with the base that the Chinese and Vietnamese were of the same quality, we hoped that through completion of an intensive training program, to which the Vietnamese would be receptive, we would be able to improve their quality as compared to that of the Chinese who practically refused to participate in any training program at all."

The same individual related initial results of the VNAF training program: 115

"The quality of the Vietnamese aircrews was at least as good as that of the Chinese. The Vietnamese were more receptive to training which was reflected in their willingness to participate in training missions. Overall, I think that we did improve our capability by employing the Vietnamese crews in lieu of the CAS Chinese crews. The Vietnamese were difficult to control, however. They were very independent, and seemed to feel that they were doing us a favor when they went on a mission. They did not see the mission from a nationalist point of view."

~~(TS NFD)~~ The problem may have been as much political in nature as psychological. The VNAF officers selected for C-123 training were former A-1 pilots belonging to Air Commodore Ky's exclusive squadron, referred to
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by one SOG individual as Ky's "precious counter-coup aircrews." These aircrews were reluctant to leave Saigon, for either personal or operational reasons. The requirement to remain proficient in the A-1 aircraft complicated the matter. They irked some of their American counterparts by requests for special compensation for their services to First Flight --
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additional pay, bonuses, special privileges, etc. Alleged inaction by the individual assigned to the air liaison position in the Vietnamese
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counterpart organization apparently exacerbated the situation.

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~~(TS NFD)~~ Despite these problems, three VNAF C-123 aircrews completed training in 1965. Success was short-lived: one crew was lost operationally, one was considered "politically unstable," and one was ineffective because of a co-pilot vacancy. The circumstances surrounding the loss of one crew underlined one of the major fallacies of the program, that is, the haste to become operational. The Chief of SOG Air Operations
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stated:

"They flew the mission during extremely marginal weather and hit Monkey Mountain [near Danang AB]... We felt that mission shouldn't go and the Air Section at Nha Trang was opposed to it. However, the people in Saigon in the Operations Section felt that the weather was not too bad to complete the mission and they gave the go-ahead. This was one of the problems that we had during the first part of the entire mission--pressure from Washington to get the mission going; to take it over from CAS as fast as possible and we believe that the people in Washington did not have a proper appreciation for the inadequacy of crews caused by the delays in getting them to us..."

~~(TS NFD)~~ By 1966 the problems of the VNAF training program had become such a hardship that the SOG Deputy Chief of the Operations Branch disqualified the one remaining VNAF aircrew and cancelled plans for sending additional crews to the United States for training. Earlier actions by the Chief of SOG through the Chief of Staff of VNAF had not rectified the situation. Stopping the VNAF program had minimal impact on operations since the Chinese aircrews had attained a high degree of proficiency by that time.

Heavy Hook--Cover, Security, and Deception (U)

~~(TS NFD)~~ Cover stories, security measures, and deception techniques were essential and important features of the Heavy Hook operations. These characteristics pervaded the entire SOG organization but were deemed

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particularly necessary for protection of aircrews and aircraft which were exposed to the high risk of falling into enemy hands. Loss of an aircraft and capture of an aircrew possibly could cause an incident of international proportions; it could cause great embarrassment to the United States Government. Hence, security precautions remained stringent requirements throughout the existence of SOG. Deception devices and techniques were refined continually in reaction to more concerted defensive efforts by the enemy. Cover stories were fitted to mission requirements, crew and aircraft configurations, and US policies governing the US involvement in SEA.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ The enemy developed and employed various systems to detect aircraft overflying North Vietnam, ranging from rather primitive means of posting sky watchers to more sophisticated monitoring by using advanced Soviet radar equipment. Heavy Hook aircrews necessarily used multiple procedures to disguise their presence and location. They held radio transmissions to a minimum and sporadically altered flight paths. Flying low-level, the crews used terrain-masking effects to minimize exposure to enemy radar nets. They sometimes made bogus drops.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ Prior to take-off on a combat mission, the aircraft and aircrew were sterilized of markings and documents which might identify the United States as sponsor of the mission. (After the US began bombing operations over North Vietnam, however, such precautions were not taken. They wore Air Force flight uniforms and the aircraft carried US markings.) When missions were to stage out of Nakhon Phanom for heliborne insertion, Heavy Hook planners would attempt to combine a logistics mission with the agent transport mission to avoid stereotyped operations which might alert

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the enemy of an impending agent infiltration. Of course, all coordination
of planning was handled through secure communications channels. ¹²¹

~~(TS NFD)~~ After the Heavy Hook aircraft was airborne, the crew had special equipment on board which they used to complement deceptive flight maneuvers. Warning receivers alerted the crew of radars employed for AAA, SAM, and airborne intercept which were trained on the aircraft. Other warning receivers indicated the bearings, signal types, and signal strengths of enemy radars. Deceptive repeaters misdirected AAA fire control radars and fighter aircraft intercept radars. Dispensing of chaff helped blot out enemy weapon controller screens which could otherwise pinpoint the location of the aircraft. ¹²²

~~(TS NFD)~~ Security and deception measures served a definite purpose: to minimize the chances of an aircraft loss and otherwise to prevent the exposure of information pertaining to SOG operations. But these measures were not entirely adequate, particularly in the case of an aircraft loss. Additional protection was provided by the use of cover stories.

~~(TS NED)~~ The office of primary responsibility for the fabrication of Heavy Hook cover stories was the Office of the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities on the Joint Staff. This office, usually acting upon proposals from the field, would contrive a cover story and coordinate it with various agencies in Washington, including the CIA, State Department, White House, Public Affairs Office under the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Defense Intelligence Agency, and appropriate Service component headquarters. ¹²³

~~(TS NFD)~~ According to the initial cover story for the Heavy Hook program, the aircraft were on loan to the Vietnamese Air Force from the

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Chinese Air Force. During non-mission periods, the aircraft were located at Saigon; they carried VNAF markings. Markings were removed for missions. The CAF crew members were documented as Vietnamese citizens while on-duty in South Vietnam. If downed during a combat mission, the crews were to explain that they were CAL employees engaged in ferrying the aircraft from the RVN to Taiwan for periodic maintenance but had wandered off course due to faulty navigational equipment. They were to state that the aircraft was unmarked because the VNAF markings removed from the aircraft had not been replaced with Chinese Nationalist markings. Accounting for the agent teams on board, the crew members were to state that those individuals were enroute to Taiwan to participate in training; they carried equipment because they did not know if it would be available at their training destination.

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~~(TS NFB)~~ Cover stories underwent frequent revision; modifications contained more explicit definitions and added greater detail. Guidance was not limited to crew member statements in the event of capture. Cover documents outlined preparatory procedures for ditching an aircraft, specified aircrew and aircraft sanitization procedures, and provided guidelines for official responses to North Vietnamese accusations or to queries from news reporters.

~~(TS NFB)~~ A SOG message dispatched on 7 September 1964 defined the conditions under which an overt rescue attempt was authorized for a Heavy Hook aircrew. SAR efforts were permitted when the aircraft was downed over international waters, friendly territory, or Laotian territory where the threat was considered minimal. The announced rationale for US involvement in the rescue attempt was for "humanitarian purposes." If an

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aircraft were lost over North Vietnam, no official US statement would be made except in response to a North Vietnamese accusation. The official response was "no US aircraft was involved." The South Vietnamese Government was to deny deliberate penetration of NVN and make counter-charges against enemy penetration. It was to accuse NVN of the "barbaric act of shooting at a harmless and lost transport aircraft in distress."¹²⁵

~~(TS-NFB)~~ In situations when an aircrew was unable to fly their aircraft to a friendly base from a combat mission over North Vietnam, they were to attempt to bail out in the Gulf of Tonkin at least 20 miles offshore or in a SAFE area in Laos. If unable to clear hostile territory, a bail-out was preferable to a crash-landing in order to disassociate the crew from the aircraft. Time permitting, the crew was to drop all agents and supply bundles in remote areas, jettison any other payload material,¹²⁶ and destroy flight plans, maps, and ECM equipment.

~~(TS-NFB)~~ In November 1965 MACV promulgated its first cover story regarding VNAF crews flying Heavy Hook aircraft. The story basically paralleled that used for CAF crews. They were to admit their VNAF status, saying that they were on a training mission near Danang when they suffered a complete loss of navigational and radio gear while flying instrument Flight Rules. To make such an explanation plausible, crews were to destroy¹²⁷ radio and navigational equipment and remove the magnetic compass.

~~(TS-NFB)~~ With the advent of USAF-flown Heavy Hook missions, additional guidance was required. In early 1967 COMUSMACV, with the assistance of the American Embassy, Vientiane, contrived a cover story for USAF aircrews attired in USAF flight uniforms on board Heavy Hook aircraft with US markings. If an aircraft loss was imminent during a psychological

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operations (Psyops) mission, the aircrew was to attempt to jettison all Psyops material. If unable to do so, it was to state that the aircraft was on a routine Fact Sheet (unclassified Psyops Program) mission. If the aircraft had no Psyops material on board, the crew was to state that it was diverted to the area to participate in a SAR operation. A similar explanation was to be offered if agents were carried on the aircraft; the agents were chosen because of their linguistic qualifications. 128

~~(TS NFD)~~ Another development in 1967 lending credence to cover stories was the drafting of a bogus contract between MACV and China Airlines, whereby CAL agreed to provide flight crews and maintenance personnel to support MACV in conducting logistics and ferry missions involving C-123 aircraft based in South Vietnam. Although this contract was designed to substantiate the Heavy Hook cover story, it was not referenced in the cover story until after a SOG review in 1969 pointed out the shortcoming.

~~(TS NFD)~~ The SOG study of cover stories, conducted in 1969, revealed other shortcomings in the Heavy Hook cover story. For example, the USAF-CAF crew complement was not addressed. ¹ If further noted discrepancies such as aircraft location, Saigon instead of Nha Trang, and aircraft markings, VNAF instead of USAF. A major criticism was directed against the lack of definitive guidance regarding aircrew and aircraft sanitization. 129

The overall conclusion of the study stated the following:

Existing cover stories may assist in explaining the presence of an aircraft and/or aircrew in a politically sensitive area but will not permit plausible denial of sponsorship.

~~(TS NFD)~~ The fallibility of cover stories was, in fact, cited much earlier in their evolution. In a letter from CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, dated 15 November 1965, the following limitations were noted: 130

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It is recognized that under the given set of operational circumstances it is virtually impossible to compose a story that will adequately cover all emergencies and incidents. However, in order to delay the opposition's establishing firm facts as to the real nature of the missions [Heavy Hook] and to provide the crew and passengers with an alternative to (a) immediate execution, or (b) stating the truth... It is not expected that a cover story will permanently deceive the opposition nor discourage them from eventually bringing public charges which are close to the truth.

Combat Spear Aircraft (U)

~~(TS-NFB)~~ In 1965 the Air Force directed that 14 C-130E aircraft be modified on the production line in an unconventional warfare configuration. These aircraft were assigned to the Special Operations Forces element under the project name of Stray Goose (later renamed Combat Talon). Later, four of these aircraft were deployed to the PACOM area: the nick-
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name of this component was Combat Spear.

~~(TS-NFB)~~ SOG asked for more suitable aircraft to replace the C-123 as early as 1964. SOG reemphasized its acute requirement for replacement aircraft after two losses of Heavy Hook aircraft in late 1964, on 1 November and 10 December 1964. At that time, the JCS deferred decision on the SOG request for several reasons: modified C-130 aircraft would not be available before mid-1965; only US crews were considered capable of operating the C-130 and this was not a viable concept under the current UW program; and higher authorities imposed restrictions on employment of the
132
C-130 in a UW role at that time.

~~(TS-NFB)~~ In March 1965 CINCPAC reopened the subject by requesting MACV to furnish additional justification for acquisition of UW-modified C-130 aircraft. Again the JCS rejected the MACV proposal. Later during

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the year, however, CINCPAC, providing additional justification, supported a MACV proposal to use Combat Spear aircraft in support of OPLAN 34A operations as outlined in the "C-130E Sky Hook Study" completed on 27 September. The JCS concurred and on 31 March 1966 notified CINCPAC of approval of the request, directing the Air Force to deploy four aircraft to PACOM.¹³³

~~(TS NFD)~~ The Combat Spear aircraft were assigned to Detachment 1, 314th Tactical Airlift Wing at Ching Chang Kuan Air Base, Taiwan, until December 1966. They were then reassigned to the 15th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) at Nha Trang Air Base, RVN. The first logistics support mission was flown in support of Shining Brass on 20 October 1966; the first Psyops leaflet drop mission was flown on 3 November; and the first OPLAN 34A resupply and agent delivery mission was flown on 25 December.¹³⁴

Combat Spear Versus Heavy Hook (U)

~~(TS NFD)~~ The thrust of the MACV Sky Hook Study was a comparative analysis between the Combat Spear and Heavy Hook aircraft. The study cited the following advantages of the C-130 over the C-123:¹³⁵

- Of the two aircraft, only the C-130 aircraft had the growth potential to meet future payload requirements. Using the 463L aerial delivery system (ADS), it could deliver three 12-foot platforms of 8000 pounds each as opposed to approximately one for the C-123.
- The C-130's higher altitude envelope considerably increased the Psyops delivery capability. The longer periods of drift of Psyops material permitted drop points in relatively undefended areas for targets in heavily defended areas which were inaccessible to the C-123 aircraft.
- The C-130 was capable of significantly higher speed, decreasing the exposure time in hostile territory.

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- The C-130's radar and terrain avoidance equipment enabled a contour low-level profile rather than merely a low altitude mission capability. It could be operated in valleys out of line of sight of Early Warning (EW) radar and fire control systems.
- The C-130 had the capacity for expansion of ECM equipment to cope with the improving air defenses in NVN. The C-123 had exhausted its stretch-out capability due to limited payload capacity.

~~(TS-NED)~~ After the C-130 aircraft arrived in-theater, SOG immediately put them to work in reducing the logistics backlog -- logistics support requirements had tripled since the commencement of Shining Brass operations. The C-130's greater allowable cargo load was its most immediate advantage over the C-123. A SOG officer related the situation in an interview:
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There was a tremendous backlog of logistic supplies to be moved...Most of the cargo could be airlifted by 7AF outfits. However, because of classification of some of the cargo, it was very difficult to have the material people at that point in time make a complete switch into the 7AF system. As a result, MACSOG hauled tremendous tonnages with MACSOG available aircraft. ... [After] the C-130's arrived and helped reduce the backlog, we were able to identify cargo that was to be handled strictly by 7AF. However, all special cargo continued to be handled with C-123 and C-130 SOG aircraft [and a C-45 and C-47 on contract from CAL].

~~(TS-NED)~~ The C-130's improved ACL also enhanced combat missions over NVN by eliminating the need to restage or refuel at Thai bases, as in the case of C-123's. Furthermore, several Psyops leaflet drops could be accomplished on one sortie. The C-130 could dispense approximately five million leaflets on one mission, whereas the C-123 could dispense only half that amount.

~~(TS-NED)~~ Although the C-130 possessed more advanced navigational and ECM equipment, greater accuracy in aerial delivery and improved

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survivability in the NVN air defense environment could not be demonstrated. Both aircraft were constrained by similar conditions of lunar illumination and cloud cover during agent resupply/reinforcement missions. Normally, acceptable conditions prevailed only four or five nights a month. Too, both aircraft flew under the same JCS restriction against flight within effective ranges of known SAM and AAA sites. Therefore, advantages of the C-130's ECM equipment, such as additional power output and a more automated chaff dispensing system, were of little importance. 137

~~(TS NFD)~~ Although a distinction of capabilities was made to justify acquisition of the C-130, the differences of capabilities between the C-123 and C-130 was not normally a primary consideration in the selection of an aircraft to support a particular OPLAN 34A agent mission. An equitable allocation of flying hours to both the 15th SOS and First Flight Detachment and satisfaction of user preferences were more common criteria used in aircraft selection. After the development of HALO insertion methods in 1967, however, the higher flight ceiling of the C-130 became a valid consideration in the selection of an aircraft to support a HALO mission. 138

~~(TS NFD)~~ Despite the disadvantages of the C-123 aircraft, it also had some advantages, as noted by the MACSOG Documentation Study: 139

Although the C-130 had advantages of greater speed, range and capacity, it was more expensive to operate and difficult to maintain. When used at FOLs [Forward Operating Locations], the C-123 had advantages of rugged construction and easier maintenance. There was little advantage to the C-130 so long as low level terrain masking techniques were used, a 3000-pound payload was the maximum, and staging bases were available.

Another advantage of the Heavy Hook aircraft, although not inherent in the aircraft, was the Chinese aircrew capability, diminishing the likelihood of exposing US sponsorship of air operations over NVN. 140

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Combat Spear--Cover, Security, and Deception (U)

~~(TS RPD)~~ The Combat Spear cover story was promulgated in May 1966. In many respects, it resembled the Heavy Hook cover story, omitting any guidance relating to VNAF and CAF aircrews. The aircraft carried USAF markings; its crew wore standard USAF flight uniforms. In the event of an incident over friendly territory, downed aircrews and any agent team members accompanying them were to state that they were flying a routine airlift mission in South Vietnam when diverted. The diversion was to participate in a search mission initiated after receipt of an international distress call from an unidentified aircraft. Similarly, for incidents over hostile territory, aircrews were to state that they were on an authorized SAR mission for downed US aircrews. Agent team members were selected as part of the rescue team because of their linguistic qualifications. For incidents occurring when the aircrew was flying a Psyops leaflet drop mission, the crew was instructed to jettison all Psyops material and state that they were on a SAR mission. If unable to rid the airplane of such evidence, the crew was to say that they were flying a routine Fact Sheet mission.¹⁴¹

~~(TS RPD)~~ Deception devices and techniques were similar to those used on the Heavy Hook aircraft. The key to safe and, hopefully, undetected penetration of enemy territory was painstakingly detailed flight planning which established ingress and egress routes carefully avoiding populated and high threat areas. This required optimal use of terrain masking against enemy radar. If the aircraft encountered a threat, the crew had a choice of evasive maneuvers and ECM tactics to employ. Since ECM tactics and equipment were discussed earlier, attention is focused on evasive maneuvers.

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~~(S-NED)~~ According to the Tactical Air Command Manual outlining procedures for Combat Talon aircrews, an aircraft encountering an unexpected AAA threat should turn to a heading that would immediately increase the range between the threat and the aircraft. In some situations, however, depending on the effectiveness of repeaters, weather conditions, type and effectiveness of enemy firing, and so on, rapid changes in altitude and heading were not necessarily the best reaction.
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~~(S-NED)~~ Aircrews regarded the SAM threat with apprehension. The best means to counter this threat was by low-level contour flying. Maneuvering the aircraft to place the SAM threat at either the three or nine o'clock position induced the highest missile-guidance-prediction error by virtue of increasing the angular acceleration required for a hit. Jinking (rapid, random altitude and course change) and chaff dispensing were additional measures used when the aircrew received a valid missile launch warning.
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~~(S-NED)~~ Low-level flight during low illumination was the best insurance against airborne intercept. Visual spotting of the Combat Spear aircraft under such conditions was unlikely. If detected, however, the aircrew could employ evasive maneuvers, repeater jamming, and chaff dispensing. If the aircraft encountered an airborne interceptor at high altitudes, the general tactic was to descend rapidly, ensuring that the interceptor's position was not looking directly at the aft section of the C-130.
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Aircraft Utilization--Heavy Hook and Combat Spear (U)

~~(TS REF)~~ Heavy Hook and Combat Spear aircraft performed three principal types of missions: insertion and resupply/reinforcement of agent teams, delivery of Psyops material, and logistics airlift. To a lesser degree these aircraft were also flown in support of aircrew proficiency and reconnaissance team training.

~~(TS REF)~~ Statistics depicting the first full year of Heavy Hook operations showed that 22 resupply/reinforcement missions were completed successfully out of 63 such missions scheduled. Most cancellations and aborts were attributed to adverse weather conditions. Other factors which degraded the air support to OPLAN 34A teams were maintenance problems, failure to establish contact with ground teams, and inaccurate aerial deliveries. During that first year 30 successful Psyops missions were flown, while logistics airlift accounted for 656,000 pounds of SOG cargo.¹⁴⁵

~~(TS REF)~~ The UW-modified C-123 aircraft continued to be the primary workhorse for SOG air operations during the following year, although Combat Spear and high performance aircraft, such as F-4s and A-1s, were used to support airborne and psychological operations. In 1966 First Flight successfully accomplished 16 resupply and infiltration missions out of 81 scheduled missions. Weather conditions accounted for 78 percent of the cancellations and aborts. Maintenance difficulties and failure to establish contact with targeted teams caused, respectively, 14 and 8 percent of the aborts and cancellations. Forty-two out of 68 Psyops missions were flown successfully, yielding a substantial increase over the previous year's Psyops effort. The most dramatic increase in air support, however, resulted from a surge in logistics requirements. Heavy Hook aircraft,

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together with CAL C-45 and C-47 aircraft, transported 4,891,228 pounds of cargo and 13,893 passengers. ¹⁴⁶

~~(TS-NFB)~~ During 1967 Heavy Hook and Combat Spear aircraft inserted three agent teams out of six such missions scheduled. The C-123s accomplished 8 of 32 scheduled resupply missions, while C-130s made 12 out of 30 scheduled deliveries. The number of Psyops missions during the year grew substantially. First Flight performed 23 out of 28 scheduled Psyops missions, and the 15th SOG accomplished 44 out of 67 scheduled. By this time most of the resupply missions were assigned to high performance aircraft. Then, with expansion of Shining Brass and the commencement of Daniel Boone operations, logistics airlift increased rapidly. During the year Heavy Hook, Combat Spear, and CAL contract aircraft moved 10,738,580 pounds of cargo and 25,016 passengers. (One unique logistic requirement levied on SOG Air Operations during 1967 was to devise a free-fall aerial delivery method to drop rice to Cambodian troops. From an altitude of 1,000 feet, the aircraft dropped triple-bagged rice; fully 97 percent of the rice was recoverable.) ¹⁴⁷

~~(TS-NFB)~~ Figures on aircraft utilization in 1968 reflected diminished combat flying efforts. Heavy Hook aircraft successfully executed 6 of 11 resupply missions, and Combat Spear aircraft carried out 5 of 21 such missions. The number of Psyops missions also decreased: Heavy Hook aircraft completed 14 of 21 missions, and Combat Spear aircraft completed 24 of 38 missions. On the other hand, the percentage of total mission flight time committed to logistic airlift increased from 65 to 85 percent. The C-123s and C-130s carried 8,888,447 pounds of cargo and 34,915 passengers. ¹⁴⁸

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(TS-NED) In 1968, aircraft utilization came under study by the MACV Ad Hoc Evaluation Group. Regarding Heavy Hook and Combat Spear aircraft, 149 the group concluded:

The current resources, both in personnel and aircraft, far exceed those required to satisfy MACSOG's airlift requirements. Three C-130 mission-configured aircraft (7.15 million dollars each) can provide current and projected combat mission support, to include training flights for crew and ground teams. One C-130 standard cargo aircraft (2.15 million dollars) when supplemented by the one C-45 Tradewind and one C-47 aircraft, on contract from CAL, can provide the required logistic support for MACSOG. Better projection of logistic planning coupled with a shift to common-user airlift for routine cargo can absorb any short-fall.

(TS-NED) Study of declining aircraft utilization, resulting from reduced combat mission commitments, also focused attention on the problem of maintaining aircrew proficiency. A letter from the 15th SOS, dated 14 August 150 1968, described the problem:

Our recent operational commitments have not permitted us to maintain the high state of proficiency and readiness possessed by our aircrews upon completion of Combat Talon training. Frequent logistic support sorties and infrequent combat missions have not provided enough current crew exposure in all areas of the Combat Spear mission.

The same letter contained a proposal to implement a training program at Clark Air Base (AB), to include Fulton Recovery System pickups, low-level terrain-following flights, and Black Baron* exercises.

(TS-NED) Later in the year, on 1 November, representatives from Detachment 4, 405th Tactical Fighter Wing, First Flight Detachment, 15th SOS, 621st Tactical Air Control Squadron signed a Joint Memorandum of Agreement. This agreement outlined the Black Baron training program as it was to be

*by Radar intercept training in conjunction with airborne intercept pilots and Ground Control Intercept controllers.

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conducted in an area southwest of Udorn Royal Thai Air Base (instead of
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Clark AB).

~~(TS NFB)~~ Another aircrew proficiency training program conceived in the same period was the Red Baron program in which SOG C-123s and C-130s were to make repeated runs against simulated AAA sites. Land-based, gun-laying radar sites were to attempt "lock-on" and "tracking" of the aircraft, and the aircrew of the targeted aircraft was to perform evasive maneuvers and to use all available electronic countermeasures. Strategic Air Command Combat Skyspot radars situated in SVN were identified for Combat Spear training, and Chinese radars located in Taiwan were selected for Heavy Hook training.

~~(TS)~~ In 1969, both the 15th SOS and First Flight Detachment began conducting aircrew proficiency training programs; these missions, however, comprised only a small percentage of the overall flying effort, as logistics support requirements placed great demands on both units. A breakdown of Combat Spear flight time, for example, revealed that 79 percent of total flying hours were devoted to logistics support, 10 percent to combat support missions, 6 percent to training missions, and the remaining 4 percent
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to maintenance flights.

~~(TS NFB)~~ Mission figures for 1969 showed that Heavy Hook and Combat Spear aircraft flew 10 and 12 combat missions respectively. They transported 7,681,460 pounds of cargo and 42,590 passengers. C-123 crews participated in 20 Black Baron and seven Red Baron training sessions. C-130 crews conducted 18 Black Baron training sessions, but the number of Red Baron missions was not discernible since the crews conducted this type of training in conjunction with routine logistics missions. Both Heavy Hook

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and Combat Spear aircrews practiced low-level terrain-following flight. Combat Spear aircrews demonstrated the Fulton system on six occasions during the year.

(TS NED) Several factors adversely affected aircraft utilization in 1969. Aircraft availability rates for both the C-123 and C-130 decreased as a result of modification programs. Heavy Hook aircraft underwent K-modification during the first part of the year, and Combat Spear aircraft began rotating to the CONUS beginning in August to undergo modification. Another specific factor undermining the Black Baron training program was the deployment of Thai-based F-102s to Clark AB. A subsequent arrangement for training with the 12th Tactical Fighter Wing at Cam Ranh Bay AB proved to be less satisfactory because of other operational commitments of the F-4 units.

(TS NED) In 1970 the number of combat support missions flown by First Flight and 15th SOS increased significantly, due in part to the Allied incursion into Cambodia and the increased support requirements for the agent training program at Long Thanh. Heavy Hook aircraft were used for 27 combat missions without an abort: three agent infiltrations in Laos, three Psyops leaflet delivery missions in Laos, and 21 resupply and rehearsal team drops in South Vietnam and Cambodia. Combat Spear aircraft were used for a similar mix of missions; 18 of 21 scheduled combat missions were flown. Logistic airlift also increased as a result of higher "in-commission" and availability of aircraft rates. Heavy Hook transported 3,258,697 pounds of cargo and 22,460 passengers; Combat Spear carried 4,874,600 pounds of cargo and 23,515 passengers.

(TS NED) Existing logistics airlift commitments, and a lack of

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interceptor aircraft participation, limited aircrew proficiency training programs in 1970. First Flight conducted only one Black Baron training session, and 15th SOS accomplished nine such training missions. Both units continued Red Baron training; Heavy Hook crews participated in 14 exercises in conjunction with phase maintenance checks in Taiwan, and Combat Spear crews accomplished similar training in conjunction with in-country airlift missions. In addition to ECM training, Combat Spear crews practiced low-level terrain-following flights in the Philippines about once every three months, and Heavy Hook crews conducted the same type of maneuvers in Taiwan approximately once every six weeks. Fulton Recovery System pickups continued to constitute part of the Combat Spear training throughout the year.

(TS WFO) In 1971, First Flight Detachment and the 90th SOS (the 15th SOS was redesignated as the 90th SOS in October 1970) increased their unit flying time, primarily as a result of acquisition of expanded Psyops missions. On 25 January the 90th SOS assumed responsibility for aerial delivery of leaflets on specified targets in Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam under the program names of Frantic Goat, Fountain Pen, and Brown Stallion. (The latter program commenced on 16 May.) In August, First Flight Detachment took charge of Psyops program previously accomplished by Candlestick aircraft staging out of Nakhon Phanom. This program entailed dispensing of leaflets over the Ho Chi Minh trail complex; it was nicknamed the Trail Campaign. In all, the 90th SOS successfully completed 226 combat missions (including Psyops missions) of 282 scheduled missions in 1971. First Flight Detachment successfully accomplished 51 combat missions during the year. The mission figures for 1971 for both the 90th SOS

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and First Flight Detachment included an increase in the number of infiltration and resupply missions. Overall logistics airlift during the year reflected a decrease in tonnages, due mainly to greater reliance on 834th Air Division air assets. Statistics depicting the training efforts during 1971 were presented in flying hours rather than missions. Hence, they are not helpful in establishing a trend of training based on previous years' data.¹⁵⁷

Redeployment Attempts (U)

~~(TS//NF)~~ The first documented attempt to diminish the number of fixed-wing aircraft supporting MACSOG surfaced in early 1968. The previously mentioned MACV Ad Hoc Evaluation Study Group report specifically stated that the contract with the Government of the Republic of China for four C-123 mission-configured aircraft could be terminated without adversely affecting SOG operations. CINCPAC backed the MACV recommendation, but the JCS replied that the termination of the contract would require extensive negotiations with another agency of the US Government.¹⁵⁸

~~(TS//NF)~~ In July 1968, CINCPAC queried the JCS on the status of negotiations to dissolve the arrangement with the Chinese. The JCS responded:

"GRC resources represent the only MACSOG assets available for certain operations and possibly future operations including those in the post hostilities era. This third country participation, once lost, may be difficult to reacquire."¹⁵⁹

CINCPAC pressed the case further, citing the cost of \$480,000 annually for an average of only two Footboy (C) missions per month flown by the GRC crews. The JCS finally closed the issue, stating that there would be no attempt to terminate the agreement.¹⁶⁰

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~~(TS REF)~~ Beginning in 1970 and extending into 1971, the Air Force initiated a series of attempts, highlighted by two memorandums from the CSAF to the JCS in May and September of 1970, to withdraw the Combat Spear aircraft from South Vietnam. The thrust of the Air Force position was that the Combat Spear aircraft were not used sufficiently in a combat role to justify their retention in SVN, and that most SOG logistics requirements could be satisfied by the Common User Airlift System. MACV, however, with CINCPAC backing, insisted that these assets must remain in South Vietnam. Countering the Air Force rationale, MACV cited the "maintain in readiness" doctrine postulated by the JCS after the bombing halt in 1968 and contended that security considerations precluded the use of Common Service Airlift to transport MACSOG's sensitive cargo and passengers.
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~~(TS REF)~~ Although no formal proposals to relocate the 90th SOS actually surfaced until 1970, Air Force planners had evidenced concern over the utilization of the UW-configured C-130 aircraft as early as the summer of 1969. a CINCPACAF message, dated 12 August 1969, revealed that the use of Combat Spear aircraft had come under close examination from October 1968 to July 1969. PACAF analysis showed that 81 percent of the 90th SOS flying time was devoted to combat support (logistics) missions, whereas only seven percent was committed to combat missions and about eight percent to training missions.
162 The analysis included the estimation that 75 percent of the combat support mission flying time could have been
163 handled by aircraft in the Common User Airlift System.

~~(S REF)~~ The 1970 MACSOG History stated that 7th Air Force proposed relocation of the Combat Spear unit as early as January 1970. Earliest

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first-hand documentation, however, is a 17 April letter from the Commander,
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7AF to COMUSMACV, which stated:

"Examination of this unit [15th SOS], in terms of its essentiality as an element of MACV strength, leads to the conclusion that, in the present and likely future context of limitations on U.S. force structure in SEA, it is marginally productive:

"a. It is special mission, contingency-oriented as opposed to the multi-purpose, firepower orientation of tactical units subject to withdrawal now and in the future.

"b. It requires space and supporting personnel and facilities at Nha Trang which will impede expansion of the VNAF under the I&M [Improvement and Modernization] program.

"c. Relocation in-country (i.e., to Cam Ranh Bay) requires extraordinary preparation and investment.

"d. For the last eight months, the hours flown were less than one percent combat, 20 percent mission peculiar (sensitive combat support), with the remainder being routine logistic support which can be accomplished by the MACV in-country airlift system, Air America, or dedicated off-shore support.

"In my view there is insufficient justification to maintain this unit at Nha Trang or to move it elsewhere in SEA. I question the essentiality of its contingency mission in competition with other units in an austere force structure; however, retention and relocation off-shore (Taiwan) may be warranted."

As a conclusion to the discussion, the Commander, 7AF recommended that COMUSMACV concur on one of two proposals. The first proposal was, as a minimum, to relocate the 15th SOS to an off-shore location. The second proposal was deactivation of the unit if further joint examination warranted. COMUSMACV did not agree to either proposal.

~~(TS: MFB)~~ Rather than dampening the attempt to relocate the 15th SOS, the MACV response merely shifted discussions of the issue to higher

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echelons of command. The Commander in Chief, PACAF (CINCPACAF) dispatched a message on 15 May 1970 stating that the time might be propitious for the CSAF to intercede with the JCS on the matter. 165

(TS REF) 21 May 1970, a CSAF Memorandum was presented to the JCS. It contained a brief historical sketch of the Combat Spear aircraft and presented statistics similar to those contained in the earlier PACAF analysis. The memorandum also pointed out peculiar problems regarding aircraft safety and aircrew proficiency training: 166

"These expensive and highly sophisticated aircraft are vulnerable to enemy ground attack while located in their present environment...It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to replace them under budgetary constraints...

"Since only three percent of the total effort now involves this type of mission [combat], and since neither low-level nor electronic warfare training is feasible within a combat zone, aircrew proficiency training requirements cannot be satisfied within the RVN."

(TS REF) The CSAF Memorandum went on to recommend that Combat Spear support to MACSOG be provided on a TDY basis from an off-shore location. This would provide MACSOG with the unique capabilities of the Combat Spear aircraft when mission requirements dictated and would provide CINCPACAF with greater flexibility in satisfying CINCPAC theater-wide special operations requirements. Specific benefits of an off-shore based unit were noted as follows: 167

"a. Protecting the weapons system for future employment in its primary UW mission.

"b. Permitting tactical training to sustain proficiency for deep penetration into hostile environments.

"c. Providing CINCPAC flexibility by being able to operate from any forward base in PACOM.

"d. Providing CINCPAC a responsive force to conduct on-going PSYOPS throughout PACOM.

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"e. Affording a substantial saving by basing the C-130's with like aircraft while permitting rapid deployment to forward operating bases.

"f. In keeping with present national policy of withdrawing forces from the RVN."

(TS-NED) Because of the Joint/combined service implications of the CSAF proposal, the JCS solicited CINCPAC and MACV for comments. CINCPAC responses on 12 June and 4 July, supported by a COMUSMACV message on 1 July, strongly opposed the CSAF position.¹⁶⁸ CINCPAC, in addition to advancing the same argument that COMUSMACV used against the 7AF proposal, stated that deployment of the Combat Spear unit to an off-shore location would include an additional cost and that the split operation would weaken MACSOG's capabilities, particularly when covert and clandestine operations were expected to increase after the Allied withdrawal from Cambodia. CINCPAC further noted that the VNAF was incapable of furnishing the necessary air support. CINCPAC directly contested statistics pertaining to Combat Spear flying time; he stated that the aircraft were being¹⁶⁹ "fully used in combat or sensitive combat support missions."

(TS-NED) Despite unfavorable consideration by the JCS on the first CSAF Memorandum, a CSAF trip report on a July visit to SEA indicated that staff action should continue in an effort to relocate the Combat Spear unit. Preliminary Air Force actions centered on attempts to acquire more management information on all aspects of air support to MACSOG. These unilateral efforts to obtain more definitive operational statistics were, by themselves, to no avail; in the final analysis, the Air Force would have to convince the Joint Staff. After some headway was made, the CSAF again asserted his desire to relocate the 15th SOS. The proposal appeared to have been ill-timed. A personal 12 October 1970 message

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from CINCPAC to the Chairman, JCS requested an abrupt stop to any attempts to change the location of the 15th SOS. ¹⁷⁰

~~(TS-NED)~~ The Combat Spear unit remained at Nha Trang until early 1972, closing out its operation shortly before the deactivation of MACSOG. Although earlier attempts by the Air Force to withdraw the unit from South Vietnam were unsuccessful, these attempts did focus high level attention on the unit and enabled the Air Force to acquire more comprehensive management information.

Part II: Rotary Wing Assets (U)

~~(S-NED)~~ The employment of USAF helicopter forces in Southeast Asia arose out of considerable controversy in both diplomatic and inter-Service arenas. Even after the deployment of USAF helicopters in SEA, particularly during their expanding role in support of special operations, contention surrounded the USAF involvement in helicopter operations.

General Background of USAF Helicopters (U)

~~(TS-NED)~~ Apparently the concept of helicopter support to US ground forces was born in the Air Force in the early 1950s. By mid-1955, the Air Force had a force of five troop carrier squadrons which participated in joint exercises. But because the Army failed to validate the requirement for USAF helicopter support, and due to tightening budgetary constraints, the USAF helicopter squadrons were deactivated. ¹⁷¹

~~(S-NED)~~ With the resurgence of emphasis on tactical operations in the early 1960s, no authority clearly delineated Army and Air Force responsibilities with regard to helicopter operations. By that time, the Army had attained a sizable aviation force. The struggle over missions and roles finally culminated in an Army-Air Force agreement in April 1966.

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The CSAF agreed:

"To relinquish all claims for helicopters and follow-on rotary wing aircraft which are designed and operated for intra-theater movement, fire support, supply and resupply of Army forces and those Air Force control elements assigned to DASC [Direct Air Support Center] and subordinate thereto. (CSA and CSAF agree that this does not include rotary wing aircraft employed by Air Force SAW [Special Air Warfare] and SAR forces and rotary wing administrative mission support aircraft..."

~~(S-NFB)~~ Later clarification was added as an addendum to the agree-

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ment in May 1967:

"SAW rotary wing aircraft - armed if required - will be employed to train foreign air forces in the operation and employment of helicopters and to support U.S. Air Force forces, other government agencies, and indigenous forces only when operating without U.S. Army advisors or not under U.S. Army control."

~~(S-NFB)~~ Prior to the agreement cited above, the Air Force had initiated efforts in South Vietnam to develop a professionally trained and well-equipped helicopter force in the VNAF. A field training unit from Stead AFB, Nevada arrived in Saigon in June 1964. Up to and during that time, however, the buildup of helicopter forces received low priority due to the higher priority placed on enhancing a tactical strike capability.

~~(TS-NFB)~~ The major impetus for the deployment of helicopters to SEA was the desire to develop an air rescue capability organic to the Air Force. Then, recognition of the broad potential of the USAF helicopter to assume an expanded role began to emerge. Heightened concern over the insurgent movement in Northeast Thailand accelerated the decision to use USAF helicopters in SEA.

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~~(TS-NFB)~~ The decision to allow the Air Force, instead of the Army, to train the Royal Thai Air Force in helicopter operations resulted from extensive discussion among the State Department, DOD, JCS, CINCPAC,

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COMUSMACV, Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Thailand (COMUSMACTHAI), and the American Embassy in Thailand. The probable rationale for assigning the mission to the Air Force was to ensure that US involvement in Thailand continue at a low profile. Strong pressure exerted by Air Force to obtain the mission undoubtedly influenced the outcome. A CINCPACAF message, 175 dated 9 April 1966, reflected CSAF views on the matter:

"...It should be recognized that the JCS decision on this helicopter augmentation with the 606th ACS [Air Commando Squadron] presents the USAF with a unique opportunity to demonstrate its ability to operate rotary wing aircraft in the USAF SAW force."

~~(TS-NED)~~ The USAF CH-3 and UH-1F crews and aircraft involved in the Thai operation achieved notable success before their politically-directed withdrawal from Thailand in January 1967. The US Ambassador to Thailand 176 commented on the impact of the program:

"The work of these helicopters has shown dramatically to the Thais not only the need but the practicality of unifying the region. These 25 helicopters had a catalytic affect on the Thai counterinsurgency effort which could not have been produced by several years of vastly more expensive and more diffused direct assistance. The results are evident everywhere -- in getting governors out in their provinces; accelerating the fielding of medical and information teams; and stimulating further deployment of Thai security forces into critical areas..."

~~(TS-NED)~~ The degree of success achieved in the Thai operation, the experience gained in infiltration and exfiltration tactics, the release of helicopter assets upon termination of the Thai operation, and the shortage of VNAF helicopters supporting UW cross-border operations all set the stage for the employment of USAF helicopters in support of MACSOG. The Air Force pushed strongly for acquisition of the mission. COMUSMACV overruled Army objections. A 7AF message on 27 May 1967 quoted an earlier COMUSMACV message which stated that: "The increasing tempo and scope of

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US/SAW operations place the highest priority on utilization of armed
UH-1F aircraft. ¹⁷⁷

In that same message, COMUSMACV had requested that the
arming of those USAF helicopters be completed on a priority basis to permit
their earliest possible employment in support of MACSOG cross-border
operations. ¹⁷⁸

~~(TS-MED)~~ Evidence of Air Force interest in this mission was contained
in a CSAF message to CINCPACAF in January 1967. It stated: ¹⁷⁹

"The value of and increasing need for a vertical lift capability in the Special Air Warfare (SAW) forces has been clearly demonstrated. Future requirements for this capability, both in support of joint and combined UW operations and in training and supporting the counter-insurgency elements of indigenous air forces, demand even greater USAF capability. Therefore, a long range objective of the Air Force is to achieve a significant expansion in our SAW vertical lift capabilities...

"While in Thailand, the helicopters from both the 606th ACS and 20th Squadron achieved significant results. These results have been recognized at all levels including Ambassadors Martin and Sullivan, and CINCPAC. It is essential that the prestige and image of these forces should be employed in SAW type missions and not become unnecessarily absorbed in non-SAW support activities which are competitive with U.S. Army helicopters present in extensive numbers. It is recognized that CINCPAC has in part justified the retention of these aircraft in SEA based on accomplishing or augmenting a variety of support missions. However, in light of increasing civic action and cross-border UW requirements, we believe that these resources can be effectively and principally used in a SAW role. This in turn will lend validity to future actions to expand the SAW helicopter force structure."

~~(TS-MED)~~ Air Force efforts to attain the SOG support mission were
further evidenced in a CINCPACAF message to the CSAF in February 1967: ¹⁸⁰

"Ref is CSAF guidance on arming SAW helicopter for use in SAW role and indicated strong initial support for project from COMUSMACV fundamental to successful implementation of program. 7AF has advised close contact with

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MACV (MACSOG) has so far indicated no resistance to use of AF gunships support SAW operations. 7AF also advised that SAW trained crews are undergoing refresher training on UW in/exfiltration tactics and use of side mounted miniguns installed in four SAW modified UH-1Fs.

"...7AF is pressing with AF MACSOG personnel use these helicopters as gunships. Rationale in urging immediate employment is to cite 'accomplished fact' should opposition to using AF helicopters as gunships SAW operations arise later."

~~(TS-NFB)~~ The major argument to be advanced against Army allegations of a breach of the CSA-CSAF Agreement by the Air Force was to cite the fact that MACSOG was a Joint UW Task Force, not under Army control. In retrospect, this rationale did not appear to be entirely cogent. An End of Tour Report (written by the 20th SOS Commander from October 1967 to April 1968) contained a more candid appraisal of the USAF helicopter role with regard to the CSA-CSAF Agreement. It noted that the Air Force employment of the UH-1F was considered to be outside of the scope of the agreement between the CSA and CSAF. The approved employment of USAF SAW rotary wing aircraft (including armed helicopters) included training of foreign air forces, support to USAF forces, and other government agencies and indigenous forces, but only when operating without US Army advisors or not under US Army control. The operation with 5th Special Forces Group units for SOG, the report stated, was clearly Army advised and Army controlled.

~~(TS-NFB)~~ Despite the controversy surrounding the USAF helicopter role, the Air Force proceeded rapidly to employ its rotary wing assets in Southeast Asia. Attention is now directed toward the primary USAF helicopter which supported MACSOG, the UH-1F, and the unit which controlled these aircraft, the 20th Helicopter Squadron (renamed the 20th Special Operations Squadron on 1 Aug 1968).

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The UH-1 Helicopter (U)

~~(TS-NPD)~~ The assets required to initiate modification and employment of USAF helicopters in a special operations role were obtained from SAC. (SAC used helicopters for missile site support.) Thirty-nine aircraft were configured for a UW role. Twenty-one were identified for the 20th SOS, five for the Tactical Air Command Combat Crew Training School, three for USAF Southern Command, and the remainder for an advanced attrition reserve. Concurrent with the acquisition and modification of SAC UH-1F helicopters, Air Force planners saw the need for a follow-on aircraft and began planning for the twin-engined "N" model. The Air Force requested 79 "N" model "Hueys" at a cost of 42 million dollars. 181

~~(TS-NPD)~~ Although the CH-3 helicopter had some advantages over the UH-1 and did provide some support to MACSOG, selection of the UH-1 as the primary USAF helicopter to support MACSOG was based on several factors. CAS requirements in Laos and the newly developed Igloo White program, which emplaced sensors along enemy logistics routes, placed heavy demands on the existing CH-3 force in SEA. Furthermore, the installation and maintenance of numerous communications and navigational aid sites, namely Tactical Air Navigation (TACAN) sites, throughout Laos, RVN, and Thailand required extensive CH-3 helilift support. 182 Disadvantages of the CH-3 in comparison to the UH-1 were its lack of armament and its requirement for a larger landing zone. 183

~~(TS-NPD)~~ The first deployment of UH-1F models to SEA followed shortly after the CSA-CSAF Agreement. Four of these aircraft were armed. After completion of the Royal Thai Air Force training program, these assets were transferred to the 20th SOS operating sites located in South Vietnam.

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Inception and Organization of the 20th Helicopter Squadron (U)

~~(TS REF)~~ The Department of the Air Force directed activation of the 20th Helicopter Squadron in October 1965. Originally assigned to the 2nd Air Division at Tan Son Nhut AB in Saigon, it came from Eglin AFB, Florida. The unit possessed eight CH-3C helicopters and 20 combat crews, each consisting of one pilot, one co-pilot, and one crew chief. Its initial mission included personnel and cargo airlift and assistance in SAR operations. Crews were detached to Cam Ranh Bay, Thailand, and Danang. 184

~~(TS REF)~~ The unit's headquarters element was later relocated to Nha Trang and managed four flights located at three operating locations. Three flights were stationed at Udorn RTAFB and were devoted primarily to CAS support, counterinsurgency activities, and transportation. "E" Flight, the Vietnam-based contingent, provided several types of support: unconventional warfare, reconnaissance film courier, base defense, SAW training, logistic airlift, and psychological operations. As of 1 January 1968, the three flights in Thailand were designated "A", "B", and "C" Flights, and the one flight in Vietnam was broken down into "D", "E", and "F" Flights. "Pony Express" was the common name for the Thai component, and "Green Hornets" became the nickname of those 20th SOS helicopters operating out of South Vietnam. 185

Early "Green Hornet" Support to MACSOG (U)

~~(TS REF)~~ The 20th Helicopter Squadron picked up the SOG mission in February 1967. On 19 February, four UH-1F helicopters, armed with 7.62 miniguns and 2.75 rocket launchers, flew their first SOG cross-border mission. They staged out of Kontum. 186

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(S-NFB) By July 1967, the unit had 13 UH-1F helicopter deployed at Nha Trang, Tan Son Nhut, and Kontum. From 1 July to 30 September 1967, supporting cross-border operations out of Kontum, the UH-1Fs transported more than 63 tons of cargo and 5,314 passengers, and expended 389,000 rounds of ammunition. 187

(S-NFB) The squadron's assets were stretched to the limit. Logistics problems, which were due in large part to the conduct of operations remote from the main operating base, compounded the problem of helicopter shortages.

(S) Nevertheless the "Green Hornets" increased the level of operations during the last three months of 1967. The unit performed the following missions in support of MACSOG: 188

Armed UH-1F:	Infiltration	104
	Exfiltration	127
	Visual Reconnaissance	66
	Army Base Defense	21
	Tactical Movement	257

Unarmed UH-1F:	Infiltration	148
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(S-NFB) The highlight of the last quarter of 1967 was a change in the location of the Forward Operating Location from Kontum to Ban Me Thuot on 10 December. Ban Me Thuot (BMT), with only a few temporary interruptions, remained the primary FOL of the 20th SOS until its withdrawal from the RVN in early 1972. The probable reason for the move to BMT was to enhance SOG operations into Cambodian territory. The effect of the move on the 20th SOS was alleviation of aircraft shortages and associated logistic problems, since BMT was significantly closer to the main support base at Nha Trang. 189

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"Green Hornet" Operations - 1968 (U)

~~(S-NED)~~ The "Green Hornets" saw much more direct combat action in early 1968. Reaction to the Communist Tet Offensive accounted for most of the increase by diverting support from the primary mission: SOG cross-border operations. In the first three months of 1968, equipped with 15 UH-1Fs, the unit more than doubled the sortie level of the previous quarter. Armed helicopters fired some 834,000 rounds of ammunition and launched over 2,000 rockets; the first figure represented nearly a three-fold increase, and the second figure a seven-fold increase, over expenditures during the previous quarter.
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~~(S-NED)~~ Although helicopters continually supported infiltration and exfiltration missions, they frequently supported ground elements in a conventional air assault role. Extracts from the 20th Helicopter Squadron
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Historical Report describe this type of support:

"...The gunships were first scrambled before dawn on 30 January. They fired on suspected mortar concentrations. Later that day two gunships drove VC [Viet Cong] and NVA troops from a stream of refugees and killed six of the enemy as confirmed by FAC's. Before the day was over, the gunships took part in an assault on an estimated two companies of NVA, dropping 28 more of the enemy according to FAC's... At 0330 hours on 2 February 1968, a gunship element was launched to attack observed enemy mortar positions. An enemy position was observed firing and was immediately attacked and destroyed by the gunships. A few minutes later, the flight was advised that an ARVN compound was under heavy attack 2 miles west of Ban Me Thuot. ...The gunships put their initial fire at 50 meters inside the perimeter and on succeeding passes worked outward to drive the enemy outside the compound..."

~~(S-NED)~~ During the spring of 1968, the 20th Helicopter Squadron received eight additional UH-1F helicopters, enabling another surge in operations. To accommodate the new aircraft and aircrews, the unit formed

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another flight, with the helicopters concentrated at Ban Me Thuot. Normally ten aircraft were situated there at any one time: four gunships, four troop carrier helicopters (commonly called "slicks"), and two spare helicopters (one gunship and one slick).¹⁹²

~~(S-NFD)~~ Support to Daniel Boone operations, compared to other mission, attenuated further during the spring. The 20th Helicopter Squadron rendered support to Daniel Boone operations on only nine days during a three-month period. The unit participated mostly in fire suppression missions, but did perform many insertions and extractions inside the RVN.¹⁹³

~~(S-NFD)~~ From 1 July through 30 September 1968, the newly-designated 20th SOS was able to increase its support to MACSOG so that it represented approximately half of the squadron's total effort. It retained ten aircraft at Ban Me Thuot but transferred four aircraft to the Udorn Detachment. Both in-country and out-country infiltration and exfiltration missions encountered greater enemy resistance. The number of emergency extractions jumped notably. Aircraft damages and crewmember injuries rose proportionately: forty hits from enemy groundfire were sustained, and five crewmembers were wounded.¹⁹⁴

~~(S-NFD)~~ The following account of an emergency extraction alludes to the hazards of such an operation and underscores the requirements for aircrew courage, flight proficiency, and coordination between ground and airborne forces:¹⁹⁵

"On 2 September the UH-1F's were launched on an emergency extraction of a Long Range Reconnaissance patrol... When the forward air controller arrived, he located their [ground team's] position and directed them eastward, toward a landing zone. After cresting a hill and starting down slope, the team made contact with hostile forces in a trench and bunker complex. After exchanging fire with

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the enemy, the team retreated to the west. ... [UH-1F] crews arrived and protected the team with mini-gun and rocket fire. The FAC directed the team toward a bomb crater approximately 75 yards north; the team met hostile fire after moving approximately 35 yards and had to retreat to their previous position. The gunships continued to deliver ordnance on known enemy positions and were drawing automatic weapons fire from the north, east, and south of the team. The two gunships were getting low on fuel and, prior to being relieved by guns 3 and 4, they continued to suppress the fire in the bomb crater area. The FAC directed the team into the bomb crater... [A slick] crew made a descent to come in at tree top level, and to a hover above the bomb crater. The crater was too small to permit landing, so a rope ladder pickup was made. As the team climbed the rope ladder, Gunships 3 and 4 made repeated mini-gun passes overhead to suppress the automatic weapons fire... During the last five minutes of the pickup, the FAC received fire from heavy automatic weapons to the south. Immediately after the slick departed the landing zone, several hostile troops were spotted in the bomb crater that was used for extraction of the team."

~~(S-NFO)~~ In the ensuing months of 1968 the "Green Hornets" resumed full-scale support to MACSOG. During this period the unit lost two aircraft. On 26 November, one gunship was downed by enemy groundfire during an emergency extraction operation. The next day, a slick registered the second loss when it crashed during an infiltration mission. These losses portended an attrition problem which emerged in 1969 and severely jeopardized the Air Force SAW helicopter role. 196

The 20th SOS Crisis in 1969 and 1970 (U)

~~(S-NFO)~~ In early 1969 the 20th SOS began experiencing a series of helicopter losses from hostile causes and maintenance malfunctions. The problem became acute in the summer when a rash of engine failures resulted in numerous losses and caused a low operationally ready rate in the remaining force.

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~~(S. NED)~~ The first loss in 1969 occurred on 3 January when a slick attempted a pickup of a beleaguered reconnaissance team after an initial attempt by the same aircraft encountered intense groundfire. The second combat loss of the year occurred during an extraction attempt on 13 February; a gunship burst into flames and crashed after being hit by groundfire. A more tragic loss followed on 26 March. This loss, resulting from unexplained causes, killed the following personnel: the 20th SOS Commander, the 14th Special Operations Wing (14th SOW) Deputy Commander for Special Operations (DCSO), the 14th SOW Deputy Commander for Materiel, the 20th SOS Flight Surgeon, the 20th SOS Maintenance Officer, two door gunners, and the Bell Helicopter Company Technical Representative. 197

~~(S. NED)~~ The succeeding squadron commander of the unit described the cumulative effect of these losses as "unbearable." He further explained: "Unbearable, because it has severely taxed the already limited resources of men and aircraft assigned." 198 The 20th SOS Historical Report elaborated on these problems: 199

"...our replacement aircraft have been obtained in the past by levying a demand on Strategic Air Command UH-1F inventories. This source of aircraft has been cut off. Alternative sources, such as aircraft assigned to Tan Son Nhut Air Base and Udorn Air Base, Thailand could be brought to Vietnam; but this would require us to drop our missions and commitments at these locations. No solution to this problem has yet been found.

"As our aircraft losses mount, crew training suffers in direct proportion. As of the end of this reporting period, it was difficult to conduct half of the airborne training considered to be minimal for upgrading pilots and gunners. Reduction of training requirements is not a feasible solution, as the extraordinary demands of this mission require instruction that cannot be simulated, cannot be taught in a classroom, but must be provided to men under actual combat conditions and over the geography of South Vietnam."

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(S-NED) The attrition problem continued unabated through the spring of 1969 in the face of heavy flying commitments and frequent emergency extractions. Two slicks crashed on 13 and 21 April as a result of enemy groundfire. Another loss on 19 May was attributed to a mechanical malfunction.
200

(S-NED) These losses aggravated the previously cited problems of aircrew proficiency training and acquisition of replacement aircraft. The unit was forced to request, and was granted, a partial stand-down for the purpose of conducting concentrated training. During the ten-day reprieve, Army helicopters filled in for the 20th SOS helicopters at Ban Me Thuot. In May and June respectively, four helicopters were received including two helicopters for the Udorn detachment. The latter transfer of two helicopters followed a recommendation contained in a 7AF study of Thailand helicopter organizations, completed on 5 March 1969. CINCPACAF directed the transfer of two UH-1Fs to be accomplished by 30 June and proposed that the two remaining UH-1Fs at Udorn be moved to Vietnam after
201
September.

(S-NED) A series of engine failures in July and August accounted for numerous aircraft incidents and three aircraft losses -- on 14 July, 19 July, and 25 August. The downward trend in engine reliability led to suspensions in 20th SOS flying activities, as reflected by flying time statistics: 763.7 hours in July; 563.5 hours in August; 223.9 hours in September, of which a major portion was Functional Check Flight time. By the end of August, the 20th SOS was unable to support the MACSOG mission at Ban Me Thuot, an operation which normally required 600 flying hours per month. Army helicopters then replaced the "Green Hornets."
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(S-NFB) Movement of the squadron headquarters from Nha Trang to Tuy Hoa on 5 September weakened the 20th SOS's ability to recover. The operationally ready rate dropped further because of delays in the arrival of supplies from Nha Trang.
203

(S-NFB) Eventually, the unit's maintenance problems were remedied. Special maintenance teams studied the problem and their recommendations, including the assignment of additional maintenance personnel, were carried out. The facilities at Tuy Hoa provided a better work area than those located at Nha Trang. The sizable increase in maintenance personnel permitted the establishment of a thorough inspection and repair program at the unit level. Construction began at Ban Me Thuot East Airfield to minimize the hazards of Foreign Object Damage.
204

(S-NFB) During the maintenance ordeal, correspondence among the Commander, 7AF, CINCPACAF, and CSAF indicated uncertainty as to the future role of the 20th SOS. Finally the Air Staff recommended retention of the gunship-only role, keeping in mind that later attempts would be made to regain the slick role. The only alternative to this course of action was to relinquish the entire mission. The 20th SOS then resumed gunship operations out of Ban Me Thuot on 1 December 1969.
205

(S-NFB) In early 1970, 7AF received indications that the MACSOG Commander was contemplating a request to MACV that Army aviation assume responsibility for support of special operations in lieu of the 20th SOS, unless the 20th SOS could fulfill both gunship and airlift helicopter requirements.
206 At that time the 20th SOS had only 12 possessed aircraft, the minimum number of UH-1Fs required to maintain the gunship-only support role. The 7AF Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations, dispatched a message

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to PACAF in later February stating the dilemma:

"Heretofore, it was felt that the Air Force could limit its MACSOG helicopter mission support to providing gunships. However, we are faced with either possible loss of mission or Army criticism of our limited helicopter support of MACSOG. The basic question is: Does the Air Force want to retain this mission of helicopter support of MACSOG operations or does the Air Force prefer to cede this mission to Army aviation?"

The message included a request for additional aircraft if continuation of the mission was envisaged. Shortly thereafter, two combat losses on 14 and 19 March increased the requirement for additional aircraft to seven UH-1Fs. Aircraft were readied for transfer to PACAF from the CONUS, but final action was held in abeyance until completion of further Air Staff study. At that time both CINCPACAF and Commander, 7AF, were lukewarm to continued MACSOG mission support.

~~(S. NED)~~ Finally, in May 1970, CINCPACAF and the Commander, 7AF backed the Air Staff position to continue support of MACSOG. The Air Staff proposal noted the ramifications from default of the mission support: default surely would have precluded a later claim by the Air Force for this type of mission. Too, the fact that the 42 million dollar investment in the "N" model was near "pay-off" was certainly a consideration in the decision. The 20th SOS received the replacement aircraft required to sustain mission support until the arrival of the UH-1N.

Post-Crisis Operations, 1970-1972 (U)

~~(S. NED)~~ During the latter half of 1970, "Green Hornet" attrition showed a definite improvement. Only two aircraft were lost in combat, neither attributable to mechanical failure as a primary cause. There were two incidents of engine failure, but both aircrews successfully recovered

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their aircraft without sustaining damage.

(S. NED) ~~_____~~ hopes for regaining the USAF slick mission for Cambodian cross-border operations, however, were dashed by the Presidential edict which banned Americans from Cambodia after 30 June 1970. US helicopter gunship support was still permitted, but the Army slicks were replaced by VNAF H-34 helicopters known as "King Bees." Beginning in July, the only US UH-1F troop carrier helicopters flying in support of Cambodian cross-border operations were those accompanying USAF UH-1F gunships and VNAF H-34 helicopters to serve as rescue aircraft, due to the limited lift capabilities of the H-34.

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(S. NED) ~~_____~~ SOG subsequently requested permission on several occasions to use US trooplift helicopters in the Cambodian AO, but each request was denied. After the 20th SOS had received sufficient numbers of aircraft to provide a combined slick and gunship package, SOG attempted to move the unit's FOL from Ban Me Thuot to Pleiku to enhance the unit's aircraft utilization rate. Although 7AF initially was amenable to the move, it later disapproved it.

(S. NED) ~~_____~~ The main operating base, however, was moved in September 1970. The relocation from Tuy Hoa to Cam Ranh Bay occurred at a more opportune time than the prior move from Nha Trang to Tuy Hoa. This relocation had little, if any, adverse affect on operations in support of MACSOG. Aircraft maintenance and aircrew training did suffer slightly, however, because of the requirement to establish new host-tenant relationships regarding supply, maintenance, and operations, and to designate and obtain tactical clearance for new training areas. Difficulties in adjustment to the new site were intensified by the concurrent arrival and phase-in of the first UH-1N models.

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~~(S NFD)~~ The first UH-1N models arrived at Cam Ranh Bay in late November 1970. Flight testing began in December and total conversion to the twin-engined model was completed by March 1971. The new helicopter had several advantages over the UH-1F model. The two engines offered greater security as well as enhancing the power output. Increased power output permitted more passengers to be transported on the slicks and more ammunition to be carried on the gunships. Added armor and self-sealing fuel tanks improved aircraft combat survivability. On the other hand, disadvantages of the N Model were its reduced range and loiter time. As a result, more aircraft turnarounds and shorter distances between staging sites and operating areas were required for SOG missions. 210

~~(S NFD)~~ The most important impact of the UH-1N was that it alleviated helicopter shortages and associated problems of acquiring replacement aircraft. 20th SOS support to MACSOG improved noticeably. Additional missions were tasked. "Green Hornet" crews again began flying out of Tan Son Nhut, performing routine administrative support missions for 7AF and MACV and assisting in training reconnaissance teams at nearby Camp Long Thanh. The unit restarted training in slicks and finally was able to provide a complete helicopter package of four gunships and four slicks for a short-duration mission staged out of Danang during September 1971. 211

~~(S NFD)~~ The temporary mission launched from Danang proved to be the highlight of 20th SOS operations during the waning period of the unit's existence. The unit provided over 1,000 sorties in an intensive operation in areas where groundfire was usually encountered on each mission. Not one aircraft was lost. This record was representative of 20th SOS operations since the advent of the UH-1N; during 1971 and 1972 only one aircraft

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was lost to mechanical failures and only one aircraft was downed by ground-
212
fire.

A Closer Look at the Helicopter in Cross-Border Operations (U)

~~(S-NFD)~~ Cross-border operations placed heavy and complex demands on the helicopter units supporting MACSOG. To fully appreciate the role of rotary wing aircraft in UW activities, a more detailed examination of cross-border operations is required. These operations involved detailed planning, extensive coordination, and specialized tactics.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ Planning began with the nomination and selection of intelligence targets. This process involved several elements at SOG headquarters and its subordinate units, MACV and its field units, and 7AF. After monthly targets lists were approved by COMUSMACV, the Commander of the SOG Ground Studies Group assigned prioritized targets for execution to the Command and Control (C&C) detachments. They, in turn, initiated further planning and scheduled specific missions, pending final approval by MACV and availability of air assets.

(TS-NFD) Air assets, namely UH-1s and FACs, were made available to the C&C detachments and their sub-forward operating locations beforehand by a monthly "frag." In the case of the 20th SOS, 7AF directed that a sufficient number of aircraft -- usually ten -- be in place to provide a minimum of seven aircraft for infiltration and exfiltration at any time of day or night. This tasking accounted for a substantial amount of alert time.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ After scheduling reconnaissance missions based on the approved targets list and adding other targets as deemed appropriate, the Command and Control detachments issued notices of intent to higher headquarters.

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The detachments then reviewed all available target data, including aerial photography, and held briefings for their staffs and reconnaissance teams. The FAC who was knowledgeable of the target area usually participated in this phase of planning by suggesting possible landing zones and insertion tactics.

~~(S NFD)~~ From an aviation standpoint, the actual mission began with a visual reconnaissance flight over the target area. A successful VR was the key to an effective infiltration. Either a FAC aircraft or one or more helicopters performed the VR.

~~(S NFD)~~ Using the EAC for the VR mission was normally preferred. This method minimized the chance of forewarning enemy security elements of an impending insertion. Too, the FAC was most familiar with the area and could plot more accurately the prospective LZs on a 1:50,000 scale map. The selection of the landing zones, both primary and alternates, was made during the VR with the assistance of the reconnaissance team leader, who almost always flew on the VR. This decision, of course, required that the FAC be thoroughly familiar with helicopter capabilities, limitations, and tactics.

~~(S NFD)~~ The Air Mission Commander, the senior helicopter pilot at the launch site, would sometimes perform the VR mission in the command and control helicopter. Again, the reconnaissance team leader was carried on the mission. A 20th SOS manual on tactics, however, recommended that a minimum of three -- optimally four -- helicopters conduct the VR. A flight of four helicopters, two gunships and two slicks, would allegedly appear to be more routine to enemy security elements than would a single ship. Furthermore, a flight of helicopters provided gun cover at all times and

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offered a rescue capability in the event that an aircraft were downed. Normal crew composition on this type of VR consisted of two insertion pilots, the C&C helicopter pilot, and two members of the reconnaissance team.
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~~(C-NED)~~ The ideal VR consisted of a single look -- one overflight to pick out the primary and alternate LZs. This was a difficult task. Large clearings were not always good LZs, since the enemy watched them closely and sometimes employed boobytraps. Areas near rivers normally lay near enemy logistic routes, hence near enemy concentrations. Small clearings encircled by dense vegetation may have offered minimal risk in regard to enemy forces, but the thick vegetation constituted a hazard to insertion helicopters and sometimes immobilized the ground teams. Due to the presence of various potential hazards, a single overflight normally was not considered adequate to ensure planning for a safe and smooth insertion.

~~(C-NED)~~ At the completion of the visual reconnaissance flight, the VR crewmembers were thoroughly debriefed, and further planning ensued. In most cases the Ground Mission Commander supervised a joint briefing for helicopter pilots, team leader, and FACs to establish take-off times, checkpoints, orbit points, final approach azimuth, flight formation, emergency extraction plans, communication procedures, and so forth. Aircrews and ground teams then separately refined their portions of planning, coordinating closely with each other. Planning touched on the most minute details; flexibility and imagination were essential.
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~~(C-NED)~~ On the day of the mission, the final pre-mission briefing was conducted at the launch site. It included such items as current weather conditions, latest intelligence information, ground-aircrew signaling

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procedures, and so forth. After completion of comprehensive flight planning and preflight checks of the aircraft, the mission was ready to launch. The FAC took off first. After flying over the area to ensure that weather permitted an insertion, he transmitted a "go-ahead" for the launch of the helicopter package.

~~(C-NFD)~~ The helicopter package typically included seven aircraft: one slick acting as the command and control ship and as a rescue helicopter; one slick which carried the reconnaissance team; another slick to transport the rest of the reconnaissance team (if a 12-man team) and serve as a medical rescue aircraft; and four gunships for armed escort. Two gunships were considered sufficient if two others were available within 20 minutes flight time to the target area. ²¹⁶

~~(C-NFD)~~ The command and control helicopter usually launched first. The other slicks launched next, followed by the gunships. The helicopters proceeded to the rendezvous point in a loose, nonstandard formation, commonly with the slicks in the front and gunships in the rear. The rendezvous point most often was located three to five kilometers from the landing zone. ²¹⁷

~~(C-NFD)~~ Flight to the rendezvous point was normally at a safe altitude, in excess of 1500 feet above the ground. If enemy forces occupied high terrain which dominated the area of operations, however, the advantages of a low-level flight were considered. In the absence of prominent landmarks and roads, and with the scarcity of TACAN sites, navigation was difficult -- particularly when cloud ceilings descended.

~~(C-NFD)~~ From the time the helicopters arrived at the rendezvous point until the time the reconnaissance team was implaced in the LZ,

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tactics and techniques varied markedly, depending on the tactical situation and the units involved. Infiltrations controlled by Command and Control North frequently included landing zone "preparation," that is, the dropping of ordnance prior to insertion. A gunship would make a firing pass over the LZ, using flechette rockets for example, and a slick would insert the reconnaissance team immediately after the firing pass. Command and Control Central sometimes sent slicks into the landing zone followed by gunships on the same azimuth, allowing rapid and accurate reaction by the gunships against any groundfire directed against the slicks. Command and Control South occasionally elected to send a slick into the LZ alone, directing the gunships to an orbit point away from the landing zone. On other occasions gunships flew a figure "8" pattern over the LZ while the slick was unloading the reconnaissance team.

(C NFD) Although some tactics were modified according to the situation, a 20th SOS manual outlined certain basic flying techniques which remained constant for the insertion aircraft. The following general practices were noted:

- Altitude in the insertion area should be between 1500 and 3000 feet above the terrain. This altitude offered the best combination of aircrew visibility of the terrain and its protection from enemy groundfire.
- Descent should be as rapid as possible without going into full autorotation.
- Terrain features should be used to conceal the helicopter.
- Airspeed should be maintained between 80 to 100 knots until final approach.

*Tactical Air Navigation.

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- Final approach should be short, fast, and low -- just above the tree tops. A moderate, gradual flare should be made into the LZ with a reduction of airspeed.
- Final descent should be made slowly and cautiously in order to avoid trees and other obstructions and to prevent settling with power.
- Take-off from the LZ should be slow and vertical until obstacles are cleared. Departure flight should be at low-level for at least two kilometers, at which time a maximum performance climb should be executed.

~~(C-NED)~~ Insertion tactics could be categorized generally as two types: high-level and low-level. Using high-level tactics, the insertion pilot would maintain a safe altitude until he sighted the LZ, then he would descend in an evasive flight path. Keeping the LZ in sight or using a reference point for locating the LZ, the insertion pilot would maintain low-level flight during the last 500 to 1000 meters. Employing low-level tactics, the insertion pilot would descend to low altitude at the release point, five to ten kilometers from the landing zone. If the insertion aircraft commander controlled the operation, he would then proceed toward the landing zone, usually with gunships in trailing positions. More frequently, the FAC or the C&C helicopter controlled the operation, in which case either one would direct the insertion helicopter to the LZ by giving changes in headings, distances remaining to the LZ, and air-speed reductions. The FAC or C&C helicopter avoided direct overflight of the final approach route and maintained a separation from the insertion aircraft of about one kilometer.

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~~(C-NED)~~ Final authority for deciding to insert or abort rested with the insertion aircraft commander. If groundfire were encountered, he almost always decided to abort. The C&C helicopter or FAC pilot then

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would determine whether or not an insertion into an alternate LZ would be attempted. Sometimes the insertion helicopter, with its armed helicopter escort, would search for another LZ while the FAC or C&C helicopter acted only as an observer.

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~~(C NFD)~~ Since a formation of helicopters flying over enemy-occupied territory inevitably alerted the enemy, false insertion tactics were developed. The purpose of such tactics was to deceive the enemy or force him to cover a number of possible insertions. Naturally, a false insertion had to simulate an actual insertion as much as possible, with the exception of actual landing. The decision to use false insertion tactics had to be weighed carefully, since the risk was nearly equal to that encountered in actual insertions.

~~(C NFD)~~ Typical methods employed to effect a false insertion included the following:

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- Insert using low-level tactics; fake into another LZ using high-level tactics.
- Insert using high-level tactics; fake a low-level insertion.
- The insertion aircraft descends into three or more LZs separated by about one kilometer from each other.
- A formation of five helicopters flying abreast descends simultaneously, each helicopter passing over a different ground mark.
- All aircraft start in a trail formation with the insertion aircraft in the number two position. The insertion aircraft lands, unloads, and joins the formation in one of the followup positions.

~~(C NFD)~~ After an actual insertion in which reconnaissance team members successfully debarked the aircraft, the slicks and gunships would fly to an orbit point and remain there at a safe altitude. The launch

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officer would release the aircraft after receiving notification from the reconnaissance team that they were in good condition and had not been compromised.²²³

~~(C-NED)~~ When the reconnaissance team accomplished its objective, was compromised, or had encountered enemy resistance and was unable to break contact, an exfiltration operation commenced. Extractions resembled insertions in many ways; the major differences during the extraction were less emphasis on secrecy and more dependence on gunships. Pre-mission briefings for exfiltrations included additional items such as team status, its location, its method for identifying its position, tentative type of pickup, and expected availability of tactical close air support. In the cases of emergency extractions, the crewmembers sometimes were not afforded a comprehensive briefing.²²⁴

~~(C-NED)~~ The FAC usually controlled the exfiltration, both for scheduled and emergency extractions. The FAC pinpointed the location of the team, estimated the degree of enemy resistance, directed the extraction helicopters to the scene, and obtained tactical close air support as needed.

~~(C-NED)~~ The helicopter gunships normally launched before the slicks. They flew to an orbit point which was much closer to the designated LZ than in the case of insertions. The gunships, normally operating in pairs, proceeded to the LZ to check and secure it. The extraction helicopter commander closely monitored radio transmissions and flew over the LZ at a safe altitude to assess the terrain, enemy groundfire, and the ground team's status and location. This familiarization precluded delay in beginning an approach to the LZ after the gunships passed a "go-ahead."

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Timing was critical, particularly in emergency extractions. Entering the LZ before the gunships had suppressed or subdued enemy groundfire was suicidal, and descending too long after the gunships cleared the area²²⁵ allowed the enemy to recover and open fire again.

~~(S NFD)~~ The LZ selected for a routine exfiltration was normally large enough to permit the helicopter to land. The LZ used for an emergency extraction, however, more frequently required the helicopter to hover, suspending special equipment such as Stabo rigs, McGuire rigs, or rope ladders to the ground team. During the latter type of exfiltration, the slick was usually unable to maintain a hover with the full team on board. Hence, additional extraction helicopters were needed. The succeeding helicopters would remain at high altitude, observing the landing zone, and would attempt to enter the LZ immediately after the preceding helicopter departed it. Departure from the LZ during extractions was the same as departure during insertions. Extraction pilots had to be exceedingly cautious since operations were often conducted in confined²²⁶ areas, with the gunships flying over the LZ at low altitude.

Helicopter Gunships (U)

~~(S NFD)~~ Although helicopter gunship support of infiltrations and exfiltrations has been addressed superficially in the foregoing, more specific discussion of the USAF armed helicopter is appropriate for several reasons: The gunship was the Air Force's major contribution of helicopter support to MACSOG. The Air Force gunship's armament was unique, seemingly better suited to SOG mission support than that of the Army UH-1. Equipped with this aircraft, the Air Force developed through combat experience a vast repertoire of versatile, effective tactics.

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~~(S-NFD)~~ The weapons system of the UH-1F and the UH-1N was defensive in nature. This helicopter was no substitute for tactical air power, nor was it even comparable to the Army's "Huey" Cobra in terms of firepower. The USAF helicopter gunship was designed for close air support to ground troops, for limited duration and within an area that was not extremely hostile. It could be used offensively only against "soft" targets such as buildings, troop concentrations not in bunkers, and watercraft.

~~(S-NFD)~~ The USAF gunship's most formidable weapon was its two pintle-mounted miniguns manned by two door gunners. Carrying 12,000 rounds of 7.62 millimeter ammunition, the aircraft could simultaneously shower bullets at the rate of 2,000 to 4,000 rounds per minute from each gun. From an altitude of 1,500 feet, the helicopter could hold its fire within 150 feet of a target, a capability which proved to be advantageous for initial suppressive fire during the helicopter's descent toward the landing zone. At low-level flight, the miniguns obviously were more potent and enhanced by their wide degree of coverage. The guns could be aimed forward, triggered by the pilot or co-pilot, or they could be operated by the door gunners with a coverage from 90 degrees forward to 30 degrees aft of the aircraft. The guns could fire downward to an angle of depression as great as 70 degrees, or upward, to an angle of elevation of about 5 degrees. ²²⁷ *

~~(S-NFD)~~ Rocket launchers complemented the miniguns. The gunships carried two pods of 2.75 inch rockets, each pod containing seven rockets. The aircraft commander or co-pilot could fire the rockets singly or in ripples.

~~(S-NFD)~~ Gunship tactics for insertions varied. The standard

*~~(S)~~ In 1971, the 20th SOS began field testing pintle-mounted 40mm grenade launchers in place of the 7.62mm miniguns; however, due to the degraded accuracy of fire and increased hazards of the new armament, the minigun remained as the primary weapon system.

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procedure in the 20th SOS for armed helicopter escort was for two gunships to trail the insertion slick to the LZ at a distance of 500 to 1000 meters, the distance depending on the expected time that the slick would be in the LZ. A slow insertion, for example, required greater spacing between the slick and gunships. Gunships avoided the slick's flight path due to the hazards of groundfire from enemy elements alerted by the first passover.

~~(C-NFD)~~ While the slick was in the LZ, the gunships provided coverage by using a variety of flight patterns. Simply orbiting the LZ enabled continuous coverage, but made the gunships vulnerable to groundfire and compromised the LZ to the enemy. Gunships sometimes made a single pass directly over the LZ at reduced airspeed. Another method was to fly an "S" pattern, passing by the LZ to one side, reversing, flying over the LZ, then reversing to the exit heading. 228

~~(C-NFD)~~ In approaching the extraction point, the gunships normally made a "tear-drop" type of descent toward the LZ, keeping the ground team in sight at all times. This type of descent permitted the delivery of ordnance if the team were in contact. In such a situation the lead gunship might have cleared the area with minigun fire, and after it departed the line of fire the second gunship might have launched a salvo of rockets. Firing passes were flown either directly over the reconnaissance team or between it and the enemy forces in contact. 229

~~(C-NFD)~~ The actual tactics and flight patterns used by Air Force gunship pilots in a particular situation were based on such factors as weather, terrain, and degree of enemy resistance. Under these circumstances, pilots determined which pattern, or combination of patterns,

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provided the best coverage to the ground team while minimizing exposure
230
to groundfire.

~~(C-NFD)~~ A 20th SOS manual on tactics cited the figure "8" pattern as the tactic which was normally most effective for providing close support to a small ground team. Timing and spacing were critical. The pattern could be established directly over the ground team, permitting dual gun firing, or offset from the team position, allowing mixed rocket and minigun attacks. Turns at the end of firing passes had to be varied to avoid repeated firing passes along one flight path.

~~(C-NFD)~~ Another attack pattern used by Air Force gunship pilots was the oval, or "racetrack," pattern. Again timing and spacing were important. One helicopter was positioned to start a firing pass as soon as the other rolled off. This pattern allowed mixed minigun and rocket fire and was most effective against point targets. As in the figure "8" pattern, turning angles were varied to avoid stereotyped attack passes.
231

~~(C-NFD)~~ The 20th SOS also used both circular and clover-leaf patterns, primarily for checking the security of an LZ. When groundfire was encountered, changing to either the figure "8" or oval pattern was usually considered the best attack technique. A MACV-published manual, however, noted that a circular pattern was used for attack when the enemy was located in one direction from the reconnaissance team and one minigun had malfunctioned. The same manual stated that the clover-leaf pattern was
232
useful in providing 360 degrees of cover for a surrounded team.

~~(IS-NFD)~~ If helicopter gunships were unable to suppress the enemy groundfire within 15 to 20 minutes, tactical fighters, particularly A-1 aircraft, offered the best method of fire suppression. Another solution

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was to have the ground team disengage, while helicopter gunships covered
233
their backtrail with fire.

~~(C-NFD)~~ After successful recovery of a ground team, the gunships
sometimes continued firing against enemy elements or proceeded with the
slick helicopters to an orbit point directed by the FAC.

Night Operations (U)

~~(C-NFD)~~ Another important aspect of UW helicopter operations was
the conduct of insertions and extractions during darkness. Night opera-
tions provided superior concealment; however, such operations were dan-
gerous. SOG was never able to surmount the immense difficulties and
night operations were conducted only infrequently. Normally, only an ex-
treme emergency justified the risk, and then an emergency extraction would
use artificial illumination since the fear of compromising the team was
234
no longer paramount.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ Interest in night operations really emerged in 1969, when
planning began for conducting this type of operation in Cambodia. The
terrain in the Cambodian Area of Operations (AO) was considered more
suitable than the rugged terrain in the Laotian AO. A MACSOG conference
on night helicopter operations, convened in July 1969, outlined some major
problem areas: establishment of the criteria for selecting landing and
drop zones, setting minimal weather standards, providing means to maintain
235
aircrews' visual references, aircrew training requirements, etc.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ The most significant problem was finding landing zones that
were suitable for night operations. Most of the sizable LZs in the
Cambodian AO were the result of clearing by "slash and burn" agricultural

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methods. The ash on such zones was stirred into the air by the helicopter rotar wash, severely reducing visibility and endangering helicopter flight. Navigation in darkness over the flat area of the AO was a difficult task in the absence of easily identified ground checkpoints. Furthermore, LZs had to be closer to mobile launch sites, since maneuvering into LZs at night required much more time. ²³⁶

~~(TS NFD)~~ weather was the second most important consideration in planning night insertion. Although no minimum standards were set for exfiltration, night insertion missions were not recommended when the cloud ceiling was below 3000 feet and visibility was less than 5 miles. Any cloud cover at all restricted natural illumination from the moon and stars. ²³⁷

~~(TS NFD)~~ The most prevalent means for providing artificial lighting (during extractions only) was dropping flares from either fixed wing or rotary wing aircraft. Fixed wing aircraft were preferred since they could carry more flares and orbit longer. A shortcoming of flares was that their descent and drift presented moving shadows to helicopter pilots. Also, flares which prematurely burned out constituted a hazard in that they might drift into helicopter rotor blades. Xenon searchlights and several types of starlight scopes were tested. Unfortunately, searchlights made the illuminating aircraft vulnerable to enemy groundfire, and starlight scopes proved to be unacceptable due to problems induced by helicopter vibration. ²³⁸

~~(S NFD)~~ Development of night helicopter operations on a full scale would have significantly increased crewmember manning. Additional training would have been needed and directives specified more crew rest for

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night operations. Augmentation would also have been required to maintain a continuous alert capability. Without manning increases, implementation of night operations would have forced a reduction in the number of teams in the field. Additionally, helicopter losses would have increased because of the drastic decrease in the margin of error in piloting the aircraft. For example, an engine failure during night operations would in most cases result in the loss of the helicopter, whereas during daylight operations chances for recovering the aircraft were reasonably good.

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CHAPTER V
COMMAND AND CONTROL (U)

~~(C NED)~~ Untangling the web of command and control relationships with regard to SOG air operations is, indeed, a difficult endeavor. The first step toward understanding the planning, organizing, coordinating, directing, and controlling of air assets and operations is a clear definition of "command and control."

~~(C NED)~~ Command and control is an arrangement employed by a commander to perform essential management functions. This arrangement embodies command relationships, personnel, and facilities -- dynamic components enabling the commander to translate objectives and instructions into action which will produce the desired results. ²³⁹ Stated differently, when US forces are involved in a war, command and control consists of two essential ingredients: one is the joint command headquarters and subordinate commanders with staffs containing talent necessary to plan and control actions, and the second is an extensive and reliable communications system from the joint headquarters to Washington DC and from the joint headquarters to forces in the field. ²⁴⁰

(U) Terms frequently used in discussion of command and control are "command" and "operational command/control." Differentiation of the terms is necessary since each entails a different degree of authority, i.e., the power to direct action or to use resources to accomplish assigned responsibility.

(U) Command entails a broad degree of authority. It is defined in JCS Pub 1 as follows: ²⁴¹

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"Command includes the authority and responsibility for effectively using available resources and for planning the employment of, organizing, directing, coordinating, and controlling military forces for the accomplishment of assigned missions. It also includes responsibility for health, welfare, morale, and discipline of assigned personnel."

(U) The standard definition of operational command (used synonymously with operational control in this study) is the following:

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"These functions of command involving the composition of subordinate forces, the assignment of tasks, the designation of objectives and the authoritative direction necessary to accomplish the mission. Operational command should be exercised by the use of the assigned normal organizational units through their responsible commanders or through the commanders of subordinate forces established by the commander exercising operational command. It does not include such matters as administration, discipline, internal organization, and unit training, except when a subordinate commander requests assistance."

Simply stated, command carries with it authority over and responsibility for all activities and needs of subordinate units. Operational command means partial authority or partial responsibility.

~~(TS MRD)~~ Outlining the UW command and control arrangement, especially the evolution of that arrangement, presents unique problems. Conduct of UW activities, due to political sensitivities, required considerable coordination with agencies normally peripheral to the military chain of command. Political sensitivities also included deliberate efforts to disguise lines of authority. For example, in many documents classified at the Secret level, MACSOG was described as a staff agency of MACV. Actually, MACSOG was an operational agency, but that fact was highly classified. Some lines of authority were overt, such as the relationship between the 15th SOS, 14th DESO, and 14th SOW; however, other lines of authority were covert, such as the relationship between 15th SOS,

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Air Operations Group, and MACSOG.

~~(S NFD)~~ The lack of detailed documentation on command and control for the entire period of SOG's existence necessitates concentration on the period ending with the 1968 memorandum of Agreement between 7AF and MACSOG. That memorandum provided extensive discussion on the responsibilities and methods for management of air assets.

Early Approval Procedures for Air Operations (U)

~~(TS NFD)~~ Prior to 14 October 1964, the CIA handled the routing and approval of OPLAN 34A air missions. On that date the Department of Defense assumed responsibility for obtaining appropriate clearances for the conduct of air operations. The process began with a monthly operations schedule, submitted by COMUSMACV approximately 10 days before the period began. This schedule, incorporating CINCPAC's comments, went to the JCS. SACSA, the action agency for such matters, would obtain approval through coordination with the Deputy Secretary of Defense (a member of the 303 Committee), the Department of State, and the CIA as required. Approval of this schedule represented final Washington authority for executing missions. However, 24 hours prior to execution of each mission, COMUSMACV would obtain political clearance from the American Ambassador, Saigon. Concurrently, a notice of intent was sent to the JCS, who in turn would inform the Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, and the Secretary of State. The 24-hour requirement was later reduced to 12 hours and the National Military Command Center was charged with the responsibility for electrically transmitting notices of intent to the appropriate offices.

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~~(TS NFD)~~ Once the mission launched, MACV would continue to submit launch, recovery, abort, and spot reports. Almost all of these were by Flash precedence. After completion of a mission, an after action report relayed aircrew debriefings. This report contained the reasons and rationale for any departure from the planned sequence of events.

~~(TS NFD)~~ The procedures cited above pertained to missions which were considered within the scope of already approved mission concepts. In early 1966 the JCS delegated to CINCPAC the authority to approve and execute specific OPLAN 34A air missions falling within that category. Approval for new mission concepts, such as the use of helicopters for the infiltration of agents into North Vietnam, continued to rest with Washington offices. Once a precedent was firmly established, CINCPAC received approval authority for that type of mission.

~~(TS NFD)~~ Common criticism of the command and control system, as related by interviews contained in the MACSOG Documentation Study, was that tight Washington control hampered the conduct of operations, especially impeding timeliness. Additionally, there was a need for a more integrated organization in Washington since both CAS and MACSOG were conducting covert operations in close proximity to each other. One senior Air Force officer stated:

"If we are to participate in clandestine type operations, we need a national level planning and coordinating agency for that purpose. The actual planning of such operations can be accomplished more effectively in the field; the Washington level organization should consist primarily of the agencies needed to ensure the requisite coordination with other operations and to obtain the necessary approval for conducting the particular clandestine operations."

Another individual, a senior Navy officer, cited some specific problems existing in OSACSA:

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"The Special Operations Division [SOD] of OSACSA, charged with handling covert matters at the DOD level, is at the bottom of the Joint Staff hierarchy and woefully understaffed. The staffing of a covert action involves going through layer after layer of conventional hierarchy. SOD, or the entity which is to handle covert matters must be placed high enough in the organizational structure and headed by a person of sufficient rank to facilitate prompt access to the decision-makers. As a result of the inadequate organizational machinery within the DOD for handling covert matters there is virtually no link between the SOD and the 303 Committee. This link should operate through the Deputy SecDef, but, because of SOD's isolation at the bottom of the Joint Staff hierarchy, it is difficult to present a proposed action to the Committee."

Tasking of a Heavy Hook Mission (U)

~~(TS-NFD)~~ During the period that Heavy Hook aircraft were the primary aircraft participating in MACSOG air operations, tasking was relatively simple. SOG would pass a series of targets to First Flight Detachment for unit-level planning. SOG then reviewed these plans and passed them to CINCPAC and Washington for final approval. Twenty-four hours prior to a scheduled mission, SOG sent an "intent" message to First Flight Detachment, giving a particular mission number.

(TS-NFD) Upon receipt of an intent message, First Flight planners made last-minute changes to the mission plan, such as adding any recently detected enemy gun positions which might require alteration of the flight path. When SOG approved the revised mission plan, First Flight Detachment briefed the Chinese crews. They had the option of declining to fly the mission if they so desired.

~~(TS-NFD)~~ Approximately 12 hours prior to mission execution, SOG dispatched an "execute" message. Shortly thereafter, First Flight Detachment started maintenance generation on the aircraft and briefed the Chinese

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aircrews, both in Chinese and English to ensure no misunderstanding as to what was required. The unit designated a staging officer, the mission commander, who was responsible for ensuring preparation of the aircraft and for monitoring the mission from beginning to end.

~~(TS NFD)~~ The mission was monitored by a CIA station located in the Philippines. The aircrew was required to make radio transmissions at designated points along the flight route. This permitted the mission to be closely monitored throughout its duration. ²⁴⁵

Command and Control, 1965-1968 (U)

~~(TS NFD)~~ During the period from 1965 to 1968, the level of both special and conventional operations rose dramatically. Increasing numbers and types of USAF aircraft supported MACSOG operations. Intense competition among different activities for a limited number of air assets became evident. For example, the MACSOG cross-border air support requirements vied with the 7AF interdiction requirements. Unfortunately, an effective command and control system lagged the buildup of an air armada and rapid escalation of the conflict. Specifically, the lack of explicitly defined responsibilities and coordination channels between 7AF and MACSOG led to a strained relationship between the two entities.

~~(TS NFD)~~ The rapid escalation of operations and competition for air resources were not the only reasons for a developing rift between 7AF and MACSOG. The extreme sensitivity of SOG activities added a complication. SOG requests for air support to 7AF encountered difficulties because few 7AF personnel were "SOG-briefed." From the 7AF standpoint, secrecy engendered concern for the proper and efficient utilization of

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its assets under the operational control of MACSOG. 7AF officials demonstrated particular anxiety regarding the necessity for Air Force supervision in such areas as tactics, flying safety, and crew protection.

~~(TS NFD)~~ Although specific command and control procedures before 1968 were not clearly evident from the available documentation, various interviews and official evaluations contained in the MACSOG Documentation Study generally indicated where responsibilities rested and problems existed. A senior Marine officer assigned to MACSOG in 1966 and 1967
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stated:

"Early in MACSOG's operations, the execution of air missions was controlled almost exclusively by MACSOG. Later we learned that our messages concerning air operations were not being disseminated to the proper people. Moreover, some of our maritime operations were being interfered with by friendly aircraft. Finally, 7AF insisted on coordinating all flying activities, including those of MACSOG. This improved coordination and control of missions."

~~(TS NFD)~~ An Air Force officer assigned to MACSOG during the same period further related difficulties in command and control and specifically
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cited problems in the relationship between MACSOG and 7AF:

"We had communications difficulties from our facility in Saigon in handling air operations which originated from bases removed from the Saigon complex. Because of security requirements and the lack of hot line facilities, in many cases our hands were tied in coordinating air operations plans. This resulted in our recommendation to have an air operations command post which would have hot line communications direct to air facilities and the base camps from which forces would launch.

"...From an Air Force standpoint, command relations were rather tenuous for awhile. Main missions were laid on with very short notice. This caused us a great deal of anxiety in attempting to get the support from 7AF. On many occasions, the 7AF frag's for the next day's combat operations were already cut. 7AF would have to divert air assets from laid-on strikes... As might be expected, 7AF was constantly badgering us for better advanced planning."

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~~(TS-MFD)~~ The inability of Air Force personnel to obtain knowledge concerning SOG operations was not limited to headquarters elements and key staff personnel. For example, the airborne operations officers aboard the Airborne Command Post (ABCCC) aircraft were responsible for allocating air assets to cross-border support when such requirements exceeded the normal sortie levels. A CINCPAC Joint Survey Team Report noted the need²⁴⁸ for SOG-briefed individuals on the ABCCC:

"For cross-border operations, SOG is allocated six A-1E sorties per day. However, this fixed allocation is not sufficient in many cases. In such cases, the Tiger Hound Airborne Command Post is requested to provide additional tactical air support. There have been times when this support was not forthcoming or excessively delayed. In order to insure that the airborne operations officer can properly assess the request for air support, he should be given a full and complete briefing on cross-border operations. Although this will not insure Tacair support is always provided when required, it will insure that the request is given proper consideration vis-a-vis other requests for air support."

~~(S-NFD)~~ The unsatisfactory working relationship between 7AF and MACSOG led to concerted attempts to rectify the situation in 1967. A series of inter-agency meetings in the fall resulted in a 7AF/MACSOG Memorandum of Understanding, signed by the Chief of Staff, 7AF and Chief, MACSOG on 26 October 1967. Most notably, the agreement established the position of the Deputy Commander for Special Operations under the 14th Special Operations Wing. In MACSOG terminology, the DCSO was called the²⁴⁹ Commander, Air Studies Group (later changed to Air Operations Group).

~~(S-NFD)~~ Three units were assigned to the DCSO: First Flight Detachment; Detachment 1, 314th Tactical Airlift Wing (subsequently designated the 15th SOS and 90th SOS); and 20th Helicopter Squadron. The UW-configured C-123 and C-130 aircraft and associated personnel were placed

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under the direct supervision and operational control of the DCSO. The 20th Helicopter Squadron, an integral part of the 14th SOW, was not exclusively dedicated to support of MACSOG, hence the DCSO was given responsibility for supervising and controlling only those elements and activities of the squadron in support of MACSOG.

~~(S NFD)~~ The underlying concept of this structure was to bring the unique operations conducted by these three units under the supervision of one authority. The Memorandum of Understanding noted that the Office of the DCSO was authorized one colonel, two majors, and one enlisted man; however, it did not outline specific responsibilities and authorities of the DCSO. The document was only a page and a half in length; the most detailed description pertained to channels in which Officer Effectiveness Reports were to be submitted.
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~~(S NFD)~~ The first incumbent to fill the DCSO position arrived in Nha Trang on 2 March, 1968. In his End of Tour Report, he related the state of affairs at that time:
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"Both 7th AF and MACSOG were delighted with the results after the DCSO office was activated. Problems that previously had been hashed and rehashed in conferences were bucked to me for solution. Being located a considerable distance from Saigon I had no personality problems with either 7th AF or MACSOG. Consequently each problem could be examined in light of facts and mission requirements. Fortunately most problems were relatively minor in nature and when isolated from an atmosphere of mutual hostility the solution was fairly obvious. MACSOG was well satisfied with the air support they received, and all mission requirements were fulfilled. Seventh Air Force was delighted because minor problems which had previously consumed an enormous number of manhours were now being handled by my office and they gradually withdrew from close supervision of MACSOG activities."

~~(TS NFD)~~ Thus, according to the first DCSO, the new arrangement proved to be satisfactory. Subsequent appraisal by 7AF Headquarters,

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however, indicated that it was not highly satisfied with the working relationship between itself and MACSOG. A 7AF staff study conducted in July 1968 pointed out several problem areas. The study specifically criticized the 1967 Memorandum of Understanding insofar that it addressed only administrative matters and not the broad spectrum of 7AF support of MACSOG activities. It further noted that 7AF/MACSOG problems frequently could not be resolved in the absence of mutually agreed upon directives. Consequently, MACV was asked to arbitrate. MACV, in turn, requested that 7AF, in coordination with MACSOG, prepare a memorandum of agreement to formalize procedures to assure systematic and effective support of SOG missions.²⁵²

~~(S NFB)~~ Meetings among 7AF staff agencies and between 7AF and MACSOG ensued during the spring and summer of 1968. Due to the lack of knowledge in regard to these unique operations, 7AF had difficulty in selecting an agency to monitor SOG operations. Planning finally progressed to the stage that a formalized agreement was reached in September 1968.

(U) The DCSO scathingly rebuked the revised agreement, which consisted of approximately 40 pages and spelled out in great detail the procedures to be followed. Its one serious mistake, he stated, was the failure to coordinate the draft with either the Commander, 14th SOW or the DCSO prior to publication. He was irked because the Chief, MACSOG assumed responsibility for preparing the Officer Effectiveness Report (OER, or ER) of the DCSO, restricting the Commander, 14th SOW to writing only a letter of evaluation. The DCSO described the impact of the change in rating officials:²⁵³

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"...While this did not lessen the amount of control the 14th SOW Commander was able to exert over his DCSO, it did, in the eyes of MACSOG, give the Chief, MACSOG a more powerful voice in dictating to the DCSO how air resources would be employed. The Chief, MACSOG being an Army officer had little concept of air doctrine and even less knowledge of the basic principles that govern the employment of air forces in combat. This lack of knowledge and expertise did not prevent him from trying to influence tactics used, over-commit air resources beyond their support capability, and in general, disregard basic planning factors regarding maintenance capability, supply lines, replacement parts, and programmed flying hours. In addition, at times he insisted that critical air resources be used for missions that could better be performed by other types of aircraft whose availability was not limited.

"In fulfilling my responsibilities to the Air Force for insuring air resources under my control were properly employed, I ran head on into a conflict with Chief, MACSOG over matters described above. It was clearly implied to me that my refusal to violate Air Force principles and directives was a great disappointment to those for whom I worked...

"The lesson to be learned from the foregoing is clear and simple. An officer with ER writing authority holds an enormous power over those individuals whose ERs he prepares. Thus, an ambitious officer placed in a position where he serves two masters will be sorely tempted to favor the one who prepares his ER. With the extreme secretiveness which surrounds MACSOG activities, it is well within the realm of possibility that aircraft could be employed improperly and no one would be the wiser... The solution to this undesirable situation is to place responsibility for preparation of the DCSO ER back in Air Force channels. The DCSO should be responsible to the 14th SOW Commander for providing air support to MACSOG to the maximum extent of his capability. MACSOG, if dissatisfied with the DCSO's performance, should make this fact known to the 14th SOW Commander for appropriate action. The 14th SOW Commander is the individual in the proper position to evaluate the performance of his immediate staff and would thus be able to objectively evaluate the validity of MACSOG's complaints."

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Post-1968 Command and Control Considerations (U)

~~(C NED)~~ As stated earlier, a dearth of information detailing command and control relationships after 1968 prevents further coverage of the topic in this report. It is suggested, however, that expanded coverage of the command and control aspects of special activities in SEA would form a natural sequel to this report. Such a study holds promise for identifying lessons of potentially great significance to future UW activities.

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CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSIONS (U)

~~(S-NFD)~~ Throughout the Vietnam conflict, UW operations were tainted with the constant infusion of conventional military thinking. There was a natural tendency to escalate operations, to immediately exploit targets within the UW area of operations to the maximum extent possible, and to bring ever increasing amounts of firepower to bear on hostile forces. The effects of conventional thinking and the attendant escalation of the application of UW forces eventually undermine a covert program. The enhancement of the enemy's defensive posture in the face of heightened offensive activity from friendly forces makes such offensive operations more costly -- both in exacting greater demands on limited numbers of forces and inducing higher casualties. Too, as more forces are brought to bear on the enemy the secrecy of these operations is jeopardized, since more people are exposed to them.

~~(S-NFD)~~ Another manifestation of the need for separation of UW and conventional concepts, resulting in part from the colocation of US UW offices and units in SEA, was a growing resentment between conventional and unconventional forces. As would be expected, this resentment vacillated according to the personalities of military commanders on the scene. The rift was, however, deeper than personality differences; there was genuine competition over limited numbers of resources, particularly air assets. Furthermore, with regard to the Air Force, there was a doctrinal objection to MACSOG. "Dedicated air assets" was a concept antithetical to the Air Force concept of the Single Manager -- centralized control.

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Air Force malaise was engendered by suspicion that air assets, C-130s and C-123s, were abused (many missions were not essential but were flown for expediency or pleasure where common-use airlift would have sufficed.)

~~(S NFD)~~ Thus, as evidenced during the Vietnam conflict, there is a need to keep UW activities removed from conventional military planning. As a result, there may be criticism that the UW program does not support the needs of conventional military forces. This only serves to underscore the fact that the program is designed to support strategic, more than tactical objectives, and to pursue political, as well as military goals. Accordingly, UW forces must be oriented to unconventional military thinking, must be separated from conventional forces, and should not have to compete with conventional forces for resources. Finally, management of UW forces should rest with an agency which is oriented towards strategic (as well as tactical) and political (as well as military) objectives.

~~(S NFD)~~ One controversial aspect of control of UW forces was the scope of involvement of high-level policy-makers. Operatives in SOG criticized the officious nature of Washington in UW operations. From their viewpoint, such criticism was valid. For example, it impaired flexibility in planning operations and, at times, induced unsuccessful missions because reaction to fleeting intelligence was delayed by the lack of Washington's (or another level's) political approval. On the other hand, it does seem important to have such sensitive operations under the close scrutiny of Washington policy-makers. What is needed is an arrangement which would take advantage of on-scene expertise and provide rapid response, while at the same time providing the appropriate level of control at the Washington level.

~~(TS NFD)~~ Another controversial aspect of UW forces relates to cost

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concepts. Emphasis should be placed on cost-effectiveness -- in direct conflict to the MACV Ad Hoc Group's statement to the contrary. To counteract an enemy whose war philosophy is based on Mao's "Protracted Warfare," it must be capable of sustaining itself for long duration. Consider the British experience in Malaya where, for example, light planes were substituted for helicopters as soon as landing strips were prepared, thus cutting operating expenses by about seventeen-fold. Further, withdrawal from exploitation operations reduces costs substantially.

~~(TS NFB)~~ One military alternative which would reduce both the visibility and the involvement of US personnel, offer greater benefits, and would be in consonance with the Nixon Doctrine would be to place greater reliance on the use of indigenous or third country national forces. (In such cases, the scope of operations and secrecy may be managed better by the CIA.) Again, look to the British use of foreign forces in Malaya, where Sarawaks, Gurkhas, etc., were put to effective use. It should be obvious that support of these troops is much less costly than supporting American troops and that disclosure of their activities is less likely. The First Flight experience in working with third country nationals has demonstrated that this modus operandi, although handicapped by language barriers, can be an outstanding success even during a dangerous, difficult, and sophisticated mission.

~~(TS NFB)~~ Regarding the secrecy aspect of UW activities, beyond the realm of a purely military evaluation, certain political realities have become evident. In observing the public and Congressional reaction to the furtive involvement in Cambodia and Laos, it is apparent that when such operations assume too great a magnitude, hiding the scope from decision-

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makers and voters may be considered immoral. When the conflict in question becomes sufficiently large, it warrants candid revelation of the situation to Congress and the public. Further, the rationale for secrecy should initially be carefully analyzed, and subsequently reevaluated. In Southeast Asia, in the initial stages of the war, the major reason for secrecy may well have been to disguise US intentions from foreign countries and the enemy so as to minimize the possibility of confrontation with a major power bloc; in later years, however, the cloak of secrecy was donned to hide operations from the news media, Congress, and the public.

~~(TS NFD)~~ In conclusion, US Unconventional Warfare operations in the Vietnam conflict should not be used as a model for the future direction of UW activities. The validity of the basic concepts used to govern the employment of UW assets in Vietnam is open to serious question. Perhaps the greatest weakness was the inability to separate conventional and unconventional forces, planning, and thinking. If unconventional forces are to play a central role in attaining future US objectives, the concepts of UW control and employment must take a new direction, departing from the road followed in Vietnam.

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GLOSSARY

AAA	Anti-Aircraft Artillery
AB	Airbase
ABCCC	Airborne Battlefield Command & Control System
ACS	Air Commando Squadron
ADS	Aerial Delivery System
AFB	Air Force Base
AO	Area of Operations
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
ASTD	Assistant to the Secretary of Defense
BMT	Ban Me Thuot
CAF	Chinese Air Force
CAL	China Airlines
CAS	Controlled American Sources, or Close Air Support
C&C	Command & Control
CHECO	Contemporary Historical Examination of Combat Operations
CHINAT	Chinese Nationalist
CI	Counterinsurgency
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINCPAC	Commander-in-Chief, Pacific
CINCPACAF	Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Air Forces
COMUSMACV	Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
CSA	Chief of Staff, Army
CSAF	Chief of Staff, Air Force
DASC	Direct Air Support Center
DCSO	Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DOD	Department of Defense
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
ECM	Electronic Countermeasures
E&E	Escape & Evasion
EF	Exploitation Forces
ER	(Officer) Effectiveness Report
EW	Electronic Warfare
FAC	Forward Air Controller
FOL	Forward Operating Location

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GCI
GRC

Ground-controlled Intercept
Government of the Republic of China

HALO

High Altitude, Low Opening

JCS
JPRC

Joint Chiefs of Staff
Joint Personnel Recovery Center

LOC
LZ

Line of Communication
Landing Zone

MAAG
MACSOG

Military Assistance and Advisory Group
Military Assistance Command (Vietnam), Studies and
Observation Group

MACV
MACVSOG

Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Studies and
Observation Group

MIA

Missing in Action

NSAM
NVA
NVN

National Security Action Memorandum
North Vietnamese Army
North Vietnam

OER
OPLAN
OSACSA

Officer Effectiveness Report
Operations Plan
Office of the Special Assistance for Counterinsurgency
and Special Activities
Office of Strategic Services

OSS

PACOM
PF
PFAO
PM
POW
PSYOPS
PSYWAR

Pacific Command
Prairie Fire
Prairie Fire Area of Operations
Paramilitary
Prisoner of War
Psychological Operations
Psychological Warfare

RVN
RVNAF

Republic of Vietnam
Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces

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SAFE	Safe Areas for Evasion
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
SAR	Search and Rescue
SAW	Special Air Warfare
SEA	Southeast Asia
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SLAM	Search-Locate-Annihilate-Monitor
SMM	Saigon Military Mission
SOD	Special Operations Division
SOG	Studies and Observation Group
SOS	Special Operations Squadron
SOW	Special Operations Wing
STD	Strategic Technical Directorate
STRATA	Short Term Roadwatch and Target Acquisition
SVN	South Vietnam
TACAN	Tactical Air Navigation
TDY	Temporary Duty
UW	Unconventional Warfare
USARV	US Army, Republic of Vietnam
VNAF	(South) Vietnamese Air Force
VC	Vietcong
VR	Visual Reconnaissance